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THE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHER

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THE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

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Tova Markowitz

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2060, the White population in the United States is projected to fall by more than twenty million people, while the Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Biracial populations are expected to increase (Vespa, 2020). There is a mismatch between the adopted curriculum and the student population. Are teachers prepared to teach the diverse students in their classrooms? To better understand the current status and to support the teachers, the study incorporated the work of Gay (2010, 2018), Ladson-Billings [(1992), (1995), (2009), (2014)], and Paris (2012) and examined the factors influencing culturally responsive teaching.

Utilizing a phenomenological methodology, this study was designed to acquire an understanding of a teacher's knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitude, and disposition to be effective. The study also investigates teachers' resources and their relevance to the students' diversity. Through purposeful sampling, the researcher recruited middle school English Language Arts teachers. The data was collected through teacher interviews and an investigation of teacher artifacts, curriculum, and literacy texts. The study aimed to explain the significance of teachers' culturally responsive teaching to the student-teacher relationship, classroom culture, and instruction. The study is significant to the field since marginalized students have often been overlooked and not reflected in classroom culture, curriculum, and literary text.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the most inspiring, motivated and optimistic person in my life, my mother Louise Abrams z"l. For 48 years of my life, I was fortunate to have the most influential role model, mentor, and cheerleader. My mother modeled perseverance and resilience. She taught me that in life I will face obstacles and challenges. She knew from experience, getting her own doctorate at the age of 65, that this journey would be life consuming and hard. But she told me, **"**Of course it's hard. If it wasn't, everyone would be doing it!" She taught to believe that I could do it!! And here I am, writing this dedication page! I did it! It wasn't easy! But I did it! I only wish my mom was physically here to see me reach this milestone. I know my mother is always in my heart. I am so grateful to have been blessed with having Louise Abrams z" l as my mom.

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She-He-Che-Ya-Nu

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵנוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-Nai e-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, she-he-che-ya-nu ve-ki-ye-ma-nu ve-hi-gi-a-nu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.

The Shehecheyanu prayer is a blessing for expressing gratitude for experiencing a new or special occasion. I did it! I have reached this milestone in my life, receiving my doctorate in education (Ed.D.). This has been a long, challenging, and fulfilling journey. Throughout this process, I have run 11 marathons; had 3 surgeries to improve the quality of my life living with irritable bowel disease; became an adjunct lecturer at a university; traveled internationally; celebrated my children's graduation from high school and recently my son's graduation from college; celebrated my 26th wedding anniversary and my 51st birthday; and witnessed the lifecycle of births and deaths.

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When I got overwhelmed, I thought about the saying my mother used to share, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." And that's what I did. I am grateful to my family and friends who got me here. There are too many friends to mention, but the following people were and continue to be my rocks and anchor through this process.

Sima, my friend and sister from another mother. Sima devoted hours of her time in helping me reach this moment by organizing my paragraphs, formatting the margins, checking my references, and turning this paper into an APA masterpiece. She believed in me and I am so thankful for her love and friendship.

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A big thank you to my colleagues Dina and Allison for your support and friendship, and to my ELA director and inspiration Dr. Lorraine Radice.

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I am thankful to myself for believing in me. During this process I discovered inner strength and perseverance I didn't realize I had. I triumphed over many challenges. It was a process. There were setbacks. But I did it!!!

She-He-Che-Ya-Nu

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Culturally responsive teaching is a commitment to students in creating learning environments that affirm cultural identities, elevate marginalized voices, and empower student opportunities and outcomes. Curriculum is centered on multicultural content from multiple perspectives, using resources written and developed by traditionally marginalized voices that offer diverse perspectives on race, culture, and identities (Howard, 2020).

Culturally relevant teachers see their students as producers of knowledge rather than recipients. When students are engaged, they become creators and producers rather than consumers and recipients. (Ladson-Billings, 2009). When human capital and intellectual potential of marginalized students are neglected, improvements in the quality of their educational experiences and outcomes is a moral imperative. The educational future of students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and social backgrounds is important and too precarious to ignore (Howard, 2020).

In January 2018, the New York State Board of Regents, under the leadership of Dr. David Kirkland, directed the Office of P-12 Education and Higher Education to convene a panel of experts to engage stakeholders and develop The Culturally Responsive Sustainable Framework. The vision is grounded in Gloria Ladson-Billings's early work on culturally relevant teaching. The framework draws on decades of research in asset-based pedagogies that recognize that cultural differences should be treated as assets for teaching and learning. The framework includes guidelines for students, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, families and community members, higher education faculty, and policy makers.

New America published an updated *Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection Guide* to help facilitate self-appraisal, goal setting, and critical conversations surrounding culturally responsive teaching competencies. The guide is intended to be used to support, mentor, provide resources, and develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of responsive teaching practices. The eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching below are intended to support the reflective practices and ongoing learning of culturally responsive teachers (Muniz, 2019).

Reflect on one's cultural lens

Recognize bias in system

Draw on students' culture to shape curriculum]

Bring real world issues into the classroom

Model high expectations for all students

Respect all students' differences

Collaborate with families and the local communities

Communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive teaching

According to the U.S. Census (2020) over 63 percent of the 46.1 million U.S. public school students were White. Today, White students comprise just 49.7 percent of the 50 million students enrolled. These changes in the racial make-up of the nation's public schools are reflective of where the overall population is headed. A recent report by the Brookings Institute (Frey, 2018) revealed that by 2045, the nation is projected to become "minority White." During that year, Whites will comprise approximately 49.7% of the population in contrast to 24.6% for Latinx; 13.1% for Blacks; 7.9% for Asians; and 3.8% for multiracial populations. The 2020 census estimates the White population in this

country is projected to fall by more than 20 million people, while the Hispanic population is set to double. Black and Asian populations are expected to increase as well, although at rates far slower than Hispanics (Vespa, 2021).

Are educators prepared to teach an increasingly diverse student population? Although the racial makeup of the nation's schoolchildren are becoming more diverse, the teacher makeup is not. Racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 20% of the 3.3 million U.S. public school elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States during the 2015-16 school year, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In the 2017-2018 school year, 79% of public-school teachers were White and non-Hispanic; 9% were Hispanic (of any race); 7 % were Black and non-Hispanic; 2% identified as Asian; 2% biracial; less than 1% Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaska Native. That makes teachers considerably less racially and ethnically diverse than the both the national average and the population of students they are teaching.

As the demographics of students in public school classrooms in the United States change, there is a need for changes to the infrastructures of educational systems. In many schools, the mismatch between the adopted curriculum and the student population fosters cultural injustice. The curriculum and the teaching are not consistently culturally responsive. Problems of errors, stereotypes, biases, and invisibility persist in the curriculum and the books available to students. Many students only have access to a one-sided perspective that does not represent their diversity. Failing to incorporate culturally responsive practices fosters a monocultural experience, prioritizing one culture, usually

privileging the White experience, while excluding the marginalized majority in the classroom. (Au, W., Brown, & Calderon, 2016).

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) refer to a teacher's ability to connect with student knowledge as students' *funds for knowledge*. They define the concept as an approach to teaching that requires understanding students' lives outside of school, students' roles within their families and their relationships with their communities. In this way, the teacher develops a more holistic sense of how students interpret their world. Using a culturally responsive approach to education showcases that all families have cultural capital, or knowledge, abilities, and networks that can be leveraged in a classroom. Differences are maintained because they are what make students and families unique. Educators in a culturally responsive classroom prioritize their responsibility to understand, value, and promote multiple cultures in the classroom.

A culturally responsive ELA curriculum should include books that are mirrors, windows, and sliding doors into a student's life (Bishop, 1990).

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the

larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.

Bishop affirms that students need the access and opportunity to read books that represent and reflect who they are. When students see themselves in a story, they feel seen and empowered. These books serve as mirrors for students to engage and connect with the literature. In a classroom with multiple cultures, students should have the opportunity to read books that transport them in and out of each other's cultures, like sliding doors. They also have the chance to linger with a book and view a different culture through a window.

Recognition, relevance, and responsiveness to culture is the framework for culturally responsive teaching. When teaching is rooted in students' lives, students thrive. Teachers who value culture and view their students' multiple cultures as strengths, they empower rigor and innovative learning.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to acquire a better understanding of the lived experience and personal beliefs of culturally responsive teachers in a middle school setting. The main goal of this phenomenological study to describe the lived experiences of the participants and their first-person perspective of preparation for the teaching of students from diverse backgrounds.

The study addressed teachers' pre-service and in-service preparation, approaches, methods, attitudes, and beliefs towards teaching students from diverse backgrounds, while investigating teachers' cultural competence to acquire the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to become effective culturally responsive educators. The development

of cultural competence is an ongoing process where teachers begin with self-assessment and evaluation of their own thoughts, behaviors, bias, methods of expression, and cultural knowledge and the impact of those factors on teaching a diverse group of students. As culturally competent teachers, they continue to learn from, respect, and appreciate the broad range of cultures and diversity in their classroom. One of the significant aspects of demonstrating cultural competence in the classroom begins with teaching curriculum, planning lessons, and using instructional materials that represent their students' cultural diversity. The findings of this study were compared with existing literature to add to the literature and gain an understanding of the culturally responsive teacher. This qualitative study enhanced current research and frameworks on culturally responsive teaching (Howard, 2020).

With the rise of diversity among students in the classroom, and the lack of teacher ethnicity, there is a need for change. Administrators and teachers are being looked upon as the flag-bearers of change. They have a moral responsibility to guarantee that all students are successfully educated regardless of their background, with an increase in the rigor and relevance of curriculum, to foster understanding of cultural and social mores among the diverse groups. Accomplishing this goal requires the presence of teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to address the languages spoken and the traditions celebrated [Meckler & Rabinowitz (2019)]

As the nation's public schools become increasingly more diverse, teachers and administrators need to advocate and make changes to curriculum, including increasing the availability of culturally responsive books in the classrooms. Districts need to include books that reflect the students learning in the classroom in classroom libraries. Teachers

need to create and implement curriculum and lesson plans that address the issues of the greater population and culture of the marginalized students who are now the majority in the classroom (Meckler & Rabinowitz (2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework was based on culturally responsive teaching to investigate best practices, as well as the effects of those practices on teachers' knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes toward teaching a diverse population. There is also a focus on the student-teacher relationship, classroom culture, and students' learning experiences. (Gay, 2018) 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." (Ladson-Billings, 2009) used the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* to describe a teacher's display of cultural competence in a multicultural setting that encourages students to work to their full potential. (Paris, 2017) introduced *culturally sustaining pedagogy* to promote equity and ensure that all students have access and opportunity to rigorous instruction that highlights multiple perspectives. All three of these conceptual frameworks were used to investigate an inclusive curriculum that promoted rigor and high achievement, highlighted marginalized voices, and supported the learning of cultures and communities.

The work of Geneva Gay (2010) focuses on teachers' culturally responsive teaching. Gay's work identifies six key practices of culturally responsive teaching:

having high expectations for all students

engaging students in lessons that fit their cultural knowledge, experiences, practices, and perspectives

bridging gaps between home and school practices

educating the whole child

identifying and teaching to students' strengths to transform education critically

evaluating and questioning current school practices, curriculum, and assessments.

All students benefit from this theory as it emphasizes ability and promotes the value of cultural experiences.

The work of Gloria Ladson-Billings grounds teaching practices in a culturally responsive context. Ladson-Billings uses the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* to describe a mind shift when observing teachers who viewed children of color as being "at promise" instead of "at risk." In the research, Ladson-Billings documented the three essential qualities of teachers: a focus on student learning; cultural competence; and critical consciousness. These teachers maintain high expectations for their students and believe they will succeed, and design curriculum that connects students with their ethnic groups and community (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The work of Django Paris (2017) introduced the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* with an approach that focuses on fostering, perpetuating, and sustaining the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of communities of color in the education system. The goal of this approach is to support multilingual and multicultural access to materials and books while also maintaining the importance of learning curriculum content taught in schools.

Significance of Study

One of the most significant issues that requires further research is the demographic divide between the teachers and their culturally diverse student population. With the rise of student diversity in the classroom, and a lack of teacher diversity, it is important for teachers to understand culturally responsive teaching and to connect with their students, families, and community. Teachers have a moral responsibility to educated students through a rigorous, relevant, and represented curriculum.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own culturally responsive pedagogy [Gay (2002), Ladson-Billings (2009)]. Teaching and learning are not just cognitive tasks, but also active and emotional processes (Marzano, 2011). During the pandemic, teachers' and students' experiences differed. The teachers considered their own and their students' struggles and strengths. But, to practice cultural responsiveness, teachers had to examine the institutional practices and values that could alienate their students. The teachers demonstrated compassion, empathy and understanding for their students' feelings. However, they needed to recognize that each of their students had a different experience. For some students, remote instruction was challenging and had a significant impact on their learning. Teachers tried their best to maintain relationships with students and their families but were not always able to connect with some of their marginalized students. Teachers needed to find ways to get beyond the barriers. They accepted that some students could not put their cameras on or unmute themselves because they might be in a space that is not conducive to learning. As

culturally responsive teachers they required high expectations for each student, while conceding to the inequity in educational resources amongst them (Smith, 2020).

Research Questions

RQ1**:** What types of knowledge, skills, and disposition do teachers need to be effective in being culturally responsive?

RQ2**:** What types of attitudes and beliefs do culturally responsive teachers need to have about teaching students from diverse backgrounds?

RQ3**:** What types of methods and strategies do teachers use to develop, design, and implement culturally responsive teaching?

Definition of Terms

Attitude**.** A settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior (Howard, 2020).

Beliefs**.** An acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists (Howard, 2020).

Culture**.** Signifies the values, customs, ways of being, ways of knowing, and traditions passed from generation to generation, practices, and languages of ethnic and racial minorities (Howard, 2020). In the context of education, it is a complex symbol that can bridge the gap between school culture and student culture, thereby becoming ever changing (Johnston, et al. 2018). The New York State Education Department understands culture as “the multiple components of one’s identity, including but not limited to race, economic background, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and ability” (2019).

Critical Consciousness. The ability to recognize and analyze and critique systems of inequality and the commitment to act against these systems (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Cultural Capital. The assets that teachers and students bring to the classroom, which can be utilized as a resource for promoting social status and power including beliefs, ideas, preferences, symbols, etc. (Howard, 2020).

Cultural Competence. The idea of individuals being able to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that allow them to effectively work in cross cultural settings and can effectively function, communicate, and coexist in settings with individuals who possess cultural knowledge and skills that differ from their own (Howard, 2020)

Culturally Equitable Classroom. A culturally equitable classroom would provide literacy instruction that rejects a deficit view of students' cultures, language, and knowledge, but instead engages multiple options for individual knowledge and success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Cultural Identity. Cultural identity is the distinctiveness of a given community, encompassing certain characteristics common to its people (Jewell, 2020).

Culturally Relevant Teaching. Culturally relevant teaching is a trajectory through which students will be empowered to expand and explore their knowledge and opportunities as they strive for academic excellence (Gay, 2018).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. This represents a mind shift when observing teachers who viewed children of color as being "at promise" instead of "at risk" (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard (CRCS). Designed by NYU Metro Center as a tool to evaluate the extent to which a school's English Language Arts curriculum is culturally responsive (Bryan-Gooden, Hester, & Peoples, 2019).

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education. CR-S is grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability) are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning. [Paris (2012), NYSED.gov (2019)]

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Culturally responsive teaching (closely related to the term "culturally relevant") refers to the "combination of teaching, pedagogy, curriculum, theories, attitudes, practices and instructional materials that center students' culture, identities, and contexts throughout educational systems" (Gay, 2018).

Disposition. A person's inherent qualities of mind and character (Howard, 2020).

Identity. The distinguishing character or personality of an individual (Jewell, 2020).

Equity. Equity is the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair. Equity is a robust system and dynamic process that reinforces and replicates equitable ideas, power, resources, conditions, habits, outcomes (Gay, 2018).

Implicit Bias. Refers to the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that shape our responses to certain groups. Implicit bias operates involuntarily, often without one's intention or awareness. Rooted in neuroscience, implicit bias is related to our brain's

effort to process incoming data by using its shortcut that is known as stereotyping. Based on how our brains are wired and the exposure to the dominant culture, bias messages seem so "normal" to our brains and often go unchecked (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2012).

Knowledge. Shulman (1987) refers to pedagogical knowledge that teachers use to guide their practices in setting up a classroom and designing a curriculum that considers academic content from multiple perspectives and utilizes specific teaching skills that address students' learning needs (Howard, 2020).

Marginalized. To be on the outside of the imaginary box of the dominant culture and treated as if you are insignificant and inferior (Jewell, 2020).

Method. Refers to a teacher's process of activating students' prior knowledge, making learning relevant, considering classroom set up, forming relationships with students and their families, and tapping into students' cultural capital (Howard, 2020).

Microaggressions. The subtle everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. They are designed to intimidate or relegate a marginalized group to inferior status and treatment (Jewell, 2020).

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. Bishop (1990) explains that children must see themselves in classroom texts. These texts can affirm marginalized students' identities and practices and communicate belonging. Literature that constitutes a curriculum reflective of students from multicultural backgrounds. This includes works

from diverse authors, characters, identities, and cultures that offer multiple perspectives which relate to students' real-life experiences.

Privilege. The benefits, advantages, and power given to the social identities shared with the dominant culture (Jewell, 2020).

Representation. The extent to which students in school are reflected in the curriculum, and the extent to which they are being exposed to a group of diverse authors, characters, identities, and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Social Justice. Centering sources of knowledge, experiences, and stories of diverse people to develop a critical consciousness of systems that exclude, minimize, and misrepresent underrepresented groups of people (Bryan-Gooden, Hester, & Peoples, 2019)

Skills. Refers to a teacher's knowledge of the learned ability a student needs to become optimal learners (Howard, 2020).

Stereotypes. Characters are portrayed in one-dimensional, simplistic ways that are not based on any facts (Jewell, 2020).

Strategies. Refers to a teacher's plan of action to build relationships with their student and design curriculum and assignments that allow students to share relevant experiences (Howard, 2020).

Systemic. Something that happens across a whole system and institution over the course of time (Jewell, 2020).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of research examining culturally responsive teachers. These studies provide information on the role of cultural competence, self-assessment, and evaluation, as well as a teacher's cultural knowledge of diverse groups of students, preparation, and staff development. Relatedly, the studies focus on the use of culturally relevant materials and curriculum. As outlined in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to acquire a better understanding of a teacher's knowledge and preparation to design and teach a culturally relevant, responsive, sustaining, and inclusive curriculum.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) can be defined as *using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them* (Gay, 2010). It begins with the theoretical framework which investigates the culturally responsive pedagogy theories of Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Django Paris. The review of literature that follows presents a comprehensive outline of the research in three related areas: (1) culturally responsive teaching; (2) the culturally responsive teacher, (3) pre-service and in-service staff development; (4) implicit bias and Cultural Competence.

Theoretical Framework

Students will engage in learning and perform better when their cultural differences are recognized in the classroom, and lessons are taught through the lens of multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds. At the heart of Geneva Gay's (2018) framework of *culturally responsive teaching* are four dynamic components that are interwoven: caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction. Teachers create a *caring*

climate where students are more willing to participate in learning. Teachers *communicate* with students, families, and the community. Teachers *design a curriculum* with lessons that are relevant to students. Teachers *provide instruction* with tasks that encourage higher levels of achievement. In a culturally responsive classroom, teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibility are paramount.

Through a student-centered approach, the teacher's methods include cultural references and recognize the importance of students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers place their students at the center of their learning process with their strengths and personal interests used as opportunities for academic success. Their teaching includes developing culturally diverse knowledge by identifying and nurturing all students' cultural strengths and validating students' personal lives. Culturally responsive teachers are committed to cultural competence and establishing high expectations for their students. They see themselves as facilitators and learners in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is an appropriate choice for this study since it promotes the cultural knowledge and skills of ethnically diverse students as valuable resources towards academic achievement (2018).

The work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." Teachers can educate the whole child, raise awareness of cultural differences, and empower the marginalized voice. Ladson-Billings (2006) reveals three principles of culturally relevant pedagogy. First, students must be provided with rigorous instruction and teachers must

hold their students accountable to high academic expectations. Second, students must maintain cultural competence, and teachers should use this cultural competence as a resource for learning. Lastly, students and teachers should be co-designers of curriculum using resources that represent diverse perspectives.

Ladson-Billings (2006) defined cultural competence as "the dynamic and synergistic relationship between home/community, culture and school culture". This requires recognizing that teaching and learning occurs beyond the walls of the classroom and is inclusive to families and communities. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an appropriate choice for this study since it promotes high expectations, rigorous instruction, and an inclusive curriculum.

The work of Django Paris (2017) is known as *culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy*. The framework exists to sustain the cultural ways of communities of color in the schools and prevent these cultures from being erased through the education system. Including literacies of marginalized cultures in the curriculum leads to an increase in achievement of diverse students. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is an appropriate choice for this study since it exists to ensure that cultures of marginalized students are sustained and preserved in a school's curriculum (Paris, 2012).

Collectively, Gay, Ladson-Billings, and Paris profess that the role of a culturally responsive teacher is to design and implement a curriculum that is committed to equity, justice, and relevance to their diverse student population. It is the responsibility of schools and educators to fosters students' identities and accentuate their present and future capabilities, attitudes, and experiences [Gay (2018); Paris (2012); Ladson-Billings, (2009)].

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study.

RQ1: What types of knowledge, skills, and disposition do teachers need to be effective in being culturally responsive?

RQ2: What types of attitudes and beliefs do culturally responsive teachers need to have about teaching students from diverse backgrounds?

RQ3: What types of methods and strategies do teachers use to develop, design, and implement culturally responsive teaching?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been under the umbrella of multicultural education since the early 1970's when there was a concern for the racial and ethnic inequalities in the classroom. (Gary, Abrahams, & Troike, 1975) argued that if racial minority students are to be taught effectively, teachers, "must learn wherein their cultural differences lie and... capitalize upon them as a resource, rather than...disregarding the differences…{and} thereby denigrating… the students" (p.5). In the twenty-first century, there is a push for ongoing professional learning that supports teacher training in examining implicit bias and learning about their students' cultures and communities. Teachers are creating warm and affirming classrooms that welcome and support a diverse student population. [Samuels (2018); NYSED.gov (2019)].

The Culturally Responsive Teacher

Culturally responsive teachers see their students as producers of knowledge rather than recipients. When students are engaged, they become creators and producers rather than consumers and recipients (Ladson-Billings, 2009). When human capital and

intellectual potential of marginalized students are neglected, improvements in the quality of their educational experiences and outcomes is a moral imperative. The educational future of students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and social backgrounds is important and too precarious to ignore [Gay, in Howard, (2020)].

Culturally responsive teaching involves a teacher's careful planning and execution of teaching methods and strategies. Teaching and learning are not just cognitive tasks, but also active and emotional processes (Marzano, 2011). Researchers have presented that culturally responsive teaching empowers and enables students to be better human beings and more successful learners. Teachers create infrastructures for students to pursue high levels of academic achievement. These include, bolstering student morale, providing resources and assistance, developing an ethos of achievement, and celebrating individual and collective accomplishments (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Teachers draw students into the curriculum and create a community of learners by locating themselves in the cultural context, creating new knowledge based upon life experiences, and viewing knowledge as reciprocal (Ladson-Billings G. , 2009).

Rychly and Graves (2012) identified three teachers' qualities that are important for culturally responsive teaching. First, teachers should be able to take their students' perspectives and understand their cultural background when designing curriculum. Second, teachers should be aware of their own cultural frames of references and develop positive attitudes and beliefs about other cultures. Lastly, teachers should have knowledge about the cultures that are represented in their classrooms and adjust their teaching accordingly. Teachers who can take the perspectives of their students are able to understand their students' different needs and adapt their instruction and curricula to

match those needs (McAllister & Irvine, 2002)). Teachers who can take others' perspectives are expected to be more successful in providing unbiased education (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

Research from Howard (2020) demonstrates the competencies in use. A fifth-grade teacher in a title one school with predominantly African American and Latinx students understood the importance of finding out about her students' lives outside of school. She "takes a walk into their brains," so she can make connections to what they know and understand. The teacher had the students write in their daily journals about their experiences on a multitude of topics, such as their likes, dislikes, fears, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Many researchers have cited that writing is a way to engage urban youth into the learning process (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Culturally responsive teachers use students' personal and cultural knowledge as a conduit to course content. In this classroom the teacher used the students' writing to create persuasive writing and speech topics she knew the students were passionate about. Two examples were: (1) Why gang members should be given harsher penalties and (2) Why city leaders should listen to students' ideas about improving the city. The teacher transformed the writing experience into a socially meaningful and culturally responsive task (Howard, 2020).

In a seventh-grade classroom in a school with similar demographics where the students were African American and Latinx, a teacher used the students' community to teach math. When learning ratios, the teacher had the students take note of the buildings, business, parks, homes, and churches in their community. The students observed that there were a disproportionately higher number of churches, liquor stores, and abandoned

buildings in their neighborhood. To understand percentage, decimal, and fractions, the students tabulated demographic shifts among different ethnic groups (Howard, 2020).

Research has shown that a culturally responsive teacher promotes success for all students, especially students from historically marginalized populations. A cross-cultural understanding of inclusiveness is fostered amongst teachers and students. Findings in a qualitative study of two hundred K-12 in-service teachers serving in low-income schools in a large urban school district in the southeast region of the United States reported teachers highlighting the benefits of a nurturing classroom environment built on trust. The teachers spoke about how their students feel connected, included, and valued, which could lead to empowerment. In addition, they emphasized how a positive classroom culture enhanced inter student and teacher-student relationships serving to boost student self-confidence and self-worth. A culturally responsive environment creates a space where students feel safe to take risks, pedagogy is practiced, and bridges are built that connect students, teachers, schools, and community (Samuels, 2018).

In a study of 423 elementary, middle, and high school teachers from Southern California urban highly diverse schools, Bonner, Warren & Jiang (2018) observed that teachers' knowledge, skills, and disposition regarding diversity had an impact on implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. These teachers demonstrated a vision of equity in education resulting in setting up classrooms responsive to the students they serve and preparing their students for greatness and high achievement. In this study, a substantial group of teachers perceived themselves to be culturally competent, serving as a starting point in their urban school and district. The teachers felt comfortable being mentors and coaches for those teachers who required necessary support such as time and

resources for adequately preparing culturally responsive pedagogy. The results of this study indicated the importance of investigating the relationship between teacher's perceptions and understanding of culturally responsive classroom practices and their ability to execute those specific practices. In addition, the research indicated that teachers who believe in engaging in CRT practices will have strongly positive classrooms and student outcomes.

The responses of the teachers in this study provided strong evidence that Southern California urban teachers of culturally diverse students have a positive attitude towards a culturally diverse student population and responsive pedagogy. Their classrooms emphasized respect, acceptance, and inclusion of culture. Their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy guided them in differentiating instruction and connecting with families and communities. The teachers encouraged cultural sharing. They described their classrooms as "A beautiful mosaic of humanity". They showed children a globe and map of the world to show where they all came from (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018)

Describing the pedagogical knowledge and skills expected of culturally responsive educators. The findings revealed that all states embed some combination of culturally responsive competencies. The competencies most addressed are family and community engagement, high expectations for all students, and respect for student diversity. As teachers advance from novices to teacher leaders, they are expected to develop a curriculum that represents and reflects the students in their class. (Muniz, 2019).

Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer (2020) sought to find the connection between teachers' perspective- taking abilities and their exposure to teaching classrooms with

diverse student populations. The research found that teachers who had better perspective-taking abilities and a positive multicultural attitude engaged in culturally responsive teaching more frequently. Culturally sensitive teachers showed a greater willingness and ability to understand the cultural differences and needs of their students. Teacher qualities of taking another person's perspective and being aware of diversity and others' experiences, supports teachers' attempts to effectively manage a culturally responsive environment in the classroom. Many of these teachers actively chose to teach in schools with a higher population of marginalized students and felt more comfortable with student diversity. In the end, the research found that teachers with increased exposure to diverse student populations developed positive perspectives and attitudes towards their students. (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020) Teachers that sought to learn more about the diverse cultures and ethnicities of their students fostered positive relationships within their students' families and communities.

Curriculum and Instruction

A culturally responsive curriculum incorporates multiple cultures and diverse topics. Teachers design lessons that represent and celebrate diversity along with encouraging questions about difference. Ladson-Billings (1995) explained how teachers influence students' development through the incorporation of culturally recognizable content. For example, stacking the library with literature that is relevant to the ethnicities and cultures of the students in the class. Civil and Khan (2001) studied teachers who used students' home experiences in planting gardens to develop important math concepts. Culturally responsive educators teach with an awareness of the cultures of the students in their classroom.

Samuels (2018) reported that teachers need to investigate and reflect on the resources available to them. They must evaluate whether these resources are inclusive and represent the students in their class. In addition, teachers agreed that lesson plans should consistently represent non dominant groups throughout the academic year, not just during the prescribed months such as Black History, Women's, and Hispanic Heritage month.

Instructional plans used frequently in schools are called the symbolic curriculum (Gay, 1995). They include images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values. The most common forms of symbolic curricula are bulletin board decorations; images of heroes and heroines; trade books; and publicly displayed statements of social etiquette, rules and regulations, ethical principles, and tokens of achievement. Therefore, classroom and school walls are valuable "advertising" space, and students learn important lessons from what is displayed there. Culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power of the symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching. They use their resources to convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity. Teachers search for images which accurately represent the diversity within and across ethnic groups (Gay, 1995).

Cortes (2000) references the phrase societal curriculum when discussing curriculum based on a myopic perspective or riddled with stereotypes. Media is a culprit in spreading stereotypes and microaggressions. Television programs, newspapers, magazines, and movies are much more than mere information or idle entertainment. For many students, the media is their only source of knowledge about ethnic diversity. For

others, what is seen on television is more influential and memorable than what is learned from books in classrooms. The messages transmitted from these sources are too influential for teachers to ignore.

Much of the information from media is inaccurate and frequently prejudicial. In a study of ethnic stereotyping in news reporting, Campbell (1995) found that these programs perpetuated "myths about life outside of White `mainstream' America ... [that] contribute to an understanding of minority cultures as less significant, as marginal" (p. 132). Members of both minority and majority groups are negatively affected by these images and representations. Ethnic distortions in mass media are not limited to news programs; they are pervasive in other types of programming as well. Therefore, culturally responsive teaching includes thorough and critical analyses of how ethnic groups and experiences are presented in mass media and popular culture. Teachers need to understand how media images of African, Asian, Latino, Native, and European Americans are manipulated; the effects they have on different ethnic groups; what formal school curricula and instruction can do to counteract their influences; and how to teach students to be discerning consumers of and resistors to ethnic information disseminated through the societal curriculum (Gay, 2018).

The Culture Within the Classroom Environment

Research shows creating a safe and productive environment is essential in a culturally responsive classroom. Preparing to teach a diverse student population requires (a) recognizing ethnocentrism and a definition of the culturally appropriate classroom behavior, (b) developing knowledge of students; cultural backgrounds, (c) using

culturally appropriate classroom-management strategies, and (d) building caring classroom communities (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007).

For classroom management to be effective, teachers need to understand, acknowledge, and respect students' cultural norms and behaviors. For example, Thompson (2004) noted that loud talking, a common African American cultural characteristic, is often misinterpreted as defiance. Viewing a behavior as a manifestation of defiance will most likely lead to conflict, the alienation of the student, and disruption of the learning environment. For this reason, teachers need to look at their own behaviors and their students' behaviors in new ways (Bondy, Ross, & Gallingane, 2007).

The teachers communicated the importance of relationship building through their words and focused on their relationships with the students and on the students' relationships with one another. The teachers reported that it was important for the students to know who they were and to open up to them on a personal level to build trust. This assisted with classroom behavior management and accountability for meeting academic and social expectations. Developing relationships was a priority for the teachers because they perceived relationships to be at the core of a productive learning community (Bondy, Ross, & Gallingane, 2007).

Most teachers are known to care for their students and value a culture of respect. However, the challenge is having the knowledge necessary to explicitly teach these skills of respectful behavior in a culturally appropriate way. The study demonstrated how these teachers made respect the central value of their classroom, making it a haven for every child. They built a culturally responsive classroom where students felt represented which

led them to take risks, feel safe, and try their best to achieve (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, 2007).

Samuels (2018) found that in a culturally responsive classroom, teachers feel more like facilitators of learning. They observed students feeling comfortable taking on a more active role in their learning, which lead to enhanced engagement and increased student achievement. Students felt safe to let their voices be heard and engaged in conversations related to current events and the existing sociopolitical climate. Some of the dialogue aroused conversations surrounding systemic inequalities which teachers facilitated rather than avoided, which is often the case in schools. Teachers reported their students having an opportunity to explore their views while being encouraged to examine and consider alternative views. Culturally responsive teachers encouraged these conversations because they provide value and insight for both the learner and the learning process.

Gay (2020) reported that teachers who know about the culture of their students, use this knowledge to plan engaging lessons and follow up activities. The learning style valued in non-dominant cultures is more collaborative and communal than a more independent learning style. In a Western culture, like the United States, learners are encouraged to work for personal achievement, but in other cultures, students are taught that the good of the community is more important than the good of any one of its members. This involves setting up cooperative group learning and peer coaching to meet the communal cultural systems of African, Asian, Native, and Latino American groups. Teachers also consider incorporating music, movement, drama, and choreography, in the classroom for this reason to promote an engaging productive classroom environment,

teachers design their classroom management and adapt their methods to benefit the learning styles of their students.

Teacher Preparation to Teach in Diverse Settings

Cross-racial teaching where a teacher's race is different from that of the students have demonstrated degrees of misunderstanding between teachers and their students. Much of this is due to lack of: training, relational trust, and the competence necessary to effectively teach students of diverse groups. Many teachers face significant challenges in educating students who are different from themselves. Often too much attention is focused on the racial disconnect between teachers and students and not on cultural differences (Howard, 2020).

Past research shows that pre-service teacher training included minimal training on teaching to and about diverse cultures (Ladson-Billings G. , 2000) There is often a cultural disconnect between teachers and students. Educators and preparation programs must commit to fostering learning that promotes culturally responsive and sustaining teaching and advocates for the academic achievement of diverse populations. Teachers must have the opportunities to understand their evolving identities and how they influence, counter, or perpetuate biases. Giving teachers training and a forum to discuss, reflect and interrogate their own microaggressions and biases, would better prepare students with a voice and the tools to promote equitable and inclusive classrooms (Samuels, 2018).

As open-minded as teachers try to be, many have misconceptions and preconceptions about their students. It is essential to question what appears to be the norm and uncover the racial inequalities in one's own beliefs and then in the curriculum

that is being taught. Professional development that uses the narratives of people of color and provides primary resources of the underrepresented, make teachers aware of the existence and harmful impact of racism(Gay, 2018)

For professional development to be successful, administrators must lead by example and support teacher learning (Gay, 2018). Funds need to be allocated from their budget to purchase equitable and diverse materials for all subjects. Time needs to be scheduled throughout the year to provide teachers with continued professional development, grade-level meetings, and professional learning communities where teachers are supported to identify, create, evaluate, and modify instruction, to ensure that lessons and resources reflect and highlight the diversity of the students ((Gay, 2018).

Many teachers and pre-service teachers feel they are lacking cultural and racial knowledge for teaching their students. The findings in many studies show that teachers need the tools to create a safe culturally responsive classroom environment, engage in uncomfortable conversations, and implement instructional practices that produce effective learning opportunities for students regarding race, culture, gender, identity and more. Professional development is needed in many areas to prepare teachers in implementing an effective culturally responsive school experience (Milner, 2018).

Professional development is needed in designing a culturally responsive curriculum as well as involving parents and the community in the process. The classroom environment should be transparent and open to questioning, respect for varying perspectives, and encouraging for students to grapple with rough issues. Students should feel safe to reflect on and balance their own views and should be encouraged to explore different sources of information and consider perspectives inconsistent with their initial

thinking on topics related to culturally responsive issues. Students are expected to bring in their own experiences. The school curriculum should be designed to help students understand the convergence between race and the subject matter they teach. Collaboration with parents and the community is needed to bolster discourse inside and outside the classroom (Milner, 2018).

Samuels (2018) describes the challenges that White teachers expressed in collaborative conversations with diverse populations, citing a lack of exposure to individuals different from themselves. In this study, teachers received training on cultural responsiveness, followed by a focus group where teachers were able to debrief their experiences. In this session, teachers shared their challenges engaging in these conversations. They explained that limited interactions make it challenging for them to recognize the existence of oppression, discrimination, and limited access and opportunity. The participants asserted what they failed to understand is that focusing on teaching equality can serve to perpetuate inequality.

Participants also emphasized the challenges of having a narrow understanding of cultures and assets of the students and communities they serve, which also results in a potential disconnect and decreased likelihood of embracing this framework. In connection with the idea of limited exposure, teachers who are not familiar with different cultures may perceive differences as less valuable or deficient. Teachers who lack training in cultural responsiveness have a myopic view of their students who are struggling academically, living in substandard conditions, or exposed to negative activities related to gangs or drugs, their first thought is for that student to leave that

lifestyle, which is not wrong, yet cultural attributes of that student's life need to be considered as well (Samuels, 2018).

Additional data from the focus groups and analysis of transcripts from the perception of the teachers, suggested that culturally responsive teaching extends beyond theory and should be fostered daily into classroom practice. The findings revealed that teachers would benefit from opportunities that allow them to (1) explore their beliefs, values, assumptions, dispositions, biases, and experiences related to diversity, (2) discuss controversial topics to increase their comfort level and skill set when facilitating such conversations in their own contexts, (3) learn inclusive, pedagogical strategies, and consider how to best incorporate these strategies into their environment, and (4) engage in dialogue on how to foster an inclusive climate and culture with students (Samuels, 2018).

Research has established a connection between culturally competent educators and positive outcomes in students. There is a need for professional development so teachers can create a classroom environment that encourages equity, gives a voice to those who are frequently silenced, and ensures that no child is made invisible. Teachers need to be prepared with the tools and resources to create and facilitate environments that embrace cultural responsiveness. Teachers themselves need to be able to engage in a space where they feel comfortable to explore their own anxieties, vulnerabilities, and biases for the benefit of their students and an inclusive classroom. It is essential for teacher preparation programs and continual professional development to provide opportunities for further engagement and learning to create more congruence between

classroom practice and strategies essential for authentic and effective culturally responsive (Samuels, 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching deals directly with controversy; studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups; contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives. Teachers need to learn how to teach cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials, revise them for better representations of cultural diversity, and provide many opportunities to practice these skills under guided supervision. Many existing obstacles to culturally responsive teaching exist and teachers need to be prepared. (Gay, 2018).

Implicit Bias and Cultural Competence of a Culturally Responsive Teacher

Brain research on implicit bias has found that these biases can be unconscious and involuntary based on cognitive processing outside of conscious awareness also known as system one cognitive processing (Milner, 2015). Social science has shown that implicit bias can be activated by the way a person perceives another's identity such as gender, race, and ethnicity. This leads to persistence of social inequities in education and can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement for some students. It is critical for educators to identify implicit bias, thereby improving student outcomes and guiding them to reach their full potential. Teachers' beliefs can shape their practices whether consciously or unconsciously [Gay, (Gay, Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice. , 2010), Milner (2015)].

Cultural competence is the idea of individuals being able to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that allow them to effectively communicate, and coexist in settings with individuals who possess cultural knowledge and skills that differ

from their own (Cross et al. (1989). Palmer (1998)) states “We teach who we are” and that teachers must separate their own lived experiences and ask themselves, “Does who I am contribute to the underachievement of students who are not like me?” Critical reflection and self-evaluation can help educators to recognize if they consciously or subconsciously hold implicit bias and negative perceptions of students and their families (Howard, 2020). For this reason, teachers must take the time to check in on their own bias, acknowledge their thoughts, and act in being more mindful of their language and gestures when teaching their students. They must also try their best to be comfortable with the uncomfortable and address controversial topics that may arise from students’ thinking and the literature they read.

Implicit teacher attitudes and stereotypes are relevant factors in the understanding of teacher behavior and student outcomes in the context of equity for all students. Research on teachers’ expectations of their marginalized students can be skewed by a teacher’s perception of a students based on a stereotype projected on a specific group of people (Timmermans & Van der Werf, 2018)). Students from cultural-ethnic minorities have been found to suffer from underestimations by their teachers (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018). When teachers respond to students’ needs based on biased expectations, they are not factually seeing their students and teaching to their needs. As a result, the curriculum, assignments, instruction, and feedback may not be appropriate. Teaching affected by this bias may lead to increased achievement gaps and educational inequalities and can be a serious threat to justice and equal opportunities in education (Ready & Chu, 2015).

Bonner, Warren, & Jiang (2018) found that most of the teachers they observed showed how much they care for their students, however, they needed to be made aware of the potential of their own bias and stereotypes. Teachers realized they had to check their attitudes and perceptions in order not to overlook someone because of their cultural background. Many teachers responded that within their capacity to effectively teach a culturally diverse curriculum, they must be vigilant in their need to improve and develop increased competence, efficacy, and cultural consciousness towards teaching and supporting the marginalized, diverse students in their class.

Sleeter (2008)) found that White teachers generally resist examining held beliefs about diverse groups, and "bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination, especially racism. The White teachers appeared to be generally ignorant of communities of color, fear them, and fear discussing race and racism. Given the changing demographics of U.S. schools, reflections of racial and cultural differences are essential, and notions of White dominance must dissipate if cultural democracy and equity are to become a reality (Howard, 2020).

Perhaps the biggest challenge in critical reflection in education is what T.D. Wilson (2002) refers to the *adaptive unconsciousness*-a social psychological concept where teachers can cognitively process in a sophisticated way their students' race and culture yet be having biased thoughts - and in some cases behaving-unconsciously biased towards their students. For example, teachers who may have limited interactions or experiences with students from a different race and culture than their own, may have a distorted and inaccurate portrayal of that culture and race based on what is posted through the media. These teachers may also have friends, colleagues, and family who share

experiences about their interactions with people from diverse backgrounds that may be less than ideal. Hence, these teachers enter the classroom conflicted and in need of sorting the accuracies from the biases and dismissing the aberrations before deciding how they will proceed in viewing, judging, teaching, and evaluating the culturally diverse students in their class (Howard, 2020).

A recent meta-analysis of teacher's implicit bias (Pit-ten Cate, & Glock, 2019) included twenty-two studies. The studies focused on teacher attitudes toward a variety of student characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, special education needs, and SES. The results of the meta-analysis indicated that teachers' implicit attitudes are on average in favor of the non-marginalized groups. Findings suggested that a teacher's attitude towards an ethnic group was more positive when the teacher was from a minority background (Glock, Kneer, & Kovacs, 2013). People tend to be biased in favor of their ingroup. This implicit group bias of teachers is likely to have adversary effects on teachers' judgements of minority students and these students' academic outcome (Denessen, Keller, Bergh, & van den Broek, 2020).

Researchers found that although some teachers embraced reflective practice and awareness of their potential biases, others did not. The notion of White privilege was raised, with the explanation that it could be challenging for White teachers to recognize the existence of oppression, discrimination, and limited access and opportunity. Other teachers expressed that when teachers treat their students equally, they are in fact perpetuating inequity (Samuels, 2018).

Howard (2020) conducted a study identifying White teachers who use culturally responsive teaching. One of the frequent comments heard from the teachers is that these

methods can only be used by teachers of color because “they understand” students’ culture. Howard refuted that statement by stating that one of the essential elements of culturally responsive teaching is getting to know students, their culture, their families, and their communities. A teacher’s ability to know and understand students is not restricted to race but is tied to developing a healthy sense of their own racial identity and privilege. For this reason, teachers need the guidance to evolve and build a skill set of instructional practices that tap into cultural knowledge, reject deficit views of marginalized students, and believe that all students can succeed.

A study involving 143 primary teachers examined whether a teacher's perspective-taking abilities and multicultural attitudes are associated with the frequency with which they engage in culturally responsive teaching. Teachers responded to 40 statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale about their practices in student assessment, curriculum and instruction, classroom management, and cultural enrichment. The items were based on the Culturally Responsive Teaching, self-efficacy scale (Siwatu, 2007), but were adapted to measure practices in the classroom. Questions measured, perspective taking and multicultural attitudes. A sample question from the survey is *I use the cultural background of my students to make learning meaningful* (responses on a scale from 1: never to 5: always)

The researchers hypothesized that teachers who have higher perspective taking abilities will more frequently engage in culturally responsive teaching. Teachers who worked in schools that had a higher concentration of marginalized students reported a more positive multicultural attitude and perspective taking abilities. These findings may indicate that these teachers engage more frequently in culturally and socially sensitive

teaching due to the diverse population of their schools. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers with multicultural attitudes and perspective taking abilities possess the desired teacher qualities for good teaching practices (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020).

Bonner et al., (2018) conducted a study with 430 P-12 urban teachers in urban Southern California exploring the perception of teachers in a culturally responsive class with diverse students using culturally responsive literature. Using the CRT questionnaire developed by Phuntsog (2001), four open-ended sentence stems were used to collect qualitative data. The stems were : (a) "I would describe my attitudes and feelings toward diverse student populations (or multicultural issues) as follows . . ."; (b) "Culturally responsive teaching or instruction that recognizes and affirms the culture, history, and language of diverse students would include the following teaching behaviors . . ."; (c) "My capacity/ability for effectively teaching culturally diverse students is . . ."; and (d) "I believe that instruction that meets the academic needs of culturally diverse students will produce the following outcomes/results . . .".

Bonner et. al., (2018) stated that teachers, who themselves come from diverse backgrounds, felt a strong capacity to teach culturally diverse students. The most prevalent, recurring response from teachers was their belief in having the capacity to effectively teach culturally diverse students. They aligned this with positive relationships with the families and willingness to learn about their students' cultures. Teachers who also come from different cultures felt they had a deeper understanding of their students However, teachers with fewer cultural experiences did not feel as confident in their capacity to provide culturally responsive instruction. These teachers requested more professional development and had an eagerness to learn more. They were committed to

implementing best practices, so that students from different cultural backgrounds felt comfortable and successful.

Siwatu (2007) found that teachers who believed in their students and built a relationship based on trust, led to the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers were asked to complete a culturally responsive survey to provide data on their beliefs and ability to implement a culturally responsive classroom. The survey was specifically designed to collect data on teachers regarding their self-efficacy to (a) use students' cultural knowledge and learning preferences to facilitate learning; (b) design culturally compatible classroom environments that promote respect amongst diverse students in the classroom; (c) provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning using non biased assessments; (d) provide students with the skills to thrive in an academic culture while maintaining a connection to their home culture (Siwatu, 2007).

Results of the study revealed the highest areas demonstrated of teacher self-efficacy is in building trust and personal relationships with students. The lowest area involved not having enough cultural knowledge to validate students in their native language and teaching students about their culture's contributions to society. Participants also reported lower levels of self-efficacy in using culturally responsive techniques and including specific cultural elements in the curriculum. If teachers do not feel confident in knowing enough about their students' cultural backgrounds, then they might be missing opportunities to provide classroom experience that will help with student-efficacy and achievement (Siwatu, 2007).

Professional Development Towards Cultural Competence and Racial Awareness

Given the changing demographics of U.S. schools, many of the White teachers currently in classrooms will find themselves teaching students who possess different experiences than their own. Morrell & Andrade (2008) offer five core pillars of racial and cultural competence for teachers of culturally diverse students: (1) *critically conscious purpose*, where teachers ask, "Why do I teach?" and "Whom do I teach?" and have a clear and realistic answer to these questions; (2) *duty*, in which teachers have a commitment to the community and students they teach; (3) *preparation*, which entails teachers having solid classroom management skills and giving intense commitment and time to their curricular decision making, lesson planning, and assessments; (4) *Socratic sensibility*, or teachers' ability to find a balance between their confidence as teachers and their ability to engage in self-critique; and (5) *trust*, or the building of authentic relationships between students and teachers that are predicated on mutual levels of trust and respect (Howard, 2020).

To further the study on teachers' cultural competence to teach culturally diverse students, Warren (2018) recommended three specific professional learning experiences that could further teachers' perspective-taking abilities. First, teachers should get exposed to texts written on and by culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Second, teachers should research and become familiar with individuals from cultural communities that differ from their own. Third, teachers should have critical conversations with colleagues on a regular basis to check in on perspective taking and cultural responsiveness in their teaching. Strengthening these capacities would benefit all students regardless of their backgrounds.

Howard (2003) asserts that a commitment to both racial awareness and cultural competence should be a lifelong process. Professional development in schools should consist of listening to the stories, experiences, histories, and setbacks of marginalized groups. It may require readjusting inaccurate perceptions and constructing new lenses and beliefs. For example, teachers will need guidance and support as they build new knowledge and reprogram age-old thoughts, replacing them with more informed data sets to guide more accurate and objective views of their students.

In 2007, Howard and faculty in a teacher education program created a mandatory education course for preservice teachers called "Identity and Teaching," that prepares them to teach in urban schools (Howard & Aleman, G.R ., 2007). The course was directed at helping pre-service teachers develop cultural competence and racial awareness that are vital for effective teaching in diverse schools. The purpose of the course is for pre-service teachers to examine their own racial, cultural, and gender identities. According to Howard (2020), students are wrestling with their racial identities. They are questioning their own racial identity, their beliefs about other racial groups, and whether their racial beliefs have ramifications for their students. The emotional outpouring and revelations of the students is a testament to how difficult it is for many of the participants to come to grips with their own notions of racial privilege. At the end of the course students reflected on the value of critical reflection and the role it plays in teaching in a culturally diverse school setting.

Students in the course explained their discomfort is a result of race being a taboo topic. They expressed concerns of not wanting to appear racially insensitive, racist, prejudice, or politically incorrect in the classroom (Tatum, 2007). Howard (2020)

emphasized that teacher education programs must push students into uncomfortable spaces to talk about race, ethnicity, culture, gender, disabilities, economic status. Facilitators guiding these uncomfortable conversations cannot allow participants' ignorance and discomfort to become an escape for not addressing and analyzing their own biased beliefs and inaccuracies. Teachers must have experiential knowledge and difficult conversations about race, so that they are adequately prepared to address race. If teachers are not prepared, they may retreat to the safety net of practicing "colorblindness," whereas not acknowledging the racial identities of their students (Schofield, 1986). Professional development and pre-service preparation courses open the window for teachers and preservice teachers to develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to dialogue about race related issues (Tatum, 2007). Students benefit when their teachers and future teachers are trained and supported to feel confident and capable in creating learning environments that are safe, affirming, and supportive in recognizing the salience of being responsive to their diverse student population (Howard, 2020).

Muniz (2019) conducted a study about teachers' beliefs and attitudes about reaching students from diverse cultures. The teachers recognized the need to readdress bias in the system. They engaged with literature and professional development opportunities to learn more about how institutional racism and bias disadvantage some groups of learners, while privileging others. They advocated for practices and policies to make education more equitable and accessible. They taught with texts that mirror and validate the cultural identities of marginalized students (Muniz, 2019).

Culturally responsive teachers believe that students' cultural backgrounds are a resource for learning. They evaluate the textbooks, literature, and instructional materials

to ensure they do not perpetuate stereotypes or fail to represent diverse groups. They complement the traditional curriculum, with song lyrics, plays, comics, and video games that reflect experiences, characters, settings, and themes their students can relate to. They deploy *cultural scaffolding* by providing links between academic concepts and the experiences that are familiar to students. In addition to providing "mirrors" reflecting students' familiar world, teachers provide "windows" into the history, traditions, and experiences of other cultures and groups (Muniz, 2019).

Research on the topic of culturally responsive professional development is sparse. The pressing challenges are the effects of when untrained teachers are given the daunting task to mentor and help preservice teachers think critically about how to address issues of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, and social class issues in the classroom. Not surprisingly, this results in many novice teachers lacking the capacity to engage students in dialogue. For this reason, it is imperative to provide professional development addressing issues of race, culture, and diversity. Teachers should be provided with access to time and a safe environment to share their own lived experiences, expose their own human frailties, and reflect on their evolving identities within a community of peers. The practice of being a culturally responsive educator relies on teachers to feel comfortable with their own identities and those of others (Howard, 2020).

Research on labeling students and teacher expectations revealed that teachers' preconceived notions about students and their academic potential frequently were influenced by race, culture, and social status and consequently contributed to the salience of self-fulfilling prophecies of students questioning their own potential for academic success. Professional development addressing cultural and racial awareness is an

essential part of the preparation of new teachers and the ongoing education of more experienced teachers so that they can address racial and cultural issues when they arise in the classroom (Howard, 2020).

Opportunities exist to provide professional development towards informing teacher educators, preservice teachers, in-service teachers, and school administrators about ways to translate critical reflection to develop culturally responsive teachers. Professional development should focus on: (1) development of teachers who are able to sufficiently address the complex nature of race, ethnicity, culture, and social status and .mentor new teachers; (2) recognition that critical self- reflection is an ongoing process and that teachers acknowledge when they make mistakes and have lapses in judgement, then get back on track to improving their responsive teaching methods; (3) the understanding that teaching is not a neutral act and teachers need to be mindful of how their words, actions, and beliefs, can contribute to or stifle the development of their own healthy identity among their students; (4) a teachers need to avoid reductive notions of race and culture assuming all Latinx students are second language learners, all African Americans prefer working in groups, and all Asian Americans are high achievers; (5) examining class data and asking challenging questions about equity in the classroom when looking at the racial breakdown of referrals for special education and gifted and talented programs, differentiation of instruction, use of culturally responsive materials and curriculum, multiple ways of evaluating and assessing students; and (6) staying the course and having those uncomfortable conversations (Howard, 2020).

Professional development in culturally responsive methods must be sustainable, perpetual and happening all the time. This requires a commitment from building and

district leaders, teachers, and the community. Schein's three levels of organization discusses artifacts, values and priorities, and assumptions. Artifacts are visible and observable; values and priorities are desired values leadership wants employees to grasp and practice; and assumptions are the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and perceptions (Schein E., 2006). Assumptions may be hidden and not match the espoused values. This is the challenge for administration and districts. The artifacts are visible in the books students are reading, and curriculum promoting multicultural views. Teachers and administrators are talking about culturally responsive strategies, goals, and philosophies. They believe in culturally responsive teaching and its benefits for all students. However, assumption can be made that culturally responsive teaching methods may not be a sustainable priority for building and district leaders. It is not enough for administrators to prepare teachers; culturally responsive leaders must promote culturally responsive school environments. This can happen by promoting inclusivity and integrating student culture in all aspects of schooling and engaging with the community. Culturally responsive school leadership is under researched and there is a need for future research in leadership preparation courses to (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

Challenges of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Even with the prevailing enthusiasm for culturally responsive teaching, researchers interviewed teachers who expressed frustration with the challenges inherent in addressing a multitude of cultures. (Gay, 2018) suggests: (1) Teachers require preparation programs that prepare them to be culturally responsive and have the knowledge, disposition, and skills to effectively teach marginalized students. (2) Teacher preparation programs must have professors that are culturally competent and

knowledgeable about culturally responsible pedagogy to effectively prepare teachers and principals. (3) Ongoing professional development is needed in all schools to further prepare teachers to be culturally competent. (4) Schools must work diligently to increase the number of racial diverse teachers in the work force.

Samuels (2018) conducted a study with in-service teachers in a K-12 setting serving low socioeconomic schools in a diverse urban school district. The goals of the study were for teachers to be socio-culturally conscious and use diverse instructional strategies when teaching their students. The results found that teachers promote student voice and engagement in conversations related to current events. However, some teachers felt unprepared and uncomfortable in facilitating difficult conversations. They also recognized the need to investigate and reflect on their current resources and evaluate whether they include or exclude the students in their class. The teachers felt they needed professional development to guide them in creating lesson plans that represent nondominant groups throughout the academic year, methods to reflect on their own personal and institutional implicit biases, and modeling in facilitating difficult conversations. Teachers reported feeling limited in their knowledge of some controversial topics and not equipped to facilitate the discussion. Some teachers reported that if they felt uncomfortable with a topic, they would minimize or avoid it to prevent the possibility of a conversation turning too controversial, aggravating students, or initiating conflict (Samuels, 2018).

Along with the challenges of cultural responsiveness, came the demands and restrains of practical obstacles like time and limited resources. Teachers explained that curriculum demands, and oversized classes made it overwhelming to accommodate

diverse populations. Also, teachers lacked the access and knowledge to resources and pedagogical strategies (Samuels, 2018).

Another challenge facing culturally responsive teaching are the constraints on teaching time because of an emphasis on educational high-stakes, biased assessments, and a standardized curriculum. Teachers feel an immense pressure to teach a curriculum accountable to standardized testing. There is a subtle message being sent that there isn't time in the classroom for "inconsequential untestable" curriculum (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018)

Conclusion

This review of literature demonstrates that researchers and theorists agree that culturally responsive teaching benefits teachers and students. When teachers acknowledge the culture and contributions of their marginalized students, they feel encouraged and motivated to learn. Teachers also feel the responsibility to create a safe and welcoming classroom environment for all students to see themselves and be valued in the curriculum. A culturally responsive teacher possesses qualities of caring, communication, and empathy. They reach out to families and communities to really get to know their students. Most teachers have these qualities and are willing to revise curriculum and engage in culturally responsive lessons.

However, just possessing a caring heart is not enough. Many teachers feel unprepared to address all the cultures in the room. They also feel uncomfortable addressing controversial topics involving race, gender, and ethnicity. Some teachers feel they lack the knowledge and resources to organize and sustain a culturally relevant classroom where everyone feels safe. Teachers also need time to address and reflect on their own biases so they can be responsive to their students.

Schein's (1985) three levels of cultural organization speak to artifacts, values, and assumptions. When visualizing an iceberg, artifacts and values are visible, and assumptions are not. Many times, the artifacts and values don't drive the assumed behavior. A district may demonstrate artifacts with culturally responsive books in classroom libraries, and teachers may be teaching culturally responsive lessons around Black History or Hispanic Heritage months, but it is not always sustainable. To be sustainable you cannot just change the visible behavior, you must change the culture. For culture to change it must be happening everywhere. This means every day, all the time teachers, administrators, district leaders, and state educators must work together to perpetuate and culturally sustain responsiveness (Schein E. , 2006). For this reason, future research should investigate the knowledge, education, and commitment of administrators and district leaders to a sustainable culturally responsive culture.

This study examined teachers' knowledge, skills, disposition, attitude, beliefs, and resources to be culturally responsive and the influence of these skills and practices on student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness. Future research should examine culturally responsive school leadership with an emphasis on self-reflection to acknowledge their own understanding. It is not enough for administrators to prepare teachers; culturally responsive leaders must promote culturally responsive school environments. This can happen by promoting inclusivity, integrating student culture, and engaging community. Culturally responsive school leadership is under researched and there is a need for future research in leadership preparation courses too (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016)

Many of the teachers in these studies work in urban, low socio-economic schools with diverse cultural populations. These teachers are challenged daily to be responsive and culturally aware of the students in their class and work diligently to promote high standards, and a rigorous curriculum. Research is lacking in examining culturally responsive teaching practices in suburban communities teaching marginalized, BIPOC, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, low socio-economic, physically challenged, and neurodiverse students attending suburban schools in mid to high socio-economic neighborhoods. The current ethnographic qualitative study will address the research of suburban teachers in preparing a culturally diverse curriculum which represents and sustains the multiple cultures and opportunities of students. The research will also focus on teacher preparation and professional development in recognizing implicit bias, teaching a diverse student population, and designing a responsive and sustainable curriculum that values and represents multiple perspectives and marginalized students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research design, methods, and methodology for the study. It will include methods for data collection and the corresponding data analysis techniques. It will also feature a description of the participants in the study, the research methods, procedures, trustworthiness, ethics, and analysis.

The research questions used a phenomenological qualitative methodology. According to Manen (2016), phenomenology is more of a method of questioning than answering. It begins with wonder and explores a person's prereflective and prepredicative ordinary daily experiences as they are being lived. With these questions there is the potential of finding a new understanding and insights into the topic. The researcher must set aside prejudgments and be objective on the topic. This is known as *epoché*; the beliefs, knowledge, attitude, and preparation of culturally responsive teachers the beliefs, knowledge, attitude, and preparation of culturally responsive teachers and bracketing. During this study, the goal of the researcher was to focus on teachers' shared experiences and be receptive to their ideas without the influence of the researcher's thoughts.

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (Creswell, 2013). The researcher hoped to gain insight into the participants' world. The purpose of the qualitative study is to understand the lived experiences of a group of people at a specific time (Moustakas, 1994).

There is an essence or distinct quality to a lived phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The assumed essence in this study is that teachers have similar beliefs about

cultural responsiveness. These beliefs guide their decisions in choosing materials and planning lessons. By interviewing the teachers, the researcher was able to determine "what" beliefs teachers have about culturally responsive teaching and "how" they implement it in their classrooms. The researcher also investigated "what" teachers are learning about themselves and "how" they are reflecting on their practices to create a responsive environment for their students (Moustakas, 1994). This will enable a greater understanding of a culturally responsive teacher and how they represent their students (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

To guide the study, the research was grounded in the following questions:

RQ1: What types of knowledge, skills, and disposition do teachers need to be effective in being culturally responsive?

RQ2: What types of attitudes and beliefs do culturally responsive teachers need to teach students from diverse backgrounds?

RQ3: What types of methods and strategies do teachers use to develop, design, and implement culturally responsive teaching.

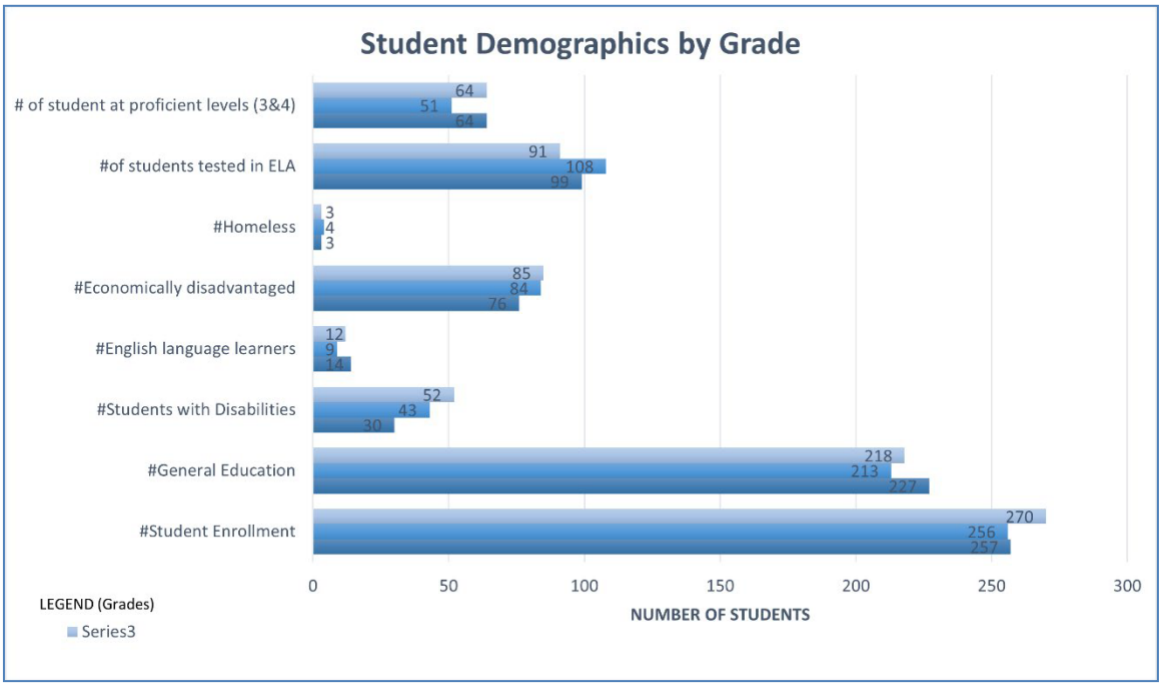
Setting

The setting for the research was a suburban school district in Nassau County, New York. The district consists of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. All four elementary schools feed into one middle school for Grades 6,7, & 8. According to the New York State Report Card 2020-2021 data (data.nysed.gov), student enrollment is 783 students. The middle school employs 88 teachers with 4 teachers being inexperienced. The school has 1 principal and 2 assistant principals.

Table 1, below, shows the academic and economic status of the students.

Table 1

Academic and Economic Demographics of Students by Grade

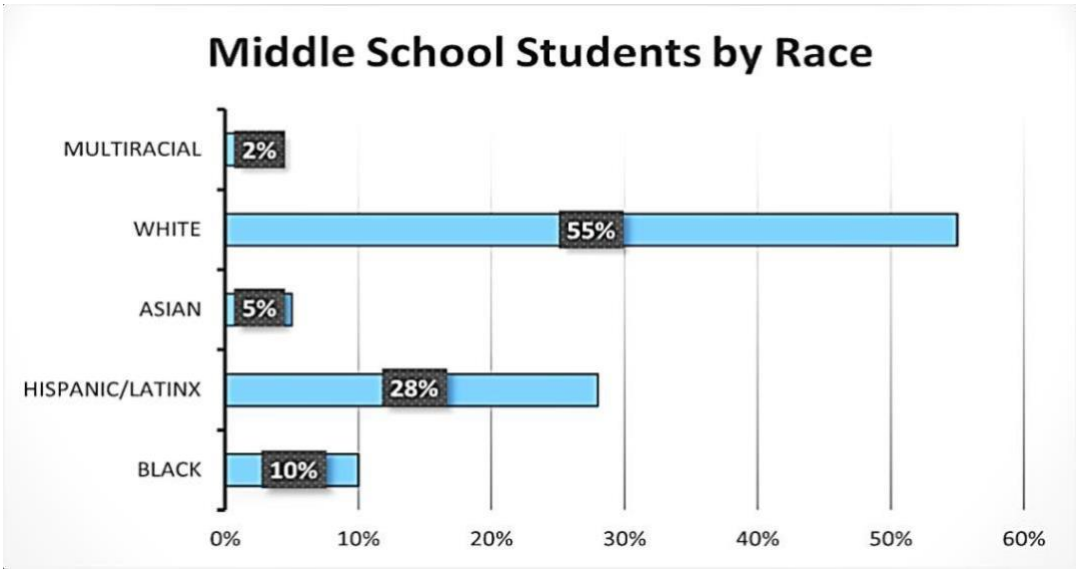


Note. Adapted from "New York State Education Data Site," NY STATE - Report Card: NYSED Data Site. (2020). Retrieved November 12, 2022, from https://data.nysed.gov/reportcard.php?instid=800000081568&year=2017-&createreport=1&38ELA=1.

According to the New York State Report Card 2020-2021 data, the middle school's demographic population is 10% Black, 28% Hispanic/Latinx, 5% Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, 55% White, and 2% multiracial (NY State Report Card, 2020). Due to circumstances related to the COVID pandemic, only 40% of the students participated in state assessments, hence the school and district's results may not represent the student population.

Table 2 shows the racial demographics of the population of the district's middle school students.

Table 2
Racial Demographics of Middle School Students



Note. Adapted from "New York State Education Data Site," NY STATE - Report Card: NYSED Data Site. (2020). Retrieved November 12, 2022, from https://data.nysed.gov/reportcard.php?instid=800000081568&year=2017-&createreport=1&38ELA=1.

The district is known to retain its teachers. Any turnover or new hiring is the result of retirement or a staff member's move to an administrative position. Although the majority of teachers identity as White females, there are male, Black, Hispanic, and Asian faculty members. The Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Administration attends a diversity job fair each year to recruit eligible and professional faculty.

All students in this middle school learn through the International Baccalaureate (IB Middle Years program (MYP. The program is focused on encouraging students to become critical and reflective thinkers. Teachers follow their mandated and district approved curriculum. But, through the MYP framework, the teachers select a global context which serves as a theme and encourages students to make connections between subjects, to link what they learn to the real world and global issues, and to reflect and act

on their learning. In connection with the school's mission statement the school aims to develop students' curiosity for knowledge and learning while they emerge as global citizens, committed to successful IB learners. All students are provided with the services and support needed to become lifelong learners that reach their fullest potential.

The school is a partner in the No Place for Hate initiative through the Anti-Defamation League. The framework encourages students, administrators, teachers, and family members to work collaboratively to develop an inclusive school climate approach. Throughout the school year there are school-wide discussion-based learning activities for students and staff to examine identities, reflect on biased behavior, and learn new ways to challenge bias and bullying in themselves, others, and society. The program provides resources for culturally responsive book suggestions with discussion guides and lesson plans for educators and students to promote critical thinking through the lens of diversity, bias, and social justice.

For the past two years, schoolwide activities have revolved around *No Place for Hate*. Twice a month, for forty minutes, the students are divided into small groups, where teachers, faculty, administrators, psychologists, social workers, and students meet to talk about equity, community, teamwork, self-management, social emotional learning, and social issues. Recently, the groups met to talk about how people can be icebergs, and you don't really know everything about a person just based on their outer appearance. All the participants completed a paper strip finishing the sentence, "I am…." The activity allowed all the participants to say something about themselves that they feel is overlooked. Overall, the goal is for students to realize they're not alone and their feelings are valued.

Participants

The researcher is an employee of the district and teaches in one of the elementary schools. The researcher gained access to the proposed research site by outreaching to prospective participants through email.

As shown in Table 3 all the participants in this study are middle school English Language Arts teachers. The teachers vary in experience from six to twenty years of experience. The participants' years of teaching range from 6-20 years. They participate in book clubs and immerse themselves in conversations to better understand their students' thoughts and feelings. This helps to facilitate the conversations happening in the classroom.

Table 3
Participant Data

Participant	Years of Experience	Title/Grade Level	Age Range
Jessica	7	ELA/6	25-30
Deena	6	ELA/6	25-30
Lina	15	ELA/6	30-35
Lori	15	ELA director K-12	35-40
Stu	17	ELA/7	40-45
Lara	20	ELA/7	40-45
Wenton	8	ELA/7	35-40

The participants in this study are two men and five women. They all identify as White, growing up in middle to upper class neighborhoods, and attending schools with little cultural diversity. They all attended college and received their master's at private and public universities. Lori taught in middle school as a 6th grade teacher and is now in her 5th year of being the K-12 ELA director. All the participants reside with their families in middle to upper class neighborhoods which they describe as being a little more diverse

than where they grew up, but similar to where they teach, and has a majority of White students.

This research study was conducted using purposeful criterion sampling. This enables the researcher to work with participants that can provide the best information about the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018. The design of purposeful sampling is to choose a cultural homogenous group that can best inform the research topic. To achieve what Glaser and Strauss (1967define as saturation, or the point in the research process when no new information is discovered during data analysis, the researcher will consider Creswell and Poth's (2018 recommendation of including a minimum of 5 – 25 participants. Participants of this study are middle school English Language Arts Teachers. The sample included seven participants, six teachers and the ELA director.

In a phenomenological study, participants share common traits and experience the same phenomenon. In this study, all the participants have experienced the phenomenon of being culturally responsive teachers. (Creswell & Poth, 2018. The participants are six English Language Arts middle school teachers and the ELA district director. Three of the teachers teach 7th grade and the other three teach 6th grade. The participants participate in weekly planning meetings and have the autonomy to choose materials to be used by their students. All the teachers are implementing culturally responsive teaching and can articulate their shared lived experiences (Manen, 2016).

Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Interviews are a preferred source when collecting data using a phenomenological approach because they allow for the researcher to ascertain the vicarious experience of

being there (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process, and utilizes open ended questions. Appendix C articulates the interview protocol composed of open-ended questions that explore the participants' background, perceptions, experiences, instruction, and professional development. The questions were aimed at evoking a participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) the interview will uncover themes of lived experiences from the participants' perspectives. Johnson and Christensen (2008) further specified that the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge would allow the researcher to understand their inner world and grasp their in-depth viewpoints. Overall, the researcher heard the participants' experience with culturally responsive teaching.

Table 4 describes examples of data that was collected during the study.

Table 4
Data Collection Methods

Interviews	Documents
Independent 30-45-minute virtual interview with each participant.	ELA curriculum for Grades 6 and 7 Teacher artifacts- resources in the shape of texts and materials used to plan for and culturally teach responsiveness.

At the start of each interview, the researcher reviewed the previously agreed upon consent protocols that the participants signed. This included 30-45 minute recorded virtual interviews. During the interview, the researcher was courteous, respectful, and a good listener. At the end of the interview the researcher thanked the participants for their time and valued contribution to the study. After the interview, the researcher received an e-mail of the written transcript.

In accordance with Moustakas (1994) the interview began with a social conversation between the researcher and participant to create a comfortable climate for the participant to respond honestly and comprehensively. The researcher was able to alter the questions as a follow up to what was said (Moustakas, 1994). Participants had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions and discuss relevant topics informally. From the interview questions, the researcher gained an understanding of the teachers' daily experiences in the classroom.

Documents

Documents and artifacts were also part of the data collection. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the researcher needs to define the purpose or using the document and requires adequate time review the materials. The researcher used the categories set out by the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard designed by the NYU Metro Center to review the documents (Bryan-Gooden, Hester, & Peoples, 2019).

The Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard was designed to help parents, teachers, students, and community members determine the extent to which their schools' ELA curriculum is or is not culturally responsive. The score card is broken down into three categories: representation, social justice, and teacher materials. A glossary of academic language with definitions is also provided (Bryan-Gooden, M. Hester, & L. Q. Peoples (2019).

The researcher used the score card as a reference when looking closely at the 6th grade Deep Character Study reading unit and the 7th grade Social Issues reading unit. Curriculum, teacher artifacts and resources are used to plan lessons and instruct students. Documents are used to supplement interviews and observations. They also provide

historical and contextual information (Prior, 2003). Bogden and Biklen (2006) categorize documents into three types: personal (i.e., individually produced, websites, e-mails, blogs), official documents (i.e., curriculum plans, reports), and public documents (i.e., records, archival information, resources that can be searched through the internet). For this study, the researcher used teacher interviews, district ELA scope and sequence plans, mentor texts, and book titles used by the teacher in the classroom for read aloud and shared reading. The researcher also looked at the titles in the classroom libraries accessible to students for independent reading and book clubs.

Data Collection Procedures

After approval from St. John's University's Institutional Review Board, teachers who met the criteria were asked to participate in the study. After obtaining informed written consent, the researcher began collecting data through conducting interviews and analyzing the ELA curriculum, teacher resources and artifacts. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative studies focus on data and the procedure for gathering them. This means, the researcher needed to anticipate ethical issues, conduct a sampling strategy, develop the means to record information, respond to issues that may arise, and store the data securely.

Below are the data collection procedures:

For the interview, the researcher selected a homogeneous group of teachers and coordinated dates and times to meet with them virtually for a 30–45-minute interview.

In accordance with Moustakas (1994) the interview began with a social conversation between the researcher and participant to create a comfortable climate for the participant to respond honestly and comprehensively.

Participants were asked open-ended questions and had the time to elaborate on their lived experiences. The researcher was able to alter them as a follow up to what was said (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions and discuss relevant topics informally.

For the document analysis, the researcher used information from the interview and referred to the NYU score card.

Trustworthiness of the Design

Qualitative researchers ask, "Did we get it right? Is the research valid?" (Stake, 1995) In qualitative research, most of the data is collected by using recording devices and transcribing digital files (Lincoln, 1985). Whittemore (2001) designed validation criteria to check in on the validation and trustworthiness of the study.

First: credibility. Is the data an accurate interpretation of the participants' meaning?

Second: authenticity. Are different voices heard?

Third: criticality. Is there transparency in assessing the validity of the data?

Fourth: integrity. Is the researcher honest in reporting the data?

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "validation" in qualitative research is trying to assess the "accuracy" of the results, as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers. This indicates that the reported data reflects the trust and rapport established between the researcher and participants. To enhance the trustworthiness of the proposed research the researcher utilized the following strategies: (1) triangulation, (2) member checking, (3) peer review, and (4) thick description.

Triangulation. Triangulation involves collecting evidence from different sources to determine common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study utilized interviews and teacher resources. Data gathered through an interview also included resources teachers used to plan and teach a lesson. According to Saldana (2016), triangulation reinforces the validity of the study**,** in researching it from more than one perspective and merging the information from different sources. Triangulation gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the participants' experiences with culturally responsive practices. This combination increases the authenticity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Member Checking. Member checking involves including the participants' thoughts on the credibility of the data and seeking participants' feedback. This approach involves asking the participants to determine if the researcher's conclusions are credible and accurate to their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal is for the participants to feel comfortable speaking honestly about their experiences and beliefs. After the researcher transcribed the interviews, each participant was emailed a corresponding transcript (Creswell, 2013), outlining major findings and themes and asked to verify its accuracy. In the end, through member checking, participants had the final say on whether the writing captured their lived experiences accurately.

Peer Review. Peer review of the data and research is a validation method in which the researcher seeks feedback from someone who is experienced in the field of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher utilized peer review as a strategy to establish credibility by critically engaging in discussion and /or debriefing with her dissertation chair, committee, and educational stakeholders (school building/district

administrators, teachers). The peer debriefer kept the researcher honest by asking questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained. The researcher kept consent forms separate from data and used pseudonyms to keep the participants' names and identity private. The researcher was the only person who had access to the interview recordings and transcripts. All the information was kept in a password-protected computer file.

Thick Description. Rich, detailed descriptions were used in the findings that included participants' actual words and statements. The researcher provided thick descriptions of settings, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures, making the research more credible and transferable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview transcripts with the participants' words verbatim were used to compose thick descriptions and present realistic findings. Thick and rich descriptions draw the reader more closely into the story or narrative, increase coherence, evoke feelings, and a sense of connection with the participants in the study (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). The overall goal was to find patterns and shared experiences amongst the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Research Ethics

The recruitment process began after the approval from the St. John's University's Institutional Review Board. The researcher began by sending an e-mail to the director of English Language Arts department, outlining the research design and methodology for this study. The recruitment/consent process began when the researcher was invited by the ELA director to attend a grade level in person planning meeting. At the meeting teachers were notified of the research project. After the meeting, the researcher followed up with an e-mail asking if they would agree to voluntarily participate in the study if they met the

criteria. Once teachers e-mailed a response of interest, the researcher sent individual e-mails with a recruitment script and informed consent form to outline the research. The consent forms informed the participants that the research would be conducted through virtual interviews that would last 30-45 minutes and require participant consent. Participants were assured that there would be no known risks, involvement was voluntary, and they could decide at any time to withdraw their participation. Once the teachers understood the details of the study and their role as participants, they were asked to e-mail the signed digital consent form back to the researcher. The consent forms were saved in a password-protected computer file.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained. The researcher kept consent forms separate from data and used pseudonyms to keep the participants' names and identity private. The researcher was the only person who had access to the interview recordings and transcripts. All the information was kept in a password-protected computer file.

Consent

After obtaining informed, digital, written consent, the researcher began collecting qualitative data. As described by Moustakas (1994), the researcher maintained the necessary ethical standards. Clear agreements between the researcher and participants were laid out in a letter of consent informing the participants about the nature and purpose of the study. Confidentiality and pseudonyms were used to avoid inclusion of identifiable information in the analysis files. Prior to the interview, the researcher engaged in the *epoché* process to guarantee an objective stance and sets aside any bias about the topic. The researcher agreed to accommodate requests from the participants to

review transcripts of the recordings and comply with requests to delete material from the recordings.

In a qualitative study, data collection and data analysis are simultaneous processes that seek to make meaning of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018. Glasser & Strauss (1967 refer to these processes as constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis aids in the process of identifying patterns, coding data, categorizing, and theming findings and the overall analysis of transcriptions (Creswell, 2016. Moustakas (1994 states organization of the data begins when the researcher looks at the transcribed interviews and document notes and studies them through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. Then, the researcher reduces the data into themes through the process of coding and condensing the codes. Finally, the data is represented in figures, tables, and discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018.

Data Analysis Approach

Interviews

In a qualitative study, data collection and data analysis are simultaneous processes that seek to make meaning of data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to these processes as constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis aids in the process of identifying patterns, coding data, categorizing, and theming findings and the overall analysis of transcriptions (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas (1994) states organization of the data begins when the researcher looks at the transcribed interviews and document notes and studies them through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. Then, the researcher reduces the data into themes through the process of coding and condensing the codes. Finally, the data is represented in figures, tables, and discussions

Analysis of Interviews

The data from the interviews was analyzed through the heuristic process for phenomenological analysis laid out by Moustakas, which provides a practical and useful approach to extract common themes across the data collected. [Creswell & Poth (2018); Moustakas (1994)]. In the first step, the researcher described firsthand experiences with culturally responsive teaching. The researcher had the chance to engage in the epoché or bracketing process, setting aside prejudgments and preconceived experiences of the culturally responsive teaching phenomenon. .

In the second step, the researcher looked through the transcripts to find statements in the interview describing the participants' experiences with the topic. Next, the researcher conducted horizontalization of the data, by developing a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. In the third step, the researcher looked for clusters of meaning or themes in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While looking for patterns and clusters of meaning, the researcher did a first round of coding using descriptive coding. This task involved assigning labels, a word, or a phrase to summarize relevant information from an interview transcript. On the second cycle, pattern coding was used to identify repetitive phrases that helped the development of major themes from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher looked for repetitive phrases that demonstrated participants' knowledge, beliefs, cultural background, instructional practices, and personal and professional development. Saldana (2016) states that during the coding process, the researcher organized and grouped similar coded data into categories. Towards the end of the coding process themes may manifest.

The overall goal was to develop an overarching theme that weaved various themes together into a narrative.

After the first three steps were conducted, the narrative was developed. The researcher created a textural description of participants' experiences describing what happened and included their examples verbatim. Next, the researcher drafted a structural description of how the experience happened. Here, the researcher reflected on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced [Creswell & Poth (2018), Moustakas (1994)].

Analysis of Teacher Materials and Curriculum

The researcher was interested in finding out participants' opinions about the artifacts and resources used from their own records and the materials given to them from the district. Teachers' materials are teacher guides, teacher and student books, handouts, lessons, journals, primary and secondary sources, photos, and websites to implement a lesson. During the interview, the researcher asked the teachers to share book titles and other resources used to plan and teach. The researcher looked for patterns in the teachers' responses. Using the categories of the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard, the researcher reviewed and synthesized the curriculum and other resources used by the teacher (Bryan-Gooden, Hester, & Peoples, 2019).

The researcher referenced two of the categories on the score card, *representation* and *teacher materials*.

Representation. Character and author, diversity, and accurate portrayals of characters. This section focuses on the representations of authors and characters by race, skin tones, abilities, sex, gender, and identity in a non-stereotypical way.

Teacher Materials. Materials reflect diverse cultural identities that are seen as assets and not deficiencies or difficulties. This section focuses on using material that represent diverse cultures, traditions, backgrounds, interests, and multiple perspectives.

Using these categories, the researcher analyzed the documents. In the final step of the phenomenological study, the researcher used data collected from interviews and documents to write a composite description or a long paragraph to describe the phenomenon The composite description is the essence of the experience and includes a textural description of what is happening in the classroom and a structural description of how teachers are implementing the phenomenon of culturally responsive teaching. In the end, analyzing the data for themes and reflecting should yield an explicit understanding of the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

Researcher bias occurs when the person performing the research has an influence on the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is a potential limitation in the study, as the researcher is passionate about culturally responsive teaching and literacy may contribute to the researcher developing a personal bias. It is necessary for the researcher to disclose any preexisting biases and judgements. Then the researcher must practice methods of *epoché* and bracketing to be receptive to the data learned from the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher remained objective throughout the story, but there were times when she felt challenged in maintaining the validity of the research. Wolcott (1990) described some steps to take to assist the researcher in maintaining validity. Wolcott suggests listening more and talking less. For example, when a participants' answers

seemed contradictory to the researcher's thinking, the researcher followed Wolcott's suggestion to restrain from a conflict, act confused and ask the participant to repeat themselves. This way the participant had a chance to clarify their response assisting the researcher in documenting answers with accuracy.

Wolcott (1990) also suggests that the researcher may be candid about their beliefs but need to check in and eliminate personal judgements. For example, Wolcott recommends checking your work for words like *should* or *ought* in sentences and revising them. The researcher made efforts to eliminate judgments through revision.

Feedback from other colleagues, like member checking is a way to check the researcher's validity. After the researcher wrote up the findings, she asked colleagues to read the write up and check that the research-maintained validity based on the participants' comments. In addition, writing accurately and making a word-by-word assessment, the researcher tries to make every sentence technically correct by checking every word in the paper for correct verb usage and grammar tenses. When sentences seemed redundant or did not convey the messages of culturally responsiveness, the researcher deleted the sentences from the paper.

Conclusion

This is a phenomenological qualitative study. The participants of this study were purposefully selected and share common characteristics and shared lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of this study is to bring to light the importance of culturally responsive teaching. In doing so, this study explores how participants' shared beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and professional development are significant in teachers' ability to teach cultural responsiveness to their students. The results of this study are

limited to its participants, and it is unknown if these findings can be generalized across other populations.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This phenomenological study identified and examined teachers' culturally responsive attitudes and practices through the lens of 6th and 7th grade middle school English Language Arts teachers' perspectives, and then analyzed how culturally responsive practices were influenced by teachers' knowledge, skills, disposition, attitudes, and beliefs towards teaching students from diverse populations. The researcher attempted to gain insight into the teachers' lived experiences regarding how they understood and used culturally responsive literature in their teaching environment, while also analyzing the methods and strategies the teachers used to develop, design, and implement a culturally responsive ELA curriculum. The qualitative data was gathered through individual teacher interviews, and an analysis of the middle school reading curriculum in Grades 6 and 7. The researcher met with each teacher for a 40-minute video interview. Teacher interviews were conducted during teachers' free time before and after school hours. This chapter explores the following theses that emerged from teacher interviews and curriculum analysis based on the research questions:

RQ1: What types of knowledge, skills, and disposition do teachers need to be effective in being culturally responsive?

RQ2: What types of attitudes and beliefs do culturally responsive teachers need to teach students from diverse backgrounds?

RQ3: What types of methods and strategies do teachers use to develop, design, and implement culturally responsive teaching?

In addition, the following questions were asked about teachers' education background, instructional practices, culturally responsive experiences and professional development.

Description of Participants

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study included interviews with a total of seven participants: six ELA middle school teachers and the K-12 ELA director. The participants are committed to culturally responsive teaching. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The following is a brief introduction to the participants who were interviewed by the researcher.

Jessica and Deena started their teaching careers in elementary school. They both have a master's in elementary education. Jessica has a TESOL certification. They both identify as White females. Jessica has 7 years of teaching experience; Deena has 6 years. They are two of the three teachers on the sixth grade ELA team. They started teaching in the district the same year. This is Deena's third year teaching 6th grade and Jessica's second year, having taught 3rd grade her first year in the district. As new teachers to the district, they receive mentorship from the ELA director throughout the year. Both are passionate about teaching the whole child and creating an environment where every child feels safe. When planning lessons and choosing books they look through the lens of multiple perspectives, representation, mirrors, and windows, gender, race, stereotypes, and other social issues. They spend their summers participating in teacher-led book clubs, reading middle school and young adult novels they are excited to include in their libraries.

Lina also started her teaching career in elementary school. She identifies as a White female. She holds a master's degree in elementary and secondary education. She has 7 years of teaching experience. Lina has been working in the district for 10 years as a middle school teacher. Lina teaches both social studies and English on the 6th grade team. Lina has a passion for teaching books and history through multiple perspectives. She leads books clubs for teachers and facilitates conversations focusing on books being mirrors, windows, or sliding doors, as well as gender, race, class, stereotypes, and other social issues. Lina is committed to creating an environment for her students where every voice counts.

Lori started her teaching career in middle school. She identifies as a White female. Her education accreditation includes a master's degree in elementary education, TESOL certification, and an administration degree. She also has 10 years of teaching experience in the classroom and 5 years as an administrator. Lori taught as a 6th grade ELA teacher before transitioning to the administrative role as the K-12 director of ELA. Both as a teacher and administrator she holds strong beliefs in being culturally responsive to her students. Lori holds weekly ELA team meetings to support and assist in creating the curriculum. She is also a mentor for new ELA teachers. Lori leads book clubs in the summer and throughout the year facilitating conversations around elementary, middle, and young adult books. All her book clubs invite teacher participants to view books through the narrative structure the author chooses, whose voice is heard and whose is silenced, questioning stereotypes about gender, race, and class, and how social issues are presented and handled. There is also a focus on thinking about ways of presenting the book, the transactional relationship teachers

and students will have with the books, and whether these books represent mirrors and/or windows.

Stu started his teaching career at high school. He identifies as a White male. After student teaching in the district, he was hired as an ELA high school teacher. He taught in high school for 15 years and moved to middle school to teach 7th grade for the past 2 years. He holds a master's degree in secondary education and a TESOL certification. He feels his experiences in high school assist him in preparing culturally responsive and relevant lessons. Stu is involved in writing curriculum and facilitating student groups in discussions around the No Place for Hate initiative through the Anti-Defamation League. Stu spends time in the classroom getting to know his students' interests so that he can suggest titles they will enjoy.

Lara teaches 7th grade ELA. She holds a master's degree in secondary education and has been teaching for 20 years. Throughout her experience she is noticing the shift in her own perspective on teaching literature from multiple perspectives. She says she is more mindful of including the voices of all her students in classroom conversations.

Wenton teaches 7th grade ELA. He holds a master's degree in secondary education and has 8 years of teaching experience. Wenton is an advocate for his students. When teaching a book, he guides his students to look at characters from multiple perspectives and to respond to them with their own thoughts and feelings.

The interview questions were divided into four sections: background information, instructional practice, teaching, understanding, and reading with a diverse student population, and professional and personal development.

Defining Culturally Responsive Teaching

When asked this question, all the teachers used the following words and phrases: inclusive to all backgrounds, awareness of culture and race, sensitivity to diverse backgrounds, providing multiple and various perspectives in the classroom, exposure to different time periods and cultures, and honoring all voices.

All teachers agreed that to be culturally responsive you need to know your students as individuals. Deena a 6th grade teacher, said, "It's thinking about my students and teaching them. I think about my students' differences. I ask myself what books can I share with them to have conversations to honor their voices? How can I create a safe environment for this to happen?"

Jessica a 6th grade teacher said,

> It means that you're aware that your students are from all different backgrounds and that they have unique experiences and knowledge to add to the classroom. Then, it is my responsibility to plan lessons that are inclusive in representing them. In this way, my students feel respected and seen while also being given the opportunities to learn about each other's cultures and experiences. When I choose texts to read in the classroom, I want to incorporate other backgrounds, along with being sensitive to my students' feelings.

Lina, a 6th grade teacher said,

> It's being all inclusive in your classroom by making sure the textbooks, and novels in your classroom represent the students in your class as well as multiple perspectives. Also, revising the curriculum so my students feel represented and

connected to what they are learning. When they feel seen, and feel their voice matters they show more interest in learning.

Stu, a 7th grade teacher said,

My classroom has kids from all diverse backgrounds. As a culturally responsive teacher, I give my students opportunities to talk about themselves and express who they are through their writing. Then I can choose books for them that fit their individual personalities.

Lara and Wenton, also 7th grade teachers, both stated, "To be culturally responsive means to think globally. Lara said, "When I teach literature, I model for my students how to look at a character from different angles, so I am not zooming in on only one perspective." Wenton said, "My students are growing up in a global world, so it's important that I bring in text that represents them along with other cultures that may not be in the classroom but are in the world."

Lori, the ELA director added,

Being culturally responsive is looking at different facets of identity. It is honoring race, ethnicity, religion, friendships, family dynamics, interests, and hobbies. Then you create experiences that are responsive to what kids share so that you are honoring all the voices and identities in the classroom.

Student Diversity

The teachers acknowledged that most of the students in their classroom are White. As stated above, the middle school is 55% White. However, aside from appearances, many of the students come from low socioeconomic families and

alternative family units consisting of single, divorced, biracial, homosexual, and heterosexual parents. Also, some students are being raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, or older siblings. There is a discrepancy between economic status amongst the students. The classes with more ENL students are the most diverse. Students in middle school are also exploring their gender, sexuality, and pronouns.

According to Stu, the school highlights the diversity of the students by including a diverse group in the morning announcements. Often, the announcements will focus on a specific month, for example, celebrating Women, Black, and Latino history.

The Impact on Students and Teachers When Race and Cultural Backgrounds Differ

All the teachers shared that by acknowledging racial, cultural, and gender differences, in the classroom, their students felt more comfortable, and more confident in presenting lessons that represented the diversity in the classroom and introduced their students to other cultures.

Lori said to be a teacher for "all students," it was important for her to know more about her students' backgrounds. Lori added that having her TESOL certification gave her a better understanding of how to plan her lessons so she could best teach reading and writing to her ELL students. Lori believes that acknowledging the differences in cultures and traditions between herself and her students provides "a gateway into creating experiences where we can all learn from each other."

Wenton described the differences with his students not just in terms of cultural differences. He added,

My 7th grade students are twelve and thirteen years old. They are growing up in a time that is completely different from when my colleagues and I grew up. With all the

technology, social media, after school activities, it has all greatly changed from when we were in middle school. Everyone is different from each other.

Lara said,

> It's a tricky question because race can refer to so many different things, it is not necessarily just skin color and cultural background. If I work on creating a relationship with my students beyond the academics of the curriculum, then the experience in the classroom will be positive and rewarding for both of us.

Stu feels that having a different cultural background from his students does matter. He confesses that he tries to keep his personal interests outside of the classroom. He finds himself speaking more comfortably through the books in the classroom. He said,

> I watch for the students' responses to the books and when I see they are developing certain likes, then I feel more comfortable sharing. But I still try not to project my own thoughts, to avoid putting myself and my views in the center of attention. It is not intentional, but I do hold some personal bias. For example, I tend to prefer books with male authors and male protagonists. I choose to read mysteries and those books lean towards my preferences.

Deena confessed that she struggles with being the White teacher, and the cultural differences that exist between herself and her students. She says,

> I care about my students. Sometimes I feel like here I am the White teacher in front of the class. I want to represent my students whose voices are not heard nearly as much. There is a piece of me that feels I am not doing enough for the marginalized students in my class. I know this is an important conversation to

> have, I don't know if it is guilt. I always acknowledge that I'm White and I can't fully understand and walk in the shoes of my Black and Latinx students. For me personally, I acknowledge the privileges I have. That is what makes it harder for me to talk about. I really want all my students to feel represented and for their voices to be heard. I hope my students don't think or see me as the teacher who will never understand because I am not the same race, ethnicity, or have a similar background to them.

Jessica shared that she is half Irish and half Maltese. Her grandparents have instilled in her an understanding and appreciation for the hardships of being immigrants to the United States Her grandfather came to this country illegally and was sleeping on benches. She said,

> Growing up hearing his stories prepared me for the empathy and respect I have for the students in my class whose parents may not speak English and work multiple jobs to give their children, my students an education. Coming from a White middle class family, I may not completely understand what my students and their families go through daily, but my grandfather's stories have opened my eyes and instilled in me the importance of seeing life through another person's lens. I was also a Spanish major in college so I can communicate with my Spanish speaking students in their native language. This is a bond we share, and my students feel more comfortable.

Lina said she shares with her students that she is Jewish and follows some traditions. She said,

> At first, my students were shocked, but then they became interested in learning more about me, my religion, and my traditions. I put myself out there in the hope that they will feel safe to talk about their religious beliefs and traditions. I think they see I'm being genuine. Regarding teaching she says, I obviously don't share the same experiences as my students, but I do my best to find materials that represent them in some way and help to feel safe.

Instructional Practice

Pre-Service Teaching Programs on Culturally Responsive Teaching

All the participants concurred that there was no explicit training in culturally responsive teaching in their course work. "The closest mention would have been a book that a professor shared about multiculturalism and how people celebrate holidays around the world or a book about social issues," Wenton said. Lara added, "The only talk of being responsive to students was regarding serving the diverse academic needs of students and differentiating instruction. Nothing about culture. As an undergrad English major, I was asked to analyze literary styles, not multiple perspectives of characters.

Stu said that most of his diversity training has been on the job. He feels lucky to have a classroom library with many culturally diverse books. He said,

> There are so many titles on my classroom library shelves that are both mirrors and windows for my students. However, ten or more years ago, nobody talked about cultural differences or diversity amongst us or in books. It was taboo to talk about differences. We were expected to be color blind and make sure our students all fit together. Now, talking about our differences and celebrating our diversity is becoming much more normalized.

Deena studied literacy in grad school. She recalled some discussions around thinking about a students' cultural backgrounds. She remembers a discussion that took place in graduate school. She said,

> In the text the author referred to skyscrapers. The professor asked us if the text seemed comprehensive and accessible to all students at the grade level it was intended for. Until the class discussion, it never occurred to me that there could be students in my class that wouldn't know what a skyscraper was. I never thought about how only kids who live in or have visited a big city would even know about skyscrapers.

From those discussions, Deena said she learned to be more mindful about asking questions and not just assuming all kids would know the answer. She added, "I learned that I need to consider that my students will be coming from different backgrounds and have different experiences." She recalls talking about standardized testing and how sometimes questions and passages are worded in a certain way, putting some of the students at a disadvantage because they have no connection. "They just don't understand the question or have anything in their schema to refer to," she confirmed.

Having attended college in upstate New York and majoring in Spanish, Jessica feels she gained knowledge in how to serve the needs of students from different cultures. She said,

> I worked with an immigrant family and tutored their kids. It gave me an opportunity to learn about their culture and recognize our differences. I also student taught in a school where there were undocumented students in my class. I learned about the Dream Act. Having that work experience in college really

opened my eyes. Growing up in a wealthy, White, suburb on Long Island with Jewish and Italian families I lived in a bubble until I got to college.

Lina said, "Nothing stands out to me regarding culturally responsive training in college or grad school. I'm not that old, but it was 15 years ago. There were probably other students in my class from different backgrounds, but we never talked about diversity amongst ourselves or as a class topic.

Access to Culturally Responsive Resources and Planning Curriculum

The participants unanimously agreed they were thankful for all the diverse books that were purchased to add and replace books in their classroom library. Each classroom library received multiple copies of texts written by diverse authors sharing multiple perspectives and covering social issues like family, identity, stereotypes, social pressures, race, gender, and others. Lori acknowledged that the district is in its third year of committing to diversifying the reading lists and accessible books to students. Lori said,

> We're still at the beginning, but we're continuing to add titles that represent and are inclusive to the students. I think it is an area to grow in broadening the scope of the types of materials we provide students. For example, reading books from new authors and inviting them to the school and finding books about a population that isn't represented equally. When I was teaching in the classroom, I would always consider the types of texts I would be using in a unit and check to make sure the reading represented diverse experiences that my students could relate to.

Lara added,

> With all the new titles on the shelf, students have more opportunities to self-select. By moving away from whole class novels to trade books and book clubs, I've noticed my students wanting to talk more about the issues that come up and feel more comfortable asking questions.

Stu sees himself being more sensitive and aware of his students now than a few years ago. His library is filled with many diverse characters. He finds that his students are receptive and have a lot to say. When it comes to text selection, Stu has the students focus on the author's perspective. He said,

> I ask the students if they think the author represented the topic in an accurate way and what they see these diverse authors writing about that other authors they've read have not done. I'm not trying to pry into their personal lives, I just want them to see I genuinely care about their choices. I want them to let me know if a character is being accurately represented in a book and if they have questions or comments about the characters or the issues being presented.

All the teachers feel they have an input as to what gets taught and what books are selected. As the director Lori is always looking to expand the diversity of books across the district. She believes it's important to provide the students with a balance between classical and contemporary texts. Most importantly, she feels strongly about providing students with a diverse literary experience. She pointed out that she carefully chooses texts that do not promote a political stance. Lori said,

> Recently, there's been a mind Shift in teaching literacy. We are teaching children not curriculum. For the past two years, the district has made the effort to provide texts with more representation in the titles, authors and topics of the books. The middle school teachers do a great job at getting to know their students and they choose books with content that is relevant and authentic for their students' interests and lives. The truth is if the book is not interesting and relevant, the students won't read it.

Looking into the future, Lori thinks broadening the scope of materials; providing texts with diversity and social issues that kids know and want to read about; and introducing students to new authors and populations that are not equally represented would be important areas of growth.

Although Lori does a lot of research to find new texts, most of the titles are suggested by the teachers. She acknowledges all the teachers' passion for inclusivity and representation.

The middle school teachers participate in book clubs to read some of the contemporary titles and to discuss the books through the lens of a teacher and the lens of a student. This process helps the teachers design lessons in the curriculum that promote representation and empathy. When she taught in the classroom. Lori remembers starting the year with her 6th graders using the text *My Name* by Sandra Cisneros. She would start the year with a mini-identity unit by sharing the origins of names, family experiences, and cultural backgrounds. She said,

> This is when I had explicit conversations with my students about how I am different from the author Sandra Cisneros who is Mexican, speaks Spanish and

shares vignettes from her family stories in Mexico. However, I would always acknowledge that there were students in my class with similar cultural backgrounds to the author and always invited them to tell their story.

Regarding text selection Stu said,

Presently, my library is full of culturally responsive texts. It's becoming normalized to always present a text with a diverse character or a particular social issue. However, in the past there were times I felt pressured to present a book because it had a diverse character in it. I didn't feel as comfortable or genuine in my teaching. For example, I didn't feel comfortable giving an Asian student a book just because there was an Asian protagonist in it. I want to be familiar with the book and make sure the characters' experiences presented an accurate account of an Asian experience and was not loaded with stereotypes. As I got more comfortable with these diverse texts, I shared them more with my students.

Lara, Wenton, and Stu shared that over the past two years there have been many additions to their 7th grade libraries. The students are reading books with issues that middle schoolers are familiar with such as being biracial; homosexuality; gender identity; homelessness; addiction; abuse; poverty; incarceration; dress codes; discrimination; immigration; dreamers; and more. They explained that the texts are gateways to uncomfortable conversations. The teachers talked to their students about how some people are born into more difficult situations than others and it's nobody's fault. Stu said, "I think these conversations have a big impact on our students."

Autonomy to Choose Books

All the teachers like having the autonomy to select books for their students that elicit conversations about real issues in the world.

> Deena is glad she has the autonomy to choose and recommend books. She said, When I was hired, I spoke with my director, and she told me I could pick a book to read as a whole class novel. I chose *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang. In the book the main character is Asian, and she lives in the hotel. Her parents work as housekeepers and are secretly hiding new immigrants from the hotel owner. She manages the from desk and has an ambition of becoming a writer, but her parents tell her she should stick to math because English is a new language for her. So the story brings up stereotypes, immigration, blue collar jobs, persistence, determination to follow your dreams, and risk taking to save others. The kids love talking about the book.

Jessica feels that she has a great deal of autonomy to select text for her sixth-grade readers. She said Lori is always receptive to her suggestions. Jessica has read texts with her class that bring up controversial topics having to do with race and social status. There are times she recalls students feeling uncomfortable because they have a personal connection with certain topics like incarceration or racial slurs.

Uncomfortable and Courageous Conversations

In his book, *Courageous Conversations About Race*, Glenn E. Singleton talks about the four agreements, (1) stay engaged, (2) experience discomfort, (3) speak your truth, (4) expect and accept non closure.

When asked about their comfort level talking about difficult topics with their students, some didn't see it as a problem, others wanted to ignore the question, and

other's confessed that they felt vulnerable. Teachers' vulnerability was due to their own inner conflicts, personal bias, or ignorance. Many times, the teachers would say, "I'm trying my best, but I think I'm disappointing my students." All the teachers were willing to experience the uncomfortable, but they were avoiding the truth. They felt inexperienced and unprepared.

During meetings, Lori gave the teachers opportunities to talk about what's happening in their classroom and how it's going with the resources. She reminded the teachers they are in a safe place and can share their thoughts and feelings. Lori observed some teachers answering quickly saying, "It's going great! My students love the books." Other teachers sat silently and listened. But others, slowly spoke up and shared their discomforts. Teachers talked about not knowing how to answer questions students would raise about gender, sexuality, and race. They felt they didn't know the answers or didn't know how to facilitate a conversation surrounding some topics.

Lara said,

> One day, in the midst of the awkward silence, I told my students not to repeat words or phrases they heard because it might hurt someone's feelings. But I realize now, that didn't address the issue because the students were counting on me to help them unpack the words.

Wenton said,

> I tell my students this is a safe space for them to talk and make sense of the world around them. But sometimes I feel like I'm letting them down, because I have the same questions or thoughts and no answers. When this happens, I let

them know I am working to make sense of these issues too. I think it's ok for them to see my uncertainties.

Teachers are feeling vulnerable. Deena, Jessica and Lina recalled a class discussion about people being falsely accused based on race. Students talked about television shows where people of color were watched and followed in stores. Other students spoke from personal experiences when they were with their families and made to feel uncomfortable in public because of their skin color or for speaking Spanish. Dina felt at a loss for words. She said, "as a White teacher, I feel exposed because I don't know what it's like to be watched in public or targeted because of my race."

Jessica said,

> Sharing my discomfort is supposed to promote empathy, but really I feel like a fraud. As a White teacher I can't give a personal experience about being pulled over by a police officer and asked to get out of the car, like a character in one of the books we read. But some of my students might know these feelings and then I feel helpless.

Lina added,

> I share with my students that I am Jewish and often they are shocked. I live in a community with other Jewish people and with White people and I just don't stand out. So how am I helping my students address the biases of this world?

Stu said,

> Teaching has made me a better person. I am more aware of other's perspectives and realize I need to be more patient. But, I still have those moments when I

will choose not to keep a text on my shelf because I don't feel prepared or informed enough to answer a student's question that might arise. They can always read the book and find the title somewhere else. But I feel better that it wasn't me who gave them the book.

During online teaching, teachers felt responsible to address current events. Lina talked about processing the events of the January 6th insurrection, and William Floyd's murder. "I told the kids I only really know as much as you know but I'll do my best to answer your questions. Not always seeing their faces or knowing who else was listening in the room made me very uncomfortable."

The teachers did observe students having respectful uncomfortable conversations amongst themselves. Lara and Wenton talked about using resources from multiple perspectives. They've observed their students' conversations getting louder as they become more passionate about topics like slavery, gender inequality, undocumented immigrants, and other current issues. Lara said, "I'll give students some background knowledge before reading a text, but then I'll challenge them to think about the character's situation, the author's perspective and whether it is the same or different from their own thoughts and feelings."

During a deeper literacy conversation, Deena observed students using the phrases she taught them, "This makes me very upset and I'm going to tell you why I am upset. I empathize with this character because..."

Jessica noticed the maturity in some of her students. She observed two students sharing opposing points of views, and they were not yelling or exchanging derogatory terms towards each other; rather, they were taking a moment to process and think about

each other's side. She said, "Even though my students come from different backgrounds and have alternative points of view, they are still able to have respectful conversations, which is kind of cool."

The teachers have observed students talking about how crazy it is to see the parallels between the past and present. Specifically, they noticed how upset their students were to read that people are still targeted because of the color of their skin and judged by their social and economic status. Overall, the teachers have observed their students engaging in deeper conversations and doing their best to see multiple perspectives, express empathy, and be respectful.

The 6th grade read-aloud book is *From The Desk of Zoe Washington* by Janae Marks. The main character (Zoe) is Black. Zoe is convinced that her father has been falsely accused and convicted of a crime and is now serving time in jail. The sixth-grade teachers noticed their students reacting to the unfairness happening in the book. The students were angry when they learned more Black people are put in jail for crimes than any other race. They were frustrated that Zoe's father's lawyer gave up and was not doing more to prove his innocence. They wanted to talk about racial injustice in this world. The teachers tried to keep the conversation about the book because they did not feel prepared to have a broader discussion on the topic of race.

In one part of the book the author described a fight on the basketball court when one player called another the N word. Deena said,

> My students were visibly uncomfortable after I read that part. They were shocked and the room went silent. They physically didn't know what to say or do to respond. I knew I had to stop reading and talk about this part. I knew I

couldn't ignore the scene and move on. I asked my students “how does this make you feel?” while inside I was feeling as shocked and confused as them.

Lina added,

When I talked with my class about the book, I pushed them to have uncomfortable conversations. When they talk about whether they think Zoe’s father is innocent or guilty, they also talked about stereotypes and the way people are treated because of the color of their skin. Students shared that they know how it feels to be watched in a store, made to feel suspicious, or be falsely accused of an action. This comes up when we talk about Zoe’s thoughts and actions working with the Innocence Project to free her dad from jail. These are the times I feel like I should be doing or saying more, but as a White teacher I just don’t know that feeling. I tell my students that I am an ally and an upstander.

Deena shared,

Even if the demographics in my class don’t represent the race or social issue in the book, I need to open these uncomfortable conversations to help students process. These are real world issues that my students need to unpack and talk about. I use these guided prompts: how does this make you feel, the character seems to be represented unfairly do you agree or disagree? have you witnessed people being falsely accused or have you assumed a character is a certain way without knowing the facts? This is where the shells start to break a little bit. The initial discomfort is now acknowledged. And even if I don’t know all the answers, I tell them I am always here to support them.

The students are resilient. Some conversations surrounding text that have taken place in all the participants' classes have had to do with bullying, wants and needs, and economic status. Students are being bullied for not wearing the latest fashion trends and the brand names. In conversations, the students share how shocked they are by lack of social issues progress over the years. Lara said, "It's so interesting to observe my students process the world through their own perspectives," Stu said. In his classroom, discussions center around their shock at how technologically advanced the world is, yet issues like bullying, race, homosexuality, and economic status seem to remain the same for decades."

All the teachers agreed the challenge is finding the balance between addressing uncomfortable conversations, maintaining a safe space, and keeping diverse books accessible for all their students.

Lara said,

> My students started to talk more about the social issues in the text. They shared how students have been bullied about their clothes being too big, too small, or old looking, and how people make assumptions rather than asking why? It's during our class conversations that situations like these are dissected and the students realize a student may not have the money to buy new or fitted clothing.

Teaching, Empathy, Understanding, and Reading with a Diverse Student Population

Book clubs for teachers and for students have been a doorway to honoring and acknowledging teachers' and students' beliefs and comfort levels. Recently, in a book club with teachers, Lori shared an awakening she observed from one of the teachers. The book was Free Lunch by Rex Ogle, a heartbreaking memoir of starting middle school,

poverty, abuse, addiction, and neglect. She shared that during the discussion one of the teachers said, “I never really thought that kids in my class could experience this at home.” Later the teacher shared with Lori that the book completely changed his teaching approach. Other teachers told Lori that this book should be a mandatory read for every teacher.

Lori said,

> The book and the experience were real game changers. Teachers are often saying, I never really thought about the hardships and challenges in my students’ lives, or I can’t really identify, so the books raise their consciousness. I try to provide opportunities for teachers to explore their own identities. It is revealed in their approach to the students.

Deena shared with her students that even though her experience is unlike Zoe’s, she still tries to connect with the character, build empathy, and think about how that character might be feeling. She said,

> I assured my students that the classroom is a safe place. If they ask me a question that I don’t have an answer to, sometimes I will open the topic up to the whole class. If it’s an explicit controversial topic, I say I need time to think about this first before we can have a class conversation. I explain to them that we all have different backgrounds and experiences. Some topics might be relatable and others not, but we will always do our best talk and learn from each other.

Lina said,

> I try to be a more compassionate teacher. I let my students know that I am learning alongside them and there are experiences I don’t have, but they do. My

students teach me about their cultures and experiences. I learn from what they share through their cultural lenses and family stories. I work on building empathy by learning from them.

Mirrors and Windows

The conversations about books being mirrors or windows start in September on the first days of school. Lori set up a framework for the teachers to think about whether the texts they are reading to their students are mirrors or windows. Lori says, "students engage in the language when choosing, sharing, and reflecting on books." Referencing the work of Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), books that are mirrors ask the students to notice the similarities in life experiences, and perspective between themselves and the characters; books that are windows ask students to notice the differences in life experiences, and perspective between themselves and the characters.

Before teaching 6th grade English in middle school, Deena talked about her four years teaching in elementary school and not finding a way to cultivate an environment focused on cultural responsiveness to the diversity of her students. Now, in middle school she immerses her students into literature that are windows and mirrors for them. She feels lucky that the director (Lori) is supportive and provides books to diversify her library.

To celebrate their reading at the end of the year, students are asked to choose a text they read during the year and write a reflection to share how the text is a mirror or window to them.

All the teachers acknowledged that their middle school years were different from their students'. They shared with their students how they may not know what it is like to

walk in the footsteps of the author or the character, but with each text students might feel a connection. They let the students know that in the classroom they are welcome to share their culture, language, traditions, and social experiences.

When planning lessons, Jessica shared she wants to make sure all her students feel seen and included. She tries to find out as much as she can about her students' family life and culture so she can choose more relevant texts. Jessica reads middle school books that are windows into her students' lives. She said,

> Reading these books made me realize that these characters are like the students in my class. They are going through issues like having a family member in jail, being homeless, living in this county illegally or other social issues. Their lives are so different from mine. It is important to read these texts and personal narratives to get a window view into my students' lives.

Deena started the year off with her sixth-grade students by modeling how books are mirrors and windows to herself. She told her students,

> This book is a mirror for me because the character has anxiety and I have anxiety. This book is a window for me because my childhood was so different from the character who is in trouble with the police or the character who is Asian and managing the front desk of a hotel while her parents try to hide undocumented immigrants. I didn't go through this experience, but I have empathy for the character. My transparency with my students is a big part of building a relationship. We talk a lot about empathy towards others.

Deena noticed her students being more transparent and engaged when talking

about texts and sharing their thoughts and feelings. She pointed out that students who are having mirror experiences may not speak up, but she can tell they are engaged by the volume of pages and minutes they spend with their books. When she observes students having window experiences, she sees them telling their friends about characters who are so different from them, going through experiences unlike their own. They are starting to see the world through another lens.

When asked which books their students seem to be seeking out the most, the consensus from the teachers were that the Black and Hispanic students are drawn to books that are mirrors for them. They are looking for themselves in characters. In contrast, the White students are going for the window books. They are not looking for themselves. Deena said, "They seem to be seeking the adventure and not having to connect with the character, but rather look through a world that is not their own. That's huge for them and I love that!"

For a class read aloud and shared texts, the teachers choose books with minority characters. They feel that even if they only have a handful of marginalized students in their class, they still don't get enough opportunity to see themselves in books, as much as the White students. After a read aloud, the teachers love the positive vibe and enthusiasm that fill their rooms. All the teachers recalled a similar story of one of their students saying, "Oh I really like this character, this book, do you have another like it?" Then, both smiling, they head to the classroom library to find a similar book. This is their why!

Jessica observed that some of her sixth-grade students were drawn to books that were mirrors or windows and others preferred reading fantasy. She said, "but those books (fantasy) can lend themselves to window experiences".

In Lina's sixth grade class, their responses to the read aloud, *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, prompted her students to learn more about the court system and why People of Color seem to be falsely accused and incarcerated more than White people. Leah said, "As a White teacher I am starting to feel more comfortable and confident in having my students pursue these inquiry projects." She credits her comfort and confidence to her own evolution and pursuance of reading more books that are window experiences and books that train teachers to facilitate uncomfortable conversations in the classroom.

Lina, Deena, and Jessica shared that the 6th grade social studies teachers are noticing a carryover between English class and social studies especially during the Tolerance unit. The students seemed to be more open to talking about their culture, heritage, and the inequities of race, gender, and religion in the United States and all over the world.

One of the social studies teachers shared with Lina that when the class read a text about the life of a Muslim boy, there was a reference to Mecca. A student in the class who is Muslim, raised his hand and shared some personal stories about his family's traditions and beliefs. The teacher told Lina how proud the student felt when connecting to the text and having this mirror experience.

When Lina's class read a text about an African village with no electricity and children digging for water to drink and wash their body and clothes, she noticed the empathy. The class talked about how difficult life must be in Africa and how much they take for granted. Lina said, "The students started to show more of an appreciation for what they have and started to see the world through another perspective."

Overall, the sixth and seventh grade teachers are noticing a shift in perspective thinking and uncovering empathy in their students. The consensus is they must be doing something right.

Teaching to a Diverse Student Population

The participants' responses to questions about teaching to a diverse student population varied between curriculum lessons and life lessons. Commenting on his own growth and comfort talking to his students, Stu shared,

> I tell my students, yes, I am an English teacher, but my main purpose is to teach you to be good people. This is a staple in my teaching, and I am optimistic that the students are transferring this value into their reading. During conversations about books, if students make remarks which they think are funny, but can be offensive, I acknowledge the comment and explain to the students why the comment can be thought of as offensive. I don't ignore the comment because then the students will continue making them.

Deena approaches some of her students' remarks through an empathy lens. She said,

> I know my students just repeat what they hear without any knowledge of the consequences of their words. I think it has to do with maturity. They are eleven and twelve years old which is a difficult age. They don't even realize their words are offensive. I tell them some of you may feel uncomfortable and that's why you laugh or get quiet, but it's important to think about how you would feel if someone said something that was offensive to you. Often, this leads to a conversation about stereotypes and how they need to be more conscious of the words they are using towards each other.

Stu, Wenton, and Lara shared that it's only in the past 3 years that they are more comfortable recommending books with characters who are gay, trans, or experimenting with their identity. Stu said, "A few years ago, I would have hidden these books because it was not in my comfort zone to talk about these topics even with my peers. But now when my students talk to me about changing their names and sharing their pronouns, I am more relaxed."

In-Service Professional and Personal Development

All the participants agreed that professional development for culturally responsive teaching is beneficial and appreciated when the opportunities arose. Lori, the director of English Language Arts K-12 shared a PD she did with tenth grade ELA teachers. They created a think tank where they reflected on their own identities and then looked at the percentages of the students they teach based on race and ethnicity. From there they created student webs and discussed the profile of the students they teach. Discussion led to curriculum reform and the types of books they might want to read with their students. Next, they spent time formulating questions to elicit conversations about text.

In another PD Lori challenged the teachers to think about the effect the text has on them. She encouraged them to think about how their similarities, differences, life experiences, and perspectives might impact the way they engage with the text and their students. She asked them to think about their students beyond the exterior of their clothing, behavior, and achievements and to really "get to know the students," as Donald Graves (2006) writes in his book A Sea of Faces. Lori wanted the teachers to see their students and sharpen their ability to get to know them as unique individuals. Lori added,

> Our job is never done as educators. It is always in revision because our population is always shifting. Even if the population stays somewhat the same, the world around us is always shifting. So, I try to engage teachers and students in the conversations. I want students and teachers to see their world in the classrooms by engaging in books that are mirror and window images for them.

More curriculum reform came about as a result of inviting teachers to participate in book clubs. The teachers gathered to read contemporary literature written for elementary, middle, and high school readers. It became a snowball effect. Teachers were fascinated with the new literature; excited to read more and plan lessons for texts that reflected their student population, and order new titles for their libraries. Lori said:

> When we read these new texts, my hope is that the teachers discover there's a match between the characters in the story and the students in their classrooms. I am always encouraging the teachers to read texts from the lenses of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors. I want them to think about the impact the book has on you as an adult reader and they might engage their students with the book, so it has the same impact.

The district is moving in the direction of more diverse books and is currently using the Teachers College Reading and Writing curriculum. Lara said, “the TC curriculum offers titles for diverse texts that we are now using in class.” Wenton said, “I see a big shift in the literature our students are reading. They are seeing themselves in books and really getting excited about books.”

Even with the professional development mention, the teachers expressed a need for ongoing and sustainable support. Most said, “I’ll get there,” when referring to uncomfortable conversations in the class. Deena said, “when I had two students shouting names at each other, I wished I had a better response, but my lack of exposure and training to handle these conflicts held me back.” Lara said, “as a district and educational system we need to find better ways to handle gender identity bullying. We want to help our students, but there are scenarios we have not been trained to deal with. Wenton said, "I think my students are more aware of themselves and more comfortable sharing their gender preferences. However, as teachers, we need more techniques and staff development to let our students know we see them the way they see themselves.”

Culturally Responsive Sustainability

The teachers shared their thoughts regarding the support and professional development they would like to receive from their building leaders to insure the sustainability of culturally responsive teaching.

Jessica said:

> I feel like we need to get away from the blanket statements of ‘we must be culturally responsive’ and to start targeting the best practices to teach students to respect each other’s differences and to think about the consequences of their words. I could really use professional development to help me handle situations when students are making comments about race, abortion, gender, politics, and trends in the news.

Stu added,

> As a district and a school, we need to work on this idea of being culturally responsive. I think we've come a long way with diverse text selections; our principals trust us regarding curriculum planning, but we don't really have open conversations with administration and other staff members about more support to sustain culturally responsive teaching in the classrooms.

Deena agreed, "I know I have my principals' support, but I don't have conversations with them about culturally responsive teaching." Wenton said, "I feel more support from my director. Lori is always there to get us better texts that really open the kids' eyes to the world we live in. I don't have additional conversations with my principals."

Curriculum Review

The district is in its second year of using the units of study from Teachers College Reading and Writing project. The researcher looked at the sixth-grade unit *A Deep Study of Character* and the seventh-grade unit *Social Issues*, *Reading for Empathy and Advocacy.* The units of study were introduced to give the teachers a scope and sequence for teaching reading and writing. The units provide the teachers with multiple perspectives resources in the forms of books, videos, and social media platforms. The teachers are embracing the units and find the materials are eliciting deeper conversations and understanding of more complex topics.

The sixth-grade unit *A Deep Study of Character* focuses on developing theories about characters based on traits, social pressure, stereotypes, and behaviors. Students are reading diverse books with characters that may or may not represent them. In this study the students are taught to investigate how the author's language and perspective demonstrates individual and group power, social pressures, identity, gender norms, and

fitting in. As an example: during the sixth grade read aloud From *the Desk of Zoe Washington.* Most of the students cannot connect to the experiences Zoe is going through, but the read-aloud broadens their world. Students are taking a deeper look into the questions of representation, equity, character's voice, power, and behavior. Students are having more meaningful conversations about identify and societal pressures and empathy for character that are similar and different to them.

The seventh-grade unit *Social Issues*, *Reading for Empathy and Advocacy* focuses on relationships and the impact the relationships have on the characters and the feelings they provoke in the readers. Students investigate how power affects relationships, and why that is significant. In book clubs, students analyze group related issues considering power, perspective, stereotypes, and assumptions. Students read, reflect, and consider the roles of an upstander, bystander, victim, or perpetrator. Readers use their personal responses to better understand and build empathy for the character and social issue. In their social issues book clubs, 7th grade students are discussing real world problems daily. They are reading books that both mirror and window their experiences. Their discussions focus on issues of homosexuality, divorce, biracial families, poverty and undocumented children. The teachers observe their students talking about fairness, equity, equality, and acceptance. The students are commenting on whether they agree or disagree with the author's perspective The consensus from the teachers was the students are making connections, building empathy and are eager to make a difference in the world.

Conclusion

The overall finding in Chapter 4 demonstrated that teachers were aware that they held implicit bias, making it uncomfortable for them to address controversial topics with

their students. They revealed their vulnerability and feeling unprepared. However, they also asserted their commitment to culturally responsive practices. For this reason, the teachers requested more time and support to process their own feelings, while also learning best practices through ongoing and sustainable professional development.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to acquire a better understanding of the lived experience and personal beliefs of culturally responsive teachers in a middle school setting. The study addressed teachers' willingness, ability, and desire to acquire the skills, knowledge, and to develop the disposition needed to become more effective culturally responsive educators.

In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the purpose of the study; to examine the beliefs, knowledge, attitude, and preparation of culturally responsive teachers. In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the theoretical frameworks and reviewed relevant literature about culturally responsive teaching. In Chapter 3, procedures and methodology for the study were explained. In Chapter 4, the researcher's findings were explicitly written into narratives. This chapter includes the findings and their relationship to prior research and existing literature and concludes with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future practice and research.

The researcher's findings were explicitly written into narratives. This chapter includes the findings and their relationship to prior research and existing literature and concludes with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future practice and research.

This study was set up to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What types of knowledge, skills, and disposition do teachers need to be effective in being culturally responsive?

This study demonstrated that the teachers who were studied self-identify as culturally responsive. Each has the knowledge, skills, and disposition to educate the

students in their class; acknowledges and respects cultural differences; and empowers marginalized voices.

Culturally responsive teachers use their knowledge, skills, disposition, and attitude to focus on establishing student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, and positive student learning experiences. Culturally responsive teachers believe all students have the ability to succeed and are committed to making sure that every student in their class is visible, represented, and feels safe in order to foster students' identities.

The teachers studied value the student-teacher relationship. They took the time to learn about their students' culture, community, and family. They use artifacts, resources, and texts that provide multiple perspectives ensuring that every student's experience has a voice. The teachers studied place their students at the center of their learning process, using their strengths and personal interests as opportunities for success. As a result, their students felt confident, ready to take risks, and make every effort to reach their potential.

RQ2: What types of attitudes and beliefs do culturally responsive teachers need to teach students from diverse backgrounds?

The self-identified culturally responsive teachers studied were open-minded, understood the importance of teaching from multiple perspectives, and developed empathy for their students' cultural backgrounds. However, the teachers were aware of their implicit biases and vulnerabilities. They acknowledged feeling uncomfortable in facilitating conversations when they had no experience and could not identify with an issue. They addressed the need for support and professional development to give them time to check in on their own discomfort and meet with their colleagues to rehearse and gain more confidence in facilitating uncomfortable classroom conversations. The

teachers wanted to facilitate and guide their students but realized they needed their own support and development too. The teachers were aware of their vulnerabilities and biases and recognized the need for time to unpack and revise these beliefs, so they could move forward in sustaining culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

RQ3: What types of methods and strategies do teachers use to develop, design, and implement culturally responsive teaching?

The culturally responsive teachers studied had access to resources and artifacts from multiple perspectives that represented mirror and window experiences for students to help them design curricula that celebrated differences and promoted student identities. In order to confront their own biases, the teachers realized they needed to rise up and embrace their commitment to learning about other cultures. They needed to show the effort and make the time to view their students' experience through the same lens. For this reason, many of the teachers voluntarily joined book clubs and read middle school texts. During these discussions, teachers expressed surprise and guilt of not always knowing and often misunderstanding the life experiences of their students outside of the school day. These opportunities helped the teachers to plan for authentic teachable moments in their lessons. The teachers worked hard to focus and refocus their lenses and be open minded to alternate points of views, so that marginalized voices were heard and valued.

Implications of Findings

The theoretical framework of this study verified the theory of culturally responsive teaching, reflecting the ways in which the teachers studied designed and modified their instruction to create safe and welcoming classroom environments. The

study also shows the transformation of teachers' cultural competence, beliefs, attitudes, empathy, and connection with their students.

This study's theoretical framework is based on the work of Gay (2018); Paris (2012); Ladson-Billings (2009), who stated, in summary "It is the responsibility of schools and educators to foster students' identities and accentuate their present and future capabilities, attitudes, and experiences." In their view, culturally responsive teachers are the key to this. Further, "Culturally responsive teachers educate the whole child, raise awareness of cultural differences, and empower, marginalized voices." (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The following is a discussion and interpretation of the findings of this research through the lens of the culturally responsive teaching theoretical framework.

Research questions regarding teachers' preparation, knowledge, skills, and disposition to teach a culturally diverse population, were based on the existing research regarding the gap between student and teacher diversity (Geiger, 2018). Public schools in the United States are becoming more culturally diverse, even as the teacher population is not (Frey, 2018).

The overall results of this research indicated that the transformation of teachers' attitudes, methods of instruction, and disposition are essential to their willingness, ability, and desire to provide relevant and responsive, learning experiences for their students. The teachers saw themselves as facilitators and learners in the classroom [Cross, *et. al*. (1989), Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2018), Howard (2020)].

The teachers studied identified as White teachers teaching a diverse population. They acknowledged their own vulnerabilities and discomfort when they could not

connect and empathize with their students. In addition, they reflected on their own beliefs and implicit biases. However, they did not abandon their students or their purpose. They persisted and did their best to go beyond their comfort zones. They collaborated and created authentic and challenging lessons. They established a trusting relationship with their students. They established a safe, respectful, and reflective learning environment. Overall, they demonstrated a willingness and passion to promote culturally responsive teaching.

For learning to be relevant and responsive to a diverse population, teachers need to practice cultural competence (Howard, 2020). The teachers should be familiar with their students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences, teach content should come from multiple perspectives, teachers should establish a welcoming classroom culture and maintain high expectations for all their students. [Gay (2018); Paris, (2012); Ladson-Billings (2009)]. The teachers in this study collaborated and created lessons that represented their students. They also outreached to families and communities to understand more about the culture of the students they teach.

Teachers' beliefs can shape their practices whether consciously or unconsciously [Gay (2010); Milner (2015)] Challenges of having a narrow understanding of cultures and assets of the students and communities they serve, could also results in a potential disconnect (Samuels, 2018).

At the heart of a culturally responsive framework, teachers must care, communicate, empower, sustain, and support their students academically, socially, and emotionally [Gay (2018); Paris (2012); Ladson-Billings (2009)]. The culturally responsive teachers integrated multicultural knowledge, teaching students to recognize

and respect each other's culture, and supported students to develop and maintain cultural competence (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, (2009). They designed curriculum with lessons that are relevant to their students (Gay, 2018; Paris, 2012). They placed their students at the center of their learning process using their strengths and personal interests as opportunities for academic success (Gay, 2018).

A teacher's knowledge and beliefs shape decision-making and practices with students. An informed teacher can direct the cultural effectives and inclusivity of their classroom (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive teachers like those studied are providing their students with mirror and window experiences; to reflect students' familiar world and learn the history, traditions, and experiences of other cultures and groups (). They selected books for their students written by ethnically diverse authors with characters that mirrored the diverse student population. Teacher qualities of taking another person's perspective and being aware of diversity and others' experiences, supports teachers' attempts to effectively manage a culturally responsive environment in the classroom (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020).

As open minded as the teachers tried to be, there were times when implicit misconceptions and their own diverse backgrounds made it challenging to empathize and connect with their students. The teachers studied felt they needed time to reflect on their own beliefs and check in on any implicit bias they might hold.

The teachers studied believe that culturally responsive teaching is sustainable and must be practiced daily in the classrooms and in schools by teachers, administrators, and district leaders. Those teachers expressed their concern about lacking the pre-service and in-service professional development to prepare them to be culturally responsive.

Some expressed lacking the confidence and empathy needed to make sure they were properly representing their students and the social issues arising from the texts.

Fortunately, the district is beginning to provide professional development on cultural responsiveness, they feel like a work in progress. The teachers are feeling supported by their literacy director and the administration. Funding to purchase diverse library books and materials is becoming more available. Teachers are purchasing instructional material to ensure not to perpetuate stereotypes or fail to represent diverse groups.

Relationship to Prior Research

This study was built upon the existing research about culturally responsive teaching, teachers' knowledge, preparation and beliefs, classroom culture, and implementation of a culturally responsive and inclusive English Language Arts curriculum.

The existing literature and findings of this study support the significant influence of teachers' culturally responsive teaching on student- teacher relationship, classroom culture, and students' learning experiences. However, the findings also revealed that teachers need daily support and guidance in being culturally responsive and implementing in pedagogical strategies. Time needs to be scheduled throughout the year to provide teachers with continued professional development, grade-level meetings, and professional learning communities where teachers are supported to identify, create, evaluate, and modify instruction, to ensure that lessons and resources reflect and highlight the diversity of the students (Gay, 2018).

The existing evidence-based research demonstrated positive influences on both teachers and students when teachers acquired culturally responsive teaching methods. Consistent and sustainable professional development towards educating pre-service, and in-service teachers is an emerging topic in education (NYSED.gov, CR-SE Framework, 2019). This study was designed to further investigate teachers' cultural competence to acquire the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to become effective culturally responsive educators. Resulting in positive student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, and achievement.

As already shown by the data, the changing demographics of U.S. schools is projecting that by 2045 the nation will become minority White. But the rate of minority teachers is not rising. That makes teachers considerably less racially and ethnically diverse than their students. [Frey (2018); Geiger, 2018). To accommodate the growing diverse population, it is the obligation of the American education system to support and mentor teachers in respecting student differences, modeling high expectations, collaborating with families and local communities, and practice cultural responsiveness [NYSED CR-SE Framework (2019); (2019)].

The evidence-based research recognized that the cultural gap between teacher and student diversity impacted teachers' effectiveness to be culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers did not possess the cultural competence and knowledge to teach students about their own culture and its contributions. [Siwatu (2007); Paris (2012); Ladson-Billings (2009); Bonner, Warren, & Jiang (2018); Gay (2018); Howard (2020)]. Teachers who did not come from a culturally diverse background, did not feel confident in their capacities to create safe classroom

environments and welcome uncomfortable conversations; there was a cultural disconnect between the teachers and the students. [(Ladson-Billings (2000); Milner (2018); McKoy, MacLeod, Walter, & Nolker, (2017); Bonner, Warren, & Jiang (2018)]. Where this disconnect exists, teachers miss opportunities to provide classroom experiences which promote student achievement [Ladson-Billings (2009); Siwatu (2007); Milner (2018); Samuels (2018); Denessen, et al (2020); Howard (2020)].

When professional development for culturally responsive teaching is not a priority, teacher have no outlets to examine their own implicit bias and misconceptions. For teachers, this bias had an adverse effect on their beliefs in the ability and academic potential of their minority students. These teachers were conflicted and in need of sorting the accuracies from the biases. The curriculum, materials, and texts available lacked views from multiple perspectives and raised the issues of stereotypes, bias and invisibility of a diverse student population [Bishop (1990); Au, W., Brown, & Calderon (2016)].

Teachers who received training in culturally responsive practices reflected on the value of self-critical reflection and the role it had in boosting their confidence, creating safe learning environments, designing accessible and cultural lessons, and developing empathy for their students (Howard, 2020). During professional development sessions, teachers had opportunities to be self-reflective and be critically conscious of their purpose of teaching. While developing cultural competence, teachers learned perspective-taking skills. They became familiar with texts from multiple perspectives. They had opportunities to have critical conversations with colleagues to check in on perspective taking and cultural responsiveness (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020).

They were always mindful in thinking about why they teach and who they teach [Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2008); Howard (2020)].

Teachers who took into consideration the culture of their students, used this knowledge to plan lessons and follow up activities (Gay, 2018). As a result, a positive student-teacher relationships were established, teachers reached out to families and demonstrated a willingness to learn about their students' cultures [Siwatu (2007); Bonner, Warren, & Jiang (2018); Gay (2018)]. When teachers demonstrate (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007)d cultural competence, students felt valued and visible. Their students achieved academically and socially (Samuels, 2018). Teachers began to see their students as producers of knowledge rather than recipients (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers observed that marginalized students spoke up in the classroom and felt respected, when the values of classroom culture welcomed them to take risks, feel safe, and try their best to achieve (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007).

Limitations of the Study

This study was developed based upon the existing research of culturally responsive teaching and extended to explore teachers' cultural competence as well as the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to be effective in teaching a culturally diverse population. Through the purposive sampling procedure, middle school English Language Arts teachers were contacted, and a total of seven participants agreed to participate in this study. The study included interviews and teacher artifacts, documents, and resources. Some limitations related to the study were apparent within the research.

The teachers revealed an internal struggle between their commitment to culturally responsive teaching methods and being aware of their own implicit biases.

These feelings made it more challenging to develop empathy for their students. The teachers expressed being unprepared and not confident enough to bring up uncomfortable topics with the whole class. Aware that they lacked a personal connection with their students, made it more challenging to show empathy. They acknowledged their need to check in on their own personal biases. The teachers feared they were failing their students in some way. But their feelings indicated a need for more support and development. Even with being aware of their own vulnerabilities, they were determined and motivated to reflect on themselves so they could provide relevant instruction to transform their students' lives.

In a phenomenological investigation such as this one, the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Researcher bias occurs when the person performing the research is passionate about the topic and may have influence on the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Descriptive data could fall into the researcher's interpretations of the circumstances. The researcher's positionality and interest in the topic could cohere with the research inquiries (Milner H. R., 2007).

In this study, the researcher reflected on her own reading life in middle school and how all the books were mirror experiences. Throughout the researcher's 28 years of teaching, the researcher noticed that student diversity was on the rise, yet the classroom library was still stacked with book titles from her own middle school experience. The researcher wanted to learn more and be involved in promoting more culturally diverse books in classrooms. It seemed to be a strength of the study since the researcher's perspective would allow making connections between cultural responsiveness and the

data; however, the researcher's belief in the necessity and effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching could influence the interpretation of the participant's responses.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This study was developed based upon the existing research of culturally responsive teaching and extended to explore teachers' cultural competence, skills, knowledge, and disposition needed to be effective in teaching a culturally diverse population. The teachers may have insufficient education and information than needed to appropriately support and sustain a culturally responsive curriculum. The results of this study indicate the importance of culturally responsive teaching in developing cultural competence, positive student-teacher relationships, a welcoming classroom culture, an inclusive curriculum, and setting high expectations. Students benefit when teachers design lessons that represent a diverse population.

Through this study, the researcher found teachers trying to teach empathy for characters of other cultures and ethnicities but having a difficult time connecting to their own empathy because they lacked the cultural background. The researcher also found teachers trying their best to plan lessons that represented the diversity in their classrooms or open window experiences but did not always feel confident in their delivery. Teachers' awareness and competencies in culturally responsive teaching could be improved by providing teachers with ongoing sustainable professional development programs.

By implementing the recommendation herein, the school and the district can create professional development programs and provide resources for teachers to practice culturally responsive methods and strategies. In addition, teachers would receive the

emotional support to check in on their own attitudes and beliefs, better preparing them to practice culturally responsive teaching. Most importantly, the school and school district can establish an organizational culture to support and train new and existing teachers.

The study also examined the gap in diversity between students and teachers. All the teachers who participated in the study identified as White. Although the majority of the students in the school district are White, the percentage of Black and Latinx students is on the rise. Some teachers reported if a topic made them feel uncomfortable, they would minimize or avoid it to prevent the possibility of a conversation turning too controversial, aggravating students, or initiating conflict (Samuels, 2018). Teachers felt they could not collaborate or reach out to the community and parents of their diverse student population making it very challenging to form any relationship inside or outside the classroom (Milner, 2018).

Recommendations for Future Research

While this research was focused on teachers' knowledge, disposition, belief, and access to resources, future research can investigate how the administration, district, and state education departments can build in pre-service and in-service educational and professional development courses to create a sustainable commitment to culturally responsive teaching.

This study demonstrates the positive influence of teachers' culturally responsive teaching on student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, and students' learning experiences. Future research on culturally responsive teaching should investigate reforming and transforming all aspects of education—from administration and curricular design to the classroom--so that they are culturally responsive. Gay (2010) made the point that if teachers need to adjust their instruction to respond to children's cultural

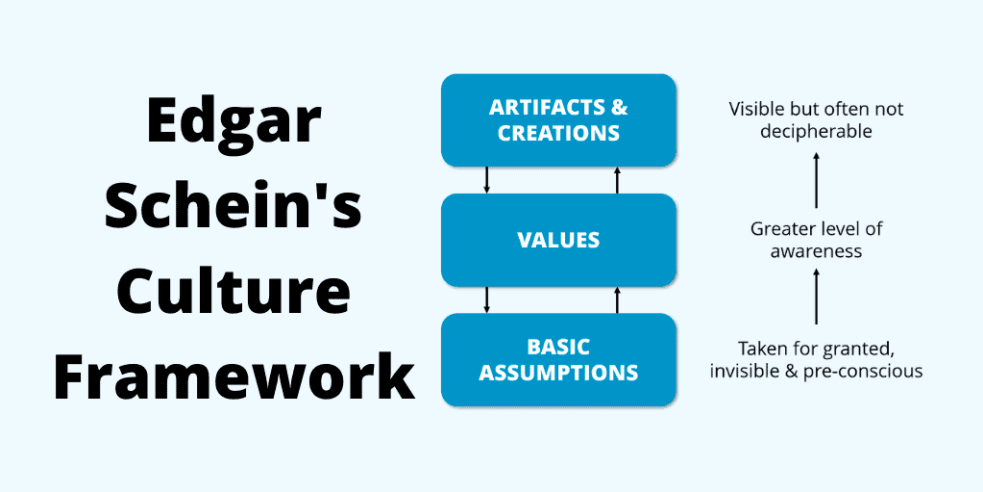
learning and social needs in the classroom, then school administrators must have a similar mandate regarding the entire school culture and climate.

There are questions teachers ask themselves that need to be resolved, such as *Why do I teach? Whom do I teach? and What do I teach?* With the rise of student diversity and the increase of White teachers there will continue to be a disparity between student diversity and teacher diversity. The research promotes the value of culturally responsive teaching, but it must come from the top down. District and building administrators must commit to a sustainable culturally responsive initiative deeply embedded in its mission. Teachers and administrators have a moral responsibility to guarantee that all students are successfully educated and instructed in a curriculum that fosters understanding of cultural and social mores among diverse groups. Failing to incorporate culturally responsive practices fosters a monocultural experience, prioritizing one culture, usually White privilege, while excluding the marginalized majority in the classroom. (Au, W., Brown, & Calderon, 2016).

Schein's (1985) three levels of cultural organization speak to artifacts, values, and assumptions When visualizing cultural organization as an iceberg, artifacts and values are visible, and assumptions are not. Many times, the artifacts and values don't drive the assumed behavior. A district may demonstrate artifacts with culturally responsive books in classroom libraries, and teachers may be teaching culturally responsive lessons around Black History or Hispanic Heritage months, but it is not always sustainable. To be sustainable, you cannot just change the visible behavior, you must change the culture. For culture to change, it must be happening everywhere. This means that every day, all the time, teachers, administrators, district leaders, and state

educators must work together to perpetuate and sustain a culturally responsive environment (Schein E. H., 2010) (Schein E. H., 2010) (Schein, 2010). For this reason, future research should investigate the knowledge, education, and commitment of administrators and district leaders to a sustainable culturally responsive culture.

Figure 1
Edgar Schein's Culture Framework (1984)



This study examined teachers' knowledge, skills, disposition, attitude, beliefs, and resources to be culturally responsive and the influence of these skills and practices on student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness. Future research should examine culturally responsive school leadership with an emphasis on self-reflection to acknowledge their own understanding. It is not enough for administrators to prepare teachers; culturally responsive leaders must promote culturally responsive school environments. This can happen by promoting inclusivity and integrating student culture in all aspects of schooling and engaging with the community. Culturally responsive school leadership is under researched. There is

There is also a need for future research into leadership preparation courses (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016)

Conclusion

Kumashiro (2000 states, "We are not trying to *move to a better place*; rather we are just trying to *move*." The data in this research demonstrated that culturally responsive teachers have a significant influence on maintaining teacher-student relationships, creating safe classroom environments, and implementing an inclusive curriculum. Practicing culturally responsive teaching has a positive impact on the teacher too. The teachers in this study used their knowledge and skills to demonstrate cultural competence, modify beliefs and attitudes, develop empathy, and make connections with their students. Teachers who took into consideration the culture of their students, used this knowledge to plan lessons and follow up activities (Gay, 2018. As a result, students felt valued and visible. They saw their students as producers of knowledge rather than recipients and held them accountable to reach their greatest potential (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The theoretical framework of this phenomenological study supports the researcher's findings that culturally responsive teachers are committed to making sure all their students and all the cultures in their classrooms are visible, valued, and respected. The teachers have high expectations for their students and expect them to reach their highest potential. Culturally responsive teachers use their knowledge skills, disposition, and attitude to focus on establishing student-teacher relationships, classroom culture, and positive student learning experiences. They use artifacts, resources, and texts that provide multiple perspectives ensuring that every student's experience has a voice. The teachers believe that culturally responsive teaching sustainable and must be

practiced daily in the classrooms and in schools by teachers, administrators, and district leaders. The conceptual frameworks of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010); culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) value and promote an inclusive curriculum, expect rigor and high achievement, highlight marginalized voices, and support sustainable learning of all cultures and communities. This study hopes to move teachers, administrators, and school culture to a place where diversity is visible, valued, respected, and honored.

APPENDIX A INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD

To: Randall F. Clemens
Tova Markowitz
Thu 1/20/2022 4:25 PM

* External Email *

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Jan 20, 2022 4:25:02 PM EST

PI: Tova Markowitz
CO-PI: Randall Clemens
Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2022-106** *The Culturally Responsive Teacher*

Dear Tova Markowitz:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *The Culturally Responsive Teacher*. The approval is effective from January 20, 2022 through January 19, 2023.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology
Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Certificate of Completion

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

fhi360
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

THIS ACKNOWLEDGES THAT

Tova Markowitz

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED
THE IRB COURSE IN THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APRIL 14, 2021

APPENDIX C TEACHER CONSENT LETTER

St. John's University
School of Education
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, New York 11439

Consent Form for Teachers

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the role of a culturally responsive teacher. This study will be conducted by Tova Markowitz, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at St. John's University. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Clemens in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at St. John's University.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in a recorded virtual interview relating to your experience as a culturally responsive teacher. The researcher will ask for your permission to record the interview. You may view the recording and request that all or any portion of the recording be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve 30-45 minutes of your time.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

These are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the researcher understand the role a culturally responsive teacher better.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure that the subject's name and identity will not become known or linked with any information they have provided. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the interview recording and transcript. All the information will be kept in a password-protected computer file.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

RESEARCHER'S AND FACULTY SPONSOR'S INFORMATION

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Tova Markowitz at 917-763-8708, Markowit@stjohns.edu or the faculty sponsor Dr. Clemens at 718-990-2554 clemensr@stjohns.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT-IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT

___Yes, I give the researcher permission to use my name when quoting material from our interview in her dissertation.

___No, I would prefer that my name not be used.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

_____ _____

Subject's Signature Date

APPENDIX D TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview questions for the participants

Background Information

Tell me what cultural responsiveness means to you.

Describe the diversity of the students in your class.

How does your race and or cultural background differ from the students that you teach? In your experience, does it really matter? Can you think of an example when race and or cultural background impacted your teaching?

Did you receive any diversity or multicultural training in your pre-service teaching program? If so, please describe the experience(s).

Instructional Practice

What changes have you made to be more responsive to culture and diversity? Can you give an example?

How are instructional materials selected for your classroom? How much input or autonomy do you have in curriculum choice- what gets taught? When? How?

Thinking about cultural diversity, are there some literary works or texts that you're particularly proud of selecting or using? If so, can you tell me why?

Do your text selections lend to opportunities for students to read about characters that mirror their cultures and experiences as well as window views to characters from other cultures and experiences? If so, can you tell me about how your students respond to these texts?

When creating a lesson or project, how much of it is influenced by student interest? Background? Culture?

Experiences teaching with a diverse student population:

Can you talk about a time when you felt confident and proud of yourself? Your students?

Can you give an example? (When did it just work?)

(You went beyond your comfort zone; you had a moment where your lesson changed your life)

Can you think about a time when you noticed your student/s feel proud of themselves?

Can you give an example?

Can you think of a time when you felt uncomfortable? Can you give an example?

Can you think of a time when you noticed your student/s felt uncomfortable? Can you give an example?

Professional and Personal Development

What professional development, classes or training did you receive/ are you receiving to help you teach/work with a diverse student population and be a culturally responsive teacher? Please describe the experience(s).

Are there any areas that you would like to improve on when it comes to culturally responsive practices in your classroom? Can you give an example?

How are district administrators, principal, and assistant principal supportive or not supportive of culturally responsive teaching? Can you give an example?

Do you have anything you would like to add that we have not yet talked about?

In your experience, is being culturally responsive teacher making an impact on you? On your students? Can you give an example?

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Vita

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