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FINDING THEIR WAY: TEACHER JOURNEYS TOWARD CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Krista Keogh

August 2013

Advisor: Susan Korach

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Abstract

Hawley & Nieto (2010) indicate that students' race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning in two important ways: how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and teachers' assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning. Research has indicated that the most significant factor in student success is the classroom teacher (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Marzano, 2007; Nye, Konstantopolous, & Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2002; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002). Teacher professional development regarding culturally responsive pedagogy has been promoted to help teachers address this achievement gap (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009; National Education Association, 2005; Singleton, 2005). The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and explore how teachers described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and training on their practice. In this case study, three teachers who had voluntarily participated in culturally responsive training were interviewed and observed in their classrooms. Gay's (2002) five elements of culturally responsive pedagogy—cultural understanding, curriculum, caring and relationships, communication, and instruction—served as a framework for data analysis and were used to examine how these teachers demonstrated culturally responsive

teaching practices. Additionally, the influence of ongoing professional development that focused on equity and culturally responsive pedagogy was explored. Key findings revealed the following: many culturally responsive strategies had become a part of teachers' personal theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974), and the teachers articulated a cognitive shift or change in mindset (Dweck, 2007) regarding race and equity. It was also noted that teachers trying to become more culturally responsive in their practice made efforts to build positive relationships with their students and create positive learning environments. Their action revealed an understanding about the need to balance social supports and academic press. The findings support the notion that culturally responsive teaching differs from "just good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1995 p. 159) in that it requires teachers to regularly reflect on instruction and be intentionally responsive to student needs in the classroom. The study also revealed the tension teachers perceive between culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching with a mandated curriculum.

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Chapter One: Introduction

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. Ronald Edmonds (1979, p. 23)

It has been several decades since The Coleman Report (1966) noted an academic achievement gap between Black and White students. Their findings revealed considerable racial and economic segregation within schools and indicated that socioeconomic status and family background had a significant impact on student achievement. Still today, Hawley & Nieto (2010) indicate that students' race and ethnicity influence teaching and learning in two important ways: how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and teachers' assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning. For decades teachers have attempted to close the racial achievement gap through intentional and unintentional ways. In 1994 Ladson-Billings coined the term "culturally relevant" to describe "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 17-18). For twenty years, the term culturally relevant pedagogy has been used by educators to describe the practices they intentionally use to meet the needs of students of color in their classrooms. Although the Coleman Report (1966) stated that, "...above all, schools bring little to

bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context" (p. 325) many more recent studies (Edmonds, 1982; Edmonds & Fredrickson, 1979; Stedman, 1987; Wiley, 1976) have focused on disproving the assertion within The Coleman Report that schools do not have bearing on student learning. Edmonds (1982) found:

There are unique characteristics and processes common to schools where all children are learning, regardless of family background. Because these characteristics, found in schools where all students learn, are correlated with student success -- they are called "correlates". This body of correlated information began what is now referred to as Effective Schools Research. These correlates include: strong instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations for student success, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, and positive home-school relations. (p. 4)

Other researchers and educators have also been interested in the factors beyond a student's background that can affect his or her achievement in school (Delpit, 1996; Gay, 2000; Haycock, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1999). In addition to these correlates, highly effective classroom teachers within a school are a single factor that has surfaced frequently as an influential component of an effective school. (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Marzano, 2007; Nye, Konstantopolous, & Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2002; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002). Haycock stated "In the end, the most central ingredient is teachers who really know their stuff, and have a wide range of teaching strategies to reach all kinds of learners" (as cited in Holland, 2007, p. 57).

Statement of the Problem

In 2011, ACT reported,

Hispanic and African American high school graduates met ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, mathematics, and science at substantially lower rates than did Asian and White graduates. For example, the rate of White graduates who were college ready in English (77%) was twice that of their African American peers (35%) (ACT, 2011).

This gap may be attributed to a number of factors, but most importantly these factors could include access to a quality teacher in the classroom who enlists the use of culturally responsive practices. Culturally responsive instructional practices have made a difference in the achievement gains for students of color (Davis, 2006; Glasgow, McNary, & Hicks, 2006; Kuykendall, 1992). Haycock (2011) reports that there are currently many high minority, high poverty schools closing the racial achievement gap. Some of the strategies the identified as effective in closing the achievement gap include:

- Teachers increase and keep high expectations for all students. It has been found that students in poor schools earn A's for work that would earn them C's in affluent schools (Prospects, 1997).
- Effective teachers have strong verbal and math skills, and have a deep understanding of their content (Haycock, 1998).
- Teachers set clear and specific learning goals (Education Trust, 2011 slide#101)
- Teachers frequently (every 4-8 weeks) assess students to measure progress and they act immediately on the results (Education Trust, 2011 slide #101).
- Teachers assign rigorous assignments. "A student can do no better than the assignments they are given." (Haycock, Slide #96)

Teachers and school leaders who are effective in closing achievement gaps, “focus on what they can do, not on what they can’t” (Education Trust, 2011 slide #91) Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as the ways in which teachers use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2000). Gay (2002) also suggests there are five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity; including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; demonstrating caring and building learning communities; communicating with ethnically diverse students; and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. Gay’s (2002) five elements of culturally responsive teaching helped frame this study.

Although evidence shows that specific teaching strategies can be effective in closing achievement gaps, little research has been conducted regarding the professional development of in-service teachers related to implementation of these culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Purpose and Importance of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and share how these teachers described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and training on practice. Limited information is available about how teachers have gained experience in teaching in a culturally responsive way or how they have applied culturally responsive pedagogy in their interactions with students. Culturally responsive professional development often

includes an exploration of beliefs and personal culture as well as strategies to use in classrooms. The study explored teachers' perceptions of the impact of culturally responsive professional development on their personal beliefs and practice. It is hoped that the journey these teachers took toward culturally responsive practice will inform teachers and administration about teacher learning and the systems that support and/or impede their development as culturally responsive teachers.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers who are intentionally working towards cultural responsiveness describe their teaching journey?
2. How do teachers describe and enact their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?
3. What is the impact of culturally responsive professional learning on teachers' instruction?

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap. The difference between how well low-income and minority children perform on standardized tests as compared with their peers. For many years, low-income and minority children have been falling behind their White peers in terms of academic achievement.

Cultural Proficiency. Knowing how to learn and teach about different groups, having the capacity to teach and to learn about differences in ways that acknowledge and honor all the people and the groups they represent, holding culture in high esteem, and seeking to add to the knowledge base of culturally proficient practice by conducting

research, developing new approaches based on culture, and increasing the knowledge of others about culture and the dynamics of difference (Lindsey, Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2003).

Culturally Responsive Teaching. A term that describes how teachers use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2000). This term is synonymous with culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally responsive instruction.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world. Culturally responsive pedagogy is divided into three functional dimensions: the institutional dimension, the personal dimension, and the instructional dimension (Lynch, 2011).

Cultural Understanding. In this study, cultural understanding is explicit knowledge about cultural diversity, cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups. Also includes understanding of one's own culture.

Culture. Values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors learned from others, often family members (Garcia, 2011).

Curriculum. A course of study teachers and students follow (Garcia, 2011). Curriculum, in its most simple, essential, commonly understood form, is the "what" of education. It is crucial to academic performance and essential to culturally responsive

pedagogy. Even the most "standard" curriculum decides whose history is worthy of study, whose books are worthy of reading, which curriculum and text selections that include myriad voices and multiple ways of knowing, experiencing, and understanding life can help students to find and value their own voices, histories, and cultures (Teaching Tolerance, 2013).

Ethnicity. Refers to a person's identity with a certain group of people. A social construct, which categorizes people based on ancestry, culture, religion, national/continental affiliations (Garcia, 2011).

Instruction. "The engagement, the interaction, the dialectic discourse of students and teachers in the process of teaching and learning" (Gay, 2000, p. 148).

Multicultural Education. Multicultural education relates to education and instruction designed for the cultures of several different races in an educational system. This approach to teaching and learning is based upon consensus building, respect, and fostering cultural pluralism within racial societies. Multicultural education acknowledges and incorporates positive racial idiosyncrasies into classroom atmospheres (Wilson, n.d.).

Race. A social construct that refers to the categorization of people into groups based on heritable characteristics and visible traits (Garcia, 2011). In this study, race and the racial achievement gap are examined because students in achievement gap data are frequently categorized based on racial identity.

Students of color. In this study, this term refers to non-White students. In some achievement gap data, students of color refer to Black and Hispanic students.

Teaching journey. How teacher beliefs and practices evolve during one's career as a teacher, which helps construct current philosophies about teaching and learning.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter explores the literature on how teacher journeys towards cultural responsiveness, and teachers' lived experiences, might affect the development of teachers' values and beliefs about teaching students of color. In order to understand the motivation for many teachers to embark upon this journey, it is also helpful to understand what disparities exist among racial groups. The statistics regarding the achievement gap and other inequities, such as an overrepresentation of students of color in special education classes and underrepresentation of students of color in gifted programs, will be discussed, along with legislation that has been created to provide accountability measures for closing the gap. The journey for the participants in this study included ongoing professional learning, therefore a brief review of culturally responsive professional learning will be discussed. The literature defining what culturally responsive teaching looks like and corresponding effective practices will be examined through Gay's five essential components of culturally responsive teaching: cultural understanding, relationships and caring, communication, curriculum and instruction. Finally, the importance of having an effective teacher in the classroom to implement these strategies is supported through literature.

The Teacher Journey

From the time teachers begin their career in the field of education, their beliefs about their practice and their students are evolving. Everything that happens during their careers, as well as events and personal histories from their upbringing help teachers construct their dynamic philosophies about teaching and learning. In her research about the teacher journey towards cultural relevance, Ladson-Billings (2001) compares pre-service teacher education to road trips which parallels the suggestion that teaching as a profession is a journey rather than a destination, a journey which begins prior to their first teaching assignment. While interviewing the teacher participants for this study, it was realized that the journeys of teachers began far before they ever stepped into their first classroom. Their journeys began when they were students themselves, and began to see and question the world around them. Their life experiences in schools and growing up in their neighborhoods have helped shape their current world views. Landsman (2008) shares her story of growing up in New England and Dallas, where the only intersections of her life with Black or Brown people's lives were service and subordination; as many of them worked for her family (location 218/2345). She tells these stories to illustrate her journey and her reflections on racism in her own life. When listening to the participants in this study, they told similar stories about how their family background influenced how they look at race and racism, not only in their jobs but in society. These stories lead us to believe that personal journeys are just as important as professional ones.

Berliner, through case study research, created a five step scale (Berliner, 1988) from novice to expert which seems to reflect the stages of cultural proficiency continuum discussed later in this chapter. These examples demonstrate that there are stages or processes that teachers go through during their careers to improve their practice. In order for teachers to grow and evolve into a culturally responsive teacher, teachers should recognize that there are stages that teachers go through as they grow in the profession, and that there political and social reasons associated with race as to why students of color are underperforming in school. In the following section we will examine the racial achievement gap and legislation that has been enacted in an attempt to close this achievement gap.

The Academic Achievement Gap

An academic achievement gap between races is pervasive throughout our public school systems. In the 2009 NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress) test, scores in both reading and math increased for all students nationwide. However, a gap between White and Hispanic students was reported at both grades four and eight in both math and reading. The average scale score gap between White students and Hispanic students in 8th grade was 26 points for math, and 24 points for reading (NCES, 2011). Similarly, the Black-White achievement gap in 2007 was 31 for 8th graders in Math and 26 for 8th graders in reading (NCES 2009). These statistics were similar in the state where the research was conducted. On state tests, the achievement gap was present in all three areas tested: reading, writing and math. This gap is not a recent dilemma, as noted in 1974 by Edmonds, when he stated that we were not successfully teaching all of

our children. This is important to note because for several decades the United States has known and been responsive to this persisting gap with legislation, yet legislation and accountability have not yet closed the gap.

Regardless of how high or low achieving a school or school district may be, as determined by state and national tests, these gaps persist between students of color (primarily African American and Hispanic students) and White students.

The academic achievement gap is related to socio-economic variances (Ferguson, 2002; Payne, 2005). However, other factors that may place students at risk of school failure and are related to academic underachievement include: free and reduced lunch, Individual Educational Plans [IEP], English language learners [ELL], or newcomer immigrants. When the factors that place students at risk for failure in school, are removed from academic achievement data, the racial academic achievement gap persists. This is accurate even when schools are well funded and higher achieving (D'Amico, 2001; Ferguson, 2001, 2002; Gordon, 2000; Jencks & Phillips, 1999; Viadero, 2002). In the district where this study was conducted, the trend is consistent with national data. Based on data from the 2005-2009 state assessment data, there is a prevalent racial achievement gap in reading, writing and math when all students with other risk factors are removed. Interestingly there is also concern however that far too often students of color are staffed into special education inappropriately, therefore they are labeled as a student with a risk factor. It can also be observed in many schools that far fewer students of color are identified as gifted when compared to their White or

Asian peers, which can indicate that students of color are not being exposed to rigorous coursework further exacerbating the gap.

Minority representation in special education and gifted programs. There are also a disproportionate number of minority students referred to special education for learning disabilities (Artiles, 2003; Donovan, 2002; Eitle, 2002; Harry & Klinger, 2006). Racial minority students are overrepresented in United States' special education programs, but under-represented in the Advanced Placement and honors courses, as well as in programs for gifted and talented or highly intelligent students (Moore, Ford & Milner, 2005; Frasier et al., 1995; Valdez, 2003). Under representation of students of color within programs for gifted learners could be explained by teachers having a misperception of what gifted education is, thus basing decisions to refer a student solely on a student's verbal abilities, grades or standardized test scores without using other screening instruments (Baskin, 2001). This is concerning specifically for our English learners because standardized test scores are often a reflection of reading proficiency in English and not necessarily an indicator of overall ability. What results when Black or Hispanic students are not challenged in school, or given the same educational opportunities as their peers, is a decrease in the number of students of color who are finding success in the academic arena. As a result, many of these students never graduate from high school (Manhattan Institute, 2005). In 2009, the national dropout rate for White students was 5% compared to 18% for Hispanic students, and 9% of Black students (NCES, 2012). It is of utmost importance that educators use an asset model for educating students of color, and that teachers focus on the strengths and

cultural capital that students bring into classrooms to help students experience academic success in school.

Educational Accountability

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965) was passed around the same time The Coleman Report (1966) was released, as both documents were part of President Johnson's War on Poverty (Robelen, 2005; Hanna, 2005). ESEA emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability (United States Department of Education, 2012). In 2002, Congress amended ESEA and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (United States Department of Education, 2012). Both pieces of legislation were intended to make progress toward closing the racial academic achievement gap. As a result of NCLB legislation, greater attention is now being paid to the state of education in its entirety (Kolodziej, 2011). Further examination and inquiry into what will close the gap once and for all is necessary and has yet to be determined.

The Need for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Institutionalized racism and the disparities in achievement data signal a need for improved pedagogy to educate our students of color. Some ways we see this institutionalized racism in schools is evidenced through tracking of students in their coursework, current discipline policies, and the overrepresentation of students of color in special education classes. Culturally responsive pedagogy has been identified as one way to close the racial academic achievement gap in the profession. Culturally responsive teaching is based on the assumption that,

When academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

Upon learning basic tenets of culturally responsive teaching many teachers respond with “But that’s just good teaching” (Ladson- Billings, 1995, p. 159). Ladson-Billings affirms that she is indeed describing good teaching, but then asks the question “Why is so little of it happening in the classrooms populated by African-American students?” (Ladson-Billings, 1995 p. 159). If U.S. Black and Hispanic students are to succeed academically, educators need to reexamine instructional practices to see why current instructional practices are failing students of color.

Gay suggests (2000; 2002) five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. Gay’s essential elements were modified slightly for this study to incorporate the work of other researchers’. In this study they are titled: cultural understanding, caring and relationships, communication, curriculum and instruction.

Cultural understanding. The majority, 90%, of the nation’s teachers are White (National Education Association, 2003) and approximately 30-40% of the U.S. school-aged population is not White (NCES, 2007). Consequently, teachers must educate themselves about other worldviews or cultures to most successfully instruct students from a culture other than their own. To understand how teachers can best teach

students of color, teacher must first recognize their own culture then make efforts to understand what the students' experiences and backgrounds include. To effectively teach students of color, teachers must match the contextual conditions for learning to the cultural experiences of the learner to increase task engagement, and therefore increase task performance (Allen & Butler, 1996). According to Gay (2000), "Culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment" (p. 8). The overriding characteristic of a culturally responsive teacher is a solid understanding of personal culture as well as the culture of their students. A teacher or organization's level of understanding of culture can be described as *cultural proficiency* (Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, 2003). Lindsey, Robins and Terrell describe a continuum related to cultural proficiency viewpoints based on personal values and behaviors or organizational policies and practices. If someone is said to be culturally proficient, (the highest level on the continuum) he or she

may not know everything about every different culture, but they know how to take advantage of teachable moments, ask questions without offending, and know how to create an environment that is welcome to diversity and change (Lindsey, Robins and Terrell, 2003 p. 97).

Table 1

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

1. **Cultural destructiveness:** The elimination of others people's cultures
2. **Cultural incapacity:** Belief in the superiority of one's own culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture
3. **Cultural blindness:** Acting as if the cultural differences one sees do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures
4. **Cultural pre-competence:** Awareness of the limitations one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups
5. **Cultural competence:** Interacting with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and school practices: acceptance and respect for difference; ongoing assessment of one's own and the organization's culture; attention to the dynamics of difference; continuous expansion of cultural knowledge and recourses; and the adaptation of one's values and behaviors and the organization's policies and practices
6. **Cultural proficiency:** Esteeming culture; knowing how to learn about individual and organization culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments. (Lindsay, Robins, Terrell , 2003, p. 97)

It is important to note that not all teachers who are working to be culturally responsive will be culturally proficient. Many teachers who are trying to become more culturally responsive in their practice find themselves in various ranges on the continuum. One of the continuum points described by teachers in this study that characterized them early in their career is that of cultural blindness. For this reason, it seems that most teachers who are working towards cultural proficiency find themselves on one of the last three continuum points later in their careers.

As a White teacher on a journey to discover her own culture, one of the participants in the study mentioned how she engaged in her own meaningful reflection on her own culture after reading Howard (1999). Howard (1999) takes White educators

on a personal journey of self-discovery while becoming more culturally responsive by walking White teachers through the stages of identity development and draws parallels to his own journey. The metaphor he uses for his journey in multicultural education is “The River of Change” (Howard, 1999 p. 65). This literature brings us back to the theme of journeys teachers take, and this one is specifically about the discovery of culture.

Teachers and schools frequently “suppress” race labels and avoid discussing issues pertaining to race in school, which then affects discussions about student learning and achievement (Pollack, 2004). White educators often do not know when or how to discuss race but “In all conversations about race educators should be prepared to do three things: ask provocative questions, navigate predictable debates, and talk more about talking” (Pollack, 2004, p. 221). Pollack and Singleton have a similar goal as Pollack is asking that people simply take the time to talk about race, and to quit avoiding these conversations. Singleton (2006) also encourages teachers and school leaders to have courageous conversations about race. They both argue that until we confront race intentionally in schools, we will not be able to effectively close a gap or improve achievement for our students of color.

Teachers must learn how to recognize, honor and incorporate the personal abilities of students to improve their teaching strategies and in turn, increase student achievement (Gay, 2000). It is helpful for a teacher to spend time with her students at the beginning of the year to discuss learning styles and do learning style inventories. Although there has been controversy related to the validity of learning styles (Pashler,

McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008; Reiner & Willingham, 2010), teachers state that they must capitalize on student strengths to help students learn, and that understanding *how* students learn is essential in their ability to teach all students (Rolfe & Cheek, 2012). When a teacher gets a new student in class or begins a new school year, he might choose to find out more about that student and what their learning preferences are through the use of an inventory so he can accommodate student learning needs in the classroom.

Relationships and caring. Gay (2000) characterized caring interpersonal relationships by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment. On the other hand, uncaring relationships can be distinguished by impatience, intolerance, dictations and control. We have all been in classrooms where the latter can be observed, and frequently these classrooms have high rates of failure and low levels of engagement. In caring classrooms, failure is not an option. Teachers of students who have effectively closed learning gaps in their classrooms, also known as *turnaround teachers* are characterized by creating environments of caring and support (Benard, 2003).

In a caring classroom, students feel that the teacher genuinely cares about them. Frequently, in schools where students believe their teachers do not care, the teachers work very hard and express great concern for their students. In these situations, it is not that the teacher does not care, it is that they are unable to make the connections that would complete caring relations with their students (Noddings, 1992). Culturally responsive teachers are able to make these connections with their students. Noddings

(1997) suggests that we look at the way we educate students in a different way. From her perspective, we cannot improve education merely by designing a better curriculum, changing our instructional methods or improving our classroom management; rather, we need to recognize multiple identities in our students. For example, a seventh grade student may be black, a teenager, a woman, an American, a Christian, a person who likes science, and so on. “As she exercises these identities, she may use different languages, adopt different postures, and relate differently to those around her. But whoever she is at a given moment, whatever she is engaged in, she needs- as we all do- to be cared for” (pp. 27-37). Schools, Noddings argues, rarely recognize or often give too little attention to these needs.

Ladson-Billings’ (1994), emphasizes the importance of relationships and caring in culturally responsive teaching. She characterizes culturally relevant teaching, as it relates to social relations, as:

- Teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to the interactions beyond the classroom and into the community
- Teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students
- Teacher encourages a “community of learners”
- Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other. (p.55)

A question educators might have is, “How do I go about building this relationship with students?” The answer to this question is partially embedded in the concept of cultural understanding, but also includes what a teacher does to learn about

her students. This can include visiting the neighborhoods where students live, shopping at their neighborhood grocery store, and making efforts to meet and communicate frequently with their family.

Teachers can also demonstrate caring for students by holding high expectations of all students and verbalizing these expectations to his students. Teacher beliefs and assumptions about student intellect and behavior impacts how students are treated during instructional interactions (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968). Good and Brophy (1994) call the impact of this the “self-fulfilling prophecy effect.” The “self-fulfilling prophecy effect” (also known as the Pygmalion effect) or the way that teachers treat students strongly influences student learning (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). A culturally responsive teacher sets high expectations for her students and believes in their innate resilience and capacity to learn. These teachers often are described as turnaround teachers who can see the possibility in students. As one student describes his teachers, “They held visions of us that we could not imagine for ourselves” (Delpit, 1995 p. 199). Caring teachers see the possibility and the ability in their students and have a “no excuses” attitude with their students. In 1999, Wilson and Corbett found that the use of a “no excuses” approach was equated (by students) to caring. Students who felt like the teacher pushed them found their confidence growing because the teacher believed in them. This kind of teacher is frequently described by the term “warm demander”. This term was originally coined by Kleinfeld in 1975 in his research on effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. A warm demander’s demeanor with students can often be

seen by an uniformed observer as somewhat harsh, yet this type of teacher tends to be highly effective with students of color (Bondy & Ross, 2008).

Finally, teachers can help build relationships and reflect their caring for students by creating a positive physical environment in which students will want to learn. Regardless of the population of students being served, a caring teacher carefully plans what is found on the walls of the classroom. A caring teacher makes sure that posters and bulletin boards reflect various cultures and languages, and displays the work of students so that all students see themselves represented at one time or another during the year. A caring teacher also uses color to decorate the room to help students focus in class (Sinofsky and Knirck, 1981), and uses positive or motivational slogans to build character and inspire students (Kuykendall, 2004). During this study, the researcher will look at the physical environment where students are learning to see examples of how students might see themselves reflected in the classrooms, and how the classrooms themselves might help create a positive learning environment.

Communication. Communication with and among students in the classroom, or communication with families outside of the classroom, is a key component of culturally responsive teaching. Communication refers to how teachers communicate with their students' families, as well as how he or she facilitates the communication in her classroom with and among her culturally and linguistically diverse students. In this section, communication will be divided into two sections, communication with parents and communication in the classroom.

Communication with parents. In 1997, a national study of parental involvement was commissioned by the National Center for Education Statistics. The results indicated that children do better when their parents, and especially their fathers, are involved with their schools (Nord, 1997). Teachers can, with or without the help of the school, build relationships and communicate on a consistent basis with the parents of their students of color in a number of ways. In her book, *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students* (1992), Kuykendall in a chapter entirely dedicated to strengthening the home-school bond with black and Hispanic parents, suggests teachers involve black and Hispanic students by doing the following: enlisting the help of Black and Hispanic parents (and other family members) on field trips; making positive phone calls home to the parents of Black/Hispanic students; and asking for help from the multilingual individuals in the building to send home communication in various languages.

Communication in the classroom. Students from different cultures often have different communication styles that should be recognized and built upon by culturally responsive classroom teachers (Kochman, 1985). This interaction in the classroom can also be called the classroom *discourse*. In conventional classroom discourse, students are expected to listen quietly and respond only when the teacher is finished talking. Teachers also expect students to respond in a particular way when speaking in class. This discourse structure is called a passive-receptive posture (Kochman, 1985 as quoted in Gay, 2000). Although this is very typical behavior in a classroom of White students, Black and Hispanic students often communicate more effectively in a classroom that is

participatory-active (Kochman, 1985 as quoted in Gay, 2000). In a participatory-active classroom, the speaker expects listeners to engage them actively through vocalized, motion, and movement responses as they are speaking. Some researchers (Asante, 1998; Baber, 1987; Kochman, 1972, 1981, 1985; Smitherman, 1977) have called this style of communication call-response communication because it involves listeners giving encouragement, commentary, compliments and even criticism to speakers while they are talking (like the “amen-ing” that is heard in Black churches). Unfortunately, in many of today’s schools, students who use this communication style during a lesson are viewed as rude, inconsiderate, disruptive, or speaking out of turn.

In addition to understanding the communication styles of our students, teachers often struggle with communication with their students who are linguistically diverse, and do not speak English as their first language. Although it may be difficult for teachers who only speak English to communicate verbally with their students who speak other languages, there are many effective teaching strategies that increase understanding and achievement among linguistically diverse students. Gersten and Baker (2000) suggest that there are five specific instructional variables that, while supported by limited experimental evidence, are potentially critical components for instruction: (a) building and using vocabulary as a curricular anchor, (b) using visuals to reinforce concepts and vocabulary, (c) implementing cooperative learning and peer-tutoring strategies, (d) using native language strategically, and (e) modulating of cognitive and language demands.

Another communication strategy for linguistically diverse students is the use of peer tutoring, and cooperative grouping in class. The role of talk and face-to-face interaction is vital for language learning; therefore, ELL students need to be given opportunities to academically interact with peers as often as possible (Rubenstein-Avila, 2003). This strategy will be discussed in greater detail in the section on instruction.

Curriculum. “If we are to create conditions in which all students can see themselves as social, political, and intellectual leaders, then we need to shape curriculum with students’ experiences, perspectives and interests in mind” (Ginsberg, 2000, p. 34). Culturally responsive curriculum goes beyond teaching about the “heroes and holidays” celebrated in other cultures and having a “foods and festivals” approach to culture (Banks, 1989; Ginsberg, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1976). A culturally responsive curriculum means designing curriculum that includes information about the histories, cultures, contributions, experiences, perspectives and issues of various ethnic groups (Gay, 2000). Banks (1989) discussed four successive levels of integration of ethnic content, which he called *approaches*:

- Level 1: The Contribution Approach highlights cultural heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.
- Level 2: The Additive Approach, the classroom teacher spends time on multicultural investigations and is greatly expanded with literal “add on” units dealing in depth with content, concepts, themes, and perspectives.

- Level 3: Transformation Approach involves altering the structure of the set curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives.
- Level 4: Social Action Approach, students explore multiple perspectives by having them make decisions on issues and take actions to solve them (Banks, 1989).

Another aspect of culturally responsive curriculum is the direct involvement by the teacher in the construction of knowledge about ethnic and cultural diversity (Gay, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1994) found that students performed better and were more successful in school when the curricula was meaningful to them, and students performed best when the instruction matched where they were in their learning. Ladson-Billings found that students learned best when the curriculum was *scaffolded* to build on their prior knowledge and understandings.

Being aware of, and avoiding perpetuating, a culturally or racially biased ‘hidden’ or latent curriculum (Banks, 2009; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009; Pai & Adler, 1997) that is often taught in schools is a key component of a culturally relevant curriculum. Pai and Adler (1997) define hidden curriculum as the indirect means by which schools teach students the norms and values of their society. They further suggest that,

Hidden curriculum may vary according to socioeconomic status, with upper-class children being taught leadership skills and having opportunities for creativity and problem solving in contrast to low-income students being taught to respect authority and receiving rewards for compliance and conformity. (p. 19)

To be clear, student understanding of the latent or hidden curriculum is not always a negative topic for students of color. Understanding this hidden curriculum helps students learn how to navigate school and helps them understand what is important or valued by the school, which are often skills and information that White parents and students have learned. It is when this curriculum includes unconscious rules and patterns that allocate power and prestige to the middle and upper classes, while denying this to the lower class that administrators, teachers, parents and students must examine their beliefs as a community. In addition to examining the topics that are included in the formal curriculum, examining the information represented in textbooks as well as in the media to include culturally positive or unbiased views of race and cultures can improve the quality and the student interest of the instructional materials.

Culturally responsive curriculum builds opportunities for discussion and discourse among students into the learning. Applebee (1997) notes the best teachers think about curriculum in terms of what conversations they want their students to be engaged in, not in terms of what concepts they want to introduce through reading or through direct instruction. One way that teachers can provide these opportunities for discussion is through literature. Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, and Vasquez (1999) consider multicultural literature as part of a

...new kind of 'critical literacy curriculum' which focuses on building students' awareness of how systems of meaning and power affect people and the lives they lead. These books invite conversations about fairness and justice; they encourage children to ask why some groups of people are positioned as "others". (p.70)

This is a characteristic of teachers who look at their curriculum beyond what they are handed at the beginning of the school year to teach. The amount of information required by state and national standards to be covered in one year can be daunting to teachers. Instead of this being something more to add to the curriculum, could teachers consider what it could replace for all students. Banks' (1989) would say that culturally responsive curriculum using the transformation approach includes altering the structure of the set curriculum to enable students to learn from diverse and ethnic and cultural perspectives.

Gay (2000) further discusses how this curriculum must then be accessible to students,

The aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation and personal efficacy. Knowledge in the form of curriculum content is central to this empowerment. To be effective, this knowledge must be accessible to students and connected to their lives and experiences outside of school. (p.111)

If teachers want students to be engaged in the curriculum taught, teachers must be mindful in the planning stages of instruction to be inclusive of topics, people, and events with which students from all cultures can connect.

Instruction. Instruction is what happens on a daily basis within the walls of the classroom. Instruction is the “Engagement, the interaction, the dialectic discourse of students and teachers in the process of teaching and learning” (Gay, 2000, p. 148).

Effective culturally responsive teachers use culturally responsive classroom management systems, rituals and routines (Bondy, Ross, Galligane & Hambacher, 2007; Gay, 2000); Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004), and they learn how to

effectively use culturally responsive instructional strategies (Berry, 1979; Bloom, 1976; Bruno, 1982; Caine & Caine, 1994; Carrier, 2005; Claxton, 1990; Cox & Ramirez, 1981; Curtis & Bailey, 2001; Curtin, 2006; Frederick, 1980; Gay, 2000; Griggs & Dunn, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994, Lysakowski & Walberg, 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rothstein- Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

Classroom management systems and routines. Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008) discuss how to build upon students' cultural strengths and show how teachers can use the concept of bridging cultures to generate multiple ways to manage a classroom in culturally compatible ways. Teachers must first understand that culture and classroom management go hand in hand, and a teacher must understand the culture of her students in order to manage classroom behavior appropriately. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) propose a conception of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) that includes five essential components: (a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism; (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and (e) commitment to building caring classrooms. Many of these components are similar or the same as the elements of a culturally responsive classroom. So why is it important for teachers to manage their classrooms in a culturally responsive way? It is important as educators to manage their classroom in a culturally responsive manner to engage students in the learning because unengaged and unmotivated students often find themselves in trouble in classes and in school and in turn tend to either be dismissed

from class and missing important instruction. This overrepresentation of students of color in discipline referrals and suspensions is called the discipline gap.

The discipline gap. In addition to an academic achievement gap, a discipline gap has been identified (Gregory, 2004; Monroe, 2005). Based on national data, students of color receive significantly more discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions as compared to their White peers. Out of all public high school students in the United States who were suspended in 2007, 49% were Black, 26% were Hispanic, and 18% were White (NCES, 2007). Black and Hispanic students are disciplined for not knowing how to “behave” in school, and are referred to an administrator for subjective behavior such as disrespect, defiance, insubordination or inappropriate behavior. White students, on the other hand, are more frequently referred for more objective behaviors such as skipping class, fighting, or theft. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007, 21.6% of all students in the US had been suspended at some point. Interestingly, that number was 42.8% for Black students, 21.9% for Hispanic students, and 25.5% for mixed-race students. Only 15.6% of White students had been suspended, which is much lower than the national rate. The same is true for expulsions and retentions where a higher percentage of Black students (12.8%) had been expelled when compared to White, Hispanic, or Asian/Pacific Islander students, and the national percentage was 3.4%. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). 10% of all U.S. Black students are expelled from school compared to only 1% of White students. One aspect of classroom management and instruction is the ability for teachers to question the practices that we use to discipline students, and

consider them carefully to ensure non-discriminatory practices towards our students of color.

Instructional strategies. A culturally responsive teacher understands the learners in his classroom and adjusts instruction to their learning needs and learning styles. There are many ways to learn about students' learning preferences. Some learning preferences can be common among members of a culture (Berry, 1979; Claxton, 1990; Cox & Ramirez, 1981; Griggs & Dunn, 1989). This is not to say that every person in each culture learns in the exact same way, however, broad generalizations have been made based on the collective values of that culture. In Latino culture, one of the characteristics or values of importance is that of "Family commitment, which involves; loyalty, a strong support system, a belief that a child's behavior reflects on the honor of the family, a hierarchical order among siblings, and a duty to care for family members" (Griggs & Dunn, 1995, p. 2). The learning needs of Hispanic-American might differ from the learning needs of a White student, whose culture emphasizes individualism (Vasquez, 1990). White American students from the dominant culture may often have learned how to comply with school regulations and school expectations. The way the United States has traditionally structured school is often very different from schooling in other countries. For students who have recently come to the United States, the traditional American teaching style may not align with the practices new immigrants learned in their native countries.

Another critical characteristic of a culturally responsive teacher is that she plans and provides active and engaging instruction. An important concept to emerge from the

reform literature on what works best for students who are at risk of dropping out is educational engagement (El Puente Project, 2006). Several researchers have studied engagement and achievement and these studies agree that engagement means on-task behavior, and that teachers must be concerned with behavioral, emotional and cognitive levels of student engagement (Bloom, 1976; Frederick, 1980; Lysakowski & Walberg, 1982). Additionally, much of the research on engagement includes, on some level, student motivation. Motivation can be described by “Whatever it takes to get students interested and engaged in learning” (Rothstein- Fisch & Tumbull, 2008, p. 113). Motivation to succeed academically can come from a number of sources, one of which may be the social needs of the student.

Culturally responsive teachers build upon students’ prior knowledge and experiences and acknowledge the amount of knowledge students have when they walk into their classrooms. Ladson-Billings, (1994) shares a story about a teacher who uses lyrics to an M.C. Hammer song to connect her students to the curriculum. By having students break apart the lyrics of a popular song that they liked, she was able to help them learn, understand and connect with Standard English. Ladson-Billings also discusses how culturally relevant teachers see that knowledge as something that each student brings into the classroom, and what students know is acknowledged, valued and incorporated into the classroom. Using students’ prior knowledge is also important when teaching students from multiple cultures. Effective teaching strategies include front-loading or pre-teaching to prepare the brain for new information; as recent brain

research has found that when the brain encounters a new idea, it searches for prior knowledge and similar experiences (Caine & Caine, 1994).

Vocabulary instruction is a crucial focus for students whose first language is not English. An effective method of teaching linguistically diverse students vocabulary is through the use of visuals and pictures. Pictures and illustrations provide a stimulus that can be universally understood by all students (Curtis & Bailey, 2001).

Furthermore, hands-on materials and visuals that students can manipulate engage a variety of senses and help to make learning more meaningful, especially for diverse students who tend to be tactile, kinesthetic learners (Bruno, 1982; Curtin, 2006). In her article *Key Issues for Teaching English Language Learners in Academic Classrooms*, Carrier (2005) discusses the use of graphic organizers in classrooms,

Graphic organizers, in particular, are powerful tools to use with ELLs because they display information with pictures, labels, or short phrases, thereby reducing the language load. Also, they are much less visually intimidating than full text. Graphic organizers can be used to present major concepts and the relationships between them, comparisons and contrasts, processes, cause and effect, and attributes, to name just a few of their uses. They also help ELLs focus on key vocabulary, instead of having to search for it in an overwhelming amount of text. Graphic organizers have the added advantage of serving as prewriting organizers and unit study guides. (p.9)

Finally, culturally responsive teachers create an environment that promotes cooperation and collectivism rather than competition and individualism in their classroom. The current education system in the United States generally promotes an “individualistic” value system (Rothstein-Fisch & Trubull, 2008).

Table 2

Characteristics of Individualist & Collectivist Value Systems

<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Collectivism</u>
Representative of mainstream U.S. Western Europe, Australia, and Canada	Representative of 70% of world cultures, including those of U.S. Immigrants (Triandis, 1989)
Well-being of individual; responsibility for self	Well-being of group; responsibility for group
Independence/self-reliance	Interdependence/cooperation
Individual achievement	Family/group success
Self-expression	Respect
Self-esteem	Modesty
Task orientation	Social orientation
Cognitive intelligence	Social intelligence

In an individualistic value system, self-realization is the ideal, and the culture of its people is focused on the well-being of the individual. Approximately 70% of the cultures in the world come from a “collectivist” value system (see Table 2). This means is that the majority of U.S. students coming from other countries or cultures have a different value system than the system they are entering. In collectivist cultures, there is more emphasis placed on the group’s wellbeing rather than on the individual. These statements about cultural values are general tendencies when the members of a culture are considered as a whole (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In classrooms where teachers are culturally responsive, the teacher makes a conscious effort to be familiar with the cultural value systems of her students and be responsive to those values. This might mean in a classroom with primarily Hispanic students, she might choose to decrease the amount of competition among students, and increase cooperation and interdependence in the classroom.

Effective Classroom Teachers

The focus of this study was the teacher journey because many people in the field of education believe that the single most important school-based factor in student achievement is a highly effective classroom teacher, and there are several studies to support this notion. (Ferguson, 1998, Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Nye, Konstantopolous, & Hedges, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2002; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002). So, what characterizes an effective teacher? Studies have resulted in contradictory findings about which attributes of teachers are most likely to translate into effective classroom performance, but some information on how specific teacher attributes correlate with teacher quality is available (Goldhaber & Allison, 1997). Goldhaber and Allison (1997) identify five indicators of teacher quality based on available research in the field. These indicators include: teacher degree levels, teacher preparation, teacher licensure, years of teaching experience, and teachers' academic proficiency. In a different study, also a meta-analysis of research done at the state level, Haycock states there are: strong verbal and math skills, deep content knowledge and teaching skill.

There are many factors outside of the teacher's control that can have a considerable impact on student achievement. Some of these factors include health conditions related to low birth weight, hunger, and nutrition, access to reading material, parent availability and participation in the educational process, and student mobility (Barton, 2004; Berliner, 2009). These are factors that teachers often have to confront or

work around in order to be successful with students. Effective teachers do their best to focus on what is within their locus of control regardless of the external factors influencing students.

School factors. Schools also have some control over what they can do as a community to improve student learning for all students. Specifically, schools that have a clear and focused mission, a safe and orderly environment, an environment of high expectations, that provide the opportunity to learn and adequate time on task, that demonstrate instructional leadership, have teachers who frequently monitor student progress and make an effort to maintain positive home-school relations (Edmonds, 1982) are more likely to engage students in a community of learners.

Culturally Responsive Professional Learning and Equity Work

In the district where this research was conducted, the work of Glen Singleton and the Pacific Educational Group provided the majority of the trainings at the district level. This training had two components, the Beyond Diversity training, a two day seminar offered to many administrators and teachers in the building and training for a small cadre of teachers whose purpose is to conduct site-based action research and to disseminate some of the beyond diversity training back at the school site. The two day Beyond Diversity training is based upon the premise that,

the racial achievement gap exists and persists because fundamentally, schools are not designed to educate students of color, and educators continue to lack the will, skill, knowledge and capacity to affirm racial diversity. Consequently, educators need to begin a deep and thorough examination of their beliefs and practices in order to “re-create” schools so that they become where all students do succeed (Singleton, 2005 p. 5).

There are other organizations aimed at providing other kinds of training and professional learning for teachers about culturally responsive instruction. This includes the Equity Alliance at Arizona State (formerly the National Center for Culturally Responsive Education Systems) and the Education Alliance at Brown University. These organizations focus on multiple aspects of Culturally Responsive Teaching, whereas the Pacific Education Group training is centered around cultural and acknowledgement of White privilege, and for a few teachers, it includes an action research component.

Because the training offered through the Pacific Educational Group at the district, and then back at the school site, is so heavily focused on understanding culture and Whiteness, that one assertion is many of the teachers working to become more culturally responsive in their practice demonstrate strength in this component, while potentially having less expertise in the other four.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Background

Districts, schools, and teachers have engaged in various efforts to close the achievement gap. Some districts have mandated or launched professional development opportunities to build teacher skill in culturally relevant pedagogy. One district in a Western state launched the Pacific Education Group *Beyond Diversity* Training in 2005. In the district training, teacher leaders, staff and administrators attended a two day workshop that focused on self-reflection of race and culture, as well as the role of Whiteness and institutionalized racism in schools. Participants in this seminar were charged with bringing this information back to their buildings to assist in the planning for equity work on site.

Another aspect of this training involved the training of an action research cadre. A small group of teachers from each site participated in more extensive training and were charged with returning to their schools and conducting action research in their classrooms focused on race and student achievement. These teachers were provided with district release days to observe other teachers and to co-plan culturally responsive lessons with the cadre. This cadre began meeting formally in 2006 and became an informal meeting that took place in individual schools with remaining members of the cadre. The equity work has evolved over the course of seven years. Much of the earlier

equity training was done directly with trainers from the Pacific Education Group in larger group settings. Today, most of the training has happened in schools and is led by building leaders rather than consultants from the Pacific Education Group. The setting for this study provided an opportunity to study the perspectives and work of teachers who have participated in and embraced this training.

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and explore how teachers described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and training on practice. In order to do this, teachers were observed using naturalistic observation and were interviewed twice during the course of their observations. This chapter outlines the processes and procedures used to describe the teacher journey and to understand the influence culturally responsive professional learning has had on the practice of these teachers.

Research Questions

This study explored the journey teachers took to become more culturally responsive and the influence of focused professional learning on their instructional practice. The following questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers who are intentionally working towards cultural responsiveness describe their teaching journey?
2. How do teachers describe and enact their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?
3. What is the impact of culturally responsive professional learning on teachers' instruction?

Research Design

Case study research design was used to understand the journeys these three teachers described. Case study research was appropriate for this study for a number of reasons. First, it allowed the researcher to look at three different participants who had each participated in a different journey to become culturally responsive. Consequently, they all had that one variable in common, the desire to become more culturally responsive in their practice, so the researcher was able to apply some cross- case analysis of their teaching strategies and their common experiences. Another reason the researcher chose case study methodology was because case study methodologies are flexible, allowing researchers to study a variety of phenomena, and case study gave the researcher the flexibility to investigate things that were not part of the initial investigation, such as teacher mindsets (Case Study Research in Education, 2009). One last reason why case study was chosen was because of the flexibility of data collection methods. In this study, the researcher sought to understand the teacher journey and impact on instruction from teachers who participated in district or school sponsored equity training, and case study methods enabled the researcher to do this using both interviews and observations.

In a case study one effective way to establish validity is through careful attention to detailed data collection processes. There are eight common verification processes often discussed in qualitative research literature (Creswell & Miller, 1997). These eight processes included: prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher

bias, member checks, thick description and external audits. Creswell (1998) suggests engaging in at least two of these procedures in any given study. In this study, five of the eight of Creswell's (1998) procedures were used to ensure validity: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, and thick description.

Participants and Site Selection

Site Selection. Both sites selected for this study were in the same suburban district. The reason this district was selected was because of convenience and the district's commitment to closing the racial achievement gap and supporting this commitment with training for staff, teachers and administrators on issues of equity. Payne Middle School (pseudonym is used), located in a suburb of a western state, was specifically selected because of its diverse student population. The Payne student body included to over 1,500 students from 70 countries, and students speak 45 different languages. During the 2012-2013 school year, the Payne Middle School student population was approximately 32% Black students, 34% Hispanic students and 22% White students. Seventy-two percent of Payne's students are on Free and Reduced Lunch programs, and there is a 25% mobility rate.

The second selected site was Wildcat Middle School (pseudonym), also located in a suburb of a western state. Although Wildcat's student demographics were drastically different from Payne, this site was selected because of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program in that school. AVID is a program started in California in the 1980s after the federal court issued an order to desegregate San

Diego's schools. To address the concern that traditionally underserved students would not be successful in their new schools, AVID was started. The philosophy behind the AVID program is to hold students accountable to the highest standards, provide them with academic and social support, and students will rise to the challenge (AVID, 2013). In the AVID classes at Wildcat, the classes had equal representation of White students and students of color. This was not representative of the general population of Wildcat, where during the 2012-2013 school year the student body consisted of 69% White students, 14% Hispanic students and about 3% Black students. Fourteen and one-half percent of the student population received free and reduced lunch, and the school had an 8% mobility rate.

Participants. The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and explore how teachers described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and training on practice. The study accessed a convenience sample of teachers who were identified by a district leader as having participated in district provided staff development or who were recommended by a colleague of the researcher. Additionally, the criteria they had to meet were that 1) they were middle school teachers who had participated in the professional development offered at the district or school level; and 2) had the desire to be culturally responsive in their practice as determined by their eagerness to participate in the trainings. The middle school level was selected because the researcher was familiar with middle school teachers and students. Teachers who were making a conscious effort to become culturally responsive were chosen because of a desire to understand their career

journeys, experience of participation in professional development, and where they were at the time of this study.

Participants were recruited in two ways. The researcher initially sent an email to the district leader overseeing the district wide professional development. The district leader then provided a list of teachers who had participated in the initial professional development through the district which took place several years before the study was conducted. Upon examining the list, three sites were chosen based on demographics of their student population. Because this study focused on teachers being culturally responsive to students of color, it was important that students of color be present in the classrooms observed. The teachers in the selected middle schools were contacted through an email (Appendix A) to participate. Three participants initially responded saying they were interested, and two of those participants ultimately ended up as participants in the study. The other teacher decided against it due to the time of year and other commitments she had made. The third participant was identified later in the study. While observing the first participant at Payne, a teacher colleague suggested another 7th grade math teacher who might be interested in the study. The colleague introduced the researcher to the third participant at school. The study and what was entailed was described to her, a recruiting email was sent, and she accepted. Once the three participants agreed to participate in the study they were sent consent letters (Appendix B) regarding their participation. Teachers were assured that their names, their students' names and school sites would be kept confidential. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Participant 1. The first participant, Chris, was a man who had grown up in and gone through the district as a student. He started teaching at Payne Middle School out of college, and had not left since. He called Payne his home and the community in which he works he considered his family. Chris did not live far from Payne Middle School and his daughter attended one of the neighboring elementary schools in the same district. Although he was not in the immediate neighborhood, he regularly attended plays, sporting events, graduations and other personal events that students had invited him to such as confirmations and Fiesta de Quinceañeras. The year before this study was conducted, several of his former students came down from the neighboring high school, brought him a special school t-shirt, and asked him to be a special guest at their graduation.

At Payne Chris was identified by colleagues as a teacher who was willing to address issues of equity in his classroom and in the community. Payne Middle School had been seen as a leader in the district in regards to piloting the Beyond Diversity training with staff, and was continuing the work as a building. Chris participated in the discussions and courageous conversations at the school level, and frequently engaged in conversations with friends and colleagues about race. A married father of one, he often tried to put himself in the shoes of his students' parents. This study marked Chris' 15th year teaching 8th grade science at the same school. Chris taught on a block schedule, so he typically saw his students for a double period every other day.

Chris' classroom was a science classroom, complete with black-topped lab counters surrounding the room and black topped lab tables where students typically

worked. The walls were left bare, with the exception of a periodic table, a clock, and a few other posters. The room was large, and as an odd shape. Not exactly rectangular, more like a pentagon. Lab counters lined the exterior of the room, and you sporadically saw a graduated cylinder or triple beam balance on the countertops. The black topped lab tables were pushed together to form a square table so four students could work together as a group. This seating configuration is highly indicative of his teaching style, as kids are often collaborating and helping each other out during class.

Participant 2. The second participant, Allison (pseudonym), had taught for 15 years. She started her career in a different district, but moved after two years and had been teaching at Wildcat Middle School for 13 years. Allison was a part of the equity work since its inception in 2005. She was a part of her school equity committee, as well as a member of the cadre who was trained in action research around culturally responsive instruction.

Allison moved from the Midwest after college and had taught Science, Technology and AVID at Wildcat. During the study she taught two sections of AVID (which was an elective), and each class was 45 minutes long five days a week. In her AVID classes, there were a large proportion of students of color due to the nature of the program, which was targeted for students “in the middle” and was intended to engage students of color who have the potential and drive to attend college. Approximately half of the students in Allison’s AVID classes were students of color. Allison was a married mother with one toddler son at home.

Allison's classroom used to be a science classroom, so it also had the lab countertops, sinks and linoleum floors. Allison taught two sections of AVID, one for seventh grade and one for eighth grade. There were 30 students in each class. Allison's room was very long from front to back, but most of the individual desks were in pods of five or six towards the front of the room. Allison's walls were adorned with posters, college pennants that hung around the perimeter of the room, quotes, and student work. There were also college banners that the AVID students have made for and about themselves. The classroom was tidy and the lab counters were neat with hanging file boxes where student work was kept. There were four classroom computers at the back of the room. The teacher desk was in the front of the room facing the class, although she didn't sit at her desk during class. Surrounding her desk were posters and pictures about her. For example there were: pictures of her family, her son, Green Bay Packers signs, Wheaties boxes and her own art. She had Thinking Maps posters and several "Foundation for a Better Life" posters (Kermit the Frog, Randy Pausch, and Team USA 1980). There were AVID WICR strategies and sentence strips with "What's your sentence" written by students. There were also several posters about "10 things you should know about...(parents, school, self-worth)."

Participant 3. Marissa (pseudonym) was the final participant at Payne Middle School. Marissa had been teaching Math at Payne for over 6 years. Marissa was a part of what Payne called their Beacon group. This was a group of teachers, administrators and community members who came together to discuss issues about race. It is with this group of people that she engaged in regular courageous conversations about race.

Marissa moved to Colorado after graduating from Michigan State, and she remained a die-hard Spartans fan. She had a large (floor to ceiling) Spartan mascot in her classroom, and was often seen wearing her MSU tee shirt on Fridays. She was in her late 20s, and was involved in several extracurricular and athletic activities at Payne including coaching Track. Marissa was also named “Teacher of the Year” at her school, an honor among a staff of over 100 teachers.

Marissa’s classroom was at the very end of the hallway. When you entered the room you noticed that all of the walls had something math related on them; Standards for Mathematical Practice, a “Become Mathematicians” bulletin board, “absolute value” and “finding area” posters, and a giant protractor. The room was carpeted, unlike the science classrooms, but she had tables (rather than desks) that were pushed together to create pods of four students. In the center of each table was a blue bin of materials for class. Along the back wall there was also a large yellow poster for students to write their name on when they passed their “trailmarker” quiz. At Payne, students had a block of Math every day, so Marissa saw her students for 80 minutes every day of the week.

Instrumentation

Interviews. The first step in the data collection process was to conduct an initial interview with each participant. This interview (Appendix B) was conducted in the school setting, during a teacher planning period, one on one with the researcher and the participant. This interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, then was downloaded and transcribed immediately after. In addition, the researcher took notes so

in the event that the recording did not work, we would not have to repeat the interview. The purpose of the initial interview was to have the participant talk about themselves, describe various aspects of their teaching practice, and describe their journey in education. The questions for the interview were initially based on the ethnographic research done by Ladson-Billings (1994). Additional questions were added regarding professional development. Each of these initial interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. A second interview was conducted with all three participants, to ask specific follow-up questions that emerged during the observations. Both formal interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Member checks were important for accuracy and to solicit the participants' views of the findings and interpretations. Through this checking process the participants' were able to ensure that their thoughts and behaviors were accurately represented in the interview and observation notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this technique the most critical to establishing credibility with participants.

Observations. The purpose of persistent observation was to provide depth to the study. Persistent observation helped the researcher identify relevancies and irrelevancies, and determine when atypical case was important to the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). The next step in this data gathering process was the observation of participants. Participants were observed between eight and ten times over the course of several weeks, with interim questions asked during the second interview. The length of the observations varied depending on when classes were held and when the observer was available, but typically lasted one to three hours in length. The purpose of these

observations was to record the interactions with students during these times. Attention was given to all student interactions, not just the interactions with students of color. These observations were continued until the actions of the teachers were predictable, and teacher behaviors were repetitive. Table 3 provides an overview of the number and timing of observations related to the interviews.

Table 3

Record of Observation and Interview Dates

	Observation Dates	Interview Dates
Chris	April 10, 2012 April 17, 2012 April 24, 2012 April 27, 2012 May 17, 2012 May 25, 2012 My 29, 2012 September 7, 2012 September 14, 2012	April 10, 2012 September 14, 2012
Allison	August 23, 2012 August 24, 2012 August 30, 2012 August 31, 2012 September 4, 2012 September 6, 2012 September 19, 2012 October 9, 2012 November 5, 2012	September 6, 2012 January 8, 2013
Marissa	September 14, 2012 September 20, 2012 September 25, 2012 October 16, 2012 October 19, 2012 November 20, 2012 November 30, 2012	October 19, 2012 November 30, 2012

All observations took place at various times during the school day, but not necessarily during class time, as it was important to also see teachers interact with students during their lunch hour, at lunch duty, and in the hallway. Non-instructional interactions were deemed to be as informative as the class time. During these observations, an observation journal was maintained with a column on the right for any questions that arose during the observation. There was not a specific observation protocol just a lined journal where during the classroom observations, descriptive notes were taken of what was observed in the classroom. On this note sheet, there was a column for reflective notes which were completed after and sometimes during the observation. After each observation, the notes were typed up into a Google doc. Following these observations, the teachers were given a copy of the typed observation notes and transcripts from the interviews to peruse. They were also given an opportunity to make comments or ask questions about the transcripts and notes.

Data Analysis Process

According to Stake (1995), “In a case study, there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (Stake, 1995, p.71). This statement characterized the data analysis process in this study. The data collection and analysis begun the moment the researcher entered the schools. Data analysis in this type of inquiry involves a twofold approach (Erlandson et al., 1993). First, the analysis that occurred on site during the data collection, and the second was the analysis that occurred away from the site following the data collection. In this study, data collection and analysis were

inseparable and ongoing. Although the interviews and observations were analyzed separately, they were reported in the findings together so the researcher could tell a coherent story about each of the participants.

Interview analysis. The initial step in the interview/data analysis process was to code the data. The five components of: cultural understanding, communication, caring, curriculum and instruction were used to categorize information (Gay, 2002). The coding process began with the interview transcripts review. Once the initial interviews were complete and transcribed, the recordings were listened to multiple times while reading through the transcripts. While listening to the recordings, transcriptions were edited for typos or missing words so participants could review them at a later time. The transcriptions were sent to the participants via email and participants were asked to make any comments they felt were necessary to help me understand their journey. The transcripts were then highlighted based on the five themes. During the highlighting process a journal of questions that emerged was kept by the researcher. Additionally, any data that did not fit into one of the five categories was noted. This was important to determine if other components or themes emerged that did not fit into one of the other five categories. Additionally, non-examples of culturally responsive teaching were identified in the interviews.

Observation analysis. The next step was to code the observation data using the same method. The observations were completed from April of 2012 until November of 2012 (Data was not collected during the summer). During observations two column notes were taken. Questions and comments that came up during or after the observation

were written in the margins after reflecting on the observations. Observation notes, minus the questions, were typed in Google docs, and shared with the participants. Participants were given the opportunity to make any comments or ask any questions they had about the observations. These observation notes were sent to participants after their final observation and interview. Observation notes were then coded based on the five components: cultural understanding, communication, caring, curriculum and instruction. Questions the researcher had about the observation or examples that did not necessarily fit any of the components were kept in a researcher journal.

Combined data analysis. The process used for combined data analysis was to create a map to tell the stories of each participant as narratives for the first and third research questions. The analysis continued by creating tree maps (Figure A) for each of the five components: cultural understanding, curriculum, caring and relationships, communication and instruction with each participant listed underneath. Evidence was then listed for each of the teachers who demonstrated understanding either in their interview or their observation.

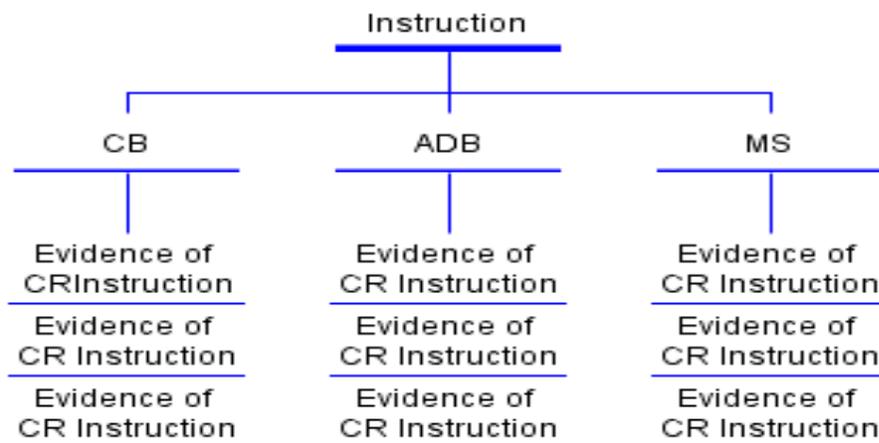


Figure A: Tree Map: interview and observation data by participant and component

The data was then highlighted and common elements color coded. It is from those recurring data that general themes emerged from the data collected from the three participants' interviews and observations.

Researcher Bias

An intrinsic interest in issues of equity in schools for several years is what has driven this research, and through this process the researcher hoped to gain some understanding of and insight into the process teachers go through to become more culturally responsive in their practice. The researcher was born and raised in the area where she taught for fifteen years. As a student and as a new teacher, she did not see the issues concerned with race in school. After working in the dean's office in a local middle school, the academic disparities became apparent to her, as many students of color were not experiencing academic success when compared to their White peers. Often this was a result of students of color being sent out of class due to disruptions and poor behavior in the eyes of the White teachers. Students of color were not spending the time they needed to in classrooms to be successful, nor did they seem to be engaged in the learning. And so the journey towards becoming more culturally responsive began for the researcher.

Because the researcher worked in the district where this study was conducted, the researcher had participated in many of these trainings and knows the schools where observations were completed. She also had personal connections with some of the participants and their colleagues. In the reporting of the data, only data that was observable or responses from interviews were reported and the researcher did her best

to avoid any statements of judgment. Additionally, teacher participants were given the opportunity to look at all observation scripts and interview transcriptions, reducing the chance for bias to be present in the reporting of the data.

Limitations

While the understanding of teachers and their journey in becoming more culturally responsive in their practice was enhanced as a result of this study, there were limitations that affected the amount of data collected, the depth of analysis, and a limited understanding of whether or not these three teachers were effective teachers of their students of color as defined by teachers, students or assessment data. Additionally, because a convenience sample was used, it was difficult to generalize any of these findings to the population.

The data collected in this study included transcripts from two interviews from each participant and observation notes from several hours of classroom visits. Each teacher had one hour of transcribed interview data and anywhere between fifteen to twenty-five hours of classroom observation data. As a result, there was more data available to examine the behaviors and interactions of these classroom teachers than data about these teachers' journeys or their experiences with culturally responsive professional learning. During data analysis a few questions were reworded or were asked more in-depth to gain a better understanding of the journeys or the professional development experiences. As a result, the researcher got a better picture of what teachers need to improve their practice and what stages teachers go through in their aim to become culturally responsive. Student data and feedback from students was not used

as an indicator of cultural responsiveness in this study, their absent voices and lack of evidence of effectiveness left a void in this research. The sampling technique used to identify participants for this study was a convenience sample; one was a teacher who was known by the researcher prior to the study, the others were teachers who had participated in a district provided staff development, or were recommended by a colleague. Additionally, the only criteria they had to meet was that they were middle school teachers who had participated in the professional development offered from the district or school level, and had the desire to be culturally responsive in their practice. As a result, it will be difficult to generalize any of the findings of this research to the greater teaching population.

As a final thought on limitations, during the data collection and analysis portion of this study the researcher frequently questioned whether or not the effectiveness of this equity work was actually measureable and identifiable. Although this was not within the scope of this study, it brought to light the fact that there are so many variables when trying to determine whether or not someone is culturally responsive in their practice and whether that practice is influencing student achievement. Teachers have different histories and their own culture before we ever have them participate in building level or district level professional learning. Students also have their own histories, learning preferences and personal cultural characteristics that may not fit with the practices of the teacher trying to be responsive to all cultures. It is important, most of all, to consider the individual child, get to know that child and be responsive to that child's needs to the best of one's ability.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and how they described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and training on practice. The five components of culturally responsive pedagogy: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2002) were used to characterize culturally responsive behaviors and statements from teacher participants. This chapter presents a narrative of each of the participants' teaching journey. Included in the descriptions of their teaching journey will be some of the background context participants discussed during their interviews to help describe their journey towards cultural responsiveness. All three teachers described some aspect of their lives prior to their teaching career, and how these aspects were reflected upon to influence their teaching. Next, examples of how the five components evidenced themselves in interviews and observations will be described.

Journeys Toward Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

When asked to describe their teaching career as a journey, all three teachers had a passionate and emotional story to tell.

Chris. Chris was a White teacher who was born and raised in the district where he teaches. He attributed his desire to go into education to his teachers: good and bad. He described and even remembered the names of some of the educators who greatly influenced him as a student. He also described a couple of teachers who were particularly bad in his career as a student, and often thought to himself “kids shouldn’t have to put up with this”. He said he knew at a young age that he wanted to be a teacher. So, he chose to go to an in-state public university, pursue teaching, and has never looked back. Chris was hired at Payne Middle School for his first year, now 15 years later he claims he will never leave.

The demographics of this school have changed drastically in 15 years,” he says in his initial interview, “But this is my family, and I tell my parents and my students just that. Our school is like a family. I could have been anywhere, but I landed at a place that really taught me to grow as an individual and not just be a better teacher, but a better person in society.

When specifically asked about his teaching journey, he described his journey as one of, “...people versus content. My passion is the kids, not the content.” In his interview he discussed how he celebrates students’ culture and enjoys making a connection with them. He often saw his students as they return throughout the years and into adulthood. He said his former students, “don’t necessarily remember what we learned, but they remember the relationship.” He took pride in the relationships he developed with students.

Whether they are freshman or whether they're twenty-five, they (students) will all pretty much tell you the same thing, 'I learned some stuff in your class and I remember we did this and we did that.' But they'll remember the bonding relationship, and that time you talked to them in the hallway when they were really upset.

Chris shared that the journey he has traveled was a tough one. He believed that building relationships with students was not valued by the teacher evaluation system and current education policy. He said,

I don't know if (valuing the relationships more than the content) is good or bad in today's culture of TCAP and CSAP and pay for performance. I don't know. I definitely realize that the journey I am on is a difficult one in today's current time because sometimes it's not ... I don't want to say it's not valued but, you know, in a lot of cases sometimes they don't judge you on those types of things, and whether you're a good teacher or not. And that's hard sometimes, you know?

Chris was passionate about his students and has felt, at times, that he was more of a counselor than a teacher, and had considered going into school counseling. Chris truly knew, from a young age, that he wanted to be a teacher. Chris recognized that his relationships with students had positively influenced him and was very open about how being a teacher at Payne had changed him as a person.

Chris recognized his Whiteness and shared his culture with his students, while making a point to understand the culture of his students. This was demonstrated in his

interactions with students and was a major theme that emerged during his interviews. One of Chris's students had her confirmation coming up and she had invited Chris and his family to attend. During lunch the student, a Hispanic student, came in to talk to Chris and to see if he was planning to attend her confirmation. They engaged in some friendly conversation where he asks if the confirmation starts at 5:00 on WPT (White people time)? The student laughed, and he confirmed that his family would be in attendance. In a later conversation with the researcher, he described some of the confirmation ceremonies he had attended in the past for his students. He discussed how long the celebrations are and how time seems irrelevant during the celebrations.

During his interviews, Chris spoke frequently about celebrating students' culture and the importance of knowing his students as individuals. In one of his interviews he talked about how Payne being truly diverse. He said,

A lot of times, the word diversity is used in schools to demonstrate a large population of Hispanic kids, or a large population of African-American kids. But, at Payne, we are truly diverse and not just in the physical culture of our kids, but the cultures within the cultures of our kids, the background of our kids, the socioeconomics of our kids. So, it's really important as a teacher to not ever generalize a student based on background or color of skin, versus really getting to know the kid, getting to know where they're coming from, getting to know their families, and their family structure. Their values, what's important to them, what they enjoy. I think one of the reasons I feel I've been successful with my journey is because, although I started the journey with a mentality of 'I

don't see color,' I instinctively had that interest in the individual student because I have an interest in individual people.

It was clear from this description by Chris that he valued understanding individual students for who they are. He warned against overgeneralizing students based on their skin color because every student was different, even if they shared the same skin color as another student. In this statement he described a shift in thinking from color-blind to seeing students for who they were as individuals.

Chris talked explicitly about how his perspective on race had drastically shifted from one of color-blindness to being very aware of race. He attributed this color-blindness to his upbringing and described times where he was with family members and in discussion his brothers would make statements based on racial stereotypes, which made him realize how his perceptions of race had diverged from that of his immediate family. He attributed this change in perspective to some of the district training, but also to his teammate who was a Black woman. He said that their relationship and her willingness to discuss issues about race helped clarify his thinking when he had questions.

Chris's strength and passion as a teacher was found in the relationships he created with his students. Since coming to Payne fifteen years ago, Chris has seen several siblings and families come through. Inevitably, he has taught many older brothers and sisters of his students. Chris always made a point to engage students in personal dialogue, even when students might be in trouble. He was often, during his observations, heard asking about family members to make connections with students.

One day in particular a White male student came in to silent reading class with an attendance card for him to sign. Chris asked the student how long he is going to be on the card, and who put him on it, his mom or the Dean. The student says it was the Dean.

“Cuz you missed too much class” Chris asks?

“Yah,” The boy says.

“How is your brother doing?” Chris asks while signing the card.

“Good.” the boy responds, and walks out of the room.

On another occasion a Hispanic girl walked in with sunglasses on.

Chris says, “Hey, Maverick!”

She responds with, “Sup Goose!”

A few moments later a Black girl walks in and Chris says, “What do you want?” in a joking manner. She asks Chris if he has anything that can fix her shoe. He gets out a glue gun for her and plugs it in.

At lunch time in Chris’ room there were a few students who come in to work, but most of the students came to Chris’ room to eat and hang out. Some listened to music, some talked with their friends, while others come to talk with Chris about video games, asked him to borrow a glue gun to fix a shoe or use a computer. Chris’ room appeared to be a safe place for students. On most days there were between 15 and 20 students in his room at lunch. During an observation a Hispanic boy came up and asked,

“Mr. B, can I buy something?”

He replies, “After you finish your work.”

At first, the researcher was confused, but then realized that Chris had a stash of food and treats that he sold to students while they worked in class. Later Chris was asked about the snacks and he said he sold food to purchase materials for summer school science supplies. He charged students 25 or 50 cents for items.

Chris then asked the student why he did not eat his lunch. He replied to Chris with something inaudible, but based on Chris’s response, it must have been about the student not having lunch money.

“You should have come in here, I would have given you something.”

Chris showed up with food for students, lent them money or food if they needed it, and used his own money, in addition to his “fundraised” money, to build science programs for students. Unfortunately, he found out later in the semester, about two weeks before summer session was supposed to start, that his class was not going to run. On the day he found out, he was really upset about it, and said to his class, “First off, I want you to know that I am tired and angry right now, and I am sorry. I just want you to know that if I am short or cranky with you guys today, it is not you”. He was not cranky with his students that day, but students responded differently to him because they knew he was upset. Chris demonstrated a profound ability to create a positive culture in his classroom. His classroom was a safe place for many students who did not seem to have a comfortable place at school.

Chris had been working on learning Spanish for the past couple of years. On several occasions he spoke to his Hispanic students in Spanish to check for

understanding and to interact personally with his students. At the beginning of the school year, Chris got a student in his class that spoke very little English and was a native Spanish speaker. During class the student was doing his best to stay engaged and on topic with the class. Chris came over to his table and asked him in Spanish if he had any questions and if he understood the lesson. The lesson was about the scientific method, and the student nodded his head that he does understand. Chris also practiced speaking his Spanish with his students who spoke both English and Spanish, but typically those were more social conversations rather than academic ones. Chris also allowed his students to sit next to other students who spoke the same language as them. For example, in one class he had a student who spoke primarily Arabic. The girl who sat next to her also spoke Arabic, but was also fluent in English. Chris allowed those students to sit together during class so that one student could translate for the other. Chris used his knowledge about students to improve communication within the classroom and with students' parents at home.

During an observation in Chris's classroom, a parent of a student stopped in to drop something off to his child in class. Although Chris was teaching he paused, walked over to the door, and shook the Dad's hand. Chris also shared during one of our interviews that he gave his students and their parents his cell phone number at back to school night since they were all collectively committed to helping the student. When asked what he did to build relationships with the parents of his students he responded,

Well, the best is, in the beginning of the year, we do a barbeque or potluck with the parents. I've talked to you about the family atmosphere and we introduce

ourselves before back to school night. The night is just about hanging out, getting to meet you, getting to know us, and it's a very social kind of low key activity where the parents get to just talk to you.

Then at back to school night we talk about some of the academic things in our classroom. For me, I really try, for the parents that do become involved in those things, and those activities, or through parent conferences, to kind of lay a foundation that we're a family. You know, 'me, you, and the kid', we all want this child to succeed.

Chris described Payne, his students and their families as a big family. This was a common theme throughout his interviews. He also discussed a few parents with whom he had a close relationship either because he had an older sibling in prior years, or because the student had struggled in some way. He finished his comment about parents by saying that he reinforced to parents,

Hey, this is our classroom, you know. You're part of the family. Welcome to the family. You know, anytime you want to come in, you know, you don't have to call and ask. Just walk in the door, anytime you want, you know. You don't need to make an appointment. Mi casa es Su casa.

Chris said he did not make as many specific and consistent efforts to communicate with students' families, but as a community, Payne hosted events which were family oriented.

Chris taught 8th grade science, so his curriculum was set through the district guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC) as well as by the members of his professional learning team (PLT). His PLT had done some work with examining the district's curriculum and making sure each unit had a project based assessment or a problem solving component. There was a focus in Chris's class on scientific method and process rather than an emphasis on memorizing content, a practice which is also reflected in the new Common Core Standards. Chris also engaged students in science curriculum through interesting, humorous and inquiry based ways. During one of my observations Chris had been teaching a unit on metric measurement and the class was going to be learning about density. He introduced the project that went along with this unit in the last few minutes of class.

OK, with our last few minutes start talking with your tables about how you might go about building a life jacket. Next week, we are going to go outside and measure my volume in the horse trough.

In order to understand density, each group was going to have to design a life vest that would enable Chris to float in water. In order to do this, they would have to know his density, hence the horse trough. They used the trough the next week to measure Chris's volume.

Chris also made an effort to make cross-curricular connections for his students when studying science. For example, when teaching metric conversions he compared how you convert metric measurement to currency.

“Do you guys remember when I told John if I gave him two nickels would he give me one dollar? He gave me a dollar and I gave him two nickels.”

“No Mr. B it was two dimes,” a student says.

“Oh yah, it was two dimes. The point is, in science, we have to do the same thing with metric measurement. So, what do we know about the meter?” He goes on to draw a diagram on the board to compare a meter to other units of measure.

Chris started each day with a similar routine. Students would come into class and get out their science notebooks. They would then write down the objective for the day, which was on the projector, and then they would answer a day starter. The remainder of the class was not always as structured as the beginning, especially on a day when students were doing an activity in class.

Chris and the members of his professional learning team all gave a science progress monitoring test three to four times during the year to measure growth on science processes. When it is given at the beginning of the year, it helped Chris know what students were coming in with and determine if they were placed appropriately, as there was an honors course at eighth grade. They used the interim assessments to see if students were making progress during the year towards proficiency in the standards. Informally, Chris walked around his room and checked for student understanding on a regular basis. Chris was constantly walking around the room to see where students were in their learning, which helped him plan for instruction on-the-spot. Chris had difficult content to teach; genetics, physics, chemistry, and human body systems. What

was not observed during observations or heard in interviews was the urgency for students to grow academically, or systems to regularly measure student growth and progress. Chris did not appear to intentionally lower his standards for students, as he taught the same content as the other teachers at his grade level. The missing piece during the observations and interviews was student accountability for the standards to which he was teaching.

Chris tried to build a positive and supportive learning environment in his classroom through positive reinforcement of students. During the genetics unit the class was working on Punnett squares, and Chris had given them a question to answer based on their Punnett squares. He asked the class,

“What percent of the offspring is going to be blue?”

A young Hispanic girl asked Chris, “Is this right?”

He says to her “how can I tell your big P from your little p?”

She explained her answer to him. His response back to her was “Wow. That was smart. You are so smart.”

It was evident throughout Chris’ observations and interviews that he believed that his most important role as a teacher at Payne was to build and maintain positive relationships with students and families. Chris tended to focus less on the academic expectations of students and more on the social-emotional aspect of students.

Allison. Allison, a White teacher who is a fifteen year veteran to the profession, is originally from the mid-west but has been teaching at Wildcat for fourteen years.

When asked to describe her teaching journey, she chose to discuss her unconventional

route into the teaching profession. When she described her journey, she said it is not one she ever imagined for herself mostly because she never really wanted to be a teacher. Even as a child, she wanted to be different.

I remember in first or second grade for school we had to create a poster of what we wanted to be when we grew up and all the girls did teachers and I drew a clown because I wanted to be different. Clowns scare me and it's not that I ever really wanted to be a clown I just didn't want to be like everybody else.

So in college she studied chemistry so she could be a physical chemist, like her dad. She was working with one of her professors and he said something to her like "Oh, I bet you are wondering why this is going to happen!" and she really "didn't care what happened." She decided at that time that chemistry was probably not her thing. Upon examination of her skills and college credits, she put it together to be a middle school science teacher. That, she said, was the best thing she ever did.

Allison had not previously considered teaching middle school because, like many people, junior high was not her favorite time in her own life. She felt that (teaching middle school) was the only thing she knew how to do. In her 15 years of teaching she taught 14 of them at Wildcat. Although the population at Wildcat was primarily White, Allison taught in the AVID program, which was a program to help students "at risk" and "in the middle" be academically successful with the ultimate goal being college for all students. She described her experience teaching AVID as an emotional one. "Teaching AVID is the hardest thing I have ever done, so a lot of times I feel like I am beating my head against the wall because there has got to be one thing

that I can get that kid hooked on that will help them.” Allison stressed and worried about her kids like a mother would. She said she was concerned when they were home for the summer and were not connected to the school. She truly took on the persona of a “school mom” for her AVID kids, and for many of her kids, she was the most stable adult in their lives.

Allison spent class time each day to share something about herself with her students and frequently asked students about the positive things happening in their lives. One day, while Allison was transitioning from one activity to the next, she said to her students, “Alright, think of one thing you would like to share that is positive because I haven’t seen you in three days!” She called first on a Hispanic girl. “I went to the mountains and swam in the river.” Allison went on to ask other kids to share their positive things. A boy shared that he went to New Mexico in the mountains. Another boy shared that he played in a football game and that his team won 60-8. Another student said that his mom gave him \$50, so he went with a friend to “Wingin’ it” and he had to eat 30 wings in a set amount of time, and he lost the bet. Another girl said she was at a friend’s house and it was raining and there was a Persian party. They took water from the water balloons and dumped it on her. Allison said while chuckling, “I don’t know how to take that positively?” Another boy shared that he fell longboarding and had to stay home and watch movies. Allison asked him, “How did that happen? Were you wearing a helmet?” After students finished sharing their stories from the weekend Allison moved on to the next activity. During these conversations Allison was

engaged in the stories and asking questions about her students. This demonstrated her interest in the well-being and in the personal lives of her students.

Allison also spent many of her passing periods, lunch times and after school hours with her students. One day a student stayed late after class to asked Allison a question. She saw his binder and noticed that it was a mess. There were papers sticking out of all sides, and since one of the basic purposes of AVID was to help students learn to “do school” and be organized, this prompted her to ask him about the binder. He said he had dropped his binder that morning, and had not had time to re-organize. He shared that he does not want to keep his life binder and he just wanted to keep the papers together. She made a deal with him, if by the end of September he had no missing assignments, he could organize his papers his way. But if at the end of September he had even one missing assignment, he had to do it her way.

“Deal?” she says.

“OK.” he replies.

She finished helping him get organized and as he is leaving, she says to him,

“Alright, are you mad at me?”

“No.” he replies.

“OK....have a good lunch.”

Allison often referred to herself as their “school mom” and she proudly let parents know this. When she spoke to parents on AVID parent night, she told parents it is her job, while they are at school, to nag them and help them be successful in school. Kids also refer to her as their school mom. On a day when she was introducing tutorials

(a strategy used in AVID classes to promote student problem solving, leadership and collaboration), she asked students what they thought her role was during the tutorials. One of the students replied, “school mom-ing!” This student said this because during tutorials Allison did not facilitate the process, the students and the tutors served as facilitators. Her role was to talk one-on-one with students about why they were not prepared for the day’s tutorial session and help them make a plan to be more successful in the future. Students in her class also checked and turned in their grades weekly. If students were not performing in their other classes, Allison talked with these students to get to the reason, which might have included talking to other teachers or contacting parents to get them involved. When observing her classes, the rituals and routines were clear and predictable; she conducted her class in a very organized manner and expected students to be on-task at all times. If they were not, she had a one-on-one conversation with them. These conversations typically involved a private conversation in the hallway or after class, where Allison was overheard asking students how she could help them be more successful in the future, and what their behavior would look like when they returned to class.

In Allison’s classroom, she specifically used call and response techniques to get student feedback, and she felt it was effective in her classrooms. She believed that using this strategy to communicate with her class was not only culturally responsive, but effective for all of her students. Call and response was one strategy Allison mentioned that helped her engage students using a collaborative or collective communication style that was congruent with their cultural communication style.

Allison communicated with parents frequently through email, text message and other electronic means, but also included parents in assignments and held parent nights twice a year. Allison's teaching situation was a bit different from most because in order to be admitted to the AVID program you cannot be an ELA student. There were several students in the class who had been in ELA prior to this class, so their parents might not have been native English speakers, but most of the students had above average English skills. This made the communication with students much easier. Allison did many things, however, to involve parents in the AVID classroom. One of the things that kept parents involved on a regular basis was requiring them to sign off on their child's grades every week. Students received a grade in AVID for turning in their updated grades with a parent signature. Allison also had a website where she kept all of the assignments and updates for parents and students. She went with the students at the beginning of the year to the computer lab to make sure they know how to sign in to the website, then she constantly reminded students to make sure their parents had enrolled.

As part of the AVID program, Allison planned two parent nights per year, which were separate from back to school nights and other school wide parent events. Once in the fall and once in the spring, parents were invited in the evening to see examples of the work their students were doing in AVID. During these parent nights, students demonstrated for their parents the process of AVID tutorials, notebook checks, Cornell note taking and other AVID strategies. This helped the AVID parents understand the purpose of the AVID course, and helped them understand what the expectations were for AVID students.

Although Allison did not currently speak Spanish, she expressed an interest in learning Spanish to help her communicate with the families of her students. To assist in this process, Allison had a Spanish speaking counselor who assisted her with the AVID program and frequently made parent contacts. Allison also had close relationships with many of her students' parents because she taught many of their siblings in the AVID program in prior years. As a result some of these parents chose to be a part of the AVID site team. Allison said she tried to keep an open door with parents, and wanted them to know that she considered herself to be their students' "surrogate" mom at school.

Allison's curriculum was flexible since there was not a state curriculum that guided her instruction, but a set of "essentials" put out by the AVID center that drove her curriculum. Furthermore, this curriculum had an underlying purpose of preparing students for high school and college, which inherently allowed her to teach students about the "hidden" curriculum and how to navigate in school.

Allison's class was very structured, although the classroom structure changed based on the day of the week. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays the routine was always the same; students came in and did their Braingle (daystarter). Then Allison would go over the Braingle while students checked their answers, after that students would get out their life binder and write down any assignments or announcements on the board. Finally students got out their AVID notebooks and started on their work for that day. Tuesdays and Thursdays were tutorial days, so they have their own routine with students coming in and doing their Braingle, then getting out their tutorial request

form and dividing into tutorial groups where they stayed for the remainder of the period.

Allison recognized student accomplishments on a frequent basis and one example of this was an “AVID Honor Roll” to recognize all of her students who had all A’s and B’s. Once a week they spent time recognizing who those students were and they got to write their name on the honor roll whiteboard. It was evident in Allison’s class, because of the continuous focus on recognizing and celebrating accomplishments in students’ lives, her intent was for her students to be successful, and her actions and responses mirrored this throughout this study.

Marissa. Marissa, a White teacher in her twenties, moved from her mid-west home after college to pursue a teaching career because there were no teaching jobs in her home state. She had a friend who told her about Payne, so she interviewed at a teaching fair and was accepted on the spot. For her first teaching job she was hired to teach math at Payne and she has stayed there for six years. Marissa reflected on her upbringing during her interview and though she never used the term Whiteness, she recognized the influence that Whiteness and privilege had on those around her, as well as how they influenced how she saw her students. She explained that completing a racial autobiography helped shed light on the fact that some members of her family have at times demonstrated racist behaviors due to the cultural conflict occurring in her hometown. She also recognized that her background influenced how and what she thought about certain populations of people, and the training she has participated in has helped her become more aware of her own prejudices. When asked in her interview

about why it is important for schools to understand the teacher journey in becoming more culturally responsive, part of her response focused on her personal journey and her culture,

I grew up in a city that had a high Middle Eastern population so I had a lot of Arabic, Chaldeans, even Italians, it's not Middle Eastern necessarily but a lot of different races, but not necessarily the black, White, Hispanic, that we talk about all the time here. So I feel like I bring a different perspective, but at the same time I wasn't one of those races to really know what they went through. So I think knowing where you have been to know where you are going is important, and to know things that you are ignorant about. Ignorance isn't always bliss. In addition maybe just knowing where you have not realized something in the past will help you have a better eye for it in the future, so you don't miss the same thing over and over again.

Marissa grew up in a more diverse town than the other participants. She does not feel that her upbringing necessarily prepared her for her current teaching situation because the ethnicities were different at Payne than where she grew up, so it was new learning for her. She does recognize the importance of knowing where you have been and knowing in what areas you are ignorant.

When asked to describe her journey, she also focused on what had evolved in her practice in the last six years. She said, "In the beginning someone handed me a binder and said here's the seventh grade curriculum, and I went "Really?" The curriculum matched up with the Connected Math Program (CMP) books and had copies

that had been made for probably the last 10 years. Typos were “whited-out” and written over and they had nothing on computers.” So, she spent the majority of her first year entering lessons into the computer for two reasons; first, she wanted to make sure she knew what was in the curriculum, and second, she wanted the information able to be easily changed or adjusted in the future. Once she had all of this information available digitally, she was able to spend her time making adjustments to meet the needs of students.

She also said in her interview that she spent a fair amount of time looking at the standards, determining what students were struggling with, and figuring out how to make the curriculum more accessible to the students. As written, Marissa thought the CMP curriculum was not accessible to 80% of the students in her classroom because many of her students were not reading at grade level. So Marissa and her colleagues spent time looking at the language of math and working with vocabulary, reading and writing in the math content area.

Marissa was not observed specifically teaching about culture. During classroom observations, Marissa was focused on the set curriculum and rarely deviated from discussions and instruction about mathematics. On occasion, she would ask students about their lives and their families, but rarely did conversations about culture occur during instructional time, neither did the incorporation of cultural connections. In Marissa’s case, the incorporation of cultural connections was related to the need to cover all of the curriculum within the parameters of the school year. On many occasions Marissa mentioned the number of standards students needed to master in

seventh grade, and then went on to discuss how many do not get covered due to time in the school year. In her interview Marissa said,

Seventy-two standards by March, and to take a week on a concept is so like, out of this world to me, it would be amazing and I think about the wonderful things you could do and how you could dig deeper and everything else, but how do I cover the other 71 concepts with taking one week on one concept? So that is one thing that has been a frustration to me with teaching and everyone always says “well it’s better to teach deeper and you don’t need to cover all the standards”.

How do I choose which standards not to cover? I’ve done that before where I have left standards out and then my scores have been poor because there were four questions on that standard on (the state test). So how do I know which standards to leave out and cover later or whatever else, and then my kids end up suffering because of it. So that’s been something I have really struggled with. I want to be a better teacher, I want to cover things more in depth, and I don’t feel like I have the time to do so and you know, it’s always that battle of do you teach the test or not, and I don’t feel like there is a choice these days.

I feel like you’re doing your kids a disservice, or I am doing my kids a disservice if I don’t teach the test because then they are going to the next grade level and someone looks at their scores, and oh, you don’t understand this, no my teacher taught it to me after the test. Well they shouldn’t have, they should have gotten it to you before the test, because that’s what the standards tell us to do.

Marissa recognized that the students at Payne came from diverse backgrounds, yet this recognition does not necessarily translate into a change in how she approached what she taught. When asked to describe her students she said,

They have been really diverse groups; diverse in their abilities and in their backgrounds. We have some kids that come from higher socioeconomic, some from lower. We have kids from all sorts of different cultural backgrounds with many different languages in their pockets. Then, because we don't do many different levels of classes, we get kids that are four years behind grade level with kids who are at grade level all in the same class, and with that you have the kids that are shy with the kids that are wanting to speak all the time. So, I think the biggest thing is just how diverse they are in every aspect of the word.

During observations in Marissa's classroom, she did not frequently discuss culture in her interactions with students. However during her interviews it was clear that culture, hers and her students, was something she frequently considered when planning for instruction and interacting with students. On occasion, she would ask a student what language was spoken in their home, ask students when they moved here or when they learned English, but discussions about culture did not come up often in her classroom.

One of the characteristics consistent with all participants was their willingness to share personal experiences with their students and allow students to be a part of their lives. Marissa's father had recently fallen ill and had been bedridden for some time. She had been spending many hours on the phone with medical supply companies for many months to get her father a wheelchair so he could get up and out of bed. She

shared some of her stories about her ongoing dilemma with her students. One day in class she interjected that her dad had finally gotten his wheelchair the day before. The kids erupted in cheering and applause. A boy asked her “Did you cry?” She responded back, “Not this time. I know I cry a lot, but not this time.” The students expressed their excitement for Marissa by cheering and laughing with her.

Marissa invited students to come in during their lunch period every day to work on math. It was during that time, as well as during passing periods, that many of her meaningful interactions with students were observed. One of the interactions observed during a passing period was with a young woman, a Black student named Lastar (pseudonym), who had missed most of class. She came in at the very end to collect her things. Marissa asked if she was called out to talk about whatever was upsetting her earlier in the week.

Lastar said, “Yah.”

Marissa talked to her about how she had noticed a lot of drama on the team.

“Are you part of the drama, or are you a bystander?”

Lastar said, “A bystander.”

Marissa spent a few minutes talking with this young woman about trying to stay out of the drama. This was an example of Marissa giving guidance, almost like a parent would, to one of her students. On a separate occasion, a student came in to ask Marissa for homework.

He asked, “Is there going to be any homework for like the next five days?”

She asked him why he is going to be out.

He told her something under his breath about “Me and....football.....we just.....”

Marissa asks, “Didn’t make good choices?”

For the next few minutes Marissa worked with the student to help him figure out how he was going to get all of his work electronically, and she was making sure he had access to the work. At the end of their conversation she said to him,

“Alright, remember you choose your path”.

“Yah.” As he walked out, his hunched over back and his slumped over head communicated that he was disappointed in himself.

Again, Marissa demonstrated how she shows caring with students by providing words of wisdom or parent-like advice. Marissa also had high expectations of her students while maintaining positive and caring relationships with her students. For example, during observations Marissa gave students directions like, “Sit up like a student” or when students were off task she approached and said, “You guys did not get your work done last night. So, you should be the quietest. I should hear nothing but math conversations”. Marissa also held students to high behavioral standards while keeping a warm rapport with students. On two accounts I saw students who were not following dress code. To one student she said, “Oh, I am so glad you just pulled those pants up. I was just getting ready to do that.” On a different occasion, a student had his hood up over his head. When Marissa saw him she said, “Please take off your hood. You know what the rules are.” Without protest, he removed his hood. Marissa demonstrated high expectations as well as a growth mindset in how she viewed mastery of the standards and the classwork that is assigned to help meet those standards. For

example, a group of girls had finished their homework during a group work time. Marissa was walking around the room to see where students were and was answering questions. The group of girls asked her how homework was going to be graded. Her response was, “As long as you correct your answers and show all of your work, you will get a good grade. The goal is that if you miss it on this one and you correct it, next time you do your homework you will get it right.” Another example of a growth mindset in Marissa’s class is her use of the Trailmarker quiz. The Trailmarker quizzes were standards-based assessments that students took over the course of the year to show mastery of concepts. When she handed the quizzes to students, she said to the class, “You can’t do worse. I always take your highest score”. She went on to explain that if students had already passed the Trailmarker that quarter, they did not have to retake the quiz.

Marissa’s classroom discourse uses more of a passive-receptive posture where students listen quietly while the teacher talks (Kochman, 1985). Once the teacher is finished, the students can answer in a prearranged, stylized way. For example, in her class, she used popsicle sticks to call on students. This is Marissa’s teaching style when she is doing direct instruction with students. Because Marissa is on a block schedule, most of the period was not direct instruction or guided practice, but the majority of the class time was spent in cooperative groups doing bell work, homework, or practice. She also built in kinesthetic learning activities in the structure of the lesson. This will be discussed in the section on instruction. One way that Marissa tried to allow students to practice their own cultural communication style was during the group work. As long as

students were on task, she did not direct the learning. Many students who spoke languages other than English would sit together and speak their own language. Some students chose to work on their own, while others talk through the work time. The fact that she changed communication styles and learning styles several times within one blocked period allowed her English language learners to code switch and also helped her use various learning styles to deliver instruction (Gumperz, 1982).

When Marissa was asked about how she builds relationships with parents, her answer was that the majority of the interactions she had with parents occur through electronic means and voicemail. She sent by-weekly email updates to parents to let them know what was going on in class, what their kids were studying and what they could expect. She checked with all of her student's parents to make sure they had access to email; she said she has sixty nine students and seventy three email addresses because some student have more than one parent listed. Marissa knew that there were a few parents who did not have email addresses, so she came up with other ways to communicate with those parents. In addition, she called or emailed parents when she had concerns about students. She had a few parents she spoke to on a more regular basis when there were ongoing concerns with students, but she primarily tried to be responsive when parents try to reach her.

On occasion, she asked students to discuss their learning with an adult, and she involved parents in the education process. For example, one night for homework she had the students share their new math vocabulary with an adult. As they were checking the homework she says to them,

Last question: you were supposed to talk to someone about what those four vocabulary words from yesterday were. If you have that signed, turn it in. I don't care if you don't have a parent or guardian at home. Ask an electives teacher or another adult in the building.

Marissa's curriculum was also driven by the district's curriculum but she was intentional about helping students access the given curriculum, especially for her language learners. Marissa spent some of her instructional time each day discussing the vocabulary of math and connecting mathematical concepts to students' lives. For example, one day while observing Marissa she introduced a new topic on combining like terms. She wrote three words up on the board, and as a class they defined each term on its own.

Table 4

Marissa's Three-Word Demonstration

Combine	Like	Terms
Definition: Put together	Definition: In common or similar	Definition: Words or categories

Marissa then briefly discussed with the class how the word *term* is different in math than it is in other subjects. They then went on to do a kinesthetic activity about combining like terms.

Marissa also gave real-life math examples to create relevance for her students. After students had finished their bell work, Marissa began going over the problems.

The problem they were struggling with was number nine: 0 divided by 38. Students were not getting the correct answer.

A student said “I got 38.”

Marissa asked “So, you have \$0 and you split it up among 38 friends and you all end up with \$38?”

Marissa had high expectations of her students, and when students were in her classroom, it was work time. Very rarely was there a minute to spare in her class because she had students working bell-to-bell. In Marissa’s class, kids walked in everyday with their homework. If a student’s homework was not complete, they would go to one side of the room and sit down, if it was complete they would be seated on the other side of the room. Then students would work for five minutes on bell work in their math notebooks. Students would then spend five minutes either finishing their homework or going over it with their table mates. Marissa would go over any of the homework questions students might have had with the class. Those assignments were then turned in and the students would return to their seats. This is when the daily instruction would begin, however Marissa did not do much direct instruction in her classroom. Most of the learning involved exploring new math vocabulary, then guided practice of sample problems, and then practice on their own on wipe-off boards. Typically after the new learning, Marissa would have a kinesthetic activity planned where kids would get up and move around while using their new skills. On occasion this routine changed slightly to accommodate a quiz or a test, but on most days this was the norm.

Marissa publicly recognized student effort, growth and achievement in her class. For example, after students had passed their Trailmarker quiz based on the math standards, students added their names to the Trailmarker poster on the wall of her classroom. Marissa frequently praised student behavior, especially when students who did not normally participate in class would begin to contribute to the group conversation. One day in particular, Marissa is going over some of the problems on a worksheet. It is a difficult problem.

She said to the class, “OK, here is the hardest one of the day! $-45n+n =$. What do we get?”

Kids raised their hands and shouted out. “ $-45n^2$ ”

“No” She responded.

Another said, “ $+45n^2$ ”.

“No” Marissa said.

Bill (an Asian student) answered, “ $-44n$ ”

“YES!” Marissa yelled.

The rest of the class cheered.

Just then, a Black student shouted out, “Man, Bill just swooped in and saved the day!”

“And my sanity” Marissa added!

After class was over, Bill walked out and Marissa said to him, “Hey Bill, thanks for sharing today. I loved hearing your voice in class”.

In Marissa's class, she called on students on a regular basis to help solve math problems. In order to make sure all voices were heard and that all students had an equal chance to participate she used popsicle sticks with student names on them. The popsicle sticks were in a jar and she picked out one at a time at random to determine whose turn it was to answer the question. If kids were called on and they were struggling with the answer, she politely asked them, "Would you like some help?" If the student replied yes, then she moved on to another student. However, she always came back to the original student to check for understanding afterwards. Marissa also used small White boards for students to practice problems and have them quickly checked by Marissa. This was a progress monitoring tool for Marissa, and a tool that made her classroom risk-free for students. As was mentioned previously, Marissa also gave Trailmarker quizzes based on standards throughout the year. This helped Marissa know which students had mastered the standards and which ones had not.

Marissa demonstrated in her observations a highly structured classroom with rigorous yet responsive expectations of her students. Additionally, in her interviews, she gave specific examples of how she tried to personalize instruction for students and help students access difficult math curriculum through language. She also showed, through her actions in the classroom, how she related to her students on a personal level.

Influence of professional learning on the teacher journey

In the district where Chris, Allison and Marissa teach there has been ongoing professional learning, both at the district level and within schools, to help teachers

confront issues of equity in their classrooms and to guide teachers on a journey of self-reflection about race and its presence in their lives. In this section, the three teachers describe the influence this professional learning had on their practice.

Chris. Chris discussed many influential aspects of the culturally responsive professional learning on his teaching, and credits his school's principal for challenging the staff to engage in the equity work. When asked specifically about what activities or discussions had been most influential for him, he named a couple of specific activities. The first activity helped him understand some of the societal racism that still occurs in the media.

I do remember one thing that's always stuck in my mind that really, I mean, I guess kind of changed the way I view a lot of things, especially in the media.

And it was during hurricane Katrina and (our principal) had put up a picture of a couple of African-Americans in, you know, waist-high water with some things in their arms that looked like groceries, or something. I don't remember what they were. But the caption was something about, you know, "rioters loot the city."

And so, we all looked at that and thought to ourselves like, "Wow, you know, that's pretty crazy." You know, we didn't really know where to go with it. And then, she put up another picture which was two White people waist-high in water, similar items in their arms, and the caption was something about, you know, "New Orleans people scavenge to survive." And when I saw that it really kind of hit home to me as far as wow, like that's totally the truth, like it's the

same picture. The only thing different was the color of the two people's skin, yet the spin on it was totally different.

And so, with that sticking to me and the way I saw that and understood it, you know, I mean, I get in so many arguments with people when it comes to media and so on and so forth. But that was one simple activity that just really made me go, "Wow, that's crazy."

When asked whether teachers could come to some of this learning on their own, or if the work we are doing in schools is necessary for White teachers to become more culturally responsive, he said,

I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the training. I wouldn't be the person I am and my daughter wouldn't be the person she is. And I wouldn't have the relationships I probably would with the kids that I do without it because I just wouldn't have an understanding like I do, or an open mind, or the ability to observe the individuals that I do, you know.

But, of course, (the training) also caused me numerous times of anxiety because now I have to ... I know the truth and I see the truth out in the world and the injustices and the ridiculousness that happens every day on the news and with politicians and friends. And I sit there and it is mind blowing when you get it and you see it and then nobody else does and you think you're crazy. But, I mean, I wouldn't be the person I am without this building and, you know, the teachings and the education that I've gotten.

In this statement and several others made throughout his interviews, it was evident that Chris has used what he has learned through the professional development to not only become a better teacher, but he believes it has made him a better person.

Allison. When discussing what components of the equity work have been most critical in influencing her teaching. She began to discuss how the school was supposed to target specific students to progress monitor. She said this practice has forced her to think about primarily providing instruction to students whose progress is being monitored students while knowing the other students would learn independent of her efforts. She continued, saying,

I filter out my White kids, and I see my kids of color first and I teach to my kids of color, and know that my White kids, no matter what I say, no matter what I do because I'm White, they're going to understand what I'm talking about.

During a different interview she was asked why she thought it was important for schools to understand the journey a teacher travels in becoming more culturally responsive, she replied,

Well I think it's totally different for different people and I think that some people take a longer time to get to certain points where it's more meaningful to them, and some teachers may never get there. And that scares me; I mean I have a White son so I'm not too concerned about his culture not being translated properly in the classroom but if I were a parent of color I would be horrified. I would be worried about how my child was going to be perceived and I would want my child to be seen for who he or she is.

Allison has also learned, through her equity work, about the importance of involving parents in the education process. She involved parents regularly with grade reports, email updates, text message reminders and parent nights. These family nights were similar in nature to the parent education classes the Kuykendall (2004) suggests offering to “Give parents a better understanding of things they can do at home to enhance the motivation of their children” (p. 183).

Marissa. When Marissa was asked about how the professional learning about equity has influenced her, she described many elements of the training that have challenged her thinking about race and culture. She first discussed what they had most recently been discussing as a group.

We’ve talked a lot about currencies, what currencies (students) bring, what currencies we bring, and we’ve even talked as finite as currencies of currencies. So like current, grades are valued by some students. Grades are valued by teachers, but what is valued in the grade?

Like do the students just want the A, or do they want the A because it shows that they’re learning or, you know, if they have an A but they’re not understanding. Stuff like that we’re talking more about what exactly in the grade. And with teachers, you know, is your homework worth 50% of your grade and test worth 50%? Like how exactly is that breaking down?

She also went on to discuss the importance of self-reflection during the professional learning and the influence the racial autobiography project had on her teaching. She said,

We've done a lot with knowing your racial backgrounds, knowing where you came from, knowing prejudices you have and how that can influence your classroom. Well I think one thing with the racial autobiographies when we all shared out, there were things that, you know, like the black members of (our group) shared that I would have never even thought of where like, you know, they took their kindergartner to school and weren't treated as all the other parents were treated when they walked in and, you know, like, "Oh, okay, so you're her father? Like is mom in the picture?" And it's like, "Why are you assuming automatically mom's not in the picture? Like no, I just brought my daughter to school today." ...just different things like that where I was like, I would never even think that would still exist these days and they're like, "Oh, it exists."

Then I wrote a racial autobiography and it kind of came to light like my family and their racist aspects at times and even I know I grew up in a community that had a large Middle Eastern population and there was a lot of fights between this culture to this culture and this culture. I mean, the White people could just walk through because they didn't care about us because we were a bunch of mutts walking around. But there was a lot of like Albanians versus Chaldeans versus

Italians going on at my high school...So I think those racial autobiographies, knowing where I came from, was huge.

All three participants mentioned the racial autobiography at one time or another during their interviews, which gave the perception that this activity had greatly influenced their thinking about students of color.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher journeys toward cultural responsiveness and explore how teachers described and demonstrated their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and training on practice. The following research questions were addressed through observations and interviews.

1. How do teachers who are intentionally working towards cultural responsiveness describe their teaching journey?
2. How do teachers describe and enact their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?
3. What is the impact of culturally responsive professional learning on teachers' instruction?

This study focused on interviews with, and classroom observations of, three teachers who have previously expressed interest in becoming more culturally responsive through their participation in ongoing professional learning about CRP. Through participant interviews and classroom observations the researcher was able to begin to understand their journey towards cultural responsiveness. It was understood by the researcher that these teachers were not necessarily going to be *the* model teachers for culturally responsive teaching; however, they were teachers committed to changing

practice to be more culturally responsive. All of the teachers displayed characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy as cited in the literature, and in some ways, they did not. This chapter presents a discussion of the research and its implications as well as, emerging themes from the data and some of the limitations of this study. Finally, recommendations for future research related to this study will be suggested.

The Teacher Journey: Emerging Themes from the Research

Several elements of teacher essence and pedagogy emerged across the data from the three teachers: relationship between teachers' perception of CRT and their actions in their classrooms, presence of cognitive shifts about teaching, importance of teacher mindsets, emphasis on building relationships with students, attention to classroom aesthetics and climate, identification of the balance between academic press and social support, and the challenges of focusing on culturally relevant practices and implementing a mandated curriculum. In the following sections, the themes within the teacher journeys and examples of how these elements presented themselves during the observations and interviews are presented.

Relationship between teacher perception of CRT and action. All three participants had viewed their teaching journeys in different ways. One significant finding was the teachers' descriptions of their teaching career as a journey did not include the terms culturally responsive or equitable in their answers unless it was specifically asked in the interview question. The researcher purposefully avoided asking teachers specifically about their journey in becoming more culturally responsive in order to see what would naturally emerge from their description. It was important to

learn if these three teachers thought of their training in culturally responsive teaching as part of their journey, or part of who they had become as a teacher. None of them specifically said anything about this until later when asked about the equity training in a separate question. However, there were threads of recognition of culturally responsive practices and experiences in their answers.

For example, Chris discussed how the demographics of his school changed drastically over the last fifteen years, but that he believed that this increased diversity and the work that is being done at his school have changed him for the better. One of the ways Chris demonstrated this was through his personal goal of wanting to learn to speak Spanish to be able to communicate with his Spanish speaking students. He discussed this desire in his interview and he also practiced the language in class with his students.

Allison discussed getting her AVID students “hooked” on something at school and preparing them for their future with skills they will need regardless of the profession they choose. Some of the skills she mentioned were organization, time management, forming relationships with teachers and other people, having study groups and knowing who to ask for help when they need it. She wanted students to gain these skills so they could do well academically and professionally and this concern was expressed for all students. With this in mind, Allison frequently yelled out to her students “AVID students. Where are you going?” Kids then respond with “College.” A regular part of the routine in AVID class is organizing their binders and learning how to use their planners.

Marissa recognized the language issues that many of her students encountered because they were not reading at seventh grade level for a variety of reasons. As a result, she has completely rewritten her lesson plans to help students understand the language of math. Any given day in Marissa's classroom, she skillfully taught at least one mathematical vocabulary term. All three of these responses fit into one or more components of culturally responsive practices, and reflect equitable teaching practices, even though these teachers did not explicitly name them as such.

This evidence of culturally proficient practice in their descriptions of authentic examples and in the observation data connects with Argyris and Schön's (1974) single loop and double loop learning. Argyris and Schön conducted a great deal of research on individual and organizational learning, and they examined the relationship between what we say and how we act. They state,

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is this theory-in-use. (Argyris & Schön 1974, pp. 6-7)

Based on the observations within these three classrooms, all three teachers have a "theory in use" that is culturally responsive in nature. In other words, they do not necessarily use the words culturally responsive when describing their journey (espoused theory), but they do use culturally responsive practices in their everyday interactions with their students and the community.

Cognitive shifts about teaching. Another theme that emerged during the interviews with participants about their journey is that they described their journey

around critical incidents and articulated a cognitive shift that occurred around equity and culturally responsive instruction. They did not name their shift, they just explained a time when their thinking about equity and their students of color changed. For these teachers, these shifts occurred as a result of conversations with colleagues and professional learning opportunities. For example, Chris described himself as colorblind during his early years as a teacher. It was not until he was placed on a team with a teacher of color that he began to have discussions about how race impacted students and has talked with him about racial inequities and Black culture. Then, as part of their building equity work, they did an activity called the color line. Teachers were asked to take a scored survey about White Privilege, then after they added up their score participants lined up around the room based on their score. Typically all of the participants of color end up at one end of the color line because it is based on privilege and judgments based on race. Chris said this really helped him understand how teachers viewed issues of privilege in his building.

Another professional learning activity which left a lasting impression on Chris was the one described in the findings that occurred right after hurricane Katrina, and its purpose was to illustrate to staff how societal racism is perpetuated in media. During a professional learning experience the teachers were asked by their building principal to look at a two pictures from Hurricane Katrina. He described the experience in detail, as if it happened this year. Experiences such as this one has led to Chris' shift in thinking about students of color. During his interview, Chris said this shift in thinking was like,

Taking the pill in *The Matrix*, where through the journey I was able to start to take the color blind glasses off. Then out pops different cultures, and different kids, and different needs, and different expectations sometimes.

He went on to talk about how this shift has transferred over to how he viewed society and his everyday life.

Allison's cognitive shift happened when she was participating in the school-based cadre conducting active research on culturally responsive teaching. She stated in an interview that this experience on the cadre transformed how she taught. She said,

I took all of the pieces- the jigsaw puzzle pieces- in my head of AVID and what was important and relevant in AVID and put a cultural spin on it so that I saw my kids of color for who they were and helped me understand them differently.

During this interview Allison went on to share stories about her relationships with specific students of color and discussed how this experience empowered her to have conversations with students about race and culture that she was not comfortable having prior to the cadre training.

Marissa's cognitive shift was different from Chris and Allison, in that rather than there just being a shift in thinking, there was a shift in practice with students. Although Allison's and Chris' instructional practices might have been affected by their change in beliefs, Marissa identified specific changes in her practice that were responsive to the needs of the students in her class. The most responsive shift she discussed was her change in thinking around grading. The example she discussed was

about a seventh grade Black boy. Here is what she said about how she has worked with this student,

He would be what a lot of people might call a typical Black male with more energy- he needs to be moving around a lot. He doesn't always write on his paper, but if you have a conversation with him, he knows what's going on and he's actively engaged in class. Sometimes he gets a little off topic, but when we're discussing something, he will get on topic and he will participate in the discussion. So I think to collect class work and say, 'Did you write it down?' Not all kids are going to be writing down. Some kids need to do different things to learn.

So that in particular is something that's changed over the last couple of years because at first I used to go around and check if they wrote down everything that we wrote down and now I think, 'write down what you need to. Participate when you need to.

Marissa discussed two professional learning events where her thinking about race and culture was influenced and challenged, but she did not say that those events changed her on a deeper level. Marissa was raised in a more diverse community than Chris and Allison, which raised a question about how prior experiences impact the degree of change that teachers experience. Chris and Allison had little to no experience with racial diversity or conflict growing up, and they both articulated significant personal change in relation to the professional learning about CRT.

The importance of mindsets. “Great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning” (Dweck, 2006, p. 194). The three teachers in this study gave several examples of things they were doing to continuously improve their practice and themselves. For example, Marissa was currently furthering her education and getting another degree. In addition to this, however, she discussed in her interviews her desire to learn from and build upon her professional practice. In numerous statements she talked about her practice like it was still evolving on a daily basis. Allison also discussed in her interview her desire to learn about culture from her students, her aspiration to always improve upon what she has done before, and she reflected upon how her participation in the cadre was the greatest professional learning opportunity she has done. Although the demonstration of Chris’ need to improve and get better at his practice was different than that of Allison or Marissa, he nonetheless articulated a passion to be a lifelong learner about people and culture. Chris’ actions indicated that he wanted to learn for himself so he could better relate to others. This was demonstrated by his persistence in learning Spanish to communicate with students and families. He also mentioned on a number of occasions how much he enjoyed learning about the culture and lived experiences of his students.

One question emerged from the data. Can teachers who have a growth mindset in some areas have a fixed mindset in others? While all three teachers demonstrated a growth mindset in many areas, including the examples given above, there were other areas where the teacher’s mindset appeared to be more fixed. Student motivation arose as an issue impacting student learning that was articulated by all three teachers.

Although all three of these teachers considered themselves to be culturally responsive in their actions with students, there was evidence that they believed that motivation was a characteristic that students came to the classroom with and there were students that teachers would not be able to motivate. Chris discussed motivation three times in his interview. The first time he mentioned it he stated that kids, “Have different backgrounds. They have different things that motivate them”. This indicated that one of the reasons Chris thought it was important to get to know students was to discover the different things that motivate them. This indicated that he believed students have a set of fixed things that will motivate him/her and it is the teacher’s responsibility to figure these things out. Although this statement could be true, it meant that Chris thought that student motivation was extrinsic. The next time he mentioned motivation, his response was more reflective of a growth mindset about motivation. His response about what he did to ensure the academic success of all students was about building relationships with them. He stated that once the relationship was developed students become more motivated. In this statement, he stated that motivation could change and the student-teacher relationship could influence motivation. The third time he mentioned motivation was when talking about the differences between his honors class and his regular science class. Chris was describing how, in a specific lab situation he let the “honors” kids do the lab, but the “regular” kids just got to observe the lab as a teacher demonstration. He said, “My accelerated kids got to do it because they have the motivation and the maturity to handle Bunsen burner fire”. This indicated that there

Chris might hold a perception that “honors” students would have more motivation to do the lab than the “regular” kids would.

Marissa also mentioned motivation once in her interviews when asked her to describe her students. She said that her student’s motivation depended on the year. “We have had a couple of groups come through. We’ve had one year of really apathetic students who are really hard to motivate.” This statement indicated a belief that students come in with a certain mentality; apathetic, lazy or uninterested and when they have that mentality they are difficult to motivate. She did not state that they cannot be motivated, but students come in with a certain mindset and they cannot or will not change over the course of the year. This indicated a fixed mindset about student attitude; an apathetic student cannot be made to care or to be enthusiastic about school. While Allison did not specifically mention the word motivation in her interviews, she did make a comment about letting go of students. In AVID, students can be exited out of the program for not keeping their grades up in their classes. She said,

I keep feeling that there has got to be something else that I can possibly do to help each kid and it really tears at my heart when there is a kid who doesn’t want my help and won’t receive it and I have to—not essentially give up on that kid—but kind of let them go because my program is only going to work—or the program is only going to work—if the kid wants it to work. If the parents want it to work that’s great and if I want it to work but if the kid is not buying in there has got to be a point where I say, “You know what, you’re going to need to find something else because I can’t help you.” That is heartbreaking for me.

This language indicated a fixed mindset about student engagement to the AVID program, that if a student wanted it to work, they would make it work.

These examples described a fixed teacher mindset about student attitudes and motivation.

When teachers are judging students, they will sabotage the teacher by not trying. But when students understand that school is for them- a way to grow their minds- they do not insist on sabotaging themselves... It's common for students to turn off school adopt an air of indifference, but we make a mistake if we think any student stops caring" (Dweck, 2006, p. 201).

According to Dweck (2006), a growth mindset also applies to students in how they view themselves, and as teachers, we must demonstrate our belief in a growth mindset while modeling it ourselves.

Emphasis on building relationships with students. The interpersonal relationships teachers have with students greatly impact teaching and learning. Gay (2000) presents her personal case in becoming more culturally responsive in her practice. She says,

I try to bond with my students as teacher, friend, and advocate, and to get them to accept me and each other in a similar manner. One way I do this is by legitimizing personal experiences as significant sources of knowledge. As a result, 'telling our personal stories' plays a prominent part in our conversations as we struggle to capture the essence of educational ideas, theories, principles and practices. (p.198)

This personal story telling was prevalent in all three classrooms observed. All three teachers in this study made a point to tell his or her stories, while also encouraging students to share theirs.

During observations all three teachers would often make fun of themselves and were purposeful in pointing out weaknesses in themselves that make them human. This is another attribute that Gay (2000) addressed in her personal case when she says “I talk about, critique and even make fun of myself a lot. I share many scenarios about mistakes I have made in the past” (p. 198). She then explained her purpose in doing so,

My purposes in these self-disclosures are threefold: to model sharing one’s own experiences and how these illustrate the pedagogical principles under study; to lead the way for my students to follow and prepare the classroom climate to make it easier for them to function in telling and analyzing their own stories; and to demonstrate that competence is not something that happens instantaneously, but rather develops over time and shifts according to contexts. In other words, I use my own stories to show how I came to be, and how I am still in the process of becoming. (p. 198)

Although Gay is referring to her experiences teaching college or graduate level courses around culturally responsive pedagogy, the power of personal connections parallels to teachers of all level regardless of content area. In the classrooms observed, teachers demonstrated this same openness with students, and their intentions in doing so were similar. The teachers in this study wanted to model how to share their own experience, to make it easier for students to share their stories in class, and to demonstrate that we are all a work in progress; we all make mistakes which helps us become human.

Classroom aesthetics and climate. In the context of this study, a positive classroom environment was inclusive of the physical layout of the space, and the positive interactions occurring within that space. “If you have ever experienced genuine ‘emotional warmth’ or felt ‘emotionally cold’ – regardless of what the thermostat says- you’ll understand that climate is not always contingent on temperature” (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 151). All three classrooms in this study were set up in a way that would

support a more collective culture and cooperative learning rather than an individualized culture (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

In addition to the physical arrangement of the classroom, the other factor that influences classroom climate is the teacher. Kuykendall (2004) states, “The behavior of the teacher is most significant in determining how comfortable and excited these students will be in the learning environment” (p. 161). All three of the participants in this study used appropriate caring interactions as well as humor to promote a positive learning environment. Allison used the “school mom” mentality with students to let them know they will be nurtured, cared for and that they have a place in the school. She refers to herself as their school mom in class and with their parents. In Mercado’s (1993) research, a theme that emerged was that African-American students in segregated schools said that in the schools that they considered to be their “home away from home” the teachers did not limit their interactions with students to just classroom instruction. In fact, teachers demonstrated concerns for the students’ emotional, physical, economic and interpersonal conditions as well. Allison tried to create this “home away from home” atmosphere in her AVID classroom and within the AVID community.

Allison also consciously used strategies which she viewed as culturally responsive to create a more positive culture for her students of color. One of the specific strategies that she mentioned in her interviews was the use of call and response in her classroom. Hammond (2013) cited, “Every time a student engages in call and

response, the information reviewed is driven deeper into long-term memory and becomes easier to retrieve at will” (para. 12).

Marissa also created a warm classroom environment through her caring actions with students. Her interaction with a student who was being suspended for five days out of school is a good example of this. When he came in, she was responsive to his needs, provided him the assignments that he needed, and then had a personal discussion about making good choices and choosing his path in life. She did not pass judgment or become angry with the student, but she shifted into a counselor stance and tried to instill hope in him for his future. Kuykendall (2004) refers to these people as *Merchants of Hope*. She said that Merchants of Hope are people, “Who enrich the life of another on a short or long term basis” (p. 197).

Finally, the three participants in this study all used humor to create a warm and caring environment in their classrooms. Several doctoral students have examined the role of humor in middle school classrooms (Barry, 1993; Johnson, 1989; Pedde, 1996), and the American Middle School Council (formerly the NMSC) fostered a position statement called *This we believe*. All of these research findings indicate that the use of humor in middle school classrooms can improve teacher rapport, improve classroom climate and can engage reluctant learners.

Identification of the balance between social support and academic press. In the literature, teachers who demonstrate both academic press and social support are called “warm demanders” (Bondy & Ross, 2008). Bondy and Ross describe the warm demander stance as a one who communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand

for student effort and mutual respect. Dweck (2006) also described this phenomenon from the mindset perspective. She said,

Many educators think that lowering their standards will give students success experiences, boost their self-esteem, and raise their achievement. It comes from the same philosophy as the overpraising of students' intelligence. Well, it doesn't work. Lowering standards just leads to poorly educated students who feel entitled to easy work and lavish praise (p. 193).

Lee and Smith (1999) conducted a study in Chicago schools and argue that,

To succeed in schools that press them hard to learn, students need strong social support. Conversely, even in the presence of strong social support, students will not learn much unless schools press them to achieve academically (p. 2)

In the three classrooms observed in this study, there was evidence of strong social support from the three educators. All three teachers demonstrated caring relationships in their interactions with students. In Allison and Marissa's classes there were clear, observable examples of high academic expectations. For example, both teachers made an effort to publicly recognize students who were performing well academically; Allison with her wipe-off board of students who had all A's and B's, and Marissa's poster of students who had passed their Trailmarker quiz. In these two classrooms, it was evident that academic success was a priority. In Chris' classroom, there was a stronger emphasis on the social support of students than on the academic press.

The challenges of focusing on culturally relevant practices and implementing a mandated curriculum. Specifically from participants who taught core classes such as math and science, both of which are tested by the state, there was an urgency to teach only to the standards and the set curriculum rather than explore ways to incorporate culturally relevant topics into the instruction. Both teachers who were

teaching in areas taught by state mandated tests described a certain level of frustration with a set curriculum based primarily on high stakes state tests which they believed limited their ability to teach about culturally relevant topics. For example, in their interviews, both Chris and Allison discussed how their curriculum was solely determined by the district curriculum, and Marissa expressed her frustration when trying to determine what to teach when so she could teach topics prior to the state test. After hearing the frustration from these teachers, it seems important that we give teachers the ability to follow the set curriculum with the academic freedom to make the content more relevant for the students sitting in their classrooms. In the district where these three teachers were teaching the district leadership has invested in culturally responsive teaching both monetarily and through their explicit training for teachers and staff. It seems that if the district made that investment, they would want teachers using the strategies they have learned to create culturally responsive classrooms. Given that the district also provided teachers with mandated curriculum, teachers were not given explicit training about how to incorporate culturally responsive strategies and topics into the curriculum.

The frustration felt by teachers to incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies while following the set curriculum is an issue that confronts many teachers. For example, Crocco and Costigan (2007) interviewed about 200 teachers in New York City and found that teachers' were increasingly frustrated with shrinking time to forge relationships with students, pressure to adhere closely to a mandated curriculum, and

pressure to organize their teaching in prescribed ways that often contradicted their professional judgment.

Considerations for Future Research

Having the time to talk with teachers and spending time in their classrooms helped the researcher understand how teachers perceive the journey toward culturally responsive practice. Some suggestions for further research include:

- Further exploration of the relationship between teacher influence and student motivation;
- An investigation into how students view teachers who are seen by their colleagues as culturally responsive
- A study of how the impact of culturally responsive strategies on student achievement
- Further exploration into how teachers use a balance between academic press and social support to improve student achievement, or a comparative study to examine the effectiveness of teachers who use these strategies in varying proportions;
- An investigation into how teachers' backgrounds influence their openness to voluntarily participate in culturally responsive teacher training
- A replication of this study be done using Ladson-Billings' model for participant selection. In her research, she had parents and administrators identify effective teachers to participate in the study

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to understand the journey teachers toward becoming more culturally responsive in their practice. In this study, three teachers who were participating in school sponsored professional learning around equity were interviewed and observed in their classroom environment. After conducting these interviews and observations, the researcher used a theoretical framework based on Gay's (2002) five elements of culturally responsive teaching to examine how these teachers demonstrate culturally responsive teaching practices as a regular part of their teaching. Gay suggests that there are five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. In this study the researcher examined how these teachers demonstrated each of these essential elements in their practice and with their interactions with students. Additionally, the teachers shared the role and influence of ongoing professional development (focused on equity and culturally responsive teaching) on their practice. The following is a summary of the key findings identified in this study.

First, participants did not specifically identify the strategies they used in class as culturally responsive. When asked what aspects of their teaching were culturally responsive, they all discussed doing what works for each and every student. This indicates that perhaps the ongoing training in the schools has led to double-loop

learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974) of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy. In other words, some culturally responsive strategies have become a part of their personal theory-in-use.

All three teachers in this study discussed a shift in thinking somewhere along their teaching path or during the training, a cognitive shift. Two of the three teachers characterized themselves as “color blind” in their first few years of teaching. This revelation indicates that these teachers demonstrated a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). It could also further indicate that professional learning and training might have the ability to influence other people’s thinking about how we work with students of color in schools. Results of this study indicated that the equity work and professional learning around culturally responsive teaching has, in fact, allowed teachers to understand perspectives different from their own that they would not have otherwise explored. As a result of these professional learning experiences, these teachers are now more also aware of the institutionalized racism that exists within our education system, so they might be more attentive to the biases they bring into the classroom.

Finally, differences between effective teaching and culturally responsive teaching pedagogy emerged from this study. Culturally responsive teaching differs from “just good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995 p. 159) in that it requires teachers to reflect on their instruction and be intentionally responsive to student needs in the classroom. It also requires teachers to consider how they can build upon the set curriculum to meet the needs of their students, while creating supportive classroom environments and maintaining academic rigor.

The researcher went into this study thinking that all of the behaviors, strategies and emotions that culturally responsive teachers revealed would fit neatly into five categories, and that it would be easy to create a checklist, configuration map or rubric to identify the degree to which culturally responsive teachers did or did not demonstrate in their practice. After further examination of the data, many hours of observations and interviews with teachers, it is clear this is not possible, especially within the scope of this study. If it is possible to create such a document, it would be a messy and challenging process requiring significant cross-calibration. There is nothing neat or tidy about understanding culturally responsive pedagogy, and teachers who have embarked upon this journey should be commended.

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Appendix A

Hello Colleague-

I am currently beginning my dissertation research on Culturally Responsive Teaching and am looking for some teachers to participate in my study. Specifically, I am looking teachers who have participated in the district CARE cadre training and/or the Singleton "Beyond Diversity" training. You were recommended to me as someone who has participated in one or both of these trainings.

My study is a naturalistic inquiry into the teacher journey in becoming culturally responsive. A naturalistic study is one where the researcher observes participants in their natural environment. For teachers, this environment is your classroom. I will be doing initial interviews with the teacher participants, followed up with classroom observations. I am hoping to complete this cycle with one or two teachers prior to the end of this school year. It will require that I come in and observe your classroom on several days, with thematic interviews occurring periodically throughout the process. My primary purpose in my research is to describe the journey a teacher has taken in becoming more culturally responsive in their practice.

If this study sounds like something you might participate in, please contact me at your earliest convenience at 303-903-8509.

I sincerely hope you will consider participating in this study to better understand how teachers become more culturally responsive in their practice.

Krista Keogh
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Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study: Understanding the teacher journey in becoming more culturally responsive and implications for professional development; a naturalistic inquiry

You are invited to participate in a study to better understand the journey a teacher takes in becoming more culturally responsive in their practice. Upon understanding this journey, the researcher hopes to identify ways to improve professional development in schools to help teachers on a culturally responsive journey. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for a Doctorate Degree in Education Administration and Policy Studies. The study is being conducted by Krista Keogh. Results will be used to better understand how teachers learn to be more culturally responsive in their classes. The researcher also hopes to understand how professional development around culturally responsive teaching has contributed to the development of culturally responsive teachers. Krista Keogh can be reached at 303-900-0000 or at kkeogh@du.edu. This project is supervised by Dr. Susan Korach, Education Department, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303-871-2212 or at skorach@du.edu.

Participation in this study will require you to participate in several interviews with the researcher, and to allow the researcher to observe your classroom over the course of several days. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue participation in the study at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses and other observation notes will be identified by pseudonym only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called *Finding their way: Understanding the teacher journey in becoming more culturally responsive and implications for professional development; a naturalistic inquiry*. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation

of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____

Date _____

I agree to be audiotaped.

I do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Initial Interview Questions for teacher participants

Initial interview

- 1) Tell me about yourself.
- 2) How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?
- 3) Tell me about your students.
- 4) If you could describe your teaching career as a journey, how would you describe it?

Planning/Instruction Interview

- 5) Tell me about how you plan for instruction.
- 6) Tell me about the curriculum you have selected for your classes.
- 7) What do you do in your classes to ensure academic success for students?
- 8) How do you handle discipline in your classroom?

Parent communication and relationships interview

- 9) How do you go about building relationships with your students/parents?
- 10) Talk to me about the relationship you have with parents of your students.
- 11) When you reflect on your teaching what are some of the emotions that you feel?

Questions about Professional Development (added)

- 1) How do you think targeted professional development has influenced your thinking about culturally responsive teaching?
- 2) Do you think that teachers can come to this thinking on their own?

- 3) What components of the district equity work were most influential on your teaching?

Interim/Post Observation Questions

1. Why do you think it is important for schools to understand the journey a teacher travels in becoming more culturally responsive?
2. When you reflect on the lessons I saw in the last few weeks, are there any observations or thoughts you would like to share about how you felt during the classes?

Chris Additional Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about how you learned Spanish, and how it helps you as a teacher.
2. What general expectations do you have for your students? And how do you communicate those expectations to them?
3. How do you know if students understand the content you're teaching? And the next piece of that, what are the various ways in which you hold students accountable for that content that you're teaching?
4. How do you know if students are growing in your class?
5. How do you decide how you will assess students on their learning? And how do you make sure you're able to assess their understanding of your content through assessments?
6. What structures or strategies do you use in your classroom that you think are culturally responsive and why do you think that they're culturally responsive?
7. What skills do you hope your students will gain from your class that they might use in the future?

Marissa Additional Questions:

1. Tell me about the professional learning you have been a part of since starting at Platte that has been focused around Equity or Culturally Responsive Teaching.
2. What components of the equity work were most critical in influencing your teaching?
3. What structures or strategies do you use in your classroom that you think are culturally responsive and why do you think that they're culturally responsive?
4. How do you know if students understand the content you're teaching? And the next piece of that, what are the various ways in which you hold students accountable for that content that you're teaching?
5. How do you know if students are growing in your class?
6. How do you decide how you will assess students on their learning?
7. What skills do you hope your students will gain from your class that they might use in the future?

Allison Additional Questions

1. Tell me about the professional learning you have been a part of that has been focused around Equity or Culturally Responsive Teaching.
2. What components of the equity work were most critical in influencing your teaching?
3. What structures or strategies do you use in your classroom that you think are culturally responsive and why do you think that they're culturally responsive?
4. How do you know if students are growing in your class?

5. How do you assess students on their learning?
6. What skills do you hope your students will gain from your class that they might use in the future