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EXPLORING INTERMEDIATE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LITERATURE

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EXPLORING INTERMEDIATE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING INTERMEDIATE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LITERATURE

Prisciliana K. Delgado

Students deserve to see representations of themselves in the books that they read, but with low amounts of culturally diverse books being published, this is not an easy feat. Students are exposed to a wide variety of literature in their classrooms, and as the need increases for culturally responsive teaching, it is important to explore how teachers navigate instruction with respect to culturally responsive books. As the Latinx population continues to grow in Texas, culturally responsive practices are becoming increasingly needed. Moreover, it is helpful to explore teachers' own histories and how those experiences affect their teaching practices. In this qualitative narrative inquiry study, three Latinx intermediate teachers from central Texas were interviewed about their reading and teaching experiences using a sociocultural consciousness lens from the culturally responsive teaching conceptual framework. Using data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, I sought to understand how teachers use culturally responsive literature with their students. My findings provide insight on how culturally responsive books and instructional practices are being used. Implications include universities expanding or modifying their existing course offerings to focus more on culturally diverse teaching. School administrators and librarians may recognize the need to increase training and access to culturally responsive materials.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the most influential people in my life: my parents, Cosme and Juanita Delgado, and my late grandmother, Georga Silguero. Mom and Dad - from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your infinite love and support. I could not have gotten through this doctoral program without you. Para mi Abuelita - muchisimas gracias por todo su apoyo, rezos y amor. Aunque ya no esta aquí con nosotros, siento verdaderamente que Ud. ha estado a mi lado durante este programa doctoral. Espero haberle hecho sentir orgullosa.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

PROLOGUE

During the time frame that this study was conducted in 2021, the state of Texas saw a plethora of issues and controversy within K-12 education. The majority of these issues reached a boiling point in the fall months of 2021, shortly after the data collection portion of this study had been completed. The state legislature banned the use of Critical Race Theory in public schools and there were several book bans across the state, many of which received national attention. Some of the books in question are culturally responsive books, and several were written by authors of diverse cultural backgrounds. Considering that this dissertation was about culturally responsive books and culturally responsive teaching in Texas, I wanted to include the following details of what has transpired over the last few months.

Critical Race Theory Ban

Critical Race Theory first appeared in the 1970s after several lawyers and scholars noticed that advances from the previous decade's civil rights era "had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back" (Delgado, 2001, p. 4). The critical race theory movement posits that racism is a part of daily life, a social construct embedded in legal systems and policies. Critical Race Theory is an approach "that encourages us to move past the superficial explanations that are given about equality and suffering, and to ask for new kinds of explanations" (HoSang, as cited by Zou, 2021).

In the spring of 2021, House Bill 3979 was filed in Texas, pertaining to the social studies curriculum in public schools. This bill was frequently referred to as the "critical race theory bill," although the term Critical Race Theory never appears in the bill itself. Arguments for this bill were that Critical Race Theory created "racial disharmony in the United States," according to State Representative Steve Toth (Olivares, 2021).

Arguments against this bill stated that this was an effort to censor teachers and whitewash Texas history. Despite intense scrutiny and protests from educators and advocacy groups, this bill was passed and Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed it into law on June 15, 2021. Scholars have noted that these efforts in Texas have little to do with Critical Race Theory itself; rather, the intention is to restrict what teachers are teaching their students about the history and identity of the United States (Zhou, 2021). For example, history of the Texas revolution and the battle of the Alamo are taught from the perspective that Davy Crockett, James Bowie and William B. Travis were valiant in their efforts to fight for independence and that Santa Anna and his troops were treacherous Mexicans denying the Texans of their freedom. Teaching that the Texan defenders of the Alamo were heroic is actually a state standard for instruction (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Several Texan teachers spoke out that Critical Race Theory was not being used in schools prior to HB 3979 being signed into law. Going back to the example of the Alamo, the way this history is taught essentially celebrates people who were fighting for independence *because* of the institution of slavery (Texas was part of Mexico at the time and Mexico was anti-slavery). By celebrating the Alamo defenders without teaching about the Mexican perspective, it teaches about the dominant culture, implying that the Mexicans were an inferior race.

One section of the bill states that teachers cannot teach anything that "an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race or sex" (Toth, 2021, p. 3). In an interview with the Texas Tribune, scholar Monica Martinez Muñoz posited that this referred to making white students feel guilty or shame for being white when teaching histories of

slavery, race or racism (Zhou, 2021). Perhaps indirectly connected are the various book bans that followed after the bill came law in the fall of 2021.

Book Bans

In 2021, Texas saw multiple book bans across public school districts. Several school districts made headlines for having books removed from their collections about transgender issues and relationships between LGBTQ characters. Two books in particular that depict characters of color will be detailed next.

Out of Darkness by Ashley Hope Perez, a historical fiction book centering around the 1937 New London School explosion in East Texas that affected a small Mexican American community gained national attention five years after being published. Its storyline is an interracial love story between a Mexican American girl and an African American boy. This young adult novel, published in 2015, was awarded the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award in 2016 and quietly remained in libraries for several years without issue, until October 2021. A parent interrupted a school board meeting in Lake Travis ISD in Austin to demand the book's removal on the grounds of a passing reference to anal sex. This historical fiction, multicultural book was removed from the school libraries and is currently being reviewed (Jensen, 2021). I would not consider this book to be culturally responsive, but because it does focus on a true story that happened to Mexican Americans in Texas, I wanted to share about it.

Another book that sparked controversy was the 2020 Newbery Award and Coretta Scott King Award winner, *New Kid* by Jerry Craft. Published in 2019, this graphic novel portrays the life of 12-year-old Jordan Banks, an African American boy attending a predominantly White school. The storyline revolves around Jordan adjusting to this

school and navigating the two worlds, his African American family's home life and his school environment. This is a culturally responsive book in that it provides a positive portrayal of the African American experience. However, the book was banned in Katy ISD, near Houston, when a group of about 400 parents signed a petition demanding its removal, claiming the book promoted Critical Race Theory (Rhodes, 2021). The book was removed from shelves and went under review by district administrators. Author Jerry Craft was scheduled to speak to elementary students in Katy ISD on October 4, but the event was postponed pending the review. Over 2,000 parents and citizens signed a counter-petition to drop the issue and return the book to the shelves. After the review, the district indeed returned the book to shelves, deeming it as appropriate to keep. Craft's author event was rescheduled for October 25, and parents were given the opportunity to opt-out their children from attending.

Krause's List

On October 25, 2021, Republican State Representative Matt Krause, who serves as Chair of the Texas House Committee on General Investigating and had recently announced that he was running for Texas Attorney General, sent a letter to the Texas Education Agency and an undisclosed number of superintendents for a "School District Content Inquiry" (Krause, 2021, p. 1). Referencing the numerous school districts that had removed books from their libraries in recent weeks, the Committee on General Investigating initiated an inquiry into Texas school district content, asking school district staff to review a list of over 800 children's and young adult titles, identify which titles were in their school collections and how many copies of each book were in school libraries and classroom collections. In addition, the Committee asked for the amount of

funds spent to acquire these books and to identify any other books not on the existing list that addressed or contained topics on sexuality, HIV/AIDS, racism, sexism, or "any other form of material that might make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress" (Krause, 2021, p. 2), utilizing Toth's wording in HB 3979.

The list of 800 titles was provided on a 16-page spreadsheet. This list was largely made up of books written by authors who are women, people of color, and/or identify as members of the LGBTQ community (Lopez, 2021). Upon conducting my own analysis of Krause's list, I found that the majority of the books had themes and/or characters pertaining to LGBTQ communities and sexuality. Another theme that had far fewer books but still enough for me to notice was books about race and discrimination. Several books about the Black Lives Matter movement are included on the list. Books chronicling the history of underrepresented groups, such as *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* by Paul Ortiz were included as well. With regard to the Latinx culture, books detailing racial discrimination of Mexican Americans in California and even an informational nonfiction book about the cultural celebration of a 15th birthday, or *quinceañera*, were on this list. *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Perez and *New Kid* by Jerry Craft were also listed.

School districts were given until November 12, 2021 to submit their written responses (Krause, 2021). The inquiry letter did not specify what the committee wanted this information for, or what repercussions districts could face if they did not comply with this request.

The day after Krause's list and letter were released, the Texas Library Association Executive Board released a statement opposing efforts to restrict the freedom to read through any attempt to limit access to books or other materials (Texas Library Association, 2021). The statement also indicated that professional librarians receive extensive training on collection development and do not make collection decisions based on their personal beliefs, likes or dislikes. On November 2, 2021, Governor Abbott sent a letter to the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) warning them that parents are concerned about students being exposed to pornographic material from their school libraries (Office of the Texas Governor, 2021). The TASB responded on November 3 asserting that their organization has no regulatory authority over school districts nor does it play a role in school library collection development, encouraging the Governor to redirect his concerns to the Texas Education Agency or State Board for Educator Certification (Troxel, 2021).

Response to Krause's List

Several school districts commented that they would not be partaking in Representative Krause's request. Austin Independent School District and Dallas Independent School District, two of the largest public school districts in the state, both released statements that they would not respond to this request. Krause's November 12, 2021 deadline came and went with little fanfare.

On the other hand, a major school district in San Antonio, Northeast ISD, the second-largest school district in the city, complied with Krause by launching an investigation into the library collections within the district, and ultimately 414 books, nearly half of Krause's list, were temporarily pulled from the shelves to be reviewed. At

the time of this writing in December 2021, 75 of the 414 that were pulled were in the process of being completely removed and/or reorganized away from the library holdings. The district is forming a committee to determine the fate of the books that are being removed - whether to create a new section in the library to house these or take other action.

The resolution to Krause's book list and investigation request is unknown, nor has he followed up on it as of this writing. On November 22, Krause announced that he was dropping out of the Texas Attorney General race to instead run for District Attorney for Tarrant County (Fort Worth is the county seat) (Goldenstein, 2021). At the time of this writing, this issue with books in classrooms and school libraries had not been resolved.

These happenings did not directly interfere with my dissertation, data collection or analysis, but I included it because some of the books being banned are culturally responsive books and the issues are taking place in the communities in which I conducted my study. The topics of book bans in Texas are sprinkled throughout the chapters of my dissertation, and it is my hope that this prologue provides context for those references and on a broader scale, to the significance of my study.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Who remembers the first time they saw a reflection of themselves in literature? For some readers, it may be a given, a moot point, because they have always seen reflections of themselves - their skin color, their eye color, their hair, their family dynamics. I remember the first time I saw a reflection of myself in a book. I was thirteen years old, in the eighth grade in 1996, reading *Baseball in April* by Gary Soto (1990). The book was a collection of short stories about Mexican American kids living in California. One of the characters in the book had my last name, much to my delight. Even though the setting was not my native Texas and the title describes a sport I had no interest in at the time, the rich descriptions of the *barrios* (neighborhoods), the families, and life straddling two cultures was like nothing I had ever read before. I had always been an avid reader since early childhood, but this experience was truly a game-changer. It opened my eyes to the world of Latinx literature and gave me a sense of validation - kids like me were present in books. Looking back, I am grateful for that day in which a book provided that much-needed literary mirror, a reflection of my lived experience as a Mexican American and Latina growing up in the United States.

Background to the Problem

In recent years, the need for windows and mirrors in children's literature has become increasingly apparent (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). This concept was notably brought to light by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) whose article, "Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors," described the need for children to see themselves, as well as learn about other lived experiences, through literature. Extensive research has been conducted on the types of books being published annually, and the numbers are eye-opening. The Cooperative Children's Book Center

annually provides statistics on the diversity in children's books. Table 1 presents a comparison of the percentages of books that were published in 2015 and 2019.

Table 1

Diversity in Children's Books from the Cooperative Children's Book Center

Book Character Background	% 2015	% 2019
American Indian/First Nation	0.9	1
Latinx	2.4	5.3
Asian/Pacific American	3.3	8.7
African/African American	7.6	11.9
Animals/Trucks	12.5	29.2
White	73.3	41.8

Since 2015, there have been fewer books published with White protagonists, but the number of books featuring animals or other entities has more than doubled. As for characters of diverse backgrounds, each group has seen an increase of varying size, but in 2019, there were still more books about animals/others than all the diverse cultural areas combined (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020). In 2015, 2.4% of published children's literature had Latinx protagonists (Huyck, Dahlen, & Griffin, 2016). By 2019, that percentage had increased to 5.3% for Latinx (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020). The increase in diverse characters shows progress and a step in the right direction, but the continual large number of books with White and animal characters illustrates a continued lack of diversity in the books being published.

Most educators are familiar with the classic works of authors such as Laura Ingalls Wilder and Dr. Seuss. Studies and critical analyses conducted on these books

years after their initial release have found issues that were not evident or addressed until now.

Concerns with Representation of Diversity in Children's Literary Classics

Laura Ingalls Wilder is best known for her Little House on the Prairie novels, which were turned into a long-running television series in the late 20th century. Her works "reflected dated cultural attitudes toward Indigenous people and people of color" (American Library Association, 2018) that were a product of her life experiences and point of view growing up in America in the 1800s. Within the eight-book series were numerous description of Black and Native characters that are considered dehumanizing (Fields, 2021). The Association of Library Services for Children had been giving an award named after Wilder since 1954, but after careful consideration of the context of her works with regard to the Association's core values, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award was renamed the Children's Literature Legacy Award in 2018. Newer reprints of Wilder's books have edited the content to remove the controversial statements, but some authors and researchers feel that the Little House books should remain as they were originally published and used as a teaching tool to have honest conversations about the history of our country (Fields, 2021). Wilder's books continue to be available in print and are still read widely.

Theodore Geisel, better known to the world as Dr. Seuss, wrote and illustrated dozens of beloved picture books that continue to be bestselling books and popular films. Despite the popularity, content analyses have found that certain Dr. Seuss titles depicted stereotypical illustrations of people of color and other content that had racial and otherwise inappropriate undertones (Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019). Researcher Ramón

Stephens stated in an interview, “Dr. Seuss and whiteness is a reflection of the overwhelming silence in literacy regarding matters of race, especially with both young people and white people” (Lynch, 2017). In March 2021, Dr. Seuss Enterprises announced that six titles would cease publication and licensing due to content that was considered hurtful and inappropriate This announcement was met with an abundance of backlash from fans of Dr. Seuss books, with critics calling this censorship and a part of cancel culture. Almost immediately, these titles sold out from stores and websites. Libraries across the United States began receiving phone calls asking if the books would be removed, if they would be available for purchase, and other concerns. Although the books may be hard to find for purchase now, many libraries have opted to keep them in their collection, citing the American Library Association’s Intellectual Freedom Policy (Mosier, 2021) that calls for libraries to provide equitable access to resources, even if the library staff do not agree with the content within those resources.

The national reading event Read Across America was originally centered around Dr. Seuss’s birthday, March 2, and was marketed with Seuss book characters and images as a day to celebrate reading. Through 2016, Read Across America was synonymous with Dr. Seuss, but starting in 2017, the National Education Association, who sponsors Read Across America, shifted away from the Seuss-related content and March 2 celebration date (Lynch, 2017). Recognizing the need to highlight diverse literature and a broader range of organizations and publishers, Read Across America is no longer affiliated with any one entity and operates independently (National Education Association, 2021). The organization promotes a year-round celebration of reading with an emphasis on all readers.

While not every book will be a mirror or window to every reader, diverse books are still critically needed because they can resist stereotypes and help readers grasp how identities often intersect across communities (Durand & Jimenez-Garcia, 2018). Authors, librarians, and educators are trying to highlight and utilize books that feature diverse characters, not just White or animal protagonists. The inclusion of culturally responsive children's literature in classroom settings can create opportunities for meaningful conversations and provide windows and mirrors for students and teachers alike.

Culturally Responsive, Culturally Relevant, and Multicultural Books

The following is my definition and explanation of the difference between the three types of culturally connected books. Various researchers and programs have their own definitions of these three types of books, many of which create overlap between their differences. For this dissertation, these are the definitions I am following to differentiate between each. With all three of these book types, it is important to remember that just because a book has a diverse culture, that does not automatically make it multicultural, culturally responsive, or culturally relevant. Characters and/or settings of diverse backgrounds may serve as a starting point to filtering through what type of book it may be.

Multicultural books provide stories and/or information on a particular culture, race, language, or tradition that is considered to be outside mainstream society. This may include a nonfiction book about the people of a particular country, fairy tale variations that reflect culture (like the various Cinderella stories from different countries), or a common theme with representations of people from multiple backgrounds. These books

are sometimes written by cultural outsiders who prepare their books through extensive research rather than their own lived experience.

Culturally responsive books, which are being used for this study, are books that reflect variance and diversity within cultural groups that pay particular attention to the setting and racial/ethnic relevance. For example, culturally responsive Latinx books will include multiple facets of that cultural experience, ranging from everyday typical activities like going to school and partaking in clubs to planning a *quinceañera*, a rite of passage for a Latina 15-year-old. Culturally responsive books often have a tone of joy and celebration within their cultural authenticity. Finally, culturally responsive books are most typically written by cultural insiders - authors who are writing about their own cultural background and may not need to do outside research to learn about the culture.

Culturally relevant books align with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in that a key component is sociopolitical consciousness. These books will also include a sociopolitical consciousness aspect, similar to a call to action, that can broaden the social consciousness of the readers (Kibler & Chapman, 2018; Tatum, 2000). Because of the sociopolitical component, these books may include topics that are difficult to discuss, such as blatant racism and prejudice. The serious, potentially heavy topics serve a purpose to raise awareness of and hopefully change the issues portrayed within the book. Examples of culturally relevant books include accounts of police brutality toward people of color, oppression, and other types of hardships.

Culturally relevant and culturally responsive books both build on the lived experiences of the people represented. Culturally responsive teaching practices emphasize the need for educators to intentionally create their classroom libraries *with*

their students, including books that contain meaningful stories and lessons. Reading a variety of culturally responsive books opens up a multitude of worlds to readers and allows them to see their environments from various perspectives, including those similar to their own.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Geneva Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). Key practices of culturally responsive teaching include high expectations for students, closing gaps between home and school practices, educating the whole child, engaging students' backgrounds and perspectives, leveraging students' strengths, and critically questioning normative schooling practices (Gay, 2002).

The Importance of Culture

The inclusion of culturally responsive literature is best paired with culturally responsive teaching. To successfully address the increasingly diverse student population in the United States and create meaningful learning experiences for students, school and literacy instruction should be culturally responsive (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Li, 2011). The word *culture* can be defined in a variety of ways, often seen as a historically transmitted pattern of meanings in which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their understandings of and attitudes toward life (Geertz, 1973). For purposes of this study, I will further define the notion of *culture* as racial and ethnic background. I recognize that the term *culture* includes multiple identities, but addressing them is beyond the scope of this study.

According to Li (2011), literacy activities are rooted in the cultural, social and historical contexts in which they occur. For students of non-mainstream cultural backgrounds, their life experiences and cultural norms may differ substantially from mainstream culture. Keeping this in mind, the use of culturally familiar materials has been shown to have a positive impact on students' achievement (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006). Literacy instruction that is personally meaningful to students of diverse backgrounds, including learning materials that are used in the classroom, can foster powerful connections and yield increased academic success (Souto-Manning, Llerena, Martell, Maguire, & Arce-Boardman, 2018). Choosing culturally responsive texts that are closely tied to students' social and cultural identities is a tremendous step in that direction.

Problem Statement

Culture either privileges for or prejudices against students' educational experiences; when culture is not present, students may struggle to find meaningful connections between their lives and their learning (Willis, 2019). Schools in the United States have continued to follow a European American cultural norm model despite the increasing diverse populations (Gay, 2002; Souto-Manning et al., 2018; Park, 2021). For students of color, this creates a "double jeopardy - having to master the academic tasks while functioning under cultural conditions unnatural (and often unfamiliar) to them" (Gay, 2002, p. 114). Students of color make up half of the population today in schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), yet instructional practices, including literature, do not always include or embrace their backgrounds, histories and experiences.

A common teaching approach has centered around a deficit perspective, in which the practices, capacities, and funds of knowledge of students from minoritized populations has not been recognized or are viewed as a negative aspect of those students (Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Such deficit perspectives send the message to children and their families that their cultural practices and histories are not as important as those in power - the dominant culture (Bishop, 1990; Nieto, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Moreover, teachers have their own cultural identity, one which positions them toward a spectrum of privilege or oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Many teachers often find it difficult and even unnecessary to discuss and deconstruct their own sociocultural history and values (Ebersole, Kanahele-Mossman, Kawakami, 2016).

Classrooms and school libraries are also affected by the deficit perspective when their collections do not represent multiple voices (Park, 2021). For classroom teachers, their belief systems can influence which books are included in their classroom libraries. Teachers who engage in culturally responsive practices may intentionally seek out culturally responsive books (Joseph, 2021), whereas others from whom cultural responsiveness is not a priority may not give the variety of their collection much thought. This problem is further exacerbated by the differences between multicultural books, culturally relevant books, and culturally responsive books.

Multicultural Does Not Equal Culturally Responsive

An important term to differentiate for purposes of this dissertation is *multicultural*. As mentioned earlier, just because a book may be identified as multicultural does not mean that it is culturally responsive. Multicultural literature is a broad term that includes books that represent the diversity of racial, ethnic and social

groups in our world (Bishop, 1997). For example, a folktale set in Mexico in the 1500s may not be relevant to Mexican American students living in the southwestern states today. Culturally responsive literature, on the other hand, allows students to make personal connections to what they are reading and explore their cultural identities (Fleming, Catapano, Thompson, Carrillo, 2016). In addition, many of these multicultural books may be about people of color, but are written by White authors. This raises a red flag; how accurate and authentic can a book be if the person who wrote it is not part of that culture or has not lived that experience? Granted, some books may be very well researched, but this is where the line is drawn between multicultural books and culturally responsive books. Multicultural books may be about one culture, written by someone from another background. Culturally responsive literature should be written by someone of that culture who can attest to the authenticity. Culturally responsive texts should have characters and places that are potentially familiar to readers of that culture. Although multicultural books may increase cultural awareness and relevance in the classroom, they do not always provide reflections of students' lived experiences.

Although both types of books may recognize, explain or celebrate culture, they are not the same, and misconceptions exist around understanding the difference and how to best use these books in a classroom. Teachers do not always know how to find or access literature that is relevant to their students and how to determine the differences between multicultural books and culturally responsive books (Souto-Manning et al., 2018). Whereas culturally responsive literature celebrates diversity and shows multiple sides to a story, multicultural literature often paints a single story from a deficit perspective that can be misleading in providing windows and mirrors to readers.

The Danger of the Single Story

A common happening in schools today is the use of books that do not reflect all students' lived experiences. Teaching practices, many of them stemming from teacher preparation programs in universities, often provide minimal instruction on how to respond to ethnic diversity, leaving pre-service teachers with a need for deeper instruction and practice (Goodwin, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003). Students have been expected to "divorce themselves from their cultures and learn according to European American cultural norms" (Gay, 2002, p. 114). This type of instruction often utilizes books that feature characters, experiences, hair types, and activities in which many students cannot relate. Books may include European American children playing in the snow, Mexican American children being deported, and/or African American children living in poverty. These experiences do not reflect the multiple facets of those cultures. Adichie (2009) gave a TED Talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story," positing that within a single story, students see only one version of that cultural experience, one they may or may not be familiar with, and their understandings of those windows become singular. Assumptions may be made of the world around them based on the single story, which may or may not be accurate. The inclusion of only single stories in classroom libraries and in instruction creates a sense of "otherness" among students who are not seeing reflections of themselves (Skulj, 2000).

An alarming ramification of this lack of diverse books is that students tend to not invest in the content being taught (Souto-Manning et al., 2018). The repeated inclusion of books in the curriculum that do not represent diverse backgrounds is at risk of teaching the single story and perpetuating stereotypes. A lack of cultural diversity within the texts

students are exposed to in school can lead to students disengaging from instruction, whether by misbehaving or not paying attention (Souto-Manning et al, 2018). When books are always windows with no mirrors, children may view one culture as more worthy and conclude that the cultures not being depicted are not valued or important. On the other hand, when books are always mirrors with no windows, students may develop a magnified view of themselves and their place in society. As a result, understandings of different perspectives and experiences may fail to develop within those students (Bishop, 2015; Souto-Manning et al., 2018).

Teachers' Lived Experiences

Similar to my experience with *Baseball in April*, many teachers (and people in general) remember a favorite book that touched our lives, pushed them to think differently, or sparked an interest (Amber & Gibbons, 2006a). Teachers likely have their own stories to share about books and moments in their schooling that served as an awakening or key moment in their lives. Whether they had windows and mirrors experiences with literature growing up, teachers have the opportunity to provide those to their students today.

As we delve deeper into the 21st century, educators should be aware of and, ideally, actively seeking and utilizing culturally responsive texts in their classrooms. Disrupting the usage of dated titles and exposing students to new, culturally authentic content with diverse characters and stories will allow teachers to explore other types of literature and provide windows and mirrors to the lived realities of diverse students.

Teachers should strive to understand their students' cultural background and socialization practices, building on this knowledge to differentiate instruction. Selection

of culturally authentic children's literature is a key component of culturally responsive teaching. When children read books and engage in classroom practices that honor and include their cultural stories and backgrounds, children become more invested in their learning, which has led to academic success (Au, 1980).

Student and Teacher Demographics in the United States and Texas

With increasingly diverse populations across the United States, there has been a rise in awareness of the need for culturally responsive teaching. Table 2 provides the percentages of children's racial/ethnic backgrounds in the United States from 2018 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2020).

Table 2

Race/Ethnicity of K-12 Students in the United States, 2018

Race/Ethnicity	%
White, non-Hispanic	50.0
Hispanic	25.9
Black, non-Hispanic	13.3
Two or more races, non-Hispanic	5.0
Asian, non-Hispanic	4.6
American Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	0.8
Some other race, non-Hispanic	0.4
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	0.2

As of the 2015-16 school year, 80% of teachers in the United States were White, 9% were Hispanic, and 7% were African American, with other racial/ethnic

groups falling below 1% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Narrowing this down to Texas, there were 5.4 million K-12 students during the 2019-20 school year; Hispanic/Latino students made up the majority at 2.8 million or 52.8%, with White students making up 1.4 million or 27% (Texas Education Agency, 2021). Considering these percentages, the need for culturally responsive teaching is imperative to ensure optimal student learning.

Current demographics reveal that the majority of the teaching force in the United States is White and female (Freiser, 2011). In Texas, 57.7% of teachers are White, with 28.1% of teachers being Hispanic/Latino (Texas Education Agency, 2021), with a female majority for both ethnicities. The number of students of color continues to rise. This nationwide and statewide diverse population is still being taught by a majority of White, female teachers.

According to Lambeth and Smith (2016), "research indicates that educators teach more effectively to students who are similar to themselves in terms of culture, race, ethnicity, and class" (p. 48). On the other hand, students that are taught by those less similar to their own identity creates a disconnect between and among students and teachers (Fasching-Varner, 2013). This study will explore the dynamics between teachers and their students with respect to their cultural backgrounds.

In the extant literature, culture is commonly referenced with a focus on students from non-mainstream cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Rueda, 2011), but in reality, culture is a universal component of daily life for all people. Given the changing demographics in schools in the United States, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore or put aside cultural factors in classroom settings.

In a state with a K-12 Hispanic/Latinx student population of 2.8 million but with mostly White educators (over 209,000, or 58%) as recent as 2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2021), Texas faces a timely concern about the use of culturally responsive teaching practices, and specifically culturally responsive books, in their classrooms. The state of Texas has its own long-running story of the education of Latinxs, which will be briefly discussed next.

Latinx Education in Texas

Before Texas became a part of the United States, it was part of Mexico. Ever since Texas became part of the Union in 1845, Latinxs in Texas have struggled for equal education opportunities (Kauffman, 2019). Until the late 1880s, Mexican American students were not given access to public education, and when they finally did get access, it was due to the creation of separate "Mexican schools" (San Miguel, 1983). Although these schools often claimed to be designed for English Learners, any student with a Spanish surname, even those who were native English speakers, attended. In part due to various lawsuits, Texas schools began superficial attempts at blatant desegregation. Rather than have designated "Mexican schools," school districts created attendance zones that put the majority of White students at certain schools and Mexican American students at others, based on where they lived. This trend continues to this day, with Latinx students attending majority Latinx campuses (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). As of 2016, Texas was the third most segregated state in the United States; nearly 54% of Latinx students attended 90-100% non-white schools (Orfield et al., 2016).

Latinxs in Texas have consistently had higher dropout rates than Whites or African American students (Kauffman, 2019; Intercultural Development Research Association, 2021). Dating back to the 1960s, dropout rates of Mexican Americans in Texas was 59%, meaning that "only 41% of Mexican American students who entered public schools actually completed the high school diploma requirement" (Kauffman, 2019, p. 908). Dropout rates have fluctuated considerably since the 1960s, with notably alarming rates for Hispanics during 1993-1994 when dropout percentages were consistently above 50%. At that time, famous Texans rose to the challenge to encourage students to stay in school, including Tejano superstar Selena Quintanilla-Perez and the San Antonio Spurs basketball team, recording commercials and holding events to motivate students (Paredez, 2009). The Intercultural Development Research Association (2021) conducts annual studies on retention, and as of the 2017-18 school year, schools in Texas were losing more than one in four Hispanic students. In the region in which I reside in Texas, 28% of Latinx students have been lost from enrollment (Intercultural Development Research Association, 2021).

The climate of education in Texas continues to be a hot topic, and one that I wanted to incorporate into my study. Its purpose will be described next.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored how Latinx educators' personal backgrounds and their own education in K-12 and higher education influenced their use of culturally responsive Latinx literature within their teaching environments. For this study, the *use* of Latinx literature is defined as such books being utilized for read-alouds, mentor texts, and other lessons and activities led by the teacher in a classroom setting. This usage referred to the

active engagement between the book and the teacher for instructional purposes during the school day.

The purpose of this study was to explore how culturally responsive Latinx literature was being used by Latinx, Texan intermediate teachers. This study homed in on educators working with predominantly-Latinx populations in the central Texas region. This study followed a framework of culturally responsive teaching to explore teachers' perceptions and usage of culturally responsive literature in their educational experiences (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Gay, 2002).

Defining Latinxs and Culturally Responsive Latinx Literature

American society has lumped all descendants of Latin American countries into the "Latino" population; moreover, the term "Hispanic" is also used to refer to descendants of Spanish-speaking countries but has implications of colonization dating back to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the Aztec empire (Lopez, Krogstad, & Passel, 2020). Within these umbrella terms, people further identify their own specific ethnicity, such as Mexican American or Cuban American. The publishing field continues to include minimal books that reflect the Latinx culture (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020), and those that do are often of a single story - that of immigration, of moving from one country to the United States, of learning English, or of deportation. This is not the lived experience of all Latinxs or Hispanics in the U.S., yet it appears to be the most common story being shared, perpetuating stereotypes. The sample for this study included Latinx teachers of predominantly Latinx students. The term *Latinx* is used in this study with the understanding that ethnic-specific terms like Mexican American and

other umbrella terms like Latin American and Hispanic also reflect the population being targeted for this research.

During Hispanic Heritage Month in September/October 2021, another variation of the term Latinx gained prominent usage. The term *Latine* was frequently used to refer to someone who was of Latinx descent. This term, unlike Latinx, is designed to work with the Spanish language and is intended to be gender-neutral (El Centro, n.d.). Latinx is also a gender-neutral term, but the pronunciation in Spanish is difficult to do; the term *Latinx* in English is spoken like it reads - "Lah-tin-ex," but in Spanish, the letter "x" is pronounced "eh-kees" and also takes on the "s", "ch" and "j" letter sounds, depending on the word. The name Xavier in Spanish, for example, is pronounced with a Spanish "j" sound, which is the letter "h" sound in English; "Ha-vi-ere". As such, Latine can be more easily read and pronounced in Spanish as opposed to Latinx.

This being said, ultimately, it is up to each individual to decide what term they use to describe themselves. Indeed, there are a myriad of options within the broad Latinx spectrum.

Culturally responsive Latinx literature, for this study, refers to children's books written about the Latinx experience that is culturally authentic and realistic with a culturally conscious ideology (McNair, 2010). Culturally responsive books should be written by an insider to that culture and may reflect the language, customs, and heritage while also depicting a storyline with universal themes. This type of literature has increased in publication in the last 30 years.

Conceptual Framework

First I will differentiate between culturally relevant and culturally responsive, then I will provide a brief historical overview of the framework's evolution.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching, described by Geneva Gay (2002) utilizes cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference to create relevant and effective instruction for ethnically diverse students. To differentiate from Ladson-Billings (2009), the term culturally relevant pedagogy refers to the use of cultural referents to relay knowledge, skills, and attitude through pedagogy that empowers students socially, emotionally, politically, and intellectually. Culturally responsive teaching is the conceptual framework that was used for this study.

Cultural responsiveness is a "much deeper introspection of instructional practices in order to ensure that teachers are not simply teaching content but teaching *students* in ways that respect, promote, and incorporate diverse ways of thinking, learning, and communicating" (Toppel, 2015, p. 559). An important aspect of cultural responsiveness is the inclusion of culturally authentic, responsive books that provide students with windows and mirrors that allow them to see reflections of themselves and glimpses of the lives of others in the books that they read (Bishop, 1990). For instructional purposes, culturally unfamiliar reading material may create an extraneous cognitive load that could hinder the effectiveness of the intended instruction (Rueda, 2011).

For purposes of this study, the framework of culturally responsive teaching was used with particular focus on cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of references of the teachers of diverse students.

Brief Historical Overview

Now I will provide a brief historical overview of the conceptual framework I used for this study, culturally responsive teaching. Freire (1970) explored the connections between teacher, student and society, which started a movement toward exploring pedagogical best practices. With terms such as culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981) and culturally responsive (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Gay, 1975), pedagogical practices revolving around cultural awareness continued to be studied throughout the 1980s. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as the ability to develop students academically, culturally, and socio-politically. Culturally responsive, as described by Gay (2002), uses cultural characteristics of diverse students as a channel for effective, meaningful teaching. Numerous articles have been written, studies conducted, and teacher training has been provided on culturally responsive teaching best practices across the United States. A more detailed overview of culturally responsive teaching can be found in Chapter Two.

Culturally responsive teaching was the selected framework for this study because it is grounded in the idea of using cultural resources to yield stronger, more effective teaching practices, which in turn may lead to academic achievement. The use of culturally responsive books, providing windows and mirrors for students, and learning how teachers experience such literature and use it in their classroom were explored through the sociocultural consciousness strand of culturally responsive teaching. Sociocultural consciousness is the understanding that how people think, behave, and live are heavily influenced by race/ethnicity, social class, and language (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Interviewing teachers of various cultural backgrounds on how they use culturally

responsive Latinx literature with Latinx students in Texas zoomed in on a very specific group which provided insight to the standings and areas for further exploration for Texas educators. Previous studies will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and my study's areas for further exploration will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Research Design

The methodology used for this study was a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for research through storytelling. In this methodology, participants' voices are lifted, allowing the researcher to learn about people's lived experiences. The study of narrative explores how humans experience the world around them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through semi-structured interviews, I spoke with participants about their views of culturally responsive teaching, books, and their own educational experiences. By listening to the stories of the participants, I was able to analyze information about how their experiences and their practices with culturally responsive teaching and books connected with each other. Three Latinx educators from Texas were recruited as participants for this study. Interviews were conducted online via a video conferencing platform and were recorded with the approval from the participants. This method will be elaborated on in Chapter Three.

Next I will share my positionality within this research study.

Positionality

Personal Background

As described earlier, I was 13 years old when I first read a book that reflected my Latinx culture, and it had a profound impact on me. The reason my teacher had us read that book was because the author, Gary Soto, was going to be coming to our town to

accept a book award and we were going to attend. His recent work *Chato's Kitchen* (1995), a picture book about a hip cat from East Los Angeles, had won the first Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award. This award had been established at Texas State University (the college in my hometown of San Marcos, Texas) the year before, and the first award presentation was taking place in the fall of 1996. This was one of my first experiences with meeting an author. I still have my autographed copy of *Baseball in April*. Ever since that day when Mrs. Kyle, my eighth grade language arts teacher, handed me that copy of *Baseball in April*, Latinx literature has played a major role in my life. As such, it became my mission, professionally and in my private life, to seek out books that reflect cultural diversity and to expose them to others early and often.

Identities

I identify as a Mexican American, a fourth-generation Texan, a *Tejana* (a Mexican American inhabitant of Texas), and as a Latina. My Mexican American culture has always been an important component of my life. My family has resided in Texas since before it became a part of the United States; our roots run deep and navigating life between two cultures is simply a way of life (although not always simple). In a broader sense, I am a Latina, a woman of Latin American descent, embracing and honoring the rich cultures and histories of Latin America.

I am a lifelong bookworm, intimately familiar with multiple reading lists, book awards, and book club programs of numerous genres and states. I am an educator: a former bilingual teacher and school librarian, both of which fueled my love of culture, language and literacy into a satisfying and meaningful career. As a teacher in Texas, the majority of my students were Latinx like me, which often served as a connection point

between us. Coming from similar backgrounds with similar experiences, I was often able to bond with students based on those similarities that would not have been afforded to me had I not been Latinx. Including culturally responsive books became a regular practice for me during my teaching career. Reflecting upon my own educational experience and wanting to provide windows and mirrors for my students, I deliberately and consciously selected culturally diverse books to include in my lessons and read-alouds as often as I could. Upon further reflection, I believe that this was something that I took upon myself; this was not an expectation within our curriculum to include culturally responsive books. While some teachers took the initiative like I did, others did not.

Most importantly, I am the daughter of my hardworking Mexican American parents, who faced discrimination and racism growing up in the 1950s and 1960s: My mother, a migrant worker who was an English Learner in a traumatic sink-or-swim immersion type of school, and my father, who knew first-hand the treatment people received based on their last name or the color of their skin. Although they were both the first in their families to go to college, neither of them graduated from college and struggled to make ends meet for my sister and me. My maternal grandmother meant the world to me - she was the one that instilled in me my pride in our culture, language, and music. My paternal grandfather, a light-skinned, hazel-eyed *güero* (light-skinned man), was often mistaken for a White person. (My other two grandparents were deceased by the time I was born.) None of my grandparents graduated from high school; most of their formal schooling ended by the time they were teenagers in order to help with the family, working as cotton pickers across the state. My parents and grandparents all attended segregated or "Mexican" schools at some point in their schooling. I am the first in my

family to graduate from college, to earn a master's degree, and now to pursue a PhD. In my point of view, my parents' and grandparents' hard work and sacrifices were to build a better life for their families. I am where I am and who I am because of them.

Considering the implications of a lack of culturally responsive teaching, which was not even a consideration during my parents' and grandparents' upbringing in the first half of the 20th century, I often wonder if schooling had been more culturally relevant and respectful of their background, would getting an education have been more important than working in the fields? Maybe, maybe not, but the use of European American-centric education in Texas combined with the lack of diverse literature certainly left my ancestors and Latinx people in general in a cultural desert. My hope is that this cultural desert continues to decrease in size and eventually disappear with the dedicated practice of culturally responsive teaching.

Exploring Bias

As a Texan Latinx educator myself, I recognized that I fit the sample of teachers I included in this study. As a Mexican American, I am passionate about the success and advancement of Latinxs in all facets of life. In addition, I am familiar with and not fond of the discrimination Latinxs have faced and the disparagingly low number of Latinx educators working in K-12 and higher education. Moreover, I am appalled at the recent book bans and uproar over critical race theory in Texas, even within the region from which my participants teach. Through my research and bookworm tendencies, I am also well acquainted with the lack of diverse literature, particularly Latinx literature, being published in the United States. My assumptions and life experiences guide how I view

and interpret things, and as such I recognize that how I executed and analyzed my study was influenced by my personal lens.

Prior to conducting this study, I recognized that I needed to understand that not every educator's experiences would match mine, not everyone may be as familiar with or interested in culturally responsive Latinx literature, and that the participants might not consider their cultural background as a defining factor of who they are as people and as educators.

One potential concern I identified before conducting my study was that I identify as an insider to the Latinx culture, but it occurred to me that others, particularly the participants, might not see me as such. Similar to the works of Sofia Villenas (1996), others might not see me as a Latina but as a "middle-class, educated woman of Spanish descent" (p. 720). Keeping in mind the danger of the single story, my story does not reflect the stereotypical views of Latinxs; I am not an immigrant, nor were my parents or grandparents. I still struggle to speak Spanish fluently. In grade school, college, and graduate school I was often one of the few or only Latinx students in my classes. Peers have jokingly and disparagingly told me that I am not a "true Mexican" because I do not fit the mold of what they consider to be a Mexican, a Mexican American or even a Latina. In this sense, I am often "othered" within my own community. In addition to the research I conducted, this study allowed me to further explore my own identity working with teachers within and outside of my culture.

Another area of potential bias lies within this self-identification as a Latinx insider. Keeping in mind the sense of otherness that I have experienced, I constantly reminded myself to remember that experience while I collected stories from my

participants. It was possible that the participants, as fellow Latinas, did not view cultural responsiveness through the same lens that I did (and still do), and I knew I needed to not hold them to higher standards just because of their ethnicity. Their mere identity as Latinas did not equate a journey like mine and I needed to be cognizant of this throughout my research.

I will next describe the significance and potential implications for this study.

Significance of the Study

The need for culturally responsive teaching has been studied and explained by various researchers and this study will provide insight to how culturally responsive books are being used, among Latinx students' teachers. The significance of this study is that by conducting this research, it used narrative to lift voices often absent from academic discourse, filling a gap in the literature with a narrative inquiry study with Latinx teachers of Latinx students.

This study draws attention to teachers' understandings of and experiences with culturally responsive books and findings could point to various courses of action. Teacher educator programs, especially those labeled as Hispanic Serving Institutions, may consider these findings to modify or expand their course offerings. School administrators and librarians may recognize the need to provide training and/or access to culturally responsive materials.

It is my hope that through this research I may build a case for the need for using culturally responsive Latinx books with Latinx students and perhaps create a snowball effect for other ethnicities and educators beyond the Latinx spectrum. The process of

problematizing the lack of culturally diverse books and how they are used in classroom settings led me to develop the overarching research question and sub-questions.

Research Questions

The main research question for this qualitative narrative inquiry study is: How is culturally responsive Latinx literature being used by Latinx middle grade teachers? Sub-questions include: What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? To what extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise?

Definition of Terms

Mainstream – The ideas, practices, attitudes, and cultures that are considered to be conventional.

Non-mainstream - Ideas, practices, attitudes, and cultures that are NOT considered to be conventional.

Latine - A gender-neutral form of the word Latino created by gender non-binary communities in Spanish-speaking countries referring to a person of Latin American origin/descent. This term replaces the end letter of Latino/a with a gender-neutral Spanish E, similar to the word *estudiante* (student) (El Centro, n.d.).

Latino - A person of Latin American origin/descent; this term is used to refer to males only or males and females together. Latino is the more commonly used term to refer to people with cultural ties to Latin America.

Latinx – A person of Latin American origin/descent; relating to people of Latin American origin/descent (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This is a gender-neutral term used to describe the

Latino population or relations to the Latino population with its first known use dating back to 2007. Although the term Latinx is used by a mere 3% of the U.S. Latino population (Noe-Bustamante, Mora, & Lopez, 2020), the term has gained momentum when referring to books that represent Latino cultures. In addition, it is important to note that the term Latinx is predominantly used in the United States and is not a common term in other Latin American countries (D. Bowles, personal communication, September 30, 2020).

Latina - An individual identifying as female of Latin American origin/descent.

Chapter Summary

Windows and mirrors in children's literature has been a topic of discussion for over 30 years, but publishing statistics indicate that diverse books still make up a small percentage of all children's books being published (Bishop, 1990; Huyck & Dahlen, 2019; Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020). Popular, classic children's books are being re-evaluated and called out for dated cultural attitudes within the text and illustrations (American Library Association, 2018; Fields, 2021; Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019). The use of culturally responsive literature in literacy instruction provides students of all backgrounds with the opportunity to have those experiences with windows and mirrors, but understanding what culturally responsive books are and how to identify and use them remains an issue for teachers.

Schools continue to follow European American cultural norms, which can be problematic to students of diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2002). These European American cultures are often reflected within classroom and school library collections in that books reflecting diverse cultures may be scarce. What one might consider to be a culturally

responsive book could actually be a multicultural book, a book that reflects a particular culture, usually written by a cultural outsider and not necessarily a book about the authentic experience. Culturally responsive books, on the other hand, are authentic, realistic, and usually written by a cultural insider. When students are exposed to minimal culturally responsive books, the danger of the single story becomes a concern: seeing only one version of a cultural experience can lead to singular understandings from those literary windows (Adichie, 2009).

Culturally responsive books are an important part of culturally responsive teaching, which continues to gain attention but may look different from school to school. Teachers may or may not choose to include culturally responsive books or even consider this an area of concern. Their lived experiences may have allowed them to see an abundance of windows and mirrors when they were students themselves, or perhaps the opposite is true. This study sought to explore teachers' experiences with culturally responsive books, if and how they are being used in their classrooms in the central Texas region. This region, like the state, has a large student population of Latinx students and a majority of White teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2021). This study was conducted through qualitative narrative inquiry, through semi-structured interviews with the participants, and follows a conceptual framework of the sociocultural consciousness component of culturally responsive teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

In the next chapter I will describe in detail the conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching, the lens of sociocultural consciousness with which this study was conducted, and a brief historical overview of culturally responsive teaching research. I

will also provide a review of the literature on culturally responsive books, teacher belief systems, and culturally responsive teaching.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The goal of my research study was to explore if and how teachers use culturally responsive books in their classrooms. This exploration was grounded in the sociocultural consciousness strand of the culturally responsive teaching conceptual framework. It is my hope that this research will shed light on teachers' understandings of culturally responsive teaching and how they use culturally responsive books in their classroom settings. This chapter will detail the conceptual framework being used, its history, and relevant research that informed my understandings of culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive literature.

Organization of the Literature

The following review of the literature pertains to the history and awareness of culturally responsive literature, the difference between multicultural literature and culturally responsive literature, uses of cultural texts in classroom settings, and existing studies conducted with pre- and in-service teachers regarding belief systems and interactions with this type of literature.

Conceptual Framework – Culturally Responsive Teaching

The research for this dissertation was grounded in Villegas and Lucas' (2002) sociocultural consciousness strand of culturally responsive teaching. Historically, adopted curricula rarely included the histories and experiences of underrepresented groups, and culturally responsive teaching aims to change that. Although my lens is the sociocultural strand specifically, I will provide an explanation of culturally responsive teacher traits and each of the six strands.

A culturally responsive teacher possesses a combination of characteristics, referred to as strands: sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of students, an understanding of themselves as agents of change, a recognition of the potential of all students regardless of race or ethnicity, knowledge of their students' home lives, and designed instruction that balances what students know with what they need to learn (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Each strand is further explained below. The first three strands pertain to a teacher's inner reflection and attitude. The last three strands pertain to actionable steps taken in and out of the classroom.

Strand 1 - Sociocultural Consciousness

Sociocultural consciousness is the first strand of culturally responsive teaching, which refers to an understanding that how people think and behave stems from their race/ethnicity, language, and social class (Banks, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This consciousness is also intricately connected with schools and society and the understanding that differences in social location are not neutral; social inequities continue to be "produced and perpetuated through systemic discrimination" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 22). People in the United States are socialized into believing that schools level the playing field – equalizers if you will – providing opportunities for all students regardless of their backgrounds. Despite this ideal that schools offer endless possibilities for advancement and achievement, existing structures continue to inhibit those individuals that are lower on the social scale (Labaree, 1997). Schools continue to engage in teaching and evaluative practices that favor affluent White students more so than students of diverse backgrounds and oppressed populations. Research has indicated that teachers and pre-service teachers feel that academic success is based on individual

characteristics, turning a blind eye to the institutionalized discrimination that continues to exist in schools today (Davis, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Thus, a teacher should be socioculturally conscious of the school, the community, and of their classroom context; limited knowledge of their students' backgrounds severely restricts a teacher's ability to build upon students' cultural and linguistic strengths (Gist, 2014). Indeed, this range of social constructs affects a student's education and sociocultural consciousness calls for the navigation of "a complex intersection of identities in diverse school communities" (Gist, 2014, p. 1013). In culturally responsive teaching, educators should examine and challenge their cultural assumptions and make efforts to learn about their students' backgrounds – both of these ongoing explorations can bring about a sociocultural consciousness. Sociocultural consciousness can serve as a powerful instructional lens for educators to understand the communities surrounding their students and support student achievement.

Strands 2-6

The second strand of culturally responsive teaching is an affirming attitude toward students of culturally diverse backgrounds. In this practice, teachers are convinced that all students are capable learners who bring with them to school a plethora of knowledge and experiences specific to their lived experiences. How teachers treat their students and how they view their students affects what and how students learn (Irvine, 1990). Educators who are respectful of cultural differences – how students think, talk, and behave – tend to provide learning opportunities and environments that are safe and comfortable for students. Introspective analysis of teachers' beliefs and exploring any negative attitudes are challenging tasks that, although seemingly difficult, may help

teachers identify biases and improve upon how they treat and teach their students. By setting high expectations for students, holding them accountable, building on cultural resources, and exposing students to an intellectually rigorous curriculum, teachers demonstrate respect and affirmation of their students which tends to produce positive academic results (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The third strand is commitment and skills to act as agents of change. Villegas and Lucas (2002) consider overseeing the growth and development of students as part of a teacher's job. Teachers should have all students' best interests at heart, regardless of cultural differences, and believe that schools can serve as the platform for social transformation and academic success. As agents of change, teachers recognize the political and ethical implications of serving as educators; schools and society are interconnected (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Developing a change agent disposition requires knowing about the change process and developing skills for handling conflict and collaboration, and identifying ways that schools can become more equitable.

Constructivist views of learning is the fourth strand of Villegas and Lucas' (2002) vision of culturally responsive teaching. A constructivist perspective perceives learning as a process in which students generate meaning and understanding to new experiences they have in school. In this perspective, students use their prior knowledge from personal and cultural experiences to make sense of new input (Piaget, 1977; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To support learning, teachers must make their lessons and actions fluid and adaptable to meet their students' needs in a way that builds on their prior knowledge and strengths. In a constructivist view, all students are considered capable learners, unlike many other deficit-teaching approaches.

Learning about students is the fifth strand of culturally responsive teaching. In addition to *what* teachers teach, they should also know *who* they teach, both in and out of school. Having knowledge of students' interests, hobbies, and family lives equips teachers to understand their in-school behavior and incorporate those interests into instruction (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Understanding who teachers are teaching can allow them to conduct learning activities and lessons in familiar, engaging contexts. Class schedules that limit the amount of time a student is with any one teacher can hinder a teacher's ability to adequately get to know his or her students; conversing with students and getting to know them as well as possible with the time allotted can lead to the facilitation of meaningful, engaging learning opportunities.

The sixth and final strand of Villegas and Lucas' (2002) vision is culturally responsive teaching practices. Becoming a culturally responsive teacher encompasses all of the aforementioned strands and creates a learning environment that encourages students to make sense of new ideas, "to construct knowledge that helps them better understand the world" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 28). Providing opportunities for students to partake in purposeful, meaningful learning on a topic of interest gives students motive to learn. Drawing on students' home lives and outside interests, culturally responsive teachers can take something like rap music, for example, and play it in the classroom for a lesson on rhythm (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Engaging in open dialogue about relevant issues that may not necessarily be pertinent to their instruction (such as drug use and sex) can validate students' experiences (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990).

The six strands of culturally responsive teaching, when executed properly, can guide teachers to create a visual map of teaching in a diverse setting. Sociocultural consciousness is the "brain" of effective culturally responsive instruction that can and should be explored (Gist, 2014). Change is not immediate; however, this framework serves as a guide that will need to be negotiated in teachers' political and social contexts. Following culturally responsive teaching practices can promote an affirming, equitable, and just learning environment - an environment for growth for students and teachers alike.

Brief Overview of Cultural Educational Studies

The concepts of including culture in teaching and literature have been notably explored by various scholars over the last 50 years. The concept of proposing a new type of pedagogy between teacher, student and society was analyzed by Freire (1970) in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, based on his experience as an educator in Brazil. With a focus on social justice, he believed that traditional school systems engaged in a banking concept of education, in which students were treated as empty vessels to be filled (Freire, 1970). This insight opened up a door to explore how students learn and how to implement pedagogical best practices with students and society in mind.

Studies in the 1980s identified a cultural mismatch between school and home (Ebersole et al., 2016). After observing teachers in a Hawaiian school incorporate the culture of their students into the curriculum, Au and Jordan (1981) coined the term "culturally appropriate" (p. 139). A similar study was conducted with Native American students, in which teachers who used language patterns similar to what their students participated in at home were more successful academically, thereby engaging in

"culturally congruent" instruction (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981, p. 117). Jordan (1985) went on to use the term "culturally compatible" (p. 60) in reference to Hawaiian students being taught by mainland educators. Each of these terms imply that students' cultures ought to accommodate the mainstream culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Ladson-Billings' (1995) seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy identifies three criteria: "an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483). This theory addresses student achievement as well as assists students to "accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

The term *culturally responsive* has also maintained an active presence in pedagogy, which encompasses teacher practice, as described by Villegas and Lucas and other researchers (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Gay, 1975; Gay, 2002). Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Gay's definition of culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages, creates a connection of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, uses a wide selection of instructional strategies, teaches students to know and celebrate their own and their peers' cultural heritages, and incorporates multicultural resources in instruction (Gay, 2002; Rueda, 2011). In other words, culturally responsive teaching calls for instruction using students' cultural and experiential filters to yield academic achievement (Gay, 2002).

More recently, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* has emerged, which seeks to foster literature, linguistic and cultural pluralism for social transformation (Paris, 2017). This enrichment yields an additive learning outcome in an effort to disrupt myths of minoritized populations. One important distinction to make is the similarities of *culturally relevant*, *culturally responsive*, and *culturally sustaining*. While the terms may come from different voices, they are geared toward the same concept. Ernest Morrell (2020) noted that the terms may indicate the time period in which the research was conducted and written; *culturally relevant* is a term that originated in the 1990s, *culturally responsive* is a term that first began gaining momentum in the early 2000s, and *culturally sustaining* stems from the 2010s.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Today - Things to Consider

Culturally responsive teaching practices recognize and maintain student culture to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture as well as breaks away from the deficit model, which does not place value on the culture and experiences of students from minoritized populations (Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999; Nieto, 2010; Ali & Murphy, 2013). This deficit model implies that "'Who you are now is not valuable, but I will make you into an individual who will perhaps, someday, be someone of worth'" (Ali & Murphy, 2013, p. 43). Such negative effects include, but are not limited to, not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or, on the other end of the spectrum, seeing distorted and inaccurate representations of it in instruction (Adichie, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Lisa Delpit (1988) identified five complex rules of power that affect how students from oppressed populations learn. Teaching students these rules of power is a step toward

leveling the education playing field. Among the five rules is one stating that the culture of power reflects the rules from the culture that has the power. For example, school culture is based on upper and middle classes – those in power. Children from middle-class homes will likely perform better in school than those who are not from middle-class homes (Delpit, 1988). Rather than concerns with methodology, the issue is communication across cultures and addressing these issues of power; whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced. Teachers serve in a capacity in which they can and should listen with "not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds" (Delpit, 1988, p. 297) by being willing to see themselves inside out, through another person's lens. This would need to be done by seeking out people with different backgrounds and perspectives and understanding their own power. Culturally responsive teaching encompasses these actionable steps through the sociocultural consciousness of teachers.

Culturally responsive teaching involves the development of teaching approaches that allow for diverse ways of thinking and acting (Gunning, 2020). Children should be allowed to express how they think and those ways of thinking need to be incorporated into the classroom. That being said, understanding children's cultural backgrounds can also yield more effective instruction. Valdes (1996) observed that children of Mexican immigrants were taught to be passive around adults and to refrain from showing off their knowledge. Considering that typical public school classrooms encourage active responsiveness and knowledge demonstration (Gunning, 2020), the aforementioned children could potentially be judged by their lack of assertiveness and be placed in groups or categories considered to be low, even if they themselves are not necessarily low-performing. Teachers who are sensitive to these cultural differences would likely think

twice before labeling a student merely on what behaviors they see at the surface in their classroom.

Engaging in culturally responsive teaching should lead teachers to make student identities and histories a central and integral part of the curriculum and celebrate what students can do instead of focusing on society-dictated expectations or deficits. The curriculum should be supplemented by more culturally authentic, relevant and responsive resources, and teachers should explore and familiarize themselves with the wealth of knowledge and resources available to them and their students. Culturally responsive teaching cultivates trust, empathy, positive racial identity, and resiliency in students, giving them opportunities to express home literacies and cultural heritage (Hanley & Noblit, 2009).

Culturally responsive pedagogy allows students to see themselves, their cultures, families, and communities reflected in the materials and resources used in their instruction (Souto-Manning et al., 2018). This ties into Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) seminal article about books serving as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. Ideally, students should see their own culture reflected within their classroom in addition to having new cultures opened up for them to experience and explore. A classroom should not be limited to one perspective or narrative. Classroom libraries and resources "should honor and reflect students' diversity, rather than perpetuate stereotypes that marginalize them" (Souto-Manning et al., 2018, p. 8). Culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive literature are powerful together and a prime component of equity-based instruction (Boston & Baxley, 2007; Tatum, 2000).

Next I will shift gears to describe culturally responsive literature.

History and Awareness of Culturally Responsive Literature

In the literature field in the 20th century, most published books that reflected diverse characters and/or settings were full of misrepresentations and stereotypes (Gopalakrishnan, 2010). If readers sought a book about Latinx characters, for example, they would likely find a book that depicted a Latinx person incapable of solving a problem, with a White savior-type character stepping in to save the day (Naidoo, 2011). Very few books portrayed characters of diverse, minoritized populations. As years passed, there was a growing evolution of more culturally diverse, responsive children's literature.

1960s-1970s

In 1965, Nancy Larrick wrote an article questioning why the majority of children's books featured white characters, noting that at that point in time, "6,340,000 nonwhite children are learning to read and to understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them" (Larrick, 1965, p. 63). Larrick surveyed over 5,000 books that were published between 1962 and 1964 for inclusion of Negro representation (Negro is the term used by Larrick); out of those 5,000+ books, only 349 included one or more Negro character. Many of these characters were vague illustrations that could have been simply a shadow that made their skin color look dark. Within this small number of potentially-Negro-inclusive books, some of them were considered objectionable or problematic because of stereotypes (Larrick, 1965). This study and its findings served as a call to action among book creators, librarians and educators to critique and shift this publishing current.

The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), founded in 1965, conducted several studies on the publishing trends of children's literature and identified Anglo ethnocentrism, gender stereotypes, and historical inaccuracies in these children's books (Nilsson, 2005). From 1966 to 1989, the CIBC produced the Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, which was dedicated to promoting and reviewing anti-racist, anti-biased materials for children (Charnes, 1984). Through the years, it expanded from eight pages to 32 pages. In its early days, the bulletin focused on integration of Black characters into children's books, but quickly expanded to spotlight the stereotypes of all people of diverse backgrounds (Native American, Asian American, Hispanic) as well as gender roles, ageism, and homosexuality (Charnes, 1984).

Some of the Latinx stereotypes identified in a 1970 article in the Interracial Books For Children Bulletin included a combination of laziness and crime (Foulke, 1970). In a children's book that was published in the late 1960s, a Mexican man was depicted wearing a *serape* (a cloak), a *sombrero* (a large hat), and appeared to be napping – perpetuating the stereotypes of clothing worn by and practices of Latin Americans. This portrayal was compared to another problematic stereotype from the same time period of a man "who is either asleep under a cactus or is busy stealing Fritos from the supermarket. A not-quite-man whose life is half fiesta and half siesta" (Foulke, 1970, p. 5). At the urging of the Council, the publisher agreed to change the problematic picture in this book.

(The reference to Fritos connects to another, more mainstream stereotype from that same time period with Fritos corn chips from the Frito-Lay company. The cartoon mascot was modeled after a stereotypical Mexican revolutionary with the oversized

sombrero, a moustache, and a thick Spanish accent. In commercials, he would rob people of their Fritos corn chips at gunpoint. The National Mexican-American Anti-Defamation Committee and the Involvement of Mexican-Americans in Gainful Endeavors pressured the company to remove the mascot but the advertisements continued (Burginger, 2020). In 1968, following the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Frito-Lay removed the guns from the mascot. At the urging from these groups to ban the character, several television stations pulled the commercials. By 1971, the entire Frito Bandito campaign was terminated.)

In 1972, The Council released a bulletin dedicated exclusively to the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in literature. In that bulletin, "patterns of institutionalized racism were being exposed and Puerto Rican rights were being claimed" (Williams, 1983, p. 4). At the time of this bulletin's publication, there were about 100 published books that reflected Puerto Rican culture, and the Council had people who identified as Puerto Ricans read and react to the books. Themes found in these books included helplessness and lack of intelligence. The Council's findings from the analyses were distributed to publishing companies in hopes of change. Ten years later, the publishing industry had not changed much, implying reluctance or unwillingness to end their practices that the Council viewed as abusive toward Puerto Ricans (Williams, 1983).

1980s-1990s

Several studies conducted near the end of the 20th century highlight the lack of diversity and culturally authentic portrayals of underrepresented groups in literature. Garcia and Pugh (1992) reviewed 35 nonfiction books published between 1986 and 1987 that were submitted for consideration for a book award by major publishers. Using the

criteria for the book award, the authors analyzed each title that was eligible for the award, assigned the book to a cultural category, and determined if the book featured a predictable or new ethnic and minority experience based on topics and personalities that surfaced between the 1960s and 1980s. With regard to multicultural characters, Hispanics were disproportionately represented in these nominated titles, with three out of the 35 books reflecting this cultural area.

In another study pertaining to book awards, a content analysis was conducted of 30 realistic children's books written by authors and illustrators of Caldecott and Newbery Award and honor books (Taylor & Napier, 1992). Economic conditions, especially those of minority populations, were carefully reviewed to determine how the characters were portrayed. Character traits including physical description, language, environment, and economic status were identified and analyzed. Results found that Hispanics or Asians represented 37.5% of characters in the Caldecott titles and 6.3% of characters in the Newbery Award and honor titles. Moreover, the Hispanic characters in these books were portrayed as being of poor economic status.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) introduced educators to the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors with the explanation that students should see reflections of themselves in literature, be provided opportunities to peek into the lives of other groups, and use their imaginations to become part of the world created by an author. The timing of her article may have played a factor in the creation of children's book reading lists and book awards that specifically recognized and celebrated works depicting diverse characters (Nilsson, 2005). For example, with regard to Latinx children's literature, the 1990s saw the creation of three notable book awards specifically for Latino stories and/or

authors with the Pura Belpré Award, the Américas Award, and the Tomás Rivera Book Award (Naidoo, 2000).

Latinx Book Awards. Established in 1993, the Americas Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature annually recognizes and celebrates works "that authentically and engagingly portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinx in the United States" (Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs, n.d.). Among its criteria is cultural contextualization and potential for classroom use (Gomm, Heath, & Mora, 2017). Since 1995, the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award has recognized quality literature that depicts the Mexican American experience (Texas State University, n.d.). In addition, the program strives to advocate for increased equity in publishing (Gainer, 2017). The award's namesake is Dr. Tomás Rivera, a Mexican American educator, author and distinguished alumnus of Texas State University, which sponsors this award. The Pura Belpré Award was founded in 1996 and is part of the American Library Association's Youth Media Awards. Named after the first Latina librarian employed at the New York Public Library, the Pura Belpré Award is presented annually to Latino/Latina writers and illustrators whose works best portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latino cultural experience (American Library Association, 2021; Gomm et al., 2017). Each of these award programs are cognizant of the need for literature that is authentic and reflective of the Latinx cultural experience.

2000s-Today

Gay (2002) noted that students have often been expected to divorce themselves from their cultures and learn based on the cultural norms and practices of European Americans, even if they themselves do not belong to that culture. The use of culturally

responsive teaching shifts from these norms and practices toward pedagogy that incorporates, celebrates, and affirms students' cultural identity. Culturally responsive texts have been noted as being instrumental in helping readers construct meaning, attain higher comprehension and make fewer miscues; such books allow them to draw on their experiences and background knowledge to predict and infer (Freeman, Freeman, & Freeman, 2003; Tatum, 2000; Ebe, 2010).

Social Media Movements. Within the last decade, social media has served as a sounding board for several movements to increase awareness of diversity in literature. Several hashtags, including #ownvoices and #weneeddiversebooks, "were the direct result of a refusal on the part of mainstream publishing venues to create more inclusive environments both in-text and out" (Shropshire & Tytler, 2019). The publishing field has historically consisted of mostly White staff (Lee & Low Books, 2016); in 2019, Lee and Low Books conducted a survey of people employed in the publishing industry (book reviewers, trade publishing employees, university press employees, and literary agents) to determine the diversity in the field. With over 21,000 surveys deployed and a response rate of 32%, the results indicated that 76% of people who work in publishing self-identified as White (Lee & Low Books, 2019). The concerns with these hashtag movements is that not only are the books being published lacking diversity, but the publishing industry that produces these books lacks diversity as well.

Since 2015, #ownvoices aimed to raise awareness and encouragement to read books with "diverse characters that have been written by authors from that same diverse group" (Vanderhage, 2019). Created by young adult author Corinne Duyvis, this hashtag expanded on the need for diverse content by raising awareness of the person behind the

stories being written. These books aim to provide authentic portrayals of lived experiences of a diverse group written by an insider, someone who has a lived experience within that group. Historically, some of the earlier multicultural books were written by authors who were considered outsiders to that culture; #ownvoices aimed to change that by allowing readers to see themselves within the stories represented realistically (Shropshire & Tytler, 2019). In addition, it provided authors of diverse groups with the opportunity to share their story and add to the existing literature. In the summer of 2021, there was a shift in the usage of this hashtag. We Need Diverse issued a statement calling for an end to the use of #ownvoices, stating that they would no longer use the hashtag and instead would use words and phrases to describe book creators that they are comfortable using (We Need Diverse Books, 2021). For example, if an author's main character is Mexican American and so is the author, and the author is comfortable with publicly identifying as such, this identification is more specific than the broad #ownvoices label that does not indicate the book's specificity. On the other hand, some authors have been pressured to share their personal identities that they are not comfortable sharing. Some authors have not felt comfortable to share the specifics of their identity, so a book with a LGBTQ+ character being labeled as #ownvoices implies that the author identifies the same as the character, which may be something he/she has not publicly shared or prefers not to disclose (LatinxPitch, 2021). Moving forward, authors of diverse backgrounds and marginalized groups are encouraged to use words and phrases to describe themselves or their books as they see fit, that are comfortable for them. Despite these recommended changes, #ownvoices is still frequently utilized on social media and in library catalogs and book lists as a quick and broad way of finding books by diverse authors.

Dating back to 2013, Latinxs in Kidlit and its Twitter handle @latinosinkidlit is a book resource for works written by and about Latinxs (their website address and Twitter handle use the term *Latino*, but the text throughout their website is spelled *Latinx*). A team of Latinx educators, librarians and writers create original content including book reviews, teaching ideas, author interviews, and literacy promotion (Latinosinkidlit.com, 2020). Starting in 2020, #latinxpitch launched a Twitter pitch movement, in which book editors and literary agents actively sought Latinx authors' and illustrators' book ideas for future children's literature. On the day of its first pitch party, there were 1.6 million impressions on tweets using the corresponding hashtag and over 100 literary agents and editors who "liked" and requested to see the authors' writings for possible collaboration (Del Barco, 2020). These two movements geared specifically toward Latinx literature are making every effort to raise awareness of and launch new authentic Latinx cultural literature.

The #weneeddiversebooks hashtag and campaign started in 2014 in an effort to publish literature for youth by and about diverse people in the United States (Mabbott, 2017). Referencing Nancy Larrick's 1965 article, a Twitter post sparked a discussion about how little things had changed in nearly 50 years. From the hashtag came the We Need Diverse Books grassroots movement, complete with a website and fundraisers to launch contests and projects to encourage and support diverse authors. In an effort to help teachers, librarians, and booksellers get diverse books in the hands of children, We Need Diverse Books has partnered with Scholastic Book Clubs to create a flyer that highlights diverse books, which is distributed to schools throughout the United States. Outreach and programming from the We Need Diverse Books program remains active in recognizing

and celebrating books that reflect realistic, authentic experiences of people from diverse backgrounds.

Librarians, teachers, teacher educators, and avid readers alike have been persistent in this movement to provide students with more culturally responsive literature for academic and pleasure reading. In addition, publishers are now following these hashtags on Twitter to locate diverse writers, recognizing the need to disrupt the traditionally White-centered publishing industry (Flood, 2020).

Next, I will review the use of culturally responsive texts in elementary classrooms.

Culturally Responsive Texts in Classroom Settings

Villegas and Lucas (2002) envisioned culturally responsive teachers to possess six characteristics: Teachers should expand their sociocultural consciousness, develop an affirming attitude toward students of diverse backgrounds, serve as agents of change, adhere to a constructivist view of learning, learn about their students and their lives outside of school, and execute culturally responsive teaching practices. Villegas and Lucas recognize the need for teacher educators and teacher education programs to engage in dialogue and action to examine and revise the existing curriculum. Following this framework would further allow teachers to effectively use culturally responsive texts in classroom settings since teachers would strive to design instruction based on these six salient traits, which in turn would lead to selection and use of literature that aligned with the students' backgrounds and interests (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The following studies explore various methods of using culturally responsive texts with students.

Hill (1998) identified three "gatekeepers" who influence the publication and promotion of culturally responsive books: publishers, review journals, and librarians and bookstore buyers (the last two are grouped together). Publishers' focus tends to be money-driven; review journals aim to identify books that will appeal to schools and libraries, and librarians and bookstore buyers often rely heavily on publishers and review journals in selecting books to acquire for their collections (Amber & Gibbons, 2006b). Amber and Gibbons (2006b) provided guidelines for K-8th grade teachers to consider when seeking out and selecting culturally responsive books for their students. Among their recommendations are to evaluate the authenticity of the story and illustrations (with respect to the human experience), copyright date (with a caution that a recent copyright date does not guarantee an accurate, authentic, or fair portrayal of the subject matter), and perspective (the point of view being depicted in the story, with consideration of the turning points in the plot). Amber and Gibbons (2006a, 2006b) also caution that just because a book has a seal of approval from another entity, be it a publisher, school district, or large corporation, that doesn't mean that it is appropriate or culturally authentic for all students.

Wanless and Crawford (2016) provide an example of using a culturally responsive text in a classroom setting: the teacher reads the book *I Love My Hair* by Natasha Tarpley and leads a discussion on things adults do to help children take care of their hair. Children in this classroom shared responses about their grandfather shaving their head and another mentions the beads on her braids. "Showing children that we see and value all aspects of them is a critical step in helping them feel welcome and connected to their teachers and peers" (Wanless & Crawford, 2016, p. 9). Reading this

book and welcoming students' responses validated and recognized the students' cultural experiences.

In one second grade classroom with a majority of Latinx students, the teacher pre-selected culturally authentic children's books by and about Latinxs and allowed the students to select the book they wanted to read to form culture circles, a grouping similar to literature circles but in which the dialogue revolved around the cultural aspects reflected in the book (Osorio, 2018). In these culture circles, the teacher acted as a fellow participant and allowed the conversation to flow naturally rather than her acting as teacher/facilitator. Blurring the lines between teacher and student roles, including literature that reflected students' lives, and promotion of critical consciousness were among the findings from the observations that were conducted. Interactions in culture circles differed from discussion of stories in basal anthologies, which more often than not do not reflect diverse characters (Osorio, 2018).

With the use of a rubric following the seven factors that help determine cultural relevance (Goodman, 1982), a study was conducted with 25 pre-service teachers in which they read a culturally relevant book to a Latinx Emerging Bilingual (EBL) student (Ebe, 2015). The cultural relevance rubric guided EBLs to consider their engagement with and understanding of the book. Findings revealed that the EBLs were more engaged in the reading of culturally relevant books and made deep connections with their reading. In addition, this study shed light on the scarce amount of culturally relevant books that were available in this school's library.

Next I will review teacher belief systems.

Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Belief Systems

Teacher education programs have responded to the awareness of growing diversity among K-12 students in the U.S. by adding multicultural education, bilingual education, or urban education courses (Goodwin, 1997). In addition, Wong (2008) recommends that multicultural courses include field-based components that will allow pre-service teachers to engage in a culturally diverse experience. However, these courses are often optional due to other university coursework requirements or only required of students pursuing a certain certification, and this "sprinkling of disparate bits of information...result[s] in the superficial treatment of multicultural issues" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 21). Mills (2008) also asserted that teacher education programs, despite an intended emphasis on diversity, can offer fragmented treatments of diversity. Teacher educators should provide instruction that prepares future educators to successfully work with a diverse range of students and be exposed to culturally responsive literature to use in the classroom. Examining teacher belief systems and identities has implications for their work in classrooms (Gay, 1984). How teachers fulfill the role of cultural accommodator, from their pedagogical practices to selecting literature for their students, is shaped by their beliefs and knowledge base of diverse practices (Nieto, 2010; Li, 2011).

Pre-Service Teachers

Preparing pre-service teachers for culturally responsive teaching is becoming an increasing trend in educator preparation programs. Lambeth and Smith (2016) conducted a qualitative study to determine the perceptions and preparation of pre-service teachers for culturally responsive work. A questionnaire was administered to 21 participants, all

pre-service teachers enrolled in a graduate program at a university in the southern United States, followed by observations in the pre-service teachers' practicum classes and interviews. Finally, the participants completed a self-evaluation upon the end of their student teaching experience reflecting on their experiences and what they hoped to continue to develop to become culturally responsive with their future students. Of the 21 participants, 20 were Caucasian and 1 was Black, which reflected the demographics of students enrolled in the College of Education at this university. Findings indicated that teacher preparation programs should teach pre-service teachers not just *why* culturally responsive teaching is important but *how* to work with culturally diverse students. Going into the study, many participants felt that they understood culturally responsive teaching, but recognized that this skill would likely continue to develop even beyond their student teaching experience (Lambeth & Smith, 2016). These results indicated that more work needs to be done in preparing teachers to work with students whose backgrounds differ from their students.

Fasching-Varner (2013) argued that racialized beliefs are always present within the narratives of White pre-service teachers. In a narrative study, nine White pre-service teachers at a northeastern university participated in two rounds of interviews in which they discussed their life experiences and journey to become teachers. The second round of the interviews explored the same questions as the first but with a focus on racialized language. For example, a round one question asking about the children that the participant went to school with was rephrased to ask about the racial makeup of those children in round two. Among the students' expressed beliefs of poor parenting among the minority students and that Black and Latinx students were difficult to work with. A

common semantic move emerged from the data analysis; the phrase *you know* was used by eight of the nine participants during their interviews, using this phrase "directly before, during, or after directly loaded language and/or descriptions relating to race and commonly seen as less than politically correct or polite" (Fasching-Varner, 2013, p. 33). Fasching-Varner posited that teachers, especially White pre-service teachers, need to break through socialization cycles and privileged lenses to better provide culturally responsive instruction.

In a teacher preparation program in Colorado, 27 teacher-candidates were assigned to literature study groups to read various Latinx children's titles that reflected the Mexican and Mexican American experience (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003). The researchers intentionally selected this type of literature to develop awareness and understanding in their participants of issues related to the Latinx population in Colorado, where the study took place. The researchers recognize that Colorado's Latinx population has had "a history of educational neglect and underachievement" (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003, p. 240), including high dropout rates, schools segregated by ethnicity and language, and low scores on state assessments. While the teacher candidates demonstrated compassion and made text-to-self connections with the experiences reflected in the literature they read, they did not appear to learn much about the Mexican culture. Moreover, they felt uncomfortable with some of the cultural yet potentially-controversial content in the books they studied. For example, one of the storylines had the backdrop of *El Día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead), which is a well-known celebration in Mexico on November 2 to remember loved ones who have passed away. The participants were concerned about the portrayal of the book characters taking death too

lightly with such a celebration. This study highlighted the need to continue to include culturally responsive literature in tandem with direct instruction about diverse cultures to foster a deeper understanding of the Mexican American experience among these teacher candidates. Race-related discussions were the most difficult for the pre-service teachers to explore.

Gist (2017) conducted a semester-long qualitative case study on culturally responsive pedagogy with three undergraduate Latina teacher candidates and their teacher educator at a Hispanic Serving Institution. The purpose of this study was to understand the pedagogical decisions made by the teacher educator through the lens of the teacher candidates. Through interviews, classroom observations, and student logs, findings indicated a link between the features of culturally responsive pedagogy and the teaching and learning experiences of the teacher candidates. The use of critical course readings that pertained to culture and language as well as culturally responsive assignments were identified as meaningful to the participants' learning experiences in this course with this teacher educator. One participant shared that her learning experience in the teacher educator's class emphasized her cultural and linguistic background as a place of strength (Gist, 2017), giving the participant a sense of empowerment in her pre-service teaching experiences. Through the culturally responsive assignments, the participants noted a personal transformation related to the cultural and linguistic diversity demonstrated by their teacher educator. In essence, the teacher candidates experienced culturally responsive pedagogy in their teacher education classroom. An immersion into culturally responsive pedagogical practices at the pre-service level can create the foundation for culturally responsive teaching for future in-service teachers.

In-Service Teachers

A group of kindergarten teachers at one Oregon school participated in Collaborative Action Research for Equity (CARE) training in 2011 (Toppel, 2015). Each teacher selected three to five students of color who were in need of additional support in an aspect of school who became the focal students. The teachers planned culturally responsive lessons with these focal students in mind in hopes of increasing engagement. In this study, cultural responsiveness was achieved by demonstrating care, promoting opportunities for student collaboration, and executing engagement strategies that met the interest and needs of the students participating in the study. All of this was done with the pre-existing core reading program used at that campus. Small group collaboration was found to be a more comfortable setting for students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds because their responses and involvement was more private with a smaller audience as opposed to whole-group activities. One teacher made it a point to listen to the radio stations her students liked to familiarize herself with their music of choice, and used those songs to create songs that incorporated concepts she was teaching. Toppel (2015) stressed that culturally responsive teachers should invest time to get to know their students, which will in turn equip teachers with the knowledge they need to incorporate strategies and practices that will engage those students.

A qualitative study conducted with practicing educators in Michigan and Texas explored how educator beliefs related to students of cultural, linguistic, and economically diverse backgrounds and their knowledge of culture's role in their teaching practices (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Participants were given an instrument with various school scenarios depicting culture clashes; they provided written responses identifying what was

happening in each scenario and how they would handle such a situation. Using a cultural awareness continuum ranging from culturally unaware to culturally responsive, data was coded and analyzed holistically to determine where each educator fell on the continuum. Findings indicated that the majority of the participants demonstrated a general awareness of culture, but also held multiple deficit beliefs about diverse students and their parents/families. These deficit perspectives were elucidated through their explanations of the culture clashes and were viewed as issues needing a technical solution rather than considering the social and cultural aspects of each situation. Out of 111 educators who participated in this study, only one was considered to be culturally responsive, meaning that this educator demonstrated a strong understanding of invisible culture, held pluralistic beliefs, and identified culturally responsive or additive solutions to the culture clash scenarios. These researchers recommend that faculty and professional developers should critically assess their own beliefs in order to shift the deficit perspective and begin to transform both their positionality and teaching practices (Nelson & Guerra, 2014).

An examination of 18 Hawaiian teachers' understandings and perspectives of culturally responsive teaching highlighted a practice of using culturally responsive teaching activities within their curriculum (Ebersole et al., 2016). Rather than embedding cultural responsiveness in everything they did, some teachers conducted culturally responsive activities as separate units during a specific time of the school year. These activities were often dependent on available resources, which were not always abundant. One teacher wanted to include Chinese versions of a particular story but was limited to traditional stories because that was what the school library had. While this teacher attempted to provide students with access to cultural stories, she ended up using

traditional stories – in essence, multicultural books – that reflected the students' ethnic background but was not relevant to their lives. Participants shared their unfamiliarity and discomfort in their lack of students' cultural knowledge. Implications of this study suggested helping teachers examine and challenge their cultural assumptions and to learn more about their students' backgrounds to develop a sociocultural consciousness (Ebersole et al., 2016).

In a study conducted with in-service teachers who work with English Learners, participants read a culturally relevant bilingual poetry book that describes the experience of one young boy who adjusts to life in the United States after moving from Mexico (Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2020). Participants engaged in literature circles discussing the book; transcripts, audio recordings of the literature circles, and written reflections were the sources of data. Findings revealed that reading and analyzing this book led participants to recognize and grapple with their assumptions and biases. For example, the poetry book includes a poem about the young boy addressing his teacher as Teacher, and the teacher finding it disrespectful and states that it sounds like he's calling her "t-shirt". In Latinx cultures, referring to a teacher as *Maestro/a* in Spanish is a sign of respect, and this student was using his cultural knowledge to address his teacher in a way that he thought was respectful. The teacher in the poem wanted to be addressed by her last name. Several participants noted that reading this poem was eye-opening; as one participant noted, "'It was a smack in the forehead moment'" (Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2020, p. 245). The discussions from the literature circles raised participants' awareness for the need of critical reflection in their teaching practices to examine and, if necessary, shift their assumptions and beliefs toward their student and school system.

Critical reflection is "a means of incorporating issues of equity and social justice into teaching thinking and practice" (Howard, 2003, p. 195) toward culturally responsive teaching. This reflexivity allows participants to look at their identity as an individual and as a professional. Howard (2003) points out that teachers should refrain from creating stereotypical profiles of their students that may lead to harm, such as the fact that not all Latino students are second language learners.

As of the 2019-20 school year, 65% of Latinx students in Texas are not identified as English Learners (Texas Education Agency, 2021). This percentage supports Howard's statement that not all Latinx students are English Learners. Recognizing this statement to be true, especially in a culturally diverse area such as central Texas, in which many Latinx families have resided for generations, my study took the angle of working with teachers who work with Latinx students who are *not* English Learners.

The evolution of culturally responsive Latinx literature and of culturally responsive teaching have followed similar paths but at different time frames: the evolution of culturally responsive literature is not moving as fast as culturally responsive teaching practices. This study serves to fill a gap in the literature by addressing teachers' understandings and uses of culturally responsive Latinx literature among educators in Texas. Drawing from the sociocultural consciousness strand of culturally responsive teaching, this study aimed to "engage in autobiographical exploration, reflection, and critical self-analysis" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 22) of Texas educators to explore their sense of both who and how they are as well as how that identity influences their teaching practices, particularly with their use of Latinx literature. Do they find reflections of themselves in the books they use in the classroom? Do they seek out books that provide

reflections of their students' lived experiences? How do their own life experiences affect what they do in their classrooms? These questions and more were further explored through narrative inquiry with Texas educators.

Chapter Summary

This study is grounded in a culturally responsive teaching conceptual framework. Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified six strands of culturally responsive teaching, including sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of students, an understanding of themselves as agents of change, a recognition of the potential of all students regardless of race or ethnicity, knowledge of their students' home lives, and designed instruction that balances what students know with what they need to learn. The focus for this study is on the sociocultural consciousness strand. Culturally connected teaching has been studied for the last 50 years, with salient terms representing differences between culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining. Culturally responsive teaching ties into the concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in literature (Bishop, 1990) by including culture into their classroom instruction.

Culturally responsive literature has evolved over time, following Larrick (1965) calling out the lack of diverse books and the Council on Interracial Books for Children studying trends in children's book publication (Nilsson, 2005). Problematic stereotypes and images of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly Latinx people, were critically reviewed and analyzed by the Council from 1966 to 1989. After Bishop's 1990 article, increased action toward diversity in children's literature came to the forefront with the creation of three Latinx children's book awards. Social media movements have

also exerted efforts in raising awareness of culturally responsive literature, particularly for #ownvoices and Latinx children's literature.

Studies in classroom settings found affirmative reactions from students toward culturally responsive literature (Wanless & Crawford, 2016; Osorio, 2018; Ebe, 2015). Teacher belief systems may also influence their understandings and attitudes toward diverse students and culturally responsive teaching. Research conducted with pre-service teachers indicated a need for further, deeper practice beyond what was offered in individual studies (Lambeth & Smith, 2016; Gist, 2017), discomfort in discussing issues pertaining to unfamiliar cultural practices reflected in literature (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003), and a need to break through personal lenses (Fasching-Varner, 2013). The common theme among all the studies with pre-service teachers on culturally responsive teaching is that more work needs to be done to guide them toward cultural responsiveness. Critical reflection was a theme from the studies with in-service teachers, indicating that more work needs to be done with them as well to examine their own beliefs (Howard, 2003; Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2020), how they view diverse students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014), and efforts they should make to get to know their students better (Toppel, 2015).

Whereas culturally responsive teaching continues to gain attention and momentum, the movement for culturally responsive books continues to develop at a slower pace. This study addressed how Texas teachers use culturally responsive Latinx literature in their classrooms. Through the lens of sociocultural consciousness from Villegas and Lucas (2002), this study explored teachers' own lived experiences, reflections, and critical self-analysis.

In the next chapter I will describe the methodology for this proposed study.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The following chapter will describe my study and approach to narrative inquiry. This study used a qualitative design to explore how culturally responsive literature was used by classroom teachers. Specifically, this study included intermediate teachers of Latinx backgrounds who teach predominantly Latinx students who are not English Learners in central Texas.

Research Design

A qualitative design was selected for this study in order to better understand this interaction between the teacher and culturally responsive books, as well as how their identities shaped their role as a teacher. Qualitative researchers want to know the story beyond numbers and through verbal and visual communication, have the participants answer questions (Lichtman, 2013). How people think and behave is derived from their race/ethnicity, social class, and language (Banks, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This study allowed for exploration and reflection on how teachers view culturally responsive books and how they used them in the classroom. Following a sociocultural consciousness lens through the culturally responsive teaching conceptual framework (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), this study involved questionnaires and interviews to answer the research questions.

As this study aimed to understand an aspect of teachers' experiences, the constructivist paradigm was used, with a central focus on the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) in an effort to "understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the context" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). Constructivist approaches to narrative inquiry center on understanding the inter-subjective operations through the inner world of the participants (Lal, Suto, &

Unger, 2012). Emphasis was placed on understanding the teachers and their interpretation of their teaching and learning histories and experiences through their eyes with regard to the use of culturally responsive literature.

Narrative Inquiry

This narrative inquiry research design was used to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the participating teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. The primary source of data came from questionnaires and in-depth interviews conducted one-on-one with three participating teachers. Data analysis began as data was being collected; these interviews were recorded and transcribed afterward. Data was collected and reviewed for weeks until the process reached a logical saturation point (Lichtman, 2013).

Narrative inquiry examines the completeness of an experience, exploring inside, outside, forward and backward aspects of the aspect of participants' lives being studied (Creswell, 2013). This design of inquiry was first introduced to the field of education research in the 1990s (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) and allows for information (data collected from the participants) to be retold or re-storied by the researcher into a chronological narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The role of the researcher in a narrative inquiry study is to listen and ask questions that will inspire the telling of stories. This method is suited for capturing stories and highlighting unique experiences and helped answer my focal questions on the experiences and perspectives of the participating teachers.

Narrative inquiry calls for a rich, thick description that fosters a multi-dimensional depiction of the participants' lives (Saldaña, 2021). This is best

accomplished through collecting the stories from the data and re-storying them in a meaningful way. A chronological sequence (beginning, middle, and end) with inclusion of turning points or monumental moments are key elements of narrative inquiry, distinguishing it from other types of research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that narrative inquiry methodology starts and ends "in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social" (p. 20). Narrative inquiry encompasses a three-dimensional space: temporal, social, and physical (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The social commonplace refers to the relation of both the participants and the researcher. The researcher, or inquirer, attends to internal conditions that may have shaped how the participants frame their lived experiences, such as culture, career, and schooling. The outward conditions are also explored, including actions, events, and people who have influenced or otherwise affected the lives of the participants. The temporal aspect refers to the experiences people have had and how people grow out of their experiences which lead to new ones (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inquirer pays attention to the temporal reality of the participants and of him/herself. The physical commonplace is the place, or physical location, of the experiences being studied. The physical commonplace serves as a landscape to people's stories which affect the meaning we make out of those experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Through this three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, I re-storied the participants' stories, placing their stories in chronological order and searching for important moments or memories within their stories that tapped into how teachers view and used culturally responsive literature in their classrooms.

Participants

For this dissertation study, data was collected from a purposive sample of three Latinx middle grade/intermediate teachers from the central Texas region with a large percentage of Latinx students. Keeping in mind that 76% of teachers in Texas are female (Texas Education Agency, 2020), I anticipated the research participants will be 66-100% female. Since this study was designed with defined inclusion criteria, this non-random approach was used for the sample. To obtain this purposive sample, I reached out to teachers from school districts within the same region with predominantly Latinx students. I first obtained the necessary permissions to conduct this study (IRB approval, participant approval).

Procedures

Informed Consent

After receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, I reached out to school district administrators in the central Texas region to recommend teachers who work with fourth, fifth, or sixth grade students to participate. Originally, my intention was to recruit participants from the same county in central Texas, but when that proved unsuccessful, I branched out to a second county within the region. From those recommendations, I reached out to the pool of participants inviting them to participate via e-mail (see Appendix A). I created consent forms for the participants to review and complete (see Appendix B). Once I had the participants selected, I communicated with the participants individually about the study, describing the study, the data collection, and how findings would be reported. Considering that talking about teaching experiences and use of cultural literature might lead to an expansive spectrum of responses, some of

which could have been difficult to discuss, participants were advised of their rights to privacy as well as the possibility of emotional issues arising from sharing their teaching experiences (Terrell, 2016). The consent forms included a detailed description of how the study would be conducted, how data would be collected, the role of the researcher, the role of the participant, access and use of field texts, and the platforms that would be used for the study (video conferencing service for interviews, online forms for the questionnaires, etc.). The field texts refer to the collected data – completed questionnaires, transcripts, recordings from our interviews, reflexive researcher notes, and handwritten notes from the interviews. Throughout the preliminary communication, which was conducted primarily via e-mail, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study. They signed and returned the consent form via e-mail.

Field notes were securely saved in my encrypted digital Dropbox account (a file hosting service); physical, handwritten notes were secured in a locked file box in my office. Participants were asked to read and review the data and texts I created based on the information they gave me during the research process. To keep track of all of my interactions with the participants, I maintained a contact log.

Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, a written questionnaire was sent via e-mail to all the participants (see Appendix C). This questionnaire asked demographic-type questions, such as how the participants identified themselves in terms of race/ethnicity, age, gender, where they attended grade school and college, how long they have been teaching, and how they rated their understanding and practices involving culturally

responsive teaching. The participants completed this questionnaire prior to the individual interviews.

One-on-one interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable time, each for approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, a video calling application. The participants were asked to do their best to find a quiet area to partake in the interview. I reminded the participants that the interview would be recorded prior to getting started. In addition to recording the interview, I took notes before, during, and after the interview. The semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions. Participants were allowed to respond extemporaneously, and I asked follow-up questions and redirected the conversation when needed. With an emphasis on listening, I did my best to "listen with attentive care" (Kim, 2016, p. 165) and as needed, asked further questions that dug deeper into the participants' stories. I was concerned that due to time limitations, I may not have time to ask all my questions. Fortunately, I was able to ask all questions within our time frame, with one interview going slightly over one hour at the agreement of the participant. The final question for each participant was the same, asking if there was anything else the participant wanted to share.

Before and after each interview, I spent time writing and reviewing notes pertaining to each participant. Prior to the interview, I noted what I anticipated, any potential biases that stood out to me, and my frame of mind at the time of the interview. After each interview, I reflected on the interview content and on my pre-interview memos to see how the interview aligned with or challenged my prior assumptions. The interviews were transcribed within three days after their conclusion through a

transcription service. In addition, I reviewed the questionnaires and analyzed that data along with the interview transcripts and my analytic memos.

Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher is often considered the data collection tool (Terrell, 2016). Data was collected via questionnaires and interviews focusing on the study's research questions. Questions for both instruments were developed by me. The questionnaire collected demographic data, which allowed me to describe the characteristics of the participants and better understand the other collected data (Terrell, 2016). The interviews were semi-structured; I had a variety of questions to ask, but I was prepared to pivot and potentially not ask all of them depending on the responses and available time during each interview (see Appendix D). This semi-structured approach allowed me to ask follow-up questions to expand on the amount of information the participants shared.

Before I began conducting my research, I piloted my data collection tools with a colleague who fit the description of the intended participants. I sent this colleague the questionnaire and conducted a one-on-one interview with her, complete with extensive note-taking on my part, and I took her feedback into consideration after we were finished to fine-tune my questions for the questionnaire and interviews. The colleague that I piloted my questions with had no involvement with the research participants or the schools from which the participants are from. To follow the same procedures with each participant to ensure dependability of my research process, I created an interview script to follow during each individual interview. I also created a step-by-step set of guidelines to follow while collecting the data. Even though I had these guidelines and script to follow,

since this was a series of semi-structured interviews, I maintained the ability to ask for clarification or elaboration in the interviews when needed.

Listening and confidentiality were two other components I kept in mind for this study. An important aspect of interviews was listening, and my role as the inquirer was to carefully listen and ask necessary questions and follow-up questions that would encourage further detail and telling of stories (Kim, 2016). Finally, to maintain confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used for each participant for the duration of the study in my notes, analyses, and report of my findings. The participants were also encouraged to use pseudonyms if they referred to specific people or schools.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative study, data analysis could begin as I started collecting data, which is what I did. This process allowed me to keep the data fresh in my mind and develop a thicker view of the data as I continued in the data collection process (Terrell, 2016). As I read through the data, I kept my research questions in mind, going as far as posting them on the wall above my computer, sifting through the data to identify teachers' thoughts on how they used culturally responsive Latinx literature in their classroom. The following research sub-questions were also considered when analyzing data: What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? To what extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise?

After the collection of questionnaires and conducting of interviews, the data was further analyzed using several stages.

Stages of Data Analysis

First, I had each interview transcribed within three days after the interview through a transcription service. Upon transcribing them, I read and re-read the interview data, identifying and coding emerging themes as they appeared (Saldaña, 2021). This was done using descriptive coding, in vivo coding, and narrative coding. Descriptive coding assigns labels to summarize the basic topic of the qualitative data in a short phrase or word (Saldaña, 2021). In vivo coding takes words or short phrases from the participant's statements in the data record as codes. Oftentimes this includes folk terms specific to a cultural group (Saldaña, 2021). Narrative coding utilizes the conventions of literary elements to qualitative texts, usually for the exploration of interpersonal and intrapersonal participant experiences (Saldaña, 2021).

The second stage of the data analysis was determining the clusters of meanings. Once I had the transcripts and had coded each interview, I made a list of the codes identified thus far, rearranging, elaborating on or merging them as I saw fit – clustering significant statements. From the codes, salient categories emerged through reducing and merging similar codes.

The third stage was writing a textural description, through the sociocultural consciousness lens of culturally responsive teaching, of what the participants experienced and a structural description to highlight their stories in a chronological order. Finally, I used the textural and structural descriptions to re-story the experiences of the participants.

While I followed this structure of data analysis, I recognized that building these narratives was not a solo job; the participants played a critical role in the retelling of their stories.

Validity and Trustworthiness

For this study, I intended to use three validation methods to show trustworthiness of my data: member checks, triangulation, and examining the role of self. Member checks entailed the "back and forthing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 56) between the inquirer and participant, which took place over several weeks. I shared the completed transcripts and re-storied narratives via e-mail for feedback and approval. By doing this, validity was supported by those whose stories I aimed to capture. Triangulation involved the use of several methods of gathering data to increase credibility of the findings (Lichtman, 2013). This was achieved by reviewing and analyzing the interviews, questionnaires, and field notes. The inclusion of multiple evidence allowed me as the researcher to confirm ideas and themes identified through analysis. Examining the role of self was my effort to sort through biases and consider how my biases affected my research and interpretation, maintaining awareness that my own history would shape this study (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2013). Throughout my research, I strived to remain completely transparent and authentic with the participants with regard to my own stories and ways of re-storying theirs.

In addition to validity and trustworthiness of the data, I maintained what I feel was a trusting partnership with the participants. This included being in constant communication with the participants, being mindful of and thankful for their time, and prioritizing their comfort and ease throughout the process. I let the participants know up front that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and that they could skip questions if they wished. Throughout all communication and exchanges, I used conversational vernacular; language of social scientists tends to be more technical and

analytical (Kim, 2016), which is not how I wanted to communicate with the participants. Through making this study participant-centered, I believe I maintained fidelity and a positive collaborative and respectful partnership with the participants.

Limitations

A natural limitation based on the specifics of this study is the minimal transferability. The central Texas area has a diverse population that is not the same throughout the state. My discussion section includes a thick description of the results in hopes of explicating the extent to which these results are transferable. The participants included intermediate teachers of Latinx students who are not English Learners (EL); if EL teachers, lower elementary or secondary teachers had been the participants, this study would have taken on an entirely different route. In addition, the participants were recommended to me when I began reaching out to administrators. This was not a random sample and the results have limited transferability because these teachers were already considered to be exemplary educators.

Another limitation was that the interviews and questionnaires provided information outside of the natural field setting. The data I obtained was not entirely equally articulated or detailed among the participants. Moreover, the interview and questionnaire responses from the participants were filtered through their views and understandings of my questions rather than of my own observations. As I read through their responses, themes were derived from my understanding. Through member-checks, I feel that we were able to avoid any misunderstandings, but that small possibility of inaccurate interpretation in my final report exists.

Being a former elementary teacher myself from within this region of Texas, and as someone who is passionate about culturally responsive Latinx literature, I needed to engage in researcher reflexivity to not be judgmental or opinionated of the information shared by the teachers that I interviewed. I served as both an insider and outsider with my participants: an insider as a fellow educator within the community and an outsider as someone who was not currently working alongside them. Initially I thought I would completely match the description of my participants, but they all taught intermediate grades that I had not taught myself, and they all had more than 20 years of experience, so our similarities were limited. However, by acknowledging the role of self, I strived to "sort through biases and think about how they affect various aspects of the research, especially interpretation of meanings" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 165).

Plan for Presenting the Results

The results of this study are included in the next chapter of this dissertation report. Upon the successful defense of this dissertation, a condensed explanation of this study will be submitted to a scholarly journal focusing on diversity in children's literature and/or culturally responsive teaching.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided the rationale for using a qualitative design for this study and provided details on narrative inquiry, the methodology in which this study is grounded. Through the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, I re-storied the information shared with me by the participants. After obtaining IRB approval and informed consent I started on my research. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted with the participants. The sample entailed three Latinx teachers from the central Texas

region. Although the data was collected over the summer when school was not in session, these teachers usually have mainly Latinx students (based on the campus population in which they teach). Questions from the questionnaire and interview were asked from the angle of sociocultural consciousness to explore if and how teachers used culturally responsive texts in their classrooms (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Data was analyzed through extensive coding (Saldaña, 2021). Validity and trustworthiness were ensured via member checks, triangulation, and researcher reflexivity. Limitations included the unlikelihood of transferability to apply the findings to a broader context, conducting the study outside of the natural field setting, and my role as both an insider and outsider, which could have affected how I interpreted the data. Results and implications from this study are shared in detail in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the research question: How is culturally responsive Latinx literature being used by Latinx middle grade teachers? In addition, this chapter relays the findings related to the following research sub-questions: What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? To what extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise? By utilizing narrative inquiry for this study, I attempted to gain insight into the teachers' lived experiences with regard to how they understand and use culturally responsive literature in their teaching environments. This study was conducted over the summer while the three participants were on summer break.

Participant Profiles

This section presents profiles of each of the three participants, providing information on their experiences using culturally responsive literature, their understandings of culturally responsive teaching, and their personal anecdotes.

This study was composed of three participants who live and work in the greater central Texas region. All three work with intermediate students (third through fifth grades). Two teachers work in the same city but in different school districts and one works in another nearby city. Despite the geographical differences in where they work, their student populations are similar.

Elizabeth is an educator who works in Escalera ISD, a school district of over 13,000 students in which approximately 98% is Hispanic and 89% is considered economically disadvantaged. At Elizabeth's campus, 98% of the population is Hispanic

with 92% low socioeconomic status. South Central ISD is made up of over 100,000 students, 68% of which are Hispanic students. Less than half of the population, 49%, is considered economically disadvantaged. Nora is a veteran educator who is starting to think about retirement from South Central ISD, in which the student population at her campus is a bit more diverse with regard to ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The campus in which Nora works has 46% Hispanic students and 12% of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged. North Central ISD has approximately 80,000 students, with 55% Hispanic students. Over half of the population, 53%, is considered economically disadvantaged. Paulita rounds out the participants working in North Central ISD at a Title I campus with over 90% Hispanic students and 96% economically disadvantaged. Table 3 provides an at-a-glance of each district profile.

Table 3

School District Profile

Participant	School District	District % Hispanic Population	District % Economically Disadvantaged	Campus % Hispanic Population	Campus % Economically Disadvantaged
Elizabeth	Escalera	98%	89%	98%	92%
Nora	South Central	68%	49%	46%	12%
Paulita	North Central	55%	53%	90%	96%

Table 4 provides an at-a-glance reference to each participant, their number of years teaching, and specific area within central Texas where they live and work. Although I did not ask for their birth dates or ages specifically, I have also included an affiliation to their demographic cohort.

Table 4

Teacher Participant Data

Participant Name	Years Teaching	School district and region in Central Texas	Demographic Cohort
Elizabeth	25	Escalera (Southern region)	Generation X
Nora	32	South Central (Southern region)	Generation X
Paulita	23	North Central (Northern region)	Generation X

All three participants used various terms to describe their ethnicity and/or cultural experience. In the profiles below, I have used the term(s) that the participant used. Each term is a variation of the term Latinx.

Meet Elizabeth

Elizabeth (a pseudonym), a second-generation Mexican American, has lived in Texas for 49 years. She grew up in the far western part of Texas and attended college and graduate school at private and public universities, respectively, in Texas. Elizabeth identifies as middle class, lives in a major city within the central Texas region, and has been in the education field for 25 years.

Thinking back upon her college courses, Elizabeth recalled taking a Multicultural Literature class in graduate school in which she "read, analyzed, and reviewed literature" by authors from various BIPOC backgrounds. With regard to book access, Elizabeth utilizes the school library and outside resources to locate and use books for her teaching environment.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The following section describes Elizabeth's views on culturally responsive teaching. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Inclusive of All Different Cultures. To Elizabeth, culturally responsive teaching encompasses "making sure that the literature and texts that you're using include different cultures...and not just the cultures of your demographics, but inclusive of all different cultures." After a pause, Elizabeth added that she recognizes that she tends to gravitate toward her own Hispanic/Latino culture; because of this, she strives to be more cognizant of her book choices.

Making Culturally Responsive Teaching and Books a Priority. For the past three years, Elizabeth has received culturally responsive training at least once a year through various entities. She explained that one training was offered by the professional organization for which she serves on reading list committees, and the others were opportunities she learned of on her own and took an interest in. Some of these opportunities have been available online and others, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were held in-person and sponsored by organizations including the Texas Library Association and Scholastic. "As far as culturally responsive training at the district and campus level, it is not a priority coming from admin," Elizabeth explained, "But I make culturally responsive teaching and books a priority when selecting books and in my lessons." She shared that a few years ago, before 2020, teachers at her campus were encouraged to attend the National Latino Children's Literature Conference that was being held in their city that year. Elizabeth attended, with the district covering her registration fee. With regard to the challenges of finding culturally responsive training opportunities, Elizabeth has found it relatively easy. "I think I naturally seek them out at conferences."

She also strongly agreed that her personal experience has shaped how she teaches her students; she has introduced them to authors who write about the Hispanic/Mexican

American experience, such as David Bowles and Diana Lopez. Elizabeth noted that it is not easy to do this with other cultures, and is cognizant of avoiding offending students. "Sometimes it's because I don't want to do something inadvertently and offend them. So, I stop and think about it more than I would if approaching a Hispanic child." In this regard, connecting Hispanic students to books that reflect her culture is a task she feels more comfortable doing. On a broader book scale (not restricted to culturally responsive books), she pays attention to what books her students are reading and will point out titles that those students might like from their preferred author or genre.

Elizabeth accepted a new job over the summer (at the time this interview was conducted) so her responses were based on her previous campus, which was a Title I campus with 92% of students coming from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Books. The following section describes Elizabeth's experiences with culturally responsive books. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Cultural Differences. To distinguish a culturally responsive book, Elizabeth refers to social media, book reviews, and if/when she reads a book herself, she will research the authors' backgrounds and make her own opinions. She recognized that there are several other cultures in which she wouldn't know if a book was culturally responsive or authentic because they are not her lived experience. She also noted that not everyone's lived experiences are the same, even within the realm of a particular culture, like Latinos, and that socioeconomic status and generation play into people's lived experiences. "It's generational," Elizabeth explained:

> You've got your second and third generations, and even with, like, the African American community we have at our school, some parents are from Africa, some students *with* their parents are recently coming from Africa, then you've got African Americans who are biracial, and that identify more as African American….There's those cultural differences.

Although those students may be grouped together for classification purposes as African Americans, their experiences may be quite different.

They're Okay, It's Authentic. Elizabeth is aware of the current movement to get away from using the #ownvoices hashtag to refer to culturally diverse books. (Originally created in 2015 by author Corinne Duyvis to raise awareness of books with diverse characters by authors of that same diverse group, the hashtag became a catch-all used broadly by publishers, book bloggers, and book creators. As referenced in Chapter 1, in the summer of 2021, We Need Diverse Books released a statement that they would no longer use this hashtag as it had become problematic. Moving forward, they would use words and phrases that the authors use to identify themselves.) Because of this, when she is seeking culturally responsive books, she takes note of where the authors grew up or have lived; for Elizabeth, an author who grew up in an area in which a particular culture is strongly present will likely be familiar enough to write a credible story. Elizabeth shared, "I find myself looking up the history of the authors and what they grew up with and, 'Okay, this person is White, but they grew up in Mexico, so they know what the culture is like.'"

In this same part of the interview, Elizabeth referenced a popular adult novel that was released in 2020, *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins. This book, about a mother

and her son who are fleeing Mexico to come to the United States, has remained a best-seller since its release, yet it was not the lived experience of the author. Moreover, the author herself identifies as White, although when the book came out she said she was part Puerto Rican. This book created an uproar in Latinx communities in that the book was written by someone who has not experienced illegal immigration herself, yet there are other books that have been written by people who have experienced it that received very little attention. Elizabeth wondered, "The whole *American Dirt*, you know, if all that controversy hadn't happened, would I have, like, thought different of it?" As a result of this controversy and the attention the book received, Elizabeth makes the effort to look "at the author's background and where they grew up, and like, 'Oh, okay, they're okay, it's authentic.'"

We Want Our Books on Display All Year Long. Elizabeth takes the opportunity to highlight culturally responsive books during months that celebrate various cultures but also diligently strives to spotlight and utilize these books year-round. For example, during the Thanksgiving season, which also ties into Native American Heritage Month, she will put out books about different tribes and the holiday itself as well as books by Native American authors, like Joseph Bruchac, regardless of the topics of the books. She further reflected that earlier in her career, during Hispanic Heritage Month, she used to display biographies about Hispanics, then later decided to include books by Hispanic/Latino authors and to have them available beyond that month-long cultural celebration.

> After a while, I just started, "I'm just gonna put out the books Latino writers put out to highlight those a little bit, not just for that month." I think a lot of people are saying now, like, "Don't just put us out on that month, you know, when it's

Latino heritage? What is our Hispanic heritage, right? We want our books on display all year long!"

She recalled during the first year or two at her previous campus, she had access to an abundance of books by African American authors but not nearly as many for the Hispanic community. Her goal then became to get more Hispanic/Latino books. For herself personally, she naturally gravitates toward Latino books. Elizabeth shares books with students by Latino authors from Texas, such as Diana Lopez from Corpus Christi and David Bowles from the Rio Grande Valley (both communities are within fairly close proximity to Elizabeth's city). She likes to read author Xavier Garza's short, scary stories to her students around Halloween.

The One from Texas. She recalled one year that a movie based on a scary book was being released, and she began reading the book to her students. "So I was reading that book to the kids and they didn't like it." Elizabeth further led me into her sphere of teaching:

Her students appeared uninterested and one raised his hand and said, "We want the other guy." Several students agreed and nodded their heads.

Another student asked, "Can you read us the scary stories book by the other guy?"

"Which other guy?" Elizabeth asked, perplexed at the distaste toward the book she was reading to them.

"The one from Texas!" the first student exclaimed.

Elizabeth recalled the book by Xavier Garza that she had read to them close to Halloween, and she grabbed the book from her shelf. "This one?" she asked.

The students nodded and cheered. "Yes, that's the one!" a student confirmed.

"But I've already read this to you," Elizabeth stated.

"You can read it again!" a student declared.

And so Elizabeth abandoned the other book and began to re-read the scary stories collection by Xavier Garza, "the one from Texas."

La Llorona. Moreover, her students particularly enjoy books with popular legends from Texas, such as *La Llorona* (the Weeping Woman). Students became interested in *Charlie Hernandez and the League of Shadows* by Ryan Calejo for that reason - because it has La Llorona in the story. Elizabeth recalled introducing her students to the book:

> I told my students, "This is like *Percy Jackson*." But they don't gravitate toward *Percy Jackson*. So you know how I sold that one? I told them, "It's got La Llorona in it." And they immediately wanted to read *Charlie Hernandez*. They were like, "Ooh, La Llorona is in it? You're talking about La Llorona?!" So that one was always checked out because they wanted to read that one.

(I can understand the sentiments of the students. La Llorona is a legend that I too grew up with. My childhood home is close to a winding road that crosses a river, and I always heard stories from friends and family that La Llorona would wander about at night along the river, wailing for her children that she had drowned in a moment of rage. When I obtained my driver's license, I refused to drive down that road for years out of fear of seeing her with my own eyes. Although I drive down that road now, I still get a little uneasy when I drive through there at night. I have yet to see her, but the stories persist. During my school librarian days, stories about La Llorona were among the most frequently checked-out books from my campus in central Texas.)

Elizabeth also shared that she felt familiar with Aztec legends because of what she learned in Spanish class back in her school days. Authors like David Bowles and Ryan Calejo are writing about these legends that might spur students to read the actual myths.

She noted that her Latino students were particularly interested in reading books by Asian/Asian American authors. Through the years, her culturally responsive book collection expanded to include various cultures, but books by Asian American authors such as Grace Lin were popular among her students. When I asked Elizabeth to share a bit about why she thinks this is the case, she elaborated,

> I think my students liked books by Asian authors like Kahtryn Otoshi, Grace Lin and Janet Wong because I booktalk their books and have shown students pictures of me with those authors that I have met at conferences and book festivals. I also read Chinese folktales to students during the week of the Chinese New Year every year.

Again, this seems to be an example of Elizabeth's efforts to seek out culturally diverse books and authors.

Toward the end of our discussion, the book *American Dirt* came up again. Discussing the *Charlie Hernandez* books, Elizabeth mused that they are similar to the *Percy Jackson* books, but they do not receive the same kind of publicity or sales as *Percy Jackson*. She compared this to the marketing that *American Dirt* received. "Authors of color don't get the same marketing that [Jeanine Cummins] did, you know, and that's what they were fighting...others are writing more authentic literature." Elizabeth's observation is significant for educators because there are stories out there written by

people who have experienced them that are not getting the same recognition. These books exist, but they are not always easy or quick to find. Moreover, with teachers' busy schedules, they may not have the time to seek out these books. Percy Jackson may be more of a household name than Charlie Hernandez, but they are both similar stories.

All The Little Breadcrumbs. When seeking out and selecting culturally responsive books, Elizabeth refers to award lists, information from conferences, and social media. "My Twitter is devoted totally to authors and library stuff. I found a lot through the tweets and stuff, going along, all the little breadcrumbs over this award or this conference. Plus, I follow a lot of BIPOC authors on Instagram." From these breadcrumbs, she explained that she is able to locate new and new-to-her books, authors, and resources. Elizabeth serves on multiple reading list committees and says the committee members intentionally look for BIPOC authors when reviewing books in hopes of creating more diverse reading lists. "We talk about how we need to get other cultures...to be inclusive."

Personal Reading Experiences. Thinking upon her experiences with literature, her favorite book as a child was *The Dream of the Little Elephant* by Ruth Bornstein. She recalled that her little sisters liked for her to read it to them. Although Elizabeth enjoyed reading, she lacked an experience in which she saw a reflection of herself in a book. "In elementary school, I remember reading Nancy Drew and not liking it." She remembered learning about Aztec legends in grade school, "but not in regular class, I remember learning about the Aztec legends in Spanish class. My Spanish teacher took the time to teach those legends."

The first time she saw a reflection of herself in a book was in high school when she read the book *Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya. Although she was in high school when she read it, it was not a school-assigned book. She borrowed it from her aunt who was in college studying to become a teacher at the time. "[Author] Rudolfo Anaya was from New Mexico, and being next to New Mexico [Texas], that kind of drew the interest." In this book, a curandera (a woman who heals using folk remedies) comes to live with a young boy and his family in New Mexico as he comes of age under Ultima's wing. Elizabeth felt a connection with this book:

> My mom believed in curanderas. I was around that stuff growing up, because that's what my mom believes in. I remember reading a couple of other books by him because it was Rudolfo Anaya. But the others don't stand out like that one did.

She also recalled a story in an anthology she used during her first year teaching that reminded her of her family. The book was *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza, which was included in the textbook she used with her students. *Family Pictures* is a collection of illustrations created by Garza based on her recollections of her own family activities: making tamales, going to church, attending a town fair, and playing in the backyard. Without being didactic, Garza celebrates the South Texas/Latinx/Mexican American experience through her words and images. She had her students make their own book similar to *Family Pictures*. She notes that if that book had not been included in the anthology, she may not have come across it. She sought out the book and purchased a copy for herself, as well as the others Garza has done. Even after the textbook went out of

adoption, Elizabeth continued using *Family Pictures* for a writing activity with her students.

On a final note, Elizabeth recalled her cousin, who is also an educator in Texas, asking her for author recommendations. She has directed him to the Tomás Rivera and Pura Belpré book award lists, from which he has read several titles. From these titles, her cousin came across the book *They Call Me Güero* by David Bowles, which he used with an intervention group of his students. *They Call Me Güero* is a novel-in-verse about a seventh grade boy living on the Texas/Mexico border, who is nicknamed Güero (light-skinned boy) because of his light skin and red hair. He is half White and half Mexican, but considers himself *puro Mexicano* (all Mexican). Güero turns to writing poetry when the going gets tough for him in this coming-of-age story, providing a positive portrayal of a Mexican American teenage boy navigating life like any other kid living along the border, Texas or otherwise. Elizabeth shared this to further drive home the point of the need and usefulness of culturally responsive books in education today.

Meet Nora

Nora (a pseudonym) is a lifelong Texas resident and comes from a middle-class family. She lives and works in a major city within the central Texas region. Nora was born in this major city but grew up in the Rio Grande Valley region; however, the city where she was born and where she currently lives has always felt like home to her. Nora attended college and graduate school at the same university, which is part of one of the nation's largest public university systems of higher education. Thinking back upon her college courses, Nora recalled taking one class about Mexican American studies. This year is year 32 in the education field for Nora.

The student population in Nora's working environment is mostly upper-middle-class with students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Nora utilizes the school library and outside resources for book access, and she feels that the school library has a sufficient number of books and resources that represent diverse cultures. She enjoys reading culturally responsive books and somewhat agrees that she has received training on culturally responsive best practices and how to find and use culturally responsive books. She strongly agrees that culturally responsive teaching leads to academic success.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The following section describes Nora's views on culturally responsive teaching. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Teaching Every Group's History. To Nora, culturally responsive teaching involves educators teaching every group's history as accurately as possible:

> Making sure that we teach every group's history...as correct as...I guess, as close to the truth as possible, I guess is what I'm trying to say. Making sure that everybody feels seen and heard and that their histories are known.

Moreover, Nora feels the best way to implement culturally responsive practices is with books that reflect those truths. She referenced the book *Cultivating Genius* by Gholdy Muhammad as being influential in her understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

Other Peers Doing the Teaching. When asked about culturally responsive training, Nora stated, "I do not think I have had formal training from an entity, if you would. I have sought out learning on my own through sessions at conferences...so essentially it was other peers doing the teaching." Nora estimated having attended between three and five sessions on culturally responsive teaching and/or literature. "I do

not think that culturally responsive teaching is prioritized in our district. I know that peers believe it should be, but I also know that things can move slowly when it involves big shifts like these." With regard to seeking this type of training, Nora felt that they were not difficult to find, especially in the last year and a half, being connected virtually. "It is a matter of knowing where to look to be able to find who is hosting a session or discussion on it.

Upon reflecting on what has shaped her most as an educator, Nora feels that her upbringing is really what led her to become the teacher that she is, to make sure that students feel seen, heard, and understood regardless of their race. She credits stories she has heard from her family (parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles) and what they experienced as being instrumental in shaping her as a person and educator to make sure those things are not repeated. She feels that her personal experiences shape how she teaches and works with others.

This piqued my curiosity, so I probed further. I asked if she could give me an example of these stories from her family. I had a feeling I knew which direction this response would go, and sadly, I was correct.

The stories her family shared with her that have shaped who she is as a person and an educator are stories of discrimination; specifically, discrimination toward her family because of their Hispanic ethnicity. Nora shared,

> My uncle has told me stories about being in school in South Texas and not being allowed to speak Spanish in school. He has also told me about when they would go work as migrant workers [in another state] that there were times when they

> wanted to go to the movies and were met with signs that told them they couldn't enter through the front doors.

Through the sharing of these stories, Nora feels that what we are taught and in turn, teach our students, should be working toward not repeating these hurtful experiences of those who came before us: "I have used those stories to help me remember that all people have feelings and are deserving of being treated equally regardless of their skin color, their culture and background, etcetera." These stories, Nora revealed, have been committed deep in her heart.

Extra Access. Nora recalls that during her first year of teaching, books were somewhat limited. Their school library was housed in the old cafeteria. When she found herself in need of more books to share with her students, Nora sought out solutions.

> I remember going to the public library and hauling books to make sure there were books in my classroom. I don't remember that I had a budget for books, because I would have to go borrow them. Then I started learning that I could just purchase them on my own, you know, through those book clubs, Troll and Scholastic and Trumpet...you know, those little things that you can order books from. Just really making sure that my students had some kind of extra access, not just the books that they – not knocking libraries, because I absolutely love libraries – but going to the library and picking out one book, when in my classroom, they had access to five or 10, you know.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Books. The following section describes Nora's experiences with culturally responsive books. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Books That Share the History of Different Groups. Nora's understanding of culturally responsive books encompasses having a wide variety of books that share the history of different groups, reflecting both the students in one's classroom and not in one's classroom, because it is important for students to know about all groups. She feels that this exposure to various cultures should not just happen during months recognizing cultural groups, like Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month, or Native American Heritage Month; rather, culturally responsive books should be in a student's reach at all times.

In A Kid's Reach at All Times. Nora feels that these books can be used for disciplinary literacy - social studies, science, language arts and more.

> I think about how we learned all of a sudden, *all* of a *sudden*, the Hidden Figures, like, why haven't we heard about them? And that's social studies, but it's also the history of a group of people that we need to know, we *all* need to know.

Nora elaborated that the *Hidden Figures* story is an example of social studies, history, and also an opportunity to teach people about a group of people that many had not previously heard about, a group that we all need to know. Beyond disciplinary literacy, Nora notes that culturally responsive books also allow readers to learn compassion, empathy, respect, and other social-emotional learning terms - things people of all backgrounds need to know to be good citizens in the world.

> These books should be in your...they should be in a kid's reach at all times, if they have questions, it gives them somewhere to go, maybe do some research within books that will give them some insight into other groups of people.

Nora feels that books really impact students' self-image. She opined that students are already bombarded with things that may not help their self-esteem or make them not feel good about themselves. However, when students see themselves in books, it is powerful; students may read a book and recognize a reflection of themselves in the plot of a story or perhaps sort through their own challenges based on how a book character dealt with a similar issue. On the flip side, students may read a book and ask themselves questions, like would they handle a certain situation the same way? Do they agree with the protagonist? Such questions can help form students' thinking.

Others Can See What It's Like. In reflecting on her reading experiences, she considers a book to be non-culturally responsive if it's simply telling a story without regard to the race or ethnicity of the main characters. On the other hand, she believes a culturally responsive book tells of some history or of a culture (not necessarily history) "so that others can see what it's like." As an example, she referred to a personal reading anecdote of when she read *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo. An avid reader, Nora is an active member of three different book clubs and *Clap When You Land* was a book one of those book clubs read together in 2021. In the book, the two main characters are Hispanic, like Nora, but Nora noted cultural differences. "When we read the plane book, *Clap When You Land*, like, looking into the culture of the way they prayed, like we're both Hispanic, she and I, but her way of her religion or her way of worshipping was somewhat different than mine. Like, still, just being able to look into someone else's way of doing things, I think is being culturally responsive. Giving voice to other groups as well."

This book still gave her insight into looking into someone else's way of doing things, even from someone within her broad cultural group. Nora also notes that sometimes the things that are happening globally influence what she wants to read:

> Last summer [2020], when, and I know this is pointed, but during the riots and all of that, that was going on, I felt very inclined to read a lot of books that had Black characters and just good stories that have Black characters, you know. So sometimes it depends on what's going on globally. That sometimes drives what I pick, what I read.

Read Books of Every Group as Much as Possible. In her work, Nora strives to plug different books, especially in the summer, using social media. She participates in the #BookADay challenge, founded by Donalyn Miller, in which participants post about a children's book every day during their summer vacation. By participating in this challenge, Nora explained,

> I push myself to make sure that I read books of every group as much as I can. Be it myths or stories with characters from different cultures, and then share just a little bit of it to help maybe a teacher that might be looking for a title to use in their classroom.

She utilizes Twitter to share these posts and to see recommendations shared by others.

Her method for selection is intentional; at times, what's going on in the world drives the books she selects, but she also has a method she follows.

> Most of the time it's going to the library and just looking through the books, reading the blurbs, and deciding, "Ok, yes." And then I kind of do have somewhat of a process...I put them out on the shelf or a table, and kind of make sure, "Did I

> get two of these or two of those? Those are a little bit of animals, and a little bit of boys and girls, oh these are kind of new" -- trying to balance it out. And make sure that I read and sometimes I catch myself. I may not read too much of the Native American group, not that I have anything against that group. It's just that I've noticed that and as a teacher, we have to be very careful to make sure that we pull in all the groups.

In this self-reflection, she strives to be careful to ensure the inclusion of all groups in her book challenge titles and social media posts.

With regard to books that reflect her Hispanic/Latino culture, Nora feels that she is not as familiar with the books being published by Latinx authors or with Latinx characters, but she is aware of the ground they are gaining in the market. She notes that she tends to gravitate toward authors she has read previously more so than authors of her own ethnicity, and she strives to be more conscientious about that.

Personal Reading Experiences. During Nora's elementary school days, they did not have a library; rather, they had a bookmobile, which was precious to her because it gave her book access. As a child, her favorite book was *The Ghost of Windy Hill* by Clyde Robert Bulla. She loved the element of mystery and ghosts, as well as the compassion among the characters. These elements are things that she still enjoys in works of fiction. Although she has always been an avid reader and always saw herself within the female characters of books, she did not see a reflection of herself as a Hispanic female until adulthood, when she read *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros.

> I never stopped to think about the first time, and it amazed me that I really didn't see a reflection until I was an adult, as much as I read. The funny thing was, I

never questioned it, “How come I don’t see myself in those books?” It just happened.

(*Caramelo* is a multigenerational family narrative following a family’s road trip from Chicago to Mexico City. This novel explores family dynamics through their storytelling, and even lies and mistruths, over several generations.) In *Caramelo*, Nora saw a reflection of her, her family, and her community, and was able to relate to many of the experiences in the book.

> When I read that book it was like sitting with my aunts, like I can hear them...I had that feeling that this was my, this was *my* city, this is *mine*, the people that are like me live here. So I could identify with things, maybe not the exact same things, but growing up as a Hispanic girl, as a Hispanic woman, I remember that feeling of “Wow, this is pretty cool.”

A final thought Nora shared was a reflection on her reading experiences as a child and those memories of the books’ influence today. As a child, some of her favorite books were the ones by Laura Ingalls Wilder. She describes losing herself in the experiences Wilder had: “I would just marvel at things that were different than where I lived. Obviously, we didn’t have maple trees for syrup or make snow cones in the winter.” Through the *Little House* books, she was exposed to it. In recent years, Wilder and the *Little House* books have been criticized for the depiction of people of different cultural backgrounds (as was referenced in Chapter 1), which is something Nora hasn’t stopped to investigate herself, but she considers that these criticisms may be coming from people who have different thoughts or reading experiences with those books. “I was just happy I was reading, so I never really thought about, ‘Wow, how come they’re not like

me?'" She grew up reading *Dick and Jane* books and remembers never questioning Jane's hair color. Moreover, she was able to make connections with the *Dick and Jane* books - they had a dog, as did she. Nora was taught to be accepting of everyone and to appreciate all people and stories. Nora feels that now is the time for change.

> I see it….We're leaving people out. I think it's the point in time for all of us to step up, all of us in different racial groups, ethnic groups, and tell our stories so that we are all heard. We're all represented.

Meet Paulita

Paulita (a pseudonym) is a Mexican American educator who has lived in Texas for 46 years. She attended college and graduate school in Texas, at private and public institutions, respectively. Paulita identifies herself as coming from a middle working class socioeconomic background, and she has been teaching for 23 years. She currently lives and works in the north central Texas region.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching. The following section describes Paulita's views on culturally responsive teaching. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Aware of Everyone That's in Our Room. Her understanding of culturally responsive teaching is "making sure that we're aware of everyone that's in our room...like really get to know where it is they're coming from." She elaborated on the importance of not making assumptions on where students are coming from with regard to their culture. "I think we have a tendency to do that, especially here in Texas, we're thinking, 'Oh, everyone has roots in Mexico.' Well, that's not the case." In Paulita's school district, while there are families from Mexico, there are many students and

families from countries in Central America, Cuba and Serbia. She also noted that within these groups, they may speak the same language but even within their respective dialects, there may be different meanings for certain words. Spanish is the primary language spoken in Cuba and Central American countries, which is also a common language among the parents of Paulita's campus. However, just because they all speak Spanish does not mean they speak it the exact same way; there are some differences in word usage because of those different cultural backgrounds, even though they all may be considered Latino in a broader sense.

Our District Made an Effort This Year. Paulita has received training on culturally responsive teaching best practices in recent years. "I received a one-time training through my school district...it touched on how to respond to bias, prejudice and stereotypes. We were presented with different scenarios and how we would respond to those in the classroom and amongst staff." Paulita added that it was supposed to be a series of trainings but follow-ups have not happened so far. "Our district has made an effort this year to include more culturally responsive books, more than they have in previous years, and are including these in the curriculum guides at each grade level." With regard to her colleagues, Paulita stated that teachers are becoming more conscious of the books they have in their classroom libraries. Paulita has participated in additional culturally responsive training by learning of them through emails, social media, word of mouth and professional organizations. She has attended online culturally responsive training provided by the International Literacy Association, Corwin (a professional development book publisher), Edweb (a professional online community of educators) and the local university. "I would say in the past two years these trainings have been easier to

find, but prior to this, they were not." Paulita feels that attending these trainings have made her stronger as an educator.

It's Not Like They Got on A Plane. Paulita is familiar with the challenges her students have faced or are facing outside of school. Considering the number of immigrant students at her campus, Paulita shared that a lot of them will tell her about their experiences migrating from Central America to Texas. "That's the really, you know, sad part to hear...the story of…" Paulita paused for a moment before continuing, "it wasn't easy. It's not like they got on a plane and just came over here." In other cases, many students were born in the United States and their parents came here when they were younger or came before those students were born. These students and their families often go back and forth to other countries to visit loved ones.

You Have to Get to Know the Parents. Paulita thinks it is important to build relationships with the students early on and to be personable. She revealed that some of her students tend to get down on themselves for their struggles in learning how to read; when this happens, Paulita will try to uplift them by being positive and telling them that's what she's there for, to help them learn. She works to earn the trust of her students and their parents. She also believes communication with parents is essential to student success, and she strives to get to know the parents and get them involved in their children's education. "You have to get to know the parents...if the parents trust you, well then obviously, then the kids trust, you have a really good rapport and it's a lot easier because they trust you." Paulita feels that having parents' trust and support feeds into the relationship she has with her students; bonding with the parents and the students nurtures

their relationships and leads to deeper connections and meaningful learning opportunities.

Understanding of Culturally Responsive Books. The following section describes Paulita's experiences with culturally responsive books. The italicized subheadings are direct quotes that she said during our interview.

Highlight or Showcase the Culture. Paulita's understanding of culturally responsive books is that these books "really highlight or showcase the culture" of the characters, particularly books with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) characters. Paulita enjoys reading culturally responsive books and shared that in the last few years she has started to learn more about these books by attending trainings and reading articles to get a better grasp on culturally responsive literature. To Paulita, a non-cultural book will likely have all White characters, or perhaps have one side character who is a person of color but their cultural background place little to no significance in the plot of the book, almost like those characters are added to check off a box.

As culturally responsive teaching and books gain momentum in the education field, Paulita reflected that back then, during her college days, there were not a lot of culturally responsive books, or perhaps they were out there but she was not taught about them or exposed to them. Thinking back on her higher education, Paulita stated,

> I almost feel kind of sad, because I didn't get any of this in college….I don't know if it's the word shame, but just like, I just feel like, God, I didn't know any of this, you know, it wasn't put on the forefront. It was there...but nobody really said, "Oh, this is important."

A Conscious Effort. In her two decades of teaching, Paulita originally defaulted to books by authors like Eric Carle and Stan and Jan Berenstain, using what she was familiar with. “It’s not until these past few years that I’ve really made a conscious effort to look at, to look for culturally responsive books.” Now, when she seeks out culturally responsive books, she utilizes Twitter and follows people who frequently post about such books. Through following people on social media, she has learned of new books, reading lists, and book awards that she did not previously know about. She is grateful to have the technology to be able to easily seek out new resources online. She also cited her book club as a way that she learns about new books. Her book club is composed mainly of fellow educators and through their monthly chats and social media posts, she has become familiar with new titles.

Paulita shared again that she felt sad to see so few books that reflect her cultural background and experiences, as well as books in which the characters look like her. She is taking a deeper look into culturally responsive books for not only her students but her daughter. She noted some newer books that have Latinx characters such as the *Lola Levine* series by Monica Brown and *Cece Rios and the Desert of Souls* by Kaela Rivera. More specifically, she noted the lack of books about Mexican Americans. “There’s not really any about Mexican Americans either. Not too many. I think the only ones I can relate to are the Selena biographies. Even then, I still think there’s a lot to be written.” The biographies she is referring to are those about Selena Quintanilla-Perez, who was a Mexican American and Texan. Several picture book biographies about her have been released in recent years. Paulita is intentionally seeking out training and books that revolve around Latinx books and feels that Latinxs are being portrayed in a positive light

and that their stories are finally being told. Through her research, Paulita noted that many of the people whose works are being published or presented on cultural issues are White. Although the content of their research and findings is about cultural diversity, they themselves are not from diverse cultural backgrounds. From the small selection of books that reflect the Latinx culture, Paulita knows that her students notice the reflections of culture and they make connections right away, but more books need to be written.

Something Everyone Has in Common. Last year, Paulita participated in an online summer critical literacy course for teachers through a major public university in Texas. In this course, they explored the uses of critical literacy, read and discussed various articles, and every participant created and submitted a lesson plan by picking a theme based on what they learned in the course. The facilitators provided topics and ideas and allowed the participants to pick from those or select their own topic. Paulita shared, "So I picked hair, because I was like, that's something everyone has in common, regardless of your culture….it just came to my mind, like 'what are some common things that people share?'" The inspiration for this came from a book she remembered using with her students, *Hair/Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros. This bilingual book explores the different types of hair within one family. Paulita's project included a list of books with similar themes of hair, the state standards that her lesson plan addressed, and an explanation of how the books selected provided windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for students. Although this course involved heavy exploration of culturally diverse books, Paulita noted that she believed both of the instructors were White. (When I looked up this training that Paulita had attended, I found that the instructors were people I know. One instructor, who is a friend of mine, is indeed White, but the other instructor is Latina.

She has an English last name, which is her married last name, which might have contributed to Paulita's belief that both were White. Since this course was held remotely and the instructors and students never interacted in-person, it makes sense that Paulita would have thought this.)

Why Do We Only Have Just That One Book? Paulita described using culturally responsive books as mentor texts for instruction. She primarily teaches struggling readers, and she pays close attention to vocabulary words and multisyllabic words that could be used to teach or reinforce skills with her students. She noted that her students will be quick to make connections to the books and will share these personal connections with her. Specifically, she referred to the Christmas-themed book *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto as one that everyone can relate to.

> We use [*Too Many Tamales*] all the time at Christmas. But we need to make more, you know what I'm saying? It's like, why do we only have just that *one* book? We need more of these books. We can't rely on the one book for making those connections.

(This statement gave me pause, and I immediately thought about Adichie's Danger of the Single Story TED Talk, which was referenced in Chapter 1. I was desperate to share this with Paulita, but I didn't want to interrupt her. Her statement, however, reinforces and validates this concern of having a singular book readily available to represent the Latinx culture at Christmastime.)

Nonetheless, Paulita continued that the connections are deep with *Too Many Tamales*. Students will share their personal experiences with making tamales at home, and Paulita's campus even held a *tamalada* (an event in which a group of people comes

together to make tamales) with the parents a few years ago. During this event, the parents came to school to start preparing the tamales, then took them home to cook, and the campus community enjoyed them the next day.

Personal Reading Experiences. The first time Paulita saw a reflection of herself in a book was when she was an adult, already teaching. Her campus was hosting a book club with the parents and they were reading *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. With this book, Paulita said it was not a complete reflection of her lived experience but one she still connected to. Paulita was born in the United States, whereas the main character in the book is from Mexico. However, reading the book reminded Paulita of the stories her grandfather used to share about his experience coming to the U.S. from Mexico and leaving everything behind in order to cross the border, like the characters in the book.

> I guess the part I related to was my grandfather because he came from Mexico. Seeing during that time and just the struggles, I guess, it's almost like having it all over there, but then having to come because of the war. And living in a tiny two-bedroom home. I think there were 14 kids. And you know, just hearing those stories...that's how that reminded me.

During the book club at her campus, some parents read the English version and others read the Spanish translation (depending on what language they preferred to read it in). "It was great just hearing their perspectives and their stories, having those conversations."

As a child, Paulita's favorite book was *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. Her kindergarten teacher read it to the class and she remembered it being the first time she started to understand a theme or message in a story. Throughout her life, she has read widely, but she feels like she has yet to find a book that she can fully relate to. "I want to

be able to say that I read that book and I can relate to it. You know, I feel like I don't have that book yet." Oftentimes, there are books in which bits and pieces might be relatable, but nothing that really reminds her of her own lived experience.

> We just really need to have more...there's still not enough. I mean, I think we're beginning to touch the surface. I mean, I read some and then some little pieces I can take but not something I'm like, "Oh, you know that really reminds me of me." Our story. I feel like there's little pieces, but it's not completely me. I can't own it, I guess. I want to be able to say, "That's *my* book."

Paulita hopes that someone will write that book someday.

Similarities Among the Participants

The three participants had several things in common. Aside from the initial criteria of my project for Latina, middle-grade educators in central Texas, they shared additional similarities that I was pleasantly surprised to learn during my interviews and analyses. All participants had over 20 years of teaching experience. They are all lifelong Texas residents and all three attended both college and graduate school at Texas universities. Each of them has a master's degree in a reading education-related field. They all self-identify as being of middle-class socioeconomic background. They all expressed having received culturally responsive training within the last three years but not prior to that. Their general understanding of culturally responsive teaching is to ensure inclusivity, make everyone feel seen, and to represent cultural backgrounds as accurately as possible. All avid readers, in their personal time, are part of book clubs or serve on reading list committees. None of them saw a reflection of themselves in a book as children; it was not until high school or adulthood that this happened for them.

Themes

This next section outlines the findings using descriptive excerpts from the participant surveys and interviews. Through a sociocultural consciousness lens, these are the themes I extracted from the data analysis that I conducted to explore the main research question and sub-questions: How is culturally responsive Latinx literature being used by Latinx middle grade teachers? What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? To what extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise?

Each theme will be explored further in the following sections.

Theme 1: Role of Social Media

Social media plays an active role in how the participants seek out and become aware of culturally responsive books (Latinx books in particular) and other trends and issues in the education and book field. Each teacher referenced social media more than once in their surveys and interviews, specifically Twitter. The teachers explained how they regularly use social media; from this, three subcategories recurred in the interviews: (a) *Seeking out new or new-to-them culturally responsive books*, (b) *Learning of trends and issues in the book/publishing fields,* and (c) *sharing/retweeting information to their networks and followers*.

Seeking Out New or New-To-Them Culturally Responsive Books. All three teachers stated that they use Twitter to look for new culturally responsive books. Elizabeth uses Twitter exclusively for book-related content, following authors, book awards, and conferences for pertinent information. Her Twitter activity is twofold: She

seeks out new and culturally responsive resources not only for her students and job but as a member of a reading list committee that is tasked with intentionally seeking out diverse books. For Paulita, Twitter serves as a networking and book recommendation resource, following people and organizations who frequently post about new and culturally responsive books. These efforts have introduced her to books and related material that she previously did not know about, such as the Pura Belpré Award. Nora also relies on Twitter to find book recommendations from other educators using the #BookADay hashtag; other educators will share a book each day, and from there Nora both learns of new titles and shares titles with others.

Learning of Trends and Issues in the Book/Publishing Fields. Social media has also allowed the participants to become aware of trends and issues occurring in the book and publishing field. Elizabeth and Nora both brought up the controversy about the book *American Dirt*, citing Twitter as a source of information for them during the onset of the uproar. Elizabeth learned of the disparity of marketing new books through Twitter, in particular, from posts about *American Dirt* and subsequent posts from authors of color. Nora referenced authors being called out by Twitter users for allegations made against them, such as Laura Ingalls Wilder and Junot Diaz. Wilder's books are considered to have racist content and Diaz has been accused of sexual harassment. Nora mused,

> I loved *Island Born* [by Diaz]. Loved it. And then I found out about him, and I was like...but then I thought, "No, no, I'm not going to deprive myself of a good book." Because a person's mistakes are a person's dealings with themselves being human. If we're going to [judge them], we're going to end up with nothing because nobody's perfect. You're gonna find fault with every author.

Elizabeth had similar sentiments, wondering if she would have thought differently of *American Dirt* if all that controversy had not happened. Nora, Elizabeth and Paulita each said despite any controversies they may become aware of through social media or elsewhere about a book, they still prefer to read the book and make judgments for themselves.

Sharing/Retweeting Information to Their Networks and Followers. Nora was the only one who gave an extensive description of sharing information on Twitter, and I admired her efforts to partake in the #bookaday challenge. Throughout the summer months, librarians, teachers, and book lovers participate in this challenge originated by educator Donalyn Miller. A simple search on Twitter using the #bookaday hashtag will yield dozens of results, and even though the challenge is commonly executed during the summer, users will still find #bookaday posts being shared almost daily throughout the rest of the year.

Nora takes her exploration of seeking out culturally responsive books a step further by posting about them on Twitter. I follow Nora on Twitter, and as I followed her posts throughout the summer of 2021, I saw what she shared with me in action: She carefully curated a wide variety of picture books and chapter books to share on her account, from books with animal characters to nonfiction, with a mix of books with diverse characters of a number of backgrounds. Her posts were short, within Twitter's character limit, featuring the book cover image, a short description of the book, and one takeaway or activity idea. Nora posted a book nearly every day from June 1 to August 31, 2021. Moreover, she has participated in this challenge every summer for the past four years. Among further exploration of her Twitter profile, she has nearly 1,000 followers,

including colleagues within her school district and region along with several authors and illustrators.

Based on the number of likes and retweets her posts received, it seemed clear that her posts were reaching a wide audience. Her engagement with the #bookaday challenge exemplifies how she uses culturally responsive books (although, I want to be clear that her posts were not exclusively culturally responsive books) to not only explore for use for herself within her role as an educator but taking it one step further to share this information to her followers. Anyone who searches the #bookaday hashtag will find her posts over the last four years along with hundreds of others.

Summary: Social media, and in particular, Twitter, has provided a learning opportunity for all three participants. Through social media, they are able to learn of new books coming out, connect with authors, get to know authors through their shared content, share information with others, and become familiar with trends, issues, and even controversies. Twitter provides a means for these teachers to learn of new books which they, in turn, have used in their classroom settings. The social media platforms have allowed them to connect with other educators, authors and publishers in a meaningful way. Their interaction with social media and their dedication to seeking out culturally responsive books demonstrates their commitment to utilizing these materials.

Theme 2: Striving for Inclusivity

Each teacher brought up their efforts for inclusivity more than once, and two subcategories specific to the type of inclusivity emerged from the interview data: *(a) A culture of inclusivity with their students* and *(b) inclusivity among the books they read and choose to use in their teaching environment.*

A Culture of Inclusivity with Their Students. At multiple points throughout the interviews, each teacher shared their intentions and efforts for inclusivity. Elizabeth stated that she strives to be inclusive "of all different cultures. And I only say that because I have to make a cognitive effort to include other cultures because I tend to gravitate more towards Hispanic/Latino, because that's what I am." Elizabeth explained that while she felt very comfortable and familiar with her own Hispanic culture and background, she did not feel that same level of comfort with the cultures of non-Hispanic students.

> There's some other cultures that I wouldn't know if a book or a lesson was culturally responsive or authentic, unless someone else tells me it is or it isn't. But then you also have to be mindful that not everybody's experience is the same.

On this note, Elizabeth shared that within broader cultures there are categories, such as the broad Latinx culture that includes Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, people whose ancestry can be traced back to those places but are American, and Afro-Latinos. There is no one-size-fits-all, and Elizabeth hopes to continue to show respect to and continue learning about the cultural background of her students to serve them as best she can.

Nora reflected on her family's history as an influence of her intention to "make sure that our kids feel seen and heard...and, and understood no matter what race they are." After a pause, Nora shared about the discrimination her uncle faced growing up, not being allowed to speak Spanish in school, not being allowed into a movie theater, and segregated water fountains.

> I have used those stories to help me remember that all people have feelings and are deserving of being treated equally regardless of their skin color, their culture

> and background, et cetera….As far as things that weren't kind to our group of people [Hispanics], so that's shaped me to interact with the students that I work with, or have worked...or the adults I work with, for that matter.

Paulita emphasized the importance of knowing her students and not making assumptions of who they are; rather, to really get to know where they're coming from. She also pointed out an idiosyncrasy for Texas being a common misconception that all the Latinx people in the state are from Mexico or have roots in Mexico. Given the close proximity of Mexico to Texas, many might consider this a logical assumption, but Paulita asserted that many of her Latinx students are from other Latin American territories and countries. Paulita is familiar with the struggles her students and their families are facing, such as immigrating to the United States or crossing the border back and forth to visit family. As each school year passes, her students let her in on their home lives, as do the parents once they get to know her. "I think it's relationship building at first, it's...it's very important to get [the students] to trust you."

Inclusivity Among the Books They Read and Choose to Use in Their Teaching Environment. When thinking about making book recommendations to her students, Elizabeth explained that she knows that she gravitates more toward the Latino/Hispanic children. (This makes sense because the campus she worked at was nearly all Hispanic students.) She recalled introducing them to Latinx authors from Texas and telling her students, "You could read this, you can identify with them." The combination of knowing her students and feeling comfortable toward the Latino culture, she felt confident in recommending these books to her students, and was met with enthusiasm and interest. Elizabeth also perused social media to get to know authors and

view book recommendations, further fueling her work with what she considered to be authentic literature to expose her students to. When building up her collection of books for her students, Elizabeth recalled intentionally reviewing what she had and seeking out more diverse books.

> I had so many books by African American authors, the experience and all that...and for the Hispanic community, there wasn't a lot. So, for the last six years, my goal was to get more Hispanic/Latino literature books. [Once I did that] I'm like, "Okay, I gotta get some other ones." I always get, you know, some Muslim ones, even though we don't have, maybe 1% [of the student population] was Muslim, 1% was Asian. And I thought it was funny, because books I did get from Asian authors, those got checked out a lot by the Latino kids. Those books would move, but not like the Muslim books. Those wouldn't and because the African American population was small those books didn't move as much either.

Even if some of the books were not moving as much as others, Elizabeth was conscientious about providing a diverse selection from her students to pick.

Nora considered it important to have a wide variety of books that share the history of different groups, "groups of kids that are in your classroom, and even kids that aren't in your classroom because it's important to know about all groups. [These books] give [students] at least some insight into other groups of people." Nora's participation in the #bookaday challenge was instrumental in helping her discover and share an array of books, paying attention to including stories with characters of different cultures. As mentioned earlier, Nora feels that teachers should be very careful to be sure they include

books representing all the different groups. Moreover, Nora believes that now is the time for people to step up and tell their stories so that everyone is heard and represented.

For Paulita, she has started to make more of a conscious effort to seek out culturally responsive books for her students. She reflected that earlier in her career, she used books she was familiar with or was able to easily find in a library or a bookstore, most of the time books by White authors featuring animal characters. Now, through the use of social media and recommendations from her book club friends, plus having readily available technology to search for books, she is able to educate herself on new books, reading lists, book awards, and book creators. The course she took in the summer of 2020 taught her to seek out themes that resonate with her students, such as hair love. Through that course, she was exposed to a broad variety of books representing different cultures while sharing a similar theme. She has a few go-to books she uses with her students for language arts and social studies instructional purposes that reflect the Latinx cultural experience, which have been successful in making meaningful connections with both the students and their parents. Finding culturally responsive books is also personal for Paulita, as she seeks them out for her daughter who is in the second grade.

Summary: All three participants make an effort to get to know their students well and to understand their backgrounds. The participants' personal backgrounds, family histories, and teaching ethics influence how they get to know their students and strive for inclusivity within their classrooms. They each utilize recommendations from colleagues, social media, and their increasing awareness of authors, reading lists, and book awards to discover new and new-to-them culturally responsive books to add to their collections, both for instructional purposes and to have available for students to read independently.

Theme 3: Personal and Family Influences

Each participant described examples of things their family members have shared with them and their effect on their views of the world and how they teach and interact with others.

Elizabeth's first reflection of herself in a book happened thanks to her aunt, who was a college student when Elizabeth was in high school and gave her a copy of *Bless Me, Ultima*. The Latinx cultural reflection was just one part of it; the storyline of the book heavily describes *curanderismo*, a traditional Mexican healing system that blends religious beliefs, faith, and prayer with herbs, plants, and other methods. Elizabeth's mom believed in *curanderas,* or women who provide healing through this healing system, which are present in the book. "I was around that stuff growing up, because that's what my mom believes in, so that drew the interest….I remember reading a couple of other books by [author Rudolfo Anaya] but they don't stand out like that one did." Had her aunt not had a copy of that book or shared it with Elizabeth, it would have delayed that reflection experience.

Elizabeth's book recommendation from her aunt was a positive experience, one that had a lasting effect, particularly in what books she reads and recommends to her students. She is eager to help students find books that provide similar reflections.

Nora's family stories were more connected with struggles her relatives faced. Nora explained:

> My upbringing is really what has led me to be somewhat of a decent teacher….And probably from the stories I've heard from my parents and my

grandparents and my aunts and uncles, and all the things that they may have experienced - *that* has shaped me to make sure that we don't repeat those things.

Those things that Nora is referring to are the incidents of discrimination her family experienced both in and outside of Texas during the time of "separate but equal." She described the separate water fountains, one for whites, one for colored people, as well as segregated movie theaters. (Although the movie theater example was in another state, the practice of segregating in the movie theater was very much alive in Texas too. My father has told me about sitting in the balcony of the movie theater because the floor seats were for Whites only in my hometown.) Her elders recalled facing the risk of punishment if they spoke Spanish in school. This othering of her family, by way of the stories they shared with her, influenced Nora to be a change-maker to the best of her ability; she strives to be empathetic, accepting, inclusive and kind toward others regardless of their background. Knowing the treatment her family faced, she strives to do her part to ensure the people she encounters don't have similar experiences.

Paulita recalled her grandfather's stories of coming to Texas from Mexico. It was through the recollection of her grandfather's experiences that she felt her first reflection of herself in the book *Esperanza Rising*, even though the reflection wasn't entirely of herself:

> It wasn't totally like me because I'm born here in the United States. I didn't come from Mexico, but I just, I guess the part that I related to was my grandfather. Because he came from [Mexico]....but it's almost like having it all over there, then having to come [to the United States] because of the war.

The memories of the struggles her grandfather described also helped Paulita develop empathy and understanding for her students who have recently experienced crossing the border, from both what the students share and what the parents share with her.

Summary: Each participant credited at least one relative for influencing how they treat others and how they may have connected with a book. Elizabeth's aunt provided her with a book that had a nuanced reflection of the *curanderismo* that Elizabeth was familiar with growing up. She, in turn, strives to help students find books that they too can connect with. Nora's parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents' stories of discrimination inspired her to be accepting, caring and respectful of everyone she encounters, especially her students. Paulita's grandfather's experience of crossing the border from Mexico to Texas resonates with her both with the book connection with *Esperanza Rising* and with the similar situations her students and their parents are facing today. Family is arguably the most important aspect of Latinx culture, and all three of them reflected this through their responses.

Theme 4: Participants' Reflections in Books

Through the surveys and interviews, each participant shared that they did not see a reflection of themselves in a book as children. Two participants were adults and one was a teenager when they had their first encounter with such a book. The reflections they experienced also connected beyond themselves into their families. All three participants are of Latinx background, and these encounters happened with Latinx books by Latinx authors - specifically, Mexican American.

Elizabeth's encounter with a book that provided a mirror into her life was in high school, while reading *Bless Me, Ultima* by New Mexican author Rudolfo Anaya.

Elizabeth's aunt, who was attending college at the time, had read the book and gave Elizabeth a copy to read. Elizabeth regularly borrowed books from her aunt, but this one struck a chord unlike any of the others she had read. "My mother believes in *curanderas* and is also a very religious Catholic," Elizabeth explained, which are two primary themes in *Bless Me, Ultima: curanderismo* and Catholicism. Beyond the book, these are nuances commonly found within Latinx, and more specifically, Mexican American culture. The connections she felt with this book prompted Elizabeth to seek out other works by Rudolfo Anaya, but none of the others had a lasting impact on her like *Bless Me, Ultima*. Elizabeth reflected on the survey during our interview:

> When you gave us that one survey, I stopped to think about what was my favorite book as a kid and I was like, "Okay, I remember reading this and this." I remember reading multicultural books, but not really till...till college reading some. [Pause] And then sometimes I wonder, like, would I be different if I got to read books like that when I was younger?

Nora shared that she while she has always seen herself in the girl character in books when she was a young girl herself, her first time seeing a reflection of herself was in adulthood:

> I don't think it was until as an adult I read *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros that I truly saw a reflection of myself and my family. I could relate to many experiences shared in the book. I have read vastly but did not grow up seeing a reflection of myself as a Hispanic girl/woman in what I read until I was an adult.

The reflection of her family in *Caramelo* reminded her of conversations and situations she has had with her family, particularly her aunts.

Similar to Elizabeth's comment, Nora revealed during our interview that she Never questioned the lack of mirrors in books she read until she completed the survey for this study:

> The day that I did the survey, and the question was about the first time you saw yourself in a book. And all this time, all this studying I've done...I never stopped to think about the first time....When I was younger, we didn't have as many books. So whatever I saw, I just took those stories and imagined or empathized or whatever. But I never thought about how come I didn't see myself.

Paulita was also an adult when she had her first encounter with a book that provided a reflection, but that reflection was more of her grandfather and the stories he would share with her. *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, an author of Mexican descent from California, is a book based on Ryan's grandmother's experience immigrating from Mexico to California in the 1930's. Similar to the book's character Esperanza and Paulita's grandfather, the author's grandmother lived comfortably in Mexico but faced dire conditions upon coming to the United States.

> *Esperanza Rising* wasn't so much a reflection of myself but of my grandfather's stories...having to leave everything behind in Mexico. It made me feel like I could relate, but I was also sad because I didn't read this book until I was an adult.

Reflecting on the availability of books that provided mirrors for Paulita, she slowly stated,

> God, it's really sad...there hasn't really been a lot, even for me...like, growing up, I didn't really have anything like that that I could say, "Oh, that reminds me, oh,

that looks like me." It wasn't until I was an adult when I read *Esperanza Rising* that I was like, "Oh there's actually books out there, you know?"

Summary: All three participants were past childhood when they first experienced a reflection of themselves in a book. Upon considering this experience for the purposes of this study, each expressed sentiments of having read other books but not having that reflection as a child. Once they had that first reflection encounter, it went beyond just their own reflection but expanded into reflections of their families and their personal histories. Each participant described surprise, wonder, and curiosity over the existence of these books that provided mirrors for them.

Theme 5: Meaningful Connections with Latinx Books

The three participants' experiences with culturally responsive Latinx books have been welcomed and left them eager for more. Within this theme, two subcategories emerged for connections with Latinx books: *(a) connections with students* and *(b) connections within the participants' own personal reading.*

Connections with Students. Elizabeth regularly seeks out and promotes Latinx books with her students. When reading spooky stories close to Halloween, her students enjoyed Texas author Xavier Garza's *Creepy Creatures and Other Cucuys* and wanted her to read the book again, even after having read it to them previously. Students were eager to read *Charlie Hernandez and the League of Shadows* by Ryan Calejo due to its inclusion of La Llorona, a famous legend not only in Texas but in the Southwest. As a reading response to *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza, during her first year teaching, Elizabeth had her students make a class book, with each student drawing their own pictures based on their family experiences. "They connected with [*Family Pictures*]

so much. I can't even remember what other stories were in that anthology or really what we did with them, just that one," Elizabeth said.

Nora asserted that when her students see themselves in books, it's powerful, not only for the cultural connection but for the student's motivation to keep reading. "When they see themselves in books, that's when we can get them to read. I think that's really powerful, and they can see that." Moreover, Nora seemed to foreshadow what was in store for access to books in Texas public schools (our interview was held in August, prior to the book bans and investigations during the fall months of 2021).

> It's interesting that people just make up decisions without ever reading the book, which is why I'm so against all the censorship and banned books and all that. Like, there's a time and a place to read things. I want my kids to read everything. But they have to be old enough to take in the content and understand it.

Paulita's student demographics are nearly entirely Latinx and when discussing how students respond to culturally responsive Latinx books, Paulita stated with enthusiasm and a sparkle in her eyes, "They make connections right away!" When reading *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto during the holidays, students are eager to share their family traditions and tamal-making practices. "They're like, 'En mi casa, nos [In my house, we]',...and yeah, it's *Too Many Tamales*. Everybody can relate to that." *Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros is another book that Paulita has used with her students that has been met with enthusiasm. Hair is something everyone has in common, and Paulita recalled that it was one of the first books she used as a teacher that she could actually relate to, citing its bilingual text as a strong component that made her and her students feel that strong connection. It was her usage of this book with her students that inspired her to create her

project for the course she took last summer on hair love. “I really think that’s important for them,” Paulita said, “They kids do notice that, I know that they do. They make those connections right away.”

Personal Reading. Elizabeth first read *Bless Me, Ultima* from the recommendation of her aunt. Now, she recommends books to her cousin, which keeps him coming back asking for additional book suggestions after reading. She has referred him to book awards that annually recognize Latinx literature and authors whose works are primarily about Latinx characters and culture. Thinking back to her schooling, Elizabeth remembered learning of Aztec legends in Spanish class. These stories that she learned in Spanish were not present in the rest of her classes in school, which made her wonder how else people would learn of them. Authors such as David Bowles and Ryan Calejo are retelling these Aztec legends in their writings, introducing their readers to the stories Elizabeth learned in school. “Now [author] David Bowles and the *Charlie Hernandez* books are including all those legends, it might spur kids to go and read the actual myths.” Further considering Latinx books that have been published lately, Elizabeth noted, “Latinx people are now being portrayed as a more diverse group of people that include different cultures and race [sic]. I hope it continues.”

Nora is a member of multiple book clubs and has read Latinx books through these groups. She noted that in some books that feature Latinx protagonists, like *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo, she saw different ways to pray and worship that she was previously unfamiliar with. Although the characters were Hispanic like her, there were still cultural differences. She referred to another book that did give her more of a reflection, *The Holy Tortilla and the Pot of Beans* by Carmen Tafolla: “Oh my gosh, I

read that in one sitting." The more Nora reads books with Latinx characters, particularly with books she feels that she can relate to, she feels deeply connected, seen and empowered. "It's this *feeling, '*this is like me,' you know...it's pretty cool."

Toward the end of our interview, Paulita began mentioning books she has read recently that feature Latinx protagonists. For a few minutes, she and I engaged in a "Have you read this book?" dialogue, then I stopped myself to let her continue to speak. She referenced several books that she had borrowed from the library, read with her daughter, and had purchased for her classroom. When I stopped talking, Paulita was silent for a moment, then she shared, "Yeah, but even then it's like, there's not really any [books] about Mexican Americans. Not too many. I still think there's a lot to be written." Despite reading widely and seeing pieces of herself in books, Paulita still has not read a book that she can entirely relate to and hopes to have that book someday.

Summary: Each participant has had meaningful experiences with culturally responsive Latinx books and are hopeful for more books to be written and published. They have each witnessed the powerful connections that can be made with a Latinx book and their Latinx students, but noted that there is room for more books that reflect this cultural experience. Within the participants' own personal reading, they have discovered cultural nuances within the broad Latinx culture and wish for more books that reflect the Mexican American experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzed findings related to the research question and sub-questions: How is culturally responsive Latinx literature being used by Latinx middle grade teachers? What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? To what

extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise? The evidence revealed that these teachers are intentional in providing students access to culturally responsive Latinx literature, that they are actively seeking out these books and sharing them with others, and that they hope students today will have the windows and mirrors in literature that they did not have as children. They hope that there will continue to be an increase in the publication and usage of culturally responsive books in school environments.

This chapter began by presenting the profiles of the three teachers who participated in this study using a narrative research format. This study aimed to understand how teachers use culturally responsive books in their environments and what experiences they have had with these books. Through careful analysis of transcribed interviews, participant surveys, field notes, and analytic memos, five themes emerged from the findings: (1) *Social media plays an active role in how the participants seek out and become aware of culturally responsive books (Latinx books in particular) and other trends and issues in the education and book field;* (2) *All the participants are striving for inclusivity;* (3) *Personal experiences with family influenced how the participants view their world;* (4) *Reflections of themselves in books happened after their childhood; and* (5) *Connections with Latinx books are meaningful and desirable*. Thick descriptions from the participants' experiences supported each of the themes. In the next chapter, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, draw conclusions from the themes in connection with the conceptual framework, and offer recommendations for future research studies.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate how teachers use culturally responsive literature in their teaching environments. The following research questions guided the study: 1. How is culturally responsive Latinx literature being used by Latinx middle-grade teachers? 2. What are teachers' experiences with culturally responsive literature? 3. To what extent and how committed are teachers to using culturally responsive literature in their classrooms? 4. What are teachers' memories of seeing reflections of themselves in literature, culturally responsive or otherwise?

The findings from this study may help to inform practice for teachers of all cultural backgrounds, school district leaders and teacher educator/preparation program leaders on the need for culturally responsive literature, teaching and training. This study also contributes to the existing literature on culturally responsive teaching and books and sheds light on teachers' experiences with, as described by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), *windows and mirrors* in their own reading practices. This study may guide scholars and practitioners to review their own teaching practices, book collections, and interactions with students and colleagues.

Revisiting the Study: Problem of Practice

For decades, schools in Texas and throughout the United States have followed a European American cultural norm model despite increasingly diverse populations (Gay, 2002; Souto-Manning et al., 2018; Park, 2021). Students of color comprise half of today's population in K-12 schools in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), yet instructional practices and literature used in the curriculum do not always include or embrace their backgrounds and experiences.

Deficit perspectives, in which the practices, capacities, and funds of knowledge of students from minoritized populations are viewed as a negative aspect of those students (Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999) remain common and send a negative message to children and their families (Bishop, 1990; Nieto, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Furthermore, teachers have their own cultural identity, one which positions them toward a spectrum of privilege or oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Previous studies have found that teachers sometimes find it difficult to discuss and deconstruct their own sociocultural history and values (Ebersole, Kanahele-Mossman, Kawakami, 2016).

This deficit perspective prevails in classrooms and school libraries when their collections lack multiple voices (Park, 2021). Teachers' belief systems can influence which books are included in their classroom libraries; teachers who strive for culturally responsive practices may intentionally seek out culturally responsive books (Joseph, 2021), whereas others for whom cultural responsiveness is not a priority may not give their collection's variety much thought.

This study explored how culturally responsive Latinx literature was being used by Latina middle-grade educators in central Texas. Following a conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching, this study explored teachers' perceptions and usage of culturally responsive literature in their educational experiences (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Overview of Findings

This section presents several conclusions I came to after interviewing three Latina middle-grade educators in central Texas. Table 5 provides an at-a-glance list of each

theme and sub-themes if applicable, the research question(s) the theme addressed, and a brief overview.

Table 5

Themes from Data Analysis

Themes	Research Question(s) addressed	Brief Overview
1. Role of Social Media Subcategories: a. Seeking out new/new-to-them culturally responsive books b. Learning of trends and issues in the book/publishing fields c. Sharing/retweeting information to their networks and followers	Main research question and sub-questions 2 and 3.	Social media plays an active role in how the participants seek out and become aware of culturally responsive books (Latinx books in particular) and other trends and issues in the education and book field.
2. Striving for Inclusivity Subcategories: a. A culture of inclusivity with participants' students b. Inclusivity among the books they read and choose to use in their teaching environment	Sub-questions 2 and 3.	The participants' own sociocultural consciousness: being cognizant of inclusivity in their teaching and in their book-seeking practices.
3. Personal and Family Influences	Sub-questions 2 and 4.	The participants each shared personal experiences with family histories that have influenced how they want to teach and serve others.
4. Participants' Reflections in Books	Subquestion 4.	Each participant was either in high school or an adult when they first saw a reflection of themselves in a book.

Themes	Research Question(s) addressed	Brief Overview
5. Meaningful Connections with Latinx Books Subcategories: a. Connections with students b. Connections within the participants' own personal reading	Main research question and sub-questions 3 and 4.	This pertains to both the connections their students make as well as the connections the participants themselves have made with books specifically about Latinx characters and/or culture.

Below is a brief summary of each theme that was identified:

1. Role of Social Media: Through the use of social media, each participant has become increasingly familiar with authors, new books, trends and issues in the literature and publishing fields. Social media, Twitter in particular, has introduced the participants to forthcoming books, previously-published books with which they were not familiar, and authors, illustrators and publishers, particularly those that produce books with Latinx content. Their use of social media has played an active role in their efforts to seek out and utilize culturally responsive materials and best practices.
2. Striving for Inclusivity: The participants demonstrated their sociocultural consciousness through their description of efforts toward inclusivity. For reasons including wanting students to feel seen, not giving in to common misconceptions of where students may be from, and wanting them to develop an understanding and appreciation of people from all backgrounds, the participants engaged in teaching practices that fostered an inclusive environment. Exposing students to a wide variety of books that portrayed diverse characters and experiences was also a

priority to the participants, aiming for inclusivity among the books they used with and/or made available to their students.

3. Personal and Family Influences: Each participant opened up about personal family histories that have shaped who they are as individuals and as teachers, as well as influenced how they want to teach. Stories of their family histories, including family members' immigration to the United States, discrimination in and out of Texas, and cultural practices elucidated how those histories influence and/or inspire the participants with their own interactions with their students and colleagues. Each participant referenced at least one relative in these personal stories, demonstrating the importance of family, a prominent aspect of Latinx culture.
4. Participants' Reflections in Books: The participants were teenagers or adults when they had their first reflection of themselves in a book; all lifelong avid readers, they did not have such a reflective reading experience as children. Each of their experiences with their respective book reflected snippets of their own family dynamics. The books they each had their reflection experience with are books that represent the Latinx culture.
5. Meaningful Connections with Latinx Books: Connections with Latinx books have been meaningful for the participants as well as their students, and the participants continue to actively seek out these books. Students have been eager to read culturally responsive Latinx books and books by Latinx authors, particularly stories and authors from Texas. The participants have their own lasting impressions from reading books reflecting the Latinx experience and they are

eager for more books to be written and published, crediting a varying sense of ownership or connection to Latinx books.

The following will be an exploration of these findings in relation to the extant literature.

Findings in Relation to the Literature

Role of Social Media

Consistent with research by Flood (2020), Mabbott (2017), and Shropshire and Tytler (2019), social media serves as a platform to increase awareness of diversity in literature and books in general. Although #ownvoices is no longer being used as it was originally intended (We Need Diverse Books, 2021), several movements conducted through social media are attracting attention, as was demonstrated by all three participants. Paulita, Nora and Elizabeth are aware that the majority of books being published lack diversity (Lee & Low, 2019), and these teachers are referencing authors of diverse backgrounds and book reviewing sources that highlight culturally responsive literature.

Two of the three participants brought up the book *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins, and the controversy that surrounded the publication of the book. They learned of this book and the concerns others had through social media. Elizabeth and Nora both felt that it was not their place to judge a book that they had not yet read, and wondered if they would have thought differently of the book if they had not been made aware of the controversy via social media. Although *American Dirt* is an adult novel, the concern about the book is applicable to culturally responsive books for youth as well: Who is telling these stories? Are the storytellers experienced and equipped enough to credibly

tell these stories? Where does the line get drawn between writing a work of fiction and writing a realistic fiction book? These questions are similar to the efforts being made by other social media movements like #dignidadliteraria, #weneeddiversebooks and #latinxpitch, all efforts to increase visibility of authors of color (including Latinx authors) and their books.

Nora has been an active participant in the #bookaday movement in an effort to spotlight high-quality children's books and share a quick teaching tip with the book. Out of the three participants, Nora was the only one who is a producer as well as a consumer of social media content. Whereas the other two participants mostly read and review content on social media, Nora creates content as well. Although Nora does not focus exclusively on culturally responsive books for this challenge, she does make it a point to include them, and a quick #bookaday search on Twitter will yield dozens of posts, several of which include culturally responsive literature. Studies involving teachers' use of social media, particularly when searching for books, is minimal, and it is my hope that this study will also serve to contribute to the existing literature around this subtopic.

Striving for Inclusivity

According to Toppel (2015), culturally responsive teachers should make the time to get to know their students, which my participants indicated doing from their responses in their interviews and in their surveys. All three participants passionately described their efforts to not only get to know their students but also strive for inclusivity within their teaching environments. Toppel asserts that this action of getting to know the students will provide teachers the knowledge they need to teach in an effective, engaging manner.

Elizabeth discussed in detail the books she selects and shares with her students, even making book recommendations by keeping an eye on what books interest them. Although the majority of her students were Latinx, her library included books that reflected Latinx, African American, Asian American, and other cultural backgrounds. This reiterates the assertion made by Souto-Manning et al. (2018) that libraries and resources should "honor and reflect students' diversity" (p. 8). Moreover, Lambeth and Smith (2016) noted that educators tend to teach more effectively to students who are similar to them. Elizabeth described this several times throughout her interview: the strong connection she felt with her Latinx students. In addition, Elizabeth explained her doubt in recommending culturally responsive books to non-Latinx students. Similar to Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejia (2003), Elizabeth illustrated her personal area of growth to become more familiar with other cultures through her students and through books to gauge a deeper understanding of her students' experiences. Through her efforts at getting to know her students, combined with her similar ethnic background and passion for culturally responsive books, Elizabeth fosters meaningful connections with the students she works with.

Nora was conscientious about her classroom library collection and meticulous about having a variety of books that represent different groups; these books served as mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) for her students to see reflections of themselves and have glimpses into other lived experiences. Fueled by the stories from her family, Nora has remained cognizant that all people have feelings and are deserving of being treated equally. She aims to provide this multidimensional inclusivity in both the books she provides for her students and in the way she teaches and treats her students.

Paulita described her students coming from different countries and how, although their common native language might be Spanish, they are not all Mexican, nor do they all speak the same dialect. These nuances serve as an opportunity for Paulita to cultivate a positive racial, ethnic, and cultural identity within her students, which Hanley and Noblit (2009) state gives students opportunities to express their cultural heritage. In addition, Paulita's reflexivity in this regard to language and culture exemplifies the effort that teachers should make to refrain from creating stereotypical profiles of their students (Howard, 2003). Her awareness of this and her subsequent efforts to recognize and celebrate each student's background is an example of culturally responsive teaching in action.

Through our conversations, although no one articulated it just so, I gained the impression that each participant was already engaging in critical reflection, which Howard (2003) posited serves as a means to incorporate issues of equity into teaching practice. Each participant described in their own words their consciousness of their campus, community, and role as an educator and how they navigate Gist's (2014) complex intersection of identities. They each described their efforts to get to know their students and their backgrounds. They are intimately familiar with their communities, having resided in central Texas for a number of years, and having lived in Texas all their lives. While they are aware of the social inequities and systemic discrimination of their greater community, as described by Villegas & Lucas (2002), they are actively pursuing all possible routes to serve as agents of change within their teaching environments. Their reflection of their own and their families' experiences, their familiarity with books, and

their acute understanding of their campus community are all examples of the participants' own sociocultural consciousness.

Personal and Family Influences

Personal and family influences is a theme that I was pleasantly surprised to extract from my data analysis, yet found difficult to connect with my review of the literature. In preparing this dissertation, I did not consider familial aspects beyond my own.

Paulita was able to develop empathy for her students based on a shared experience; similar to how her students' families are crossing the border into the United States presently, her grandfather also had that same experience several decades ago. Through this family history, she has a unique understanding of the challenges faced when coming to a new country. Whereas many of her students are immigrants, Paulita is equipped with empathy for their experiences, and this is evident to her students to the point that they feel comfortable talking with her about what they have gone through when crossing the border. Similar to Osorio's (2018) cultural circles, in which the teacher had students select books to read and engage in dialogue with the teacher as a participant and not the facilitator, Paulita leverages this empathy with the use of culturally responsive books to create a safe space for students to open up to her and their peers.

The stories Nora's family shared with her - that have shaped who she is as a person and an educator - are stories of discrimination; specifically, discrimination toward her family. The hardships that her family experienced are similar to the hardships thousands of others have experienced, and transcends the Latinx culture. Several books about minoritized populations are written through the lens of a discriminatory encounter,

or have that as part of a larger storyline (Gopalakrishnan, 2010; Naidoo, 2011). If someone were to seek books about discrimination against Mexican Americans or other Latinxs, they would find quite a few. *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh, based on the true story of Sylvia Mendez's struggles with discrimination in California schools in the 1940s, won the Pura Belpré Honor Award and Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award in 2015. More recently, books like *For All/Para Todos* by Alejandra Domenzain and *Alejandra Fights Back!* by Leticia Hernandez-Linare use fictitious setting to describe the current issue of fighting for fairness in schools, places of employment, and neighborhoods. Discrimination refers to the unjust treatment of different categories of people or things, and creates a sense of otherness. Although these books have a place in literature, particularly nonfiction books about a person or incident that had a profound impact in history, they do not serve the same purpose as culturally responsive books.

Nora is aware of the fine line between culturally responsive books and multicultural books and, along with Paulita and Elizabeth, recognizes the need for more positive, celebratory portrayals of Latinx families in children's books. As such, each of their belief systems has been influenced by their personal and family histories; through their beliefs and knowledge base of best practices, they fulfill the role of cultural accommodator through their teaching. Contrary to the deficit perspective (Nieto, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the participants' experiences are similar to those of their students, which can in turn lead to students becoming more invested in their learning and in their teacher.

Participants' Reflections in Books

The participants were teenagers or adults when they had their first reflection experience with a book. One way to explain this could be the fact that Paulita, Elizabeth and Nora are all from Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980; looking back at what books were being published during that time frame, there were few and problematic books that reflected non-White cultures (Charnes, 1984; Foulke, 1970; Larrick, 1965; Nilsson, 2005). With the exception of *Bless Me, Ultima*, which was first published in 1972, the other two books that the participants credited as their first reflection were published in the early aughts. *Esperanza Rising* was published in 2000 and *Caramelo* followed in 2002. By this time, a concerted effort was being made to publish books that reflected the Latinx cultural experience, especially books for children and young adults (Gomm, Heath & Mora, 2017; Naidoo, 2000).

Bishop (1990) described mirrors in books that would allow readers to see reflections of themselves. Each participant experienced this first-hand with their aforementioned book, and moreover, the reflection was broader than just their own singular experience, but that of their family. In a sense, the books were not full reflections of themselves, but rather reflections of nuances they grew up with around their family. *Bless Me, Ultima* reflected Elizabeth's mother's belief in *curanderismo* (refer to chapter 4, page 114 for full definition). *Caramelo* reminded Nora of the family dynamics of her extended family. *Esperanza Rising* reminded Paulita of her grandfather's stories of coming to the United States. Whereas each participant has read an abundance of books that served as windows and even sliding glass doors, they have had significantly fewer

experiences with books that served as mirrors, and they hope that this gap will continue to shrink with the publication of future Latinx books.

Meaningful Connections with Latinx Books

Each participant described the connections that their students have made with culturally responsive Latinx books with a glimmer in their eyes, as if they could feel the power of this connection. Their usage of books like *Creepy Creatures and Other Cucuys* and *Too Many Tamales* exemplify their efforts to engage in what Gay (2002) defined as culturally responsive teaching: "using the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106).

The enthusiastic book connections among their students that Paulita and Elizabeth detailed in their interviews are similar to the results found in Wanless and Crawford's (2016) study using the book *I Love My Hair* by Natasha Tarpley. Similarly, Paulita's students immediately began sharing personal stories of their own family traditions for making tamales and Elizabeth's students were eager to read books with the cultural legends they had grown up hearing. These interactions with books validated and recognized the students' cultural experiences.

This synergy with familiar stories exemplifies the concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990). The students discovered mirrors in these stories that honored and reflected their cultural diversity (Souto-Manning et al., 2018). In turn, these books may serve as windows and sliding glass doors for readers who are not familiar with Latinx culture.

Next I will explore the findings in relation to the conceptual framework of sociocultural consciousness.

Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

This study was conceptually grounded in the sociocultural consciousness strand of culturally responsive teaching. Sociocultural consciousness is the understanding that how people think and behave is based on their race/ethnicity, language, and social class (Banks, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Gist (2014) indicated that a teacher should be socioculturally conscious of the school, the community, and their classroom context, and all three participants demonstrated this consciousness through their interviews.

Paulita in particular was extremely familiar with her students and their parents, and gave rich, vivid descriptions of their relationships and communications. Paulita also stated more than once the importance of getting to know the students and parents and building trusting relationships. On a broader scale, her campus has nearly all Hispanic/Latino students, with many students whose parents recently came to the United States, and Paulita and her campus colleagues work with these understandings to create meaningful programs, events and opportunities for their parents. When they decided to hold the book club with *Esperanza Rising* that provided Paulita's first reflection of herself in a book, the book was chosen partly for its dual-language publications; the Spanish and English editions ensured that parents who wanted to participate would be able to read the book in a language that they were comfortable with. The *tamalada* also provided an opportunity for parents and students to partake in a culturally significant activity (although this does not mean that all of them have participated in a *tamalada* before); something about the inclusion of food tends to bring people together, and the

program including making tamales and sharing them with the school community made for an enjoyable, meaningful event.

Gist (2014) stated that with regard to sociocultural consciousness, limited knowledge of students' backgrounds can adversely affect a teacher's ability to build upon students' strengths. Each participant had extensive knowledge of their students' backgrounds. Elizabeth, Nora and Paulita were cognizant of the social class differences within their communities. Elizabeth and Nora work in different school districts within the same city, but Elizabeth's population is lower socioeconomic status than Nora's. Within that city, the neighborhoods in Nora's district are more affluent than the ones in Elizabeth's district. Paulita's campus population is also low socioeconomic status with a large immigrant population, more so than Elizabeth and Nora's district. Elizabeth noted the diversity within the African American population at her campus - those from Africa compared to those that are second or third generation African American. Similarly, Paulita recognized that among her students and their families, they came from various countries and spoke different dialects of the Spanish language. In this statement, Paulita challenged a common cultural assumption in Texas that all Latinos are from Mexico.

I would like to note that through my data collection and analysis, I found that these teachers were aware of their own sociocultural consciousness. Contrary to the finding that teachers tend to have a difficult time speaking about their sociocultural history and values (Ebersole et al., 2016), my participants each took their lived experiences, influences and ethnicity to provide a rich description of the work they do and how they strive to be the best educators possible. They deconstructed their experiences while talking with me and co-constructed their participant profiles with me

after their interviews. Going into this study, I was cautiously optimistic to find participants who were actively engaging in culturally responsive teaching. Given the current political climate in Texas, it seems anything having to do with culture and diversity in K-12 public education is quickly criticized. However, these three teachers are putting in the effort and taking their years of experience to create positive, enriching learning environments for their students.

Sociocultural consciousness is just one component of culturally responsive teaching. The participants' responses to my interview questions were all interwoven into their own sociocultural consciousness frameworks. That being said, I would like to point out that they also encompassed the five other strands of culturally responsive teaching. They all had affirming views of their students and developed personal relationships with them. They understood the role they played as their educator and as an agent of change toward a more equitable teaching environment. They employed a constructivist view of teaching, often drawing upon culturally responsive books to deepen those cultural connections to make sense of new input. They knew who they were teaching, familiarizing themselves with their students' lives beyond the desks of the classroom. All of this combined sets the stage for meaningful culturally responsive teaching practices and an optimal learning environment for the students.

Reflections on the Methodological Approach

The use of narrative inquiry as my methodology allowed me to gain an intimate understanding of the experiences of these three Latina educators in Texas on how they use culturally responsive literature in their teaching environment. The survey, interview, and follow-up emails provided me with a three-dimensional awareness and understanding

of what has shaped the participants as educators and how they view culturally responsive literature. This methodology allowed me to deeply explore these educators' lived experiences in their own words and extract data from their stories. Through data analysis, I found similarities in their experiences; narrative inquiry allowed my participants to have a voice and share their experiences with me first-hand.

By using a qualitative approach, I sought to know the participants' stories beyond numbers and yes/no answers. A constructivist paradigm enabled me to place emphasis on understanding the teachers, their interpretation of their teaching, learning and reading histories, and experiences through their eyes, gaining a deeper understanding of the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The qualitative method allowed me to work through a three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, to re-story the participants' stories, searching for significant moments or experiences that informed me as the researcher of how teachers viewed and used culturally responsive literature in their classrooms.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this qualitative study invite further research to be considered and explored. Next steps may include a follow-up with the current participants, implementing this study with teachers from the same campus, or exploring additional cultural backgrounds. Following up with the participants would allow me to see if and how this study influenced them in their teaching practices during the following school year. I conducted my research over the summer; an extension could be revisiting with them the following year and adding to their narratives. My study was conducted with three teachers who were each at different campuses within three school districts. To further

narrow the study, this study could be replicated within one school district or one campus, with all the participants from that one entity. A narrower study could be done to make a case for additional culturally responsive training for campus and district leaders. Another option would be to conduct this study with teachers of another cultural background. Although my study was conducted with Latina teachers, it could be conducted with another cultural group or even multiple teachers of diverse backgrounds. A comparison study between White teachers and teachers of color may yield timely, relevant data, especially if conducted at one campus or within one school district.

One aspect I wished to include in this study was an itemized list of the participants' classroom library collections. Future studies could solely explore classroom library holdings or pair it with interviews and a survey to gain even more understanding of the books they have in their classroom and how they use them with their students. An exploration of the participants' school library collections would also be another meaningful set of data. Taking this one step further, since some of the participants described going to the public library to look for culturally responsive books, including the public libraries' holdings could provide more information to this study.

Social media was a strong theme from this study, and future studies could explore the participants' social media usage in more depth - perhaps explore who they follow, what they post, and what hashtags they use. Since my interviews, the rise of concern over a multitude of diverse books has led to new social media movements and hashtags, some of which my participants are either following or participating in. This would be interesting to see, considering how active all three of my participants are with social media.

An alternative method to conducting this study would be to use an interpretive phenomenological analysis instead of narrative inquiry. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach that aims to focus on the subjective lived experience of individuals (Love, Vetere, & Davis, 2020). IPA seeks the essence of an experience and could be used to analyze teachers' uses of culturally responsive literature as opposed to putting stories together like I did with narrative inquiry. IPA tends to have a double hermeneutic, which adds a layer of subjectivity and interpretation of an experience; in my study with narrative inquiry, I co-constructed the participant summaries after our interviews, which would not be part of the analysis process for phenomenology.

Another variation to this study could be involving secondary teachers or even pre-service teachers who are in college. Although this study focused on middle-grade teachers, secondary teachers also use a wide variety of books in their instruction that could be explored. My participants shared that they did not learn much about culturally responsive teaching in college; keeping this in mind, including pre-service teachers in a replicated study could serve to explore that population and at the very least possibly raise awareness among those participants.

My conceptual framework for this study was the sociocultural consciousness component of culturally responsive teaching. An alternative theoretical framework for a similar study could be Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the context in how people learn, particularly with regard to meaningful exchanges between people and their culture (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory posits that an individual's process of learning cannot be separated from the culture, language, tools and practice that are part of their

world (Jaramillo, 1996). Conducting this study through a sociocultural theory theoretical framework would dig deeper into the cultural background of the participants.

Implications for Practice

Teachers and Librarians on Campus

Teachers and librarians are on the front lines in education. Although a campus may not officially focus on culturally responsive teaching, many teachers (including the three in my study) are aware of it and are doing what they can to include culturally responsive practices and literature in their work. Teachers should continue to make these efforts, and engage in outreach with their colleagues by encouraging them to include culturally responsive books in their instruction.

If teachers are looking for books, whether specific titles or just culturally responsive books in general, they should reach out to their school librarian for recommendations and assistance. Certified school librarians in Texas are teachers and leaders, and to serve in a school librarian position requires graduate school coursework; most of the time, librarians earn a Master's degree in information and library studies. They are intimately familiar with all kinds of books, trends and issues in the literature field and can serve as a crucial player in the search for culturally responsive books (Texas State Library and Archivies Commission, 2017; American Association of School Librarians, n.d.).

Staying abreast of new and forthcoming titles, such as my participants did by utilizing social media, will further help teachers and librarians stay up to speed on new culturally responsive books, practices, and even training opportunities. If teachers and librarians are struggling to find funding for these books to add to their library collections,

they may consider seeking grant opportunities or speaking to their principal or library director about an allocation of funds. Taking the opportunity to attend culturally responsive training at conferences or webinars may count toward required professional development hours for work and will further improve teachers' understanding and implementation of culturally responsive teaching and books.

Finally, the power of collaboration is tremendous. Teachers may want to consider partnering with another teacher or their librarian for culturally responsive teaching units, to acquire culturally responsive books to use in their instruction, or perhaps even attend or offer training on culturally responsive teaching and literature, depending on how comfortable they feel with the topic. Being cognizant of inclusivity within their classrooms, teachers and librarians can create a powerful partnership in building meaningful instructional and reading opportunities for their students to help them feel seen, heard and provide those mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.

Campus and District Leaders

Efforts to include culturally responsive teaching practices and materials often come from the leadership within a campus or school district. If a campus is not prioritizing culturally responsive teaching, then it will likely be up to each teacher to implement such practices and literature. However, if a campus or school district does take an interest in culturally responsive teaching and literature, this might make materials and resources more accessible to teachers.

Supporting culturally responsive teaching and books can lead to several action items coming from leadership and trickling down to the faculty in a campus or school district. If an entity is taking on culturally responsive practices, they will likely provide

funding for training, materials and resources. Teachers should receive plenty of training and coaching throughout the school year to guide them toward a more culturally responsive instructional approach. Funds should be prioritized toward professional development books and books for students. Efforts should also include enhancing classroom and school libraries to include more culturally responsive titles. Campus leaders may consider applying for grants or evaluating their campus budgets to ensure a sufficient amount of funds is available to grow classroom and school library collections.

All three participants shared their experiences with culturally responsive training. For the most part, they are seeking them out themselves, either of their own curiosity, interest, or as an expectation from serving on a reading list committee. Paulita was the only one who mentioned having training at her campus, and even that training was incomplete; what was supposed to be a series of trainings has yet to happen beyond the one they had. Campuses that support culturally responsive teaching and literature would ideally provide training for their teachers on a regular basis. In addition, professional organizations should continue to offer webinars, conference programs, and research articles on best practices. For those who may not be able to receive training from their work, these opportunities are important to provide. From a campus or district leader standpoint, providing funding for teachers to attend these trainings (if there is a cost), time off to attend, or supporting their own teachers in presenting on such practices at a conference, or even on their own campus, could make great strides toward learning and engagement for everyone involved.

Another implication for practice is learning from history, including the histories of the teachers, and striving to do better moving forward. When talking with Nora and

how the discrimination her family experienced affected her, she had my full attention, and I kept thinking about what she said for days afterward. On the day of the interview, and each time I thought about it, Nora's elaboration on her family's stories left me with a tightening in my chest. The experiences her family had sounded almost verbatim to the stories I have heard from my parents and relatives through the years. Both of our families grew up in the same general region of Texas, and hearing stories of discrimination like these never gets easier. Although perhaps these incidents happened with our elders and not directly to us, the injustice is something that we both feel. Similar to Muñoz Martinez's (2018) account of the racial terror that took place in Texas borderlands, the injustice never leaves us. To that end, all educators, district leaders, and other stakeholders should take these lessons from our history and do all they can to avoid history repeating itself. Engaging in critical reflection, checking personal biases, and striving for inclusivity - ideally through a culturally responsive pedagogy - are all positive steps toward a more equitable experience for students from diverse populations, especially Latinx students in Texas.

Teacher Preparation Programs and Educational Service Centers

Universities and education service centers are constantly preparing new teachers for their careers in education, and in recent years, more of an effort to include classes on serving diverse populations has been made. A brief review of catalog degree plans from several Texas public universities shows the inclusion of at least one course on culture and diversity in their teacher preparation programs. For example, Texas State University's College of Education degree plan requires a minimum of two courses on teaching in a

multicultural society and literacies in diverse communities (Texas State College of Education, 2021).

The 20 Education Service Centers in Texas regularly offer webinars and in-person training on various topics. Usually, educators are either sent to the training at their principal's direction or they may ask to attend. These centers include culturally responsive training among their offerings on a regular basis. One center also provides culturally responsive assessments of campuses to evaluate where the campus is and what they can do to increase their culturally responsive teaching practices (Education Service Center Region 20, 2021).

By including these offerings for pre-service and in-service teachers, the awareness, understanding, and action of culturally responsive teaching and use of culturally responsive literature will continue to be present. All of my participants expressed not getting much training or exposure to culturally responsive best practices, or much of anything with regard to diverse populations or multiculturalism, in college or early in their careers. They are all veteran educators with decades of experience. The efforts being made now by universities and education service centers in Texas are working to change that, and hopefully, teachers now will receive the training, support, and understanding they need for more culturally responsive instruction.

State Legislation

At the time of this writing, the state of Texas is attacking classroom and school libraries over book access. State Representative Matt Krause sent a letter to public school district superintendents in October 2021 with a list of 850 books (Chappell, 2021) that were deemed potentially inappropriate. He charged the superintendents to have their

faculty review their classroom and school library collections for these books. While this charge was met with sparse action (several district leaders throughout Texas openly stated they would not comply), it was further fueled by Governor Greg Abbott with a letter to the Texas Education Agency in November 2021 calling for the removal of books with pornographic or obscene content (Pollock & McCullough, 2021). After carefully reviewing the list of 850 books, I found that the majority were books about the LGBTQ+ experience, with just a few books that would be considered culturally responsive. It seems that Representative Krause and Governor Abbott's focus is more on content of a sexual nature, but this attack on books is causing a storm in schools across the state. Teachers and campus leaders are on both ends of the spectrum: some are hesitant to keep certain books over concerns of controversy, and others are emboldened, enraged, and empowered to speak out against what they consider to be censorship.

On November 4, 2021, librarians, educators, authors and book creators from all over the United States came together using the hashtag #fREADom, calling for an end to the censorship and banning of books (We Are Teachers, 2021). These #fREADom fighters argued that books should be made available to all readers, and if anyone, parents should have a say in what their children are allowed to read more so than a school or a political leader. During this social media movement, which peaked as the #7 trending topic on Twitter that day, people shared books that have had a positive influence on them. Many people described feeling seen with the books that they posted about. Although not all of the books were culturally responsive, several were among the books shared that day.

The reason I feel this is important to include in this discussion is that the majority of the books being argued against by these state leaders are books by authors of color and of diverse backgrounds. There are already so few books that feature non-White characters, and these books are being attacked. Book collections are intended to provide options to readers. It does not mean that all readers will enjoy or connect with every single book. A task force that includes state library leaders, educators, and state representatives would likely lead to a better understanding, if not acceptance, of the collection development and book availability in schools across the state.

Conclusion

This narrative study explored how three Latinx teachers from the central Texas region used culturally responsive books in their teaching, how familiar they were with culturally responsive teaching practices, and their thoughts on and experiences with books. These three veteran educators are actively taking measures to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices of their own accord, without a district or campus-driven model. Their experiences with culturally responsive books are broad and substantial; they are familiar with the books, but only in recent years have they gained this understanding, and they feel that more is needed: The participants still feel the need to learn more about these books, and also believe that more books need to be written and used in the classroom. Despite being avid readers, none of the participants saw a reflection of themselves in a book until they were past childhood. They demonstrated a keen sense of awareness of their students and school communities, and actively sought out ways to deepen those connections with their students.

The majority of the findings supported the existing literature on culturally responsive teaching, culturally responsive literature, and windows and mirrors in children's books. One area that I did not previously explore in preparing the literature review was the role of family; this was a prevalent theme from my participants, one that they credit for influencing them and shaping who they are as educators. Each participant independently engaged in critical reflection of their work and utilized social media to grow as educators. They each were on a mission to strive for inclusivity within their teaching environments. They witnessed first-hand the powerful, deep connections that Latinx books have had with their Latinx students.

The sociocultural consciousness lens through which I executed my study was evident in the participants' teaching practices; they are already employing the six strands of culturally responsive teaching. Narrative inquiry allowed me to see this from multiple angles through the participants' responses to the survey and interview questions. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I was able to re-story their experiences and gain a three-dimensional awareness and understanding of their experiences.

Future research could include a similarly constructed study but with a different population, different ethnicity of the participants, or another theoretical framework. Including the classroom and school library holdings among the data points would enhance a replicated study.

Implications for practice include increasing awareness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching for teachers through professional development and training. Campus leaders should provide the resources necessary to ensure optimal conditions for culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive books should be

prioritized in building library collections and books to use in the curriculum. Universities and education service centers that serve pre-service teachers should strive to provide courses on culturally responsive teaching and literature to better equip future teachers. State legislation should work with teachers and not against them in developing appropriate teaching methods and rely on the expertise of librarians to curate collections that will appeal to all audiences, with the understanding of having something from everyone without shying away from content that some people consider inappropriate.

Above all, this study demonstrated that these Latina teachers are committed to their profession, their students, and to books that reflect diverse experiences. They are aware of the challenges and controversies within the education field, especially in Texas, yet they remain steadfast in their mission to strive for inclusivity, educate themselves, and create meaningful, effective learning opportunities for their students through the use of culturally responsive books and culturally responsive teaching.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION INVITATION LETTER

Dear Invitee,

My name is Priscilla Delgado. I am a doctoral student at St. John's University's PhD in Literacy program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Exploring Teachers' Experiences with Culturally Responsive Literature. The intention is to explore if and how middle grade teachers use culturally responsive books in their classrooms.

The study involves completing a questionnaire on your educational and personal background and taking part in one or more one-on-one interviews. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study will not include your name or any other identifying information in the final report. If you would like to participate in the study, please reach out to me via email at pkdelgado@gmail.com. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have before, during, and after the time you take part in this study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Priscilla Delgado, M.S.I.S
Doctoral Student, St. John's University

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Exploring Teachers' Experiences with Culturally Responsive Literature

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to explore if and how culturally responsive Latinx literature is being used by educators. This research will add to the related literature and practice of using culturally responsive literature and culturally responsive teaching.

Each participant agrees to complete a pre-interview questionnaire, and undergo a minimum of one interview from xxxx, xx, 2021 to xxxx, xx, 202x.

By volunteering to participate in this study, you consent to having your interview audio and video (if applicable) recorded and transcribed, and along with excerpts from your questionnaire responses, used as sources of data. Your interviews will be transcribed so that the researcher may look for themes that address her research questions. The files will be deleted immediately upon completion of the dissertation project. Relevant excerpts from the questionnaires will be used to highlight interview data.

RISKS

To protect your privacy and confidentiality, real names or other identifying information within data will be replaced with pseudonyms for purposes of transcribing audio files and reporting findings. You will be given an opportunity to review the findings and offer feedback to the researcher. Summaries of the dissertation resulting from this research will be shared with all participants.

BENEFITS

Results from this study will contribute to the literature of culturally responsive teaching, culturally responsive literature, and Latinx populations and lead to a greater understanding of how Latinx teachers use culturally responsive Latinx literature in their classrooms. You, as participants, stand to gain a fuller perspective on their own ongoing narratives of themselves as developing reflective practitioners.

CONFIDENTIALITY

No identifying personal reference will be made in oral or written reports of this research that could link volunteer participants to this study. However, as participants, you may know the identity of other participants in the study, as they may know your identity. And,

because this study only has up to three participants, you and the other participants may know whose experiences are being shared in the final report.

Your data, and all participants' data including audio/video files, transcripts and questionnaires will be stored in password protected electronic files or in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's private office at 615 Barbara Drive, San Marcos, TX. All audio files that are transcribed will be deleted immediately after the dissertation is published. At the completion of the dissertation project, participant questionnaires will be deleted.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Prisciliana Delgado, at 615 Barbara Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666 or by phone at (512) 557-4090.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data analysis is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature_____ Date_____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Initials:

Participant _____ Researcher _____

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Section I: Personal Information/Demographics (open-ended responses)

1) Describe your background in terms of race/ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, etc.
2) How many years have you been teaching?
3) Where did you attend college?
4) If applicable, where did you attend graduate school?
5) Do you remember taking any classes on multicultural education or urban education in college and/or grad school? If yes, please describe what you recall.
6) How long have you lived in Texas?

Section II: Likert Scale Questions

Using the following scale, rate the statements in each section:
1: strongly disagree
2: somewhat disagree
3: neither agree nor disagree
4: somewhat agree
5: strongly agree

1) I use the school library to access books to use in my classroom
2) I use outside resources to access books to use in my classroom (public library, bookstores, online shopping)
3) I use the school library to access culturally responsive books to use in my classroom
4) I believe the school library has a sufficient number of books and materials representing diverse cultures
5) I have received training on culturally responsive teaching best practices
6) I have received training on how to find and use culturally responsive books
7) I enjoy reading culturally responsive books
8) I believe that culturally responsive teaching leads to academic success
9) I feel like an insider in the community in which I teach
10) My personal experiences shape how I teach my students
11) I feel included in classroom decision making

Section III: Open-ended questions

1) What was your favorite book as a child? Why was this book your favorite?
2) When was the first time you saw a reflection of yourself in a book? What was the reflection you saw? If you remember, how did it make you feel?
3) Given that you are a Latinx teacher teaching in a predominately Latinx school, explain what your teaching experience has been like this year.
4) How familiar are you with current Latinx books being published? What are your thoughts on how Latinxs are portrayed?

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

Semi-structured interview (these questions will be spread over multiple meetings if needed; not every question will be asked, depending on the responses from each participant)

1) What is your understanding of culturally responsive teaching?
2) As a Latinx, how does your background shape how you interact with your Latinx students?
3) What do you know about the lives of your students outside of school?
4) What steps do you take to get to know your students?
5) What is your understanding of culturally responsive books?
6) How do you distinguish a culturally responsive book from a non-cultural book?
7) How have you used culturally responsive books in your classroom?
8) How do you go about selecting culturally responsive books for your students?
9) How do you use culturally responsive Latinx books in your classroom?
10) How have students responded to the inclusion of these books in your classroom?
11) To you, how do books affect students' self-image?
12) Talk about the first time you remember seeing a reflection of yourself in a book.
13) Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX E: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS DISCUSSED DURING INTERVIEWS

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Tafolla, C. (2008). *The holy tortilla and a pot of beans.* Wings Press.

APPENDIX F: LIST OF AUTHORS MENTIONED DURING INTERVIEWS

(No Specific Book Titles)

Berenstain, Stan and Jan

Bruchac, Joseph

Carle, Eric.

Lin, Grace.

Lopez, Diana

Otoshi, Kathryn

Stork, Francisco

Wilder, Laura Ingalls

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