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Cultural Sensitivity: Early Career Teacher Beliefs, Espoused Theories, and Theories in  
Use

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Michelle Steinberger

August 2016

Advisor: Susan Korach

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine early career teacher practice and beliefs about students of color in their classrooms and the relationship between those beliefs and their classroom practices. In this study, seven teachers in the initial five years of their teaching career were interviewed and observed inside of their classrooms using the Quality Responsive Classroom Observation Protocol. The interview questions were developed to look at the beliefs, teacher preparation, and culturally responsive pedagogy of early career teachers. Data was then analyzed using the five tenets of the Critical Race Theory: (1) Centrality of Race and Racism; (2) Challenging the Dominant Perspective; (3) Social Justice; (4) Experiential Knowledge of Students; and (5) Transdisciplinary Perspective. The question that guided this study was: What is the relationship among teachers' cultural sensitivity, their understanding and commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy, and their actual pedagogical practice?

The study showed that the espoused beliefs of teachers are not consistent with the pedagogical practices observed in the classroom and that the race of the student does impact the experiences of our students of color within the classroom. The educational practices observed in the classrooms, when examined through the lens of critical race theory, did perpetuate the power of the dominant class. The implications for school

leaders were also discussed to help improve future classrooms to meet the needs of our diverse students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

From the early 1990's to 2013, there has been a drastic change in the demographic makeup of the local classroom in the United States public school system. In 1993, White students constituted 66% of the total enrollment of students nationwide in public elementary and secondary schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995, Table 44). Another report by the same organization projected that the percentage of White students would fall to a little over 50% in 2013 and below 50% for the first time ever in 2014 (NCES, 2014, Table 203.60). During those same years, Black and Hispanic students (students of color) went from 16.16% and 12.7% respectively in 1993 of public school enrollment (NCES, 1995, Table 44) to 15.5% and 25.1% respectively in 2013 (NCES, 2014, Table 203.60). Researchers project that by the year 2023, White students will make up 45% of the overall enrollment of public school students and Black students will comprise 15% of the total enrollment while Hispanic students will have grown to almost 30% of the total percentage of enrollment across the country (NCES, 2014, Table 203.60).

While student enrollment has become increasingly diverse, the racial identity of teachers in those classrooms has remained relatively unchanged. In 1994, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that almost 73% of public school teachers were

females and over 86% were White (NCES, 2014, Table 209.10). In 2012, 76% of public school teachers were women and almost 82% were White (NCES, 2014, Table 209.10). After two decades, white, female teachers remain the norm in our public school classrooms.

In addition to the disproportionality of White female teachers, there is a gap between the achievement levels of students within the classrooms. When we examine student achievement in those classrooms, assessment results clearly represent the achievement discrepancy between White students and students of color. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a national assessment that takes a representative sample from across the nation in subjects such as math and reading (NCES, 2010). The NAEP is considered the “gold standard of assessments because it is developed using the best thinking of assessment and content specialists, education experts, and teachers from around the nation” (NCES, 2010, p. 2). The Nation’s Report Card uses results from NAEP assessments to report on the achievement of various demographic groups, gender, socioeconomic factors and race (NCES, 2010). NAEP scores are reported using point scales of 0-300 or 0-500, specific achievement levels are designated for each grade level and subject and reported out as basic, proficient or advanced. The achievement level results represent the percentage of students performing at or above each level (NCES, 2010).

In 1992, Black students scored an average of 237 on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP math assessment (NCES, 2013). Hispanic students scored an average of 249 on the same test (NCES, 2013). When compared to White students taking the same test, the same year, the

students of color are significantly below the White students average score of 277 (NCES, 2013). Mathematics is not the only area where students of color are falling behind their White peers. On the 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP reading assessment, also in 1992, Black students scored an average score of 237 (NCES, 2013). Hispanic students scored an average of 241, and White students scored an average score of 267 (NCES, 2013). The average score for Black students on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP math assessment in 2013 was 263, compared to Hispanic students at 272, and White students at 294 (NCES, 2013). The 2013 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading assessment saw Black students score an average of 250, Hispanics scored 256, and White students had an average score of 276 (NCES, 2013).

Students of color are consistently over represented in students labeled with learning disabilities. According to the Digest of Education Statistics, in the school year 2011-2012, over 15% of the students that were served by Special Education services in schools were Black students (NCES, 2013, Table 204.50). Hispanics made up 11.5 % of the students covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and White students represented just over 13% of the special education population (NCES, 2013, Table 204.50). During this time, 51% of all students were White, over 15.5 % were Black, and approximately 24% were Hispanic (NCES, 2014, Table 203.60). Although Black students represented a smaller percentage of the total enrollment than both White and Hispanic students, Black students were still the largest ethnic group represented in the special education population.

The difference between White students and students of color is also apparent when looking at the dropout rates of high school students. The United States Department

of Education defines the dropout rate as “the percentage of 16- through 24- year olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate)” (NCES, 2014). In 1994, the dropout rate of all students was 11.4% (NCES, 2013, Table 219.70). During that same year, the dropout rate for White students was at 7.7%, Black students were at 12.6% and Hispanics had a dropout rate of 30% (NCES, 2013, Table 219.70). In 2012, the total dropout rate had fallen to 6.6%, Whites had a dropout rate of 4.3% while Black students had a rate of 7.5%, and Hispanic students had a dropout rate of 12.7% (NCES, 2013, Table 219.70). Although White students have been able to maintain a dropout rate lower than the total of all races, Black students and Hispanics have typically been on the high side of total dropouts.

Students of color are also found in low numbers when examining students enrolled in advanced classes. The Office for Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education (2014) published a news brief regarding the college and career readiness of our nation’s children. According to this study, 74% of our high schools serving a high population of black and Hispanic students, offer math courses such as Algebra II, which can be compared to the 83% of high schools serving the lowest enrollment of students of color that offer higher math courses (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 8). The same discrepancy of higher course offerings can be seen in science where 63% of high schools serving high populations of black and Hispanic students, compared to 78% of high schools serving a much smaller population of students of color, give their students access to high level science courses (United States Department of Education,

2014, p. 8). Unfortunately, even if a student of color does attend a high school that offers a full range of courses, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the enrollment of students of color in these courses will not be representative of their total enrollment in the school (United States Department of Education, 2014). According to this study, White students make up 54% of the total enrollment of students across the country; they constitute 59% of students enrolled in at least one AP course, 60% of students taking the AP placement exam, and 67% of the students that receive a qualifying score on at least one of their AP exams (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 11). Comparatively, Black and Hispanic students make up 37% of total high school enrollment, 27% of students enrolled in at least one AP course, 26% of students taking the AP placement exams, and 18% of the students receiving a qualifying score (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 11). Reports such as these highlight the differences in academic achievement between White students and students of color but do little to explain why the differences exist and persist.

Lisa Delpit, author of *Multiplication Is for White People* (2012), states that “African American children do not come into this world at a deficit and ‘there is no ‘achievement gap’ at birth – at least not one that favors European American children” (p. 5). Delpit (2012) cites various studies done by researchers Marcelle Geber (1956), William Frakenburg and Joe Dodds (1960s and 1980s), and Phyllis Rippeyoung (2006) to support this statement.

In 1956, Marcelle Geber was studying the effects of malnutrition on the development of children in Africa (Delpit, 2012). Despite the malnutrition suffered by

these children, “the developmental rate of native Ugandan infants was so much higher than the established norm that these babies were able to outperform European children twice or three times their age” (Delpit, 2012, p.3). Geber witnessed Ugandan infants sitting upright at a mere 48 hours old, and crawling and sitting up by themselves at 6-7 weeks (Delpit, 2012). Geber also described what she believed to be the first step in logical reasoning when she witnessed Ugandan infants stand up and walk to retrieve a toy that had been removed from their sight by being placed in a toy box (Delpit, 2012). According to the Gessell early intelligence test, this was an example of “object permanency” one of the first steps toward reasoning (Delpit, 2012, p. 4).

Frankenburg and Dodds found that African American children bested their White American peers at six months of age when looking at developmental speeds (Delpit, 2012). Concerned that their work in the 1960’s was perhaps “merely some sort of data quirk and not replicable” (Delpit, 2012, p. 4), Frankenburg and Dodds came to the same conclusions with a different sample of children many years later. Dodds states “there were no items that the White children were doing earlier than the Black children in the first year of life” (as cited by Delpit, 2012, p. 4). In fact, even by the age of four, Black children were still outscoring their White peers in 15 categories while White children only came out on top in three of the categories (Delpit, 2012).

Phyllis Rippeyoung (2006) used the Bayley Scale of Infant Development to compare the scores of Black and White children. When Rippeyoung used controls to establish a level playing field for the comparison, she reported, “if black and white babies were born with the same degree of good health, and the parents interacted with the babies



to the same degree, black babies would surpass white babies on all aspects of the Bayley Scale” (Delpit, 2012, p. 5). These studies clearly show that the gap between White students and students of color in our schools is not an ability gap; in other words, the discrepancy between White students and students of color appears to be more of a product of education rather than a result of genetics. According to Carey, “the achievement gap discourse has catalyzed a turn toward labeling and categorizing away our problems, and has ultimately left us victimizing students and teachers” (2013, p. 451).

Various researchers have detailed the history of education in America. In *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality*, Joel Spring (2013) states “that for some Americans, racism and democracy are not conflicting beliefs, but they are part of a general system of American values” (2013, p. 10). Roger Smith, in *Civic Ideals*, posits that “for over 80 percent of U.S. history, American laws declared most people in the world legally ineligible to become U.S. citizens solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender” (as cited by Spring, 2013, p. 10). Other researchers, such as Milner (2012), view this discrepancy of achievement between White students and students of color as the accumulation of decades of “opportunity gaps” afforded to students of color. Perhaps it is time to view this problem under a different lens. Rather than place the blame of the “achievement gap” on the students that are left behind to struggle in the classrooms, Milner (2012) suggests that the achievement problem is a result of repeated missteps by those leading our country, governing our states, educating our students – by society.

The data clearly reveal a discrepancy between the academic achievement of White students and students of color across the country. According to an essay written by Hui-Min Chou (2007), “the changing demographics in the United States have demanded changes in teacher education preparation programs, as schools of education realize that tomorrow’s teacher will be teaching a broader diversity of students than ever before in U.S. history” (p. 141). Unfortunately, not all teacher education programs have embraced this idea of change. “Most institutions have met multicultural standards by instituting a single course often taught by untenured faculty or people of color” (Chou, 2007, p. 153). Multiculturalism is not a subject that can be covered by one class during the course of an entire teacher preparation program; it is a subject that should be embedded within the curriculum of every class, taught by every teacher, not just a subject broached by professors of color. The accrediting organization of teacher preparation programs across the country, The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), maintains that teacher candidates must possess and demonstrate the beliefs that all students can learn (Villegas, 2007). “Preparing teachers who are responsive to the student population that schools have historically left behind is imperative” (Villegas, 2007, p. 371). The challenge is how do we know that preparation can impact beliefs and that culturally responsive pedagogy leads to different outcomes?

While most teacher education programs acknowledge the importance of an increasing diversity among school pupils...relatively little attention in mainstream teacher education programs has been focused on preparing teachers for the children they will likely encounter. (Chou, 2007, p.139)

According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), teacher preparation programs need to infuse the following six strands into their educator curriculum if the final result they desire is culturally responsive teachers: sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students that are not from the dominant culture, ability and desire to be change agents, adoption of a constructivist view when it comes to learning, knowing about their students, knowledge of and ability to implement culturally responsive practices in their classrooms.

### **Problem Statement**

One of the strands of teacher education that intentionally aims to prepare teachers who are able to meet the needs of all students is culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As early as the 1970's, educators were seeing a need to reform teacher preparation programs to help teachers meet the needs of their diverse students (Gay, 2010). If teachers are being taught culturally responsive pedagogy in their teacher preparation programs, then why are we still seeing the achievement gap or discrepancy between White students and students of color in our schools?

“Teachers’ knowledge about and attitudes toward cultural diversity are powerful determinants of learning opportunities and outcomes for ethnically different students. For some students they facilitate academic achievement; for others they obstruct learning” (Gay, 2010, p. 613). Teacher beliefs have been correlated to their classroom practices, positive attitudes about students of color in the classroom lead to positive instruction and expectations in the classroom, which then lead to positive outcomes for students in the classroom (Gay, 2013).

Research on the relationship between beliefs and actions is well documented in organizational theory. Chris Argyris (2000) defines espoused theory of action as that theory “based on principles and precepts that fit our intellectual backgrounds and commitments” (p. 80). Theory-in-use, according to Argyris (2000), are those “to which we resort in moments of stress” (p. 80). Teachers articulate espoused theories and beliefs about students and their actions in the classroom represent their theories-in-use. What happens to the beliefs of teachers over time that affect their ability to establish a classroom that has a positive impact on the student engagement of both their White students and students of color? What are those specific factors and how do they alter teachers’ espoused theories when put into action as theories in use (Argyris, 2000) as observed by classroom practices?

This relationship between background and commitment is fundamental to the purpose of this study. This study emanates from my personal experience as a student of color about the neutral, colorblind institutions that educate our students- schools.

### **Researcher’s Perspective**

I have been in education my entire life, first as a student, then as an educator. It is my experiences as a student in the public school system that led me to be the educator I am today. As the researcher, I recognize the power of my own beliefs and experiences, my personal lens that creates my perspective on anything I see or hear. What I remember from my school days in grades K-12 is the reason I strongly believe in this study and its implications. I know what it feels like to be different, what it feels like to be judged, and

what it feels like when the person that is teaching your class doesn't even know you. This is what I remember.

I was born in San Antonio, Texas. My father is Mexican and my mother is White, and I, of course, am a blend of both. My mother is from a large family. She is the oldest of eight children, seven of which were girls. My father was the oldest child, and more importantly, the oldest son, of four children to a very traditional Mexican family. My father, as the first-born son, was the head of the family. His parents, his younger brother, and both his younger sisters were subservient to my dad, who interestingly enough was the least educated of all the siblings. Obviously, as a female child, with an older brother, I was treated as less than when compared to the firstborn son by all those on my father's side of the family. Unfortunately, playing the role of the subservient female was not a role I was equipped to play. The relationship with my father's side of the family dwindled to nothing by the time I became an adult.

As people grow up, they tend to look for others that are like them. I don't remember much about my preschool years other than I lived in San Antonio with both my parents and my older brother. My parents got divorced, and I moved to El Paso, Texas with my mother and brother. I started kindergarten at East Point elementary on the east side of El Paso. I attended this school from kindergarten through my 4<sup>th</sup> grade year. It was a neighborhood school, and I walked to and from school each day. Of any school I attended growing up, this is probably the school where I was most like my classmates. I have olive skin that tans quite easily, and during the summer months, especially when I was little, I got very dark. So, as a child, attending an elementary school, in a border town

between Texas and Mexico, I actually resembled most of my fellow students. It wasn't until I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade that a teacher, in front of the entire class, pointed out to me my differences from most of the other students in the class. It was my Spanish teacher, and she pointed out to me, in front of the class, that I should know how to speak Spanish because of my Spanish surname. This was the first time I recall being made to feel uncomfortable in class, amongst my classmates, because of something about me that did not match who I was thought (assumed) to be, but it was not the last.

At the end of my 5<sup>th</sup> grade year, we moved to Duncanville, Texas. Duncanville is an affluent suburb of Dallas. We moved to a housing community with a pool, playgrounds, tennis courts and a clubhouse for the homeowners to use. I attended Byrd Middle School for two years. Byrd Middle School was not diverse; it was a White school. My memories from Byrd include one of my favorite teachers, and track coach, calling me a "wetback" in class, in front of all of my classmates. Mr. Billings was one of the most popular teachers at school. He was a young man that coached both football and track and taught Texas History. I know that Mr. Billings liked me, which made his comment even more bothersome. I don't remember the context of the comment, I don't remember the exact day, what I do remember is the laughter from my classmates and the snickering that would continue in the halls and the classrooms for the rest of the year. When a teacher calls a student a name in class, especially a popular teacher, that opens the doors for others to do the same, and they did. After that day, I dreaded going to social studies. I remember sitting at my desk hoping not to be noticed, not to be called upon, and not to

hear “wetback.” I didn’t tell my parents until I was in my thirties because I had always felt that in some way it was my fault. I was different.

I ran track growing up. I was fast. In addition to the White students that attended Byrd, there were also some Black students that attended my school as well. Being one of the fastest girls in the school, I earned a spot on the 4 x 200 meter relay team. I was the only non-Black runner on the team, not the only White runner, but the only non-Black runner. Comparisons were also made between me and the other members of my team regarding our “ashy skin.” I was different.

After two years of living in Duncanville, we moved to Grand Junction, Colorado where I enrolled at West Middle School for my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. When we moved to Grand Junction, many years ago, the diversity was quite different than it is now. In fact, when we moved to Grand Junction, my brother and I were the diversity.

One of my memories from my eighth grade year at West Middle School involved my social studies teacher. I was in his classroom during lunchtime, making up a test that I had missed when I was absent. Another teacher walked in and asked who I was, he responded by saying, “She’s actually a very good student, surprisingly, considering her last name.” My last name was Paredes, Spanish for walls.

When I began high school, I attended Grand Junction High School. I enrolled in French to meet my foreign language requirement for high school rather than the more practical Spanish because I didn’t want to be associated with the Spanish culture in any way. I was embarrassed about my culture.

Although I graduated with honors and earned my letters as a varsity athlete in three different sports, I was never acknowledged for my academics or my athleticism. Every month during my senior year, I would watch as one of the counselors came up to the senior hall to award the monthly Kiwanis award to the outstanding senior. I watched month after month, as all my friends received the award and then the award started going to others that had grade point averages less than mine and didn't even participate in sports. I was nominated for the outstanding Colorado Hispanic Athlete of the year award but couldn't even receive an award from my local Kiwanis chapter as one of the outstanding seniors in my school.

I was accepted to attend the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) my senior year, a school that some of my friends applied to as well but were not accepted. The reason I was accepted, and they were not, according to them, was because I was a "beaner." Beaner was a term that my friends often used as a nickname for me just in case I didn't already know I was different.

UCLA was a bit more diverse than both Duncanville and Grand Junction. In fact, I don't recall any other issues regarding by ethnicity throughout college other than the extremely unprofessional question of "What are you" asked by numerous students and professors.

Perhaps it was my background and the experiences I had throughout my education that led me to my first teaching job in a lower socioeconomic community within a school that was predominantly English Language Learners, with a high free and reduced lunch population. I loved my students and everyday my challenge for myself was to make a



connection with a student. I was fortunate that I did not encounter the classroom management struggles that many new teachers struggle with their first few years, but my first years as an educator were far from easy.

My biggest strength as a teacher, and now as an administrator, has been my ability to make connections with my students. My students have always known that I cared about them. But caring about my students did not mean that I didn't have high expectations for them, in fact, I believe the success of my students was because they knew I cared about them and I believed they could meet my expectations. My classroom was a safe, learning environment for all students with routines and procedures that were consistently enforced, day after day. I rarely sent students to the office for misdeeds because that would have been easier for my students to handle when compared to the disappointment that I would show on my face when discussing their consequences. Even when I became an administrator within my building, I still prided myself on my ability to connect with my students.

My biggest struggle in my career might have been when the district decided to move administrators around the district. The reasoning behind this decision was that leaders needed to be able to demonstrate that they could serve different communities. Although I argued that I could easily navigate the more affluent communities within our district, since that was the culture I myself was living in, and not everyone wanted to serve the students within my current school, I did make the move to the middle class school. Since that move almost ten years ago, I have watched as my school has become more and more diverse every year since I have arrived. Personally, the shift in

demographics within my school has been a welcome change for me. However, veteran teachers within my building have struggled with the new student population, as their teaching practices are not yielding the same results. Classroom practices that worked for the dominant culture students that once walked the halls of my school are falling short when it comes to meeting the needs of the diverse learners that have since enrolled within our school. They seem to see their practices as transferable to all students and therefore blame the new student population for the change in results.

I don't profess to be an exemplary teacher, or even an educator that is proficient in culturally responsive pedagogy, but I am a person who has experienced what it feels like to be treated as an outsider in their own family, group of friends and even within their own school. Although I have experienced many wonderful teachers through my own educational journey, it is the words of few that have shaped me as the person I am today. I learned what not to do. My dream as an educator is to continue to work on creating a learning environment that will meet the needs of all our students, no matter where they may come from, and allow them to experience success within our public school classrooms.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between early career teacher beliefs about cultural diversity and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and their enacted pedagogy within classrooms composed of large numbers of culturally diverse students. This study utilized a sample of teachers from an urban district, located within a suburb of a western state, who were currently working at a

culturally diverse middle school, teaching within the fields of Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts. All teachers were within the first five years of their teaching career. The results of this study will help to inform teacher preparation programs, district professional development departments, and schools about the impact of a culturally responsive pedagogy focus on teacher preparation and the relationship with teacher beliefs.

### **Research Question**

The following question guided the study:

1. What is the relationship among early career teachers' cultural sensitivity, their understanding and commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy, and their actual pedagogical practice?

The case study consisted of two data collection phases: classroom observations and interviews. I observed each participant in two different class periods using an observation tool (Quality Responsive Classroom observation protocol) that was designed to be “more sensitive to classroom practices that support linguistically and culturally diverse learners” (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013, p. 1). After classroom observations, I conducted a one-on-one focused interview with each of the participants.

This study does not dispute the fact that there is a discrepancy between the academic performance of White students and students of color in our public schools. There is a gap that exists between White students and students of color when examining the achievement levels of students on standardized assessments such as the NAEP. White students consistently outscore their colored peers in both math and reading (NCES,

2013). Students of color have higher dropout rates than their White peers (NCES, 2013), and are far less likely to be enrolled in advanced academic courses (United States Department of Education, 2014). What this study does question is whether the gap that exists between White students and students of color is an achievement gap or an opportunity gap (Milner, 2012). By examining the pedagogical practices of recent graduates of a teacher preparation program, teachers within the first five years of their teaching career, this study is exploring whether preparing teacher candidates to practice culturally responsive pedagogy while they are in preparation is observable in their theories of action (i.e. classroom practices) when they take over their own classroom.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Achievement Gap:** the difference in academic achievement that exists between white students and students of color

**Counter-storytelling:** Counter-storytelling examines the stories told by the dominant culture, making more visible racial privilege and the white way of viewing the world, by providing a voice for members of subordinated groups (Love, 2004).

**Critical Race Theory (CRT):** framework that “seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP):** teaching by “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2013, p. 50).

**Majoritarian Stories:** description of events as told by members of dominant/majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by dominants to insure their dominant position (Love, 2004, p. 227)

**Opportunity Gap:** focuses on opportunity, allows researchers to examine the causes of disparities that exist between and among students in school (Milner, 2012, p. 693).

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Literature Review**

“Within the context of U.S. history, society, and education, race is one of the most powerful, pervasive, and problematic manifestations of human differences.”

Gay, 2013, p. 61

Educational policy has been shaped by historical moments within our society that have led to new laws that overturned old laws (Spring, 2010, 2013). The historical implications that race has cast on education and academic achievement has created two very different lenses through which discrepancies defined by race can be examined (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010, 2012). One perspective explores the ideas that are most familiar to us in the United States. It is the very “stories” that comprise our textbooks, determine what knowledge is of value, and what knowledge is not worth knowing (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Love, 2004). Valued knowledge is represented in academic lessons and scholarly tests that are used to measure the differences between the academic achievement of White students and students of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Love, 2004; Gay, 2010; Gay & Howard, 2010). The discrepancy that exists between White students and students of color serves as a support for the idea that students of color are in some way predestined to be academically inferior to their White peers. This of course is known as the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2013).

The other lens explores the possibility that the discrepancy in academic achievement between White students and students of color is a product of decades, even centuries worth of educational deprivation (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007; Milner, 2010, 2012). This perspective suggests that there are “counter-stories” to be told, stories that examine the history of our students of color, stories that allow their voices to be heard, stories that counter the “truths” we have been taught (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012). To examine this problem that impacts the academic achievement of students of color when compared to their White peers, the researcher explored the following areas to provide background knowledge and context for this study: race and education; critical race theory; race and educational policy; majoritarian storytelling; the achievement and opportunity gaps; impact of teacher beliefs on the academic achievement of all students; culturally responsive pedagogy; and tools to assess cultural competency.

### **Race and Education**

Our country has a storied past of pretending to see all people as equals but historical recollections present a very different story. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence purported that “All men are created equal,” a phrase that is often cited when discussing the injustices felt by people of color in this country. In fact, the majority of U.S. history involves telling some group of people that they are not full citizens simply because of their race or gender (Spring, 2013). According to Milner (2012),

U.S. society is philosophically and ideologically structured such that all people are supposedly created equally with the *same* opportunities for success. In reality, however, educational practices and opportunities are not equal or equitable. There is enormous variation in students’ social, economic, historic, political, and

educational opportunities, which is in stark contrast to the “American dream” – one that adopts and supports meritocracy as its creed or philosophy. Still, many educators believe that if people---their students, in particular---just work hard enough, they will be rewarded and will achieve success. They can fail to recognize systemic barriers and institutional structures that prevent opportunity and success, even when students are hardworking. (p. 704)

Although there are many obstacles to overcome within the educational system in regards to race, this study is addressing only one; the preparation of culturally responsive teachers for our diverse classrooms.

Education has long served as one of the foundational components of the dominant culture (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Education is power, and therefore, not something that can be afforded to all groups of people without concerns of toppling over the balance of power that currently exists in the country. According to Joel Spring, in America, “racism and democracy are not conflicting beliefs, but they are part of a general system of American values” (2013, p. 10). The education of people of color was so threatening to White people that some states enacted laws that made the education of African American slaves illegal (Spring, 2013). African American, Hispanic American, and Native American students -- students of color -- have long fought for their right to an education.

In his book, *American Education* (2010), Spring outlines the historic goals of public education through the decades. People of color received no benefits from laws such as the 1790 Naturalization Law, which only granted citizenship to those that were free and White. The 1820's through the 1840's were a time when public schools were about opportunity, common morals and politics (Spring, 2010). Students of color were also subjected to various laws that restricted their access to public education within the classrooms. In the 1830's, Indians were removed from their lands and taught to be



“civilized,” or more like the White person, through “cultural transformation” (Spring, 2010, p. 98). During this time, in 1855, the United States Supreme Court declared that Chinese people were not White (Spring, 2010). As early as the 1850's, California required the use of English for academic instruction, with Texas following with its own law in 1870 (Spring, 2010). Texas even went as far as making it illegal to use a language other than English when teaching in schools (Spring, 2010).

The forty years between the 1880's and 1920's were a time when public schools focused on the "Americanization of immigrants" (Spring, 2010, p. 5). The 1895 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* gave legal support to the idea of "separate but equal", allowing separate schools for White students and students of color (Spring, 2010). Homer Plessy brought this case to the courts who was a man that was seven eighths White and one eighth Black (Spring, 2010). Plessy was considered to be Black due to the “so-called one drop of blood rule, which classified anyone with an African ancestor, no matter how distant, as African American” (Spring, 2010, p. 62). The Texas courts decided that Mexicans were not White in 1897, and in 1922 the courts decided that neither were the Japanese (Spring, 2010). The 1922 ruling in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* again involved defining “White persons.” Takao was a Japanese student that graduated from a high school in Berkeley, California and went on to study at a California University (Spring, 2010). He was a white skinned, English speaking, Christian person but not White according to the courts (Spring, 2010). The Supreme Court rejected the idea of skin color as a ruling factor in defining White people and instead used the term Caucasian to define what White people meant (Spring, 2010). In 1923, the case of the *United States*

*v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, Supreme Court ruled that an India immigrant was not Caucasian, despite the fact that the “scientific rhetoric of the time” (Spring, 2010, p. 62), concurred that he was Caucasian. According to the decision made by the Supreme Court, “What we now hold is that words ‘free white persons’ are words of common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understanding of the common man” (Spring, 2010, p. 62).

During the 1950's through the 1980's, the states saw the introduction of the War on Poverty (Spring, 2010). The War on Poverty was society’s response to the many social factors that contribute to poverty such as education, income, housing, medical care, and diet (Spring, 2010). Eliminating poverty was possible if the aforementioned factors were taken into consideration (e.g. improving education, providing better jobs, increasing income) (Spring, 2010). The early childhood education program, Head Start, public housing, food stamps, and Title I are some examples of programs created during the War on Poverty (Spring, 2010) This is also the time when public schools were about the "equality of educational opportunity" (Spring, 2010, p.5). As public schools were going through different eras with each era focusing on a different goal, people of color were struggling to gain access to those not-so-public schools.

Not until 1954, with the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Schools* did the law seem to side with people of color when it was decided that segregation was unconstitutional and separate schools were not equal (Spring, 2010). Ten years after the Brown decision was the Civil Rights Act that denied federal funding to any and all institutions, including schools that allowed discrimination

(Spring, 2010). According to Heward and Cavanaugh in 2001, “If a society can be judged by the way it treats people who are different, our educational system does not have a distinguished history” (as cited by Gay, 2010, p. 614).

### **Critical Race Theory**

“Critical Race Theory operates on three basic premises: that racism is pervasive; that racism is permanent; and that racism must be challenged” (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 95). Legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Ladson-Billings, 1998) first introduced Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the 1970’s. The pair was “deeply distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 10).

Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2002) describe CRT in the field of education as

a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom. (p. 25)

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) saw CRT as a way to bring attention to those aspects of education that maintained the status quo. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2003) states that

CRT asserts that racism is normal, not aberrant, in U.S. society, and because it is so ingrained in our society, it looks ordinary and natural to people in the culture. U.S. students of color have grown accustomed to the exclusions, the surveillance, and the inequities. (p. 11)

The strength of CRT is that it not only recognizes the existence of racism within our educational institutions but it also highlights the perpetuation of racism among school staff and students within our public school systems. According to the works of Solórzano and Bernal (2001), “CRT scholars have developed five tenets to guide CRT research: Centrality of Race and Racism; Challenging the Dominant Perspective; Commitment to

Social Justice; Valuing Experiential Knowledge; and Being Interdisciplinary” (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 445).

Centrality of Race and Racism is one of the five tenets of CRT research. In their work on CRT, Dixson and Rousseau (2005) posit that to this day “race remains a significant factor in society in general and education in particular” (p. 8). By likening race to property rights, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) developed three propositions, built upon Whiteness as Property, the 1993 work of legal scholar Cheryl Harris, to illustrate the inequity that exists within schools (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005):

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

Harris (1993) defined the core characteristic of “whiteness as property” as “the legal legitimization of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination” (p. 1715).

One of the property rights of Whiteness in education was the absolute right to exclude. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe how the right to exclude has been used within our schools: the exclusion of Black students completely from schools; separate schools; white flight to the suburbs; vouchers, private schools, and schools of choice; and the resegregation of students in specialized programs.

Another tenet of CRT involves challenging the dominant perspective. CRT uses counter-stories to challenge “the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity”

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). CRT challenges the majoritarian stories of White privilege and rejects the cultural deficit theory as a valid response to the achievement gap that exists between White students and students of color. Bernal (2002) describes how the use of “counterstories within the educational system can be an important pedagogical practice for teachers and students as well as an important methodological practice for educational researchers” (p. 116).

According to Solórzano and Yosso, counter-storytelling is the methodology of CRT (Love, 2004). Love uses what she calls the majoritarian achievement gap storytelling and the methodology of counter storytelling to examine the difference in academic achievement that exists between white and black children (2004). She contends that the court decision in *Brown v the Board of Education*, a decision that was meant to provide educational equity to all students, has actually been used as an argument to support the superiority of White students over Black students in academic achievement (2004).

Majoritarian stories are built from racial privilege, perceived wisdoms and the shared cultural understandings from the dominant race (Love, 2004). Majoritarian stories serve the dominant race by maintaining their power, obscuring White privilege, and blaming minority groups for their own subordination (Love, 2004).

Commitment to social justice is a central tenet to CRT. “In addition to uncovering the myriad ways that race continues to marginalize and oppress people of colour [*sic*], identifying strategies to combat these oppressive forces and acting upon those strategies is an important next step within CRT” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 23). The different

experiences of White and Black children within the American school system illustrate how normal policies and procedures at our schools impact the future of our minority students. Many students of color attend schools that do not offer advanced placement or honors classes due to the reduced funding provided by the school community. Students of color that attend the same school as white students are more likely to be suspended and expelled and assigned to special education and vocational courses but less likely to be enrolled in any honors or advanced placement courses (Love, 2004).

CRT commits to social justice within the walls of our school buildings, by challenging the status quo, and examining educational policies that continue to perpetuate the subordination of students of color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Valuing the experiential knowledge of our students of color is another tenet of CRT. “The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the way to justice” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Students of color need to be heard. Their personal experiences bring credence to the idea that schools are not the neutral educational institutions they claim to be. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) maintained, “the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 58). Without the voices of those that have been continually marginalized by society we may never discover the reason why students of color are continually outperformed by their White peers on academic measures. “The Eurocentric perspective has for too long viewed the experiential knowledge of students of color as a deficit or ignored it all together” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 121). The knowledge obtained by listening to the voices of

students of color might allow educators to begin the transformation needed in schools to allow all students, regardless of color or culture, to experience academic success.

The final tenet of CRT involves being interdisciplinary. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe this methodology as a transdisciplinary perspective, a perspective that includes work from the fields of both ethnic studies and women's studies, sociology, history, and of course, law. Multiple perspectives are used to examine the effects of racism on people of color.

### **Race and Educational Policy**

The twenty-first century's federal legislation No Child Left Behind was a renewal of Title I (Spring, 2010) and sought to achieve the lofty goal of attaining one hundred percent of students proficient in both Mathematics and Language Arts by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was enacted to shrink the achievement gap within public schools in the United States. NCLB, a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, held all public schools responsible for educating all students, White students and students of color, by standardizing all curriculum and assessments (Sunderman et al., 2005; Spring, 2010).

“No Child Left Behind proposed to achieve equal educational opportunity by teaching all students the same curriculum on uniform state standards” (Spring, 2010, p. 142).

According to the President George W. Bush, NCLB was described as “a path to racial equity and economic success” (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005, p. xxv). And

according to Linda Darling-Hammond, “the broad goal of the NCLB is to raise the achievement levels of all students, especially underperforming groups, and to close the

achievement gap that parallels race and class distinctions” (Meier et al., 2004, p. 3).

However, there is some disagreement on the goals and values of NCLB. Spring (2012) stated that “the No Child Left Behind Act represents a victory for those advocating that schools teach a uniform American culture” (p. 142). Similarly Richard Milner (2012) said that “standardization, in many ways, is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality and equity of opportunity afforded to them” (p. 694).

Students of color are not new to the public school classrooms. In fact, a long documented past exists regarding the history of students of color in public school classrooms. Studies from nearly 20 years ago were asking the same questions we are asking today. Why are our students of color not experiencing the same level of academic achievement as their White classmates? Some might be so bold to suggest that the continued discrepancy between the two groups, White students and students of color, is proof that White students are superior to their non-white peers (Delpit, 2012). Why else would students of color still experience a lower level of academic achievement? “From the period of African enslavement until America’s present, the dominant belief system has disparaged the academic competence, even the academic capacity of African Americans” (Delpit, 2012, p. 39). Could the reason African American students are not successful in schools be due to the way they are being taught?

Policy leaders will continue to develop acts such as NCLB that are meant to close the achievement gap between White students and students of color; bills will be drawn up to outline the specifics of an educator effectiveness evaluation system; each one



developed with the idea of policy changing practice and increasing the academic achievement of our students of color causing the disappearance of the achievement gap. Unfortunately, like history has shown us with the decision made in the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, even this decision by the courts that segregation was unconstitutional and separate was not equal, has not mitigated the beliefs and attitudes of many people toward people of color.

What happens when we assume that certain children are less than brilliant? Our tendency is to teach less, to teach down, to teach for remediation. Without having any intention of discriminating we can do harm to children who are viewed within a stereotype of “less than.” (Delpit, 2012, p. 6)

Teachers must believe that students of color are capable of learning at the same level as their White peers. They must abandon the deficit perspectives they hold regarding the ability of our students of color, diversity must be acknowledged, differences must be embraced, and society must learn how to function within a pluralistic world so that students of all colors, from all backgrounds can experience success in a public school setting.

### **Majoritarian Storytelling**

Public schools have opened their doors to students of color throughout history by asking them to remove all cultural identifiers and beliefs before crossing over the threshold into the American classroom where they will learn the “true” history of their country, learn the language of the White people and become American students. Students that are able to adapt to the ways of the dominant culture within the classroom are the students that are considered successful. “According to cultural deficit storytelling, a

successful student of color is an assimilated student of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31).

Public school systems are the result of hundreds of years of middle class views, Eurocentric values, White privilege, and majoritarian storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian stories represent the commonly accepted “history” of the United States, as told by members of the majority group, justifying the actions taken in the past by their belief and value system (Love, 2004). Majoritarian stories use schools and their traditional curriculums to maintain the dominant perspective in their instruction and maintain the status quo, which is White privilege (Love, 2004). The dominant culture of our society, the White culture, has promoted these “truths” of our world so much that we actually believe them to be facts (Love, 2004; Milner, 2012). These “truths” include beliefs that students of color are naturally inferior to White students, in intelligence, behavior, and even cleanliness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Other majoritarian stories purport that White students work harder than students of color, and therefore they are deserving of all privileges and advantages that are a result of their hard work, because according to the “truths,” our society is a meritocracy (Spring, 2010).

Meritocracy, according to Love (2004), provides one of the three building blocks of Majoritarian stories: invisibility, normative and universal, and the myth of meritocracy. In a meritocracy, all students regardless of the color of their skin are able to experience success within the school system if they are willing to work. “A meritocracy is an education system that gives an equal chance to all to develop their abilities and to advance in the social hierarchy” (Spring, 2010, p. 6).

Invisibility refers to the inability or perhaps refusal of the dominant group to see the advantages afforded to them simply for being a part of the dominant group. White privilege is often used to describe this luxury of dominance (Love, 2004). Majoritarian stories represent the way things are viewed in our country; White people are the norm and the needs of White people represent the needs of all therefore they are universal (2004). According to the works of Ladson-Billings and Tate, the myth of meritocracy is supported by the following concepts:

neutrality, colorblindness, objective standards of performance, equal opportunity to meet the standards of performance, fair methods of assessment and evaluation, neutral and objective reporting of performance results, and allocation of merit to those whose performance meets the standards specified. (as cited by Love, 2004, pp. 230-231)

Love (2004) states that majoritarian stories are meant to validate the status quo by telling stories that do the following: (1) represent schools as “neutral” institutions; (2) suggest “colorblind[ness]” (p. 230) to the differences in students; (3) state that all students, regardless of race, are given the same opportunity to meet the “objective standards of performance” (p. 230); (4) measure things by “fair methods of assessment and evaluation” (p. 231) that then utilize a “neutral and objective reporting of performance results” (p. 231) that show that this country allows “equal opportunity” for those that are willing to work hard” (p. 231).

Instructors often tell students of color that they do not see color in their classrooms ignoring any differences that might exist between students and maintaining invisible “White privilege” cannot exist in a school that does not see color (Milner, 2012). Multiculturalist James Banks discussed the danger of being “colorblind” in

schools when explaining how statements such as “‘I don’t see color’ reveal a privileged position that refuses to legitimize racial identifications that are essential to people of color and that are often used to justify inaction and perpetuation of the status quo” (as cited by Milner, 2012, p. 699). The rationale of failing to see color neglects to recognize these differences that exist between our students. A teacher that claims to be colorblind is disregarding the history and experiences brought forth from the many different cultures that comprise our public school classrooms. If we want to teach all students, we must first recognize that they are different and different students require different strategies within the classroom to be successful.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the power of invisibility is by examining the stories that are not told. The difference in academic achievement between White students and students of color on standardized tests is seen as an achievement gap, a quantitative measure of the intellectual superiority of White students over students of color. But when Asian students out score their White peers, there is no mention of an achievement gap between Asian and White students. “It is the privilege of white people to avoid discussion of differences in academic achievement between white students and certain groups of Asian students, and to keep unspoken and invisible any suppositions of the intellectual inferiority of white students” (Love, 2004, p. 229).

The curricula taught in schools represent the views of the past, present, and future through the eyes of the dominant culture. “Students, very often, learn from a curriculum dominated by White contributions and White norms to the exclusion of curriculum contributions from other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups” (Milner, 2012, p. 700).

Students of color are given little more than cursory attempts at exploring diversity on specific days such as Martin Luther King Day in January or during the four weeks of Hispanic Heritage month in the fall to celebrate or explore their own culture and history. White students and students of color may attend the same schools, but they do not have access to the same curricula in their schools. Students of color are more likely to be labeled with a learning disability than their White peers (NCES, 2013, Table 204.50). The enrollment of students of color in advanced courses is not representative of the total enrollment of diverse students in the school (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 8).

Students of color are evaluated by the same assessments used to evaluate their White peers, the same assessments that were developed by people in the dominant culture based on dominant perspectives. These dominant perspectives, or basic skills, are not universal skills (Gay, 2010; Gay & Howard, 2010). Different cultures do not emphasize the same skills, require the same mastery of facts, or expect a set level of knowledge in various subjects such as social studies or science (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). To examine the levels of all students based on these specific assessments that assess those areas deemed important by our Eurocentric, middle class values is unfair (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). The playing field is anything but equal. Children that have been raised and schooled in this culture since they entered their schooling years are essentially given the answers to the tests they will be taking year after year (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). Students are gradually taught the skills that are considered most important by the dominant culture in each successive grade (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013).

Students of color, or students from different cultures, enter our public school system already behind their White peers in academic classes, and unaware of the rules of the school (Delpit, 2012). When scores of such assessments highlight the difference in performance levels between White students and students of color, the superiority of White students seem to be proven by the visible achievement gap between the two groups.

Students of color are constantly encouraged to work harder, and they can have the same opportunities and advantages presented to their White classmates (Love, 2004) Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) suggests that instead we should “reconceptualize this notion of achievement gap and begin to think about the incredible education debt we, as a nation, have accumulated” (p. 316). Ladson-Billings (2007) goes on to say that rather than telling students of color to “catch up we have to think about how we will begin to pay down this mountain of debt we have amassed at the expense of entire groups of people and their subsequent generations” (p. 316). Our students of color should not be the ones expected to work harder to close this gap. The public school systems, teacher preparation programs, building administrators, policy makers, and teachers need to recognize that our public school system has failed many of its students for far too long.

Unfortunately in most cases majoritarian stories are just that ... stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Schools may claim to be neutral institutions but most are not repeating the same actions that brought us to the present academic state (Yenika-Agbaw, 2013). “School can structurally produce and reproduce inequity, poverty, and injustice for students” (Milner, 2012, p. 703). The status quo in schools that majoritarian stories

describe show a disproportionate amount of students of color labeled with a learning disability, a higher suspension rate for students of color when compared to their White classmates, and little representation of students of color in advanced classes (Love, 2004; Milner, 2012; NCES, 2013, 2014).

The achievement gap makes us think that the problem is merely one of student achievement. It comes to us as if the students are not doing their part. We hear nothing of the other “gaps” that plague the lives of poor children of color. The persistent under-funding of schools serving Black and Brown children has had a pernicious effect on the earning ratios of Black and Brown people related to years of schooling. So, while the income gap more closely resembles the achievement gap, the wealth disparity better reflects the education debt. (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 317)

This majoritarian view of the achievement gap is an example of an “underlying fallacy... regarding students of color that needs to be debunked. This is the assumption of universal marginality, powerlessness, and disadvantage” (Gay, 2013, p. 54). Do we really believe that students of color are inferior to their White peers, unable to achieve the same academic levels, destined to be marginalized citizens for centuries to come? Or is there a possibility that this achievement gap is the result of the refusal of our country to educate all people for centuries?

### **Counter Storytelling and the Opportunity Gap**

We could examine the “achievement gap” from a different perspective. Perhaps the “achievement gap” is no more, and the problem becomes more of an “opportunity gap.” According to Milner’s Opportunity Gap Explanatory Framework (2012), the problems with the achievement of students of color might very well be the result of the schools, policies, curricula, assessments, and teachers that exist within the public school system. Milner (2010), states, “the blame for failure is too often placed on students (or

their parents), without any serious interrogation of the role that educators and educational systems and structures play in the maintenance of the status quo” (as cited by Milner, 2012, p. 707).

The Opportunity Gap Explanatory Framework is constructed of five tenets including: “color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, low expectations and deficit mindsets, and context-neutral mindsets and practices” (Milner, 2012, p. 698). The framework was constructed in hopes of understanding educational practices that result in the discrepancy seen between white students and students of color rather than using the “achievement gap” as a suitable explanation for the lower achievement shown by our students of color (Milner, 2012).

Richard Milner (2012) argues that the use of “achievement gap explanations can force us to focus on individual students as well as groups of students rather than inequitable, racist, and sexist structures, systems, contexts, policies, and practices that lead to perceived achievement gaps” (p. 696). Rather than the term “achievement gap,” Ladson-Billings prefers to look at it as an “education debt” owed to the students of color that have been “poorly served” by their own public school systems (Milner, 2012, p. 696).

Martin Luther King Jr. suggests in his in his highly renowned “I Have a Dream” speech, given in 1963, that he too believed that there was an “opportunity gap,” which has grown into an “education debt” that is owed to all people of color across this country.

In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men--yes, black men



as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.”

Counter-storytelling examines the stories told by the dominant culture making more visible racial privilege and the White way of viewing the world (Love, 2004).

Counter-storytelling provides a voice for members of subordinated groups that have been silenced for too long (Love, 2004). It also allows access to a world that is rarely seen by those of the dominant culture, a world-view that is obscured by White privilege (Love, 2004).

Solórzano and Yosso describe four functions of counter-storytelling: to build community between marginalized people; to challenge the majoritarian stories and belief systems thought to be truths; to bring together all people of color to share with them what can be; and to create new stories that combine both stories (majoritarian and counter) to give a clear depiction of the history of our schools, our country and our world (2002).

The importance of recognizing the difference between majoritarian stories and counter-stories is the realization that not every student will see the world through the same lens. Teachers must be aware of the different perspectives and experiences that students bring to the classrooms if they want their students to learn. In addition to the beliefs of their students, teachers must also be aware of their own personal thought and attitudes towards students of color because according to Gay (2010), “of utmost importance in this approach to educating students is for teachers to become critically

conscious of their own cultural socialization, and how it affects their attitudes and behaviors toward the cultures of other ethnic groups” (p. 619).

### **Teacher Beliefs**

The work of educators is to provide all students with the insightful opportunity to learn. Educators are charged with ensuring their practice communicates the material, the support, and the expectations to each unique child. Educators, like all people, are a compilation of their own personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, moral principles and formal training delivered by teacher preparation programs and school districts (Kagan, 1992; Simmons et al., 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). As a result of these experiences, teachers enter the field with specific mental models that provide guidance for their actions within the classroom (Kagan, 1992; Farrell & Choo, 2005; Gay, 2010). According to the works of Senge (2006), “Our ‘mental models’ determine not only how we make sense of the world, but how we take action” (p. 164). Chris Argyris of Harvard explains mental models this way, “Although people do not [always] behave congruently with their espoused theories [what they say], they do behave congruently with their theories-in-use [their mental models]” (as cited by Senge, 2006, p. 164). The power of mental models is their ability to affect what we do by affecting what we see (Senge, 2006). As Senge explains, “our behavior and our attitudes are shaped by the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world” (Senge, 2000, p. 67). Mental models are invisible to the person that holds them unless they actively seek to reveal them. It is these mental models that take in new information, forget information

that does not fit well with existing mental models and remember that information that reinforces established mental models, thus making change a difficult process for anyone (Senge, 2000).

Kagan (1992) states “teacher belief is defined broadly as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” (p. 65). Farrell and Choo (2005) similarly use the definition of belief provided by Elsenhart (1988) those beliefs are “an attitude consistently applied to an activity” (p. 2). The beliefs of teachers are developed over time. The experiences from their own days as a student, sitting in a classroom, shape the beliefs that will eventually guide their own classroom practices. Research has shown that classroom teachers are the most significant factor that impacts student learning and teacher beliefs are developed long before teacher candidates even step into their own teacher preparation programs (Kagan, 1992; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008). Teacher candidates have completed years of informal observations on their own educators and classroom experiences from kindergarten to college (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008). Kagan and Munby (as cited in Stuart & Thurlow, 2000) believe that teachers “form their beliefs about teaching and learning early and are highly resistant to change” (p. 114). Unconsciously, teachers compile past experiences and develop their own beliefs about teaching and learning that then act as the sieve through which all-new experiences and education must pass through (Kagan, 1992). According to the works of Hollingsworth and Kagan (as cited in Stuart & Thurlow, 2000), “These beliefs serve as

filters for new information in a way that culturally held beliefs are frequently confirmed rather than confronted” (p. 114).

Through numerous studies on teacher beliefs, researchers have realized the tremendous impact teacher beliefs have on classroom practices, which in turn affects student learning (King, Shumov, & Lietz, 1999; Avramidis & Norwich, 2010).

“Whether positive, negative, or ambivalent, beliefs and attitudes always precede and shape behaviors” (Gay, 2013, p. 49). Teacher beliefs guide their classroom practices.

How a teacher feels about a specific student, or group of students, can have a huge impact on the instructional practices of the teacher as well as the academic achievement of the student. According to Gay (2010), “Teacher attitudes, expectations, and actions toward ethnically diverse students are tremendously powerful in determining the quality of education they receive” (p. 627).

Espoused theories and theories in use describe the relationship between what articulates as values and the descriptions of one’s actions (Menges & Rando, 1989). “The distinction made between the two contrasting theories of action is between those theories that are implicit in what we do as practitioners and managers, and those on which we call to speak of our actions to others” (Smith, 2001, 2013). According to the work of Argyris and Schon (as cited in Segal, 1998), “espoused theories refer to the explicit beliefs and ideals of teachers generated independently of the teaching situation, while theories in use refer to the perspectives of teachers that arise through their practices” (p. 205). As they state “espoused theories are those that an individual articulates, makes explicit and claims to follow. Theories-in-use are those that can be inferred from action” (Argyris, Putnam,

& McLain Smith, 1985, p. 81-82). Similarly, Chris Argyris (1994) defines espoused theory of action as that theory “based on principles and precepts that fit our intellectual backgrounds and commitments” (p. 80). Theory-in-use, according to Argyris (1994), are those “to which we resort in moments of stress” (p. 80).

Ideally, the espoused theory and the theory in use would exhibit congruence with each other but often times that are not the case. Teacher preparation programs work to instill efficient teaching strategies into the tool set of every graduating teacher while schools and school districts are leading professional development to bring those same effective teaching tools to the doorstep of veteran teachers. But how effective are professional development classes and teacher prep programs if the end result is simply teachers becoming versed in stating the correct espoused theory of teaching without actualizing it? If what teachers say they do in the classroom does not match the actual classroom practices, how does that benefit the students? According to the works of Argyris (1994), most of us are unaware of the contradiction that exists between our beliefs and our practices. In fact, “most of us are consistently inconsistent in the way we act” (Argyris, 1994, p. 80). According to Menges and Rando (1989),

action science suggests that a lack of correspondence, that is, a gap between espoused theory and theory-in-use, is the norm for human behavior (p. 57) ... contradictions between espoused theories and observed theories-in-use can be powerful levers for change. (p. 59)

Eraut states that “the mismatch between espoused theories and theories-in-use is a natural consequence of the dualistic approach to professional education” (as cited in Harnett, 2012, p. 378). Dualistic refers to the way that most teacher candidates spend time in university classes, learning theory and pedagogical strategies, completing a few

field experiences and internships and then they are teachers, with their own classrooms. Harnett (2012) adds, “while espoused theories are developed, taught, and assessed in formal educational contexts, theories-in-use develop separately as teachers learn to cope with the pressures and demands of practice” (p. 378). Taking over your own classroom and putting your own routines and procedures into place is far different than stepping into a classroom for your student teaching experience and taking over a class that has already been set up for success by a veteran teacher. Student teachers just follow the lead of their cooperating teacher when they take over the classroom. During their student teaching assignment, they are protected and sheltered from the rest of the school by both their cooperating teacher and the university staff. Not until a teacher is hired for their first teaching assignment, do they get the full experience of running their own classroom while also dealing with other school staff, time constraints, and the established school culture which may or may not match their own or the one they were exposed to during their teacher preparation program.

The work of a teacher is influenced by his/her beliefs, which in turn impact the instructional practices a teacher uses in the classroom. Teacher beliefs, or their mental models, are difficult to measure as they are not directly observable and typically must be inferred. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) write, “intercultural relations can be enhanced by increasing ‘intercultural sensitivity’ that will lead to increased ‘intercultural competence’” (p. 422). Intercultural sensitivity is defined as the “ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (p. 422). Intercultural competence refers to the “ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways” (p. 422).

Teaching is not a culturally free zone (Gay, 2010). Teachers need to be cognizant of their beliefs and the impact those beliefs have on their instruction (Cabello & Burstein, 1995). “Critical cultural consciousness of self and others for all teachers is an important pillar of culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2010, p. 619). Educators must not only recognize the differences that students bring into their classrooms but they must also embrace those differences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Differences should not be ignored but rather examined. The diversity that exists within our classrooms allows for the use of a very powerful teaching strategy, the opportunity for both our teachers and students to explore and learn from different perspectives learn from each other.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

If you were to walk into an urban public school classroom today, your eyes would feast upon a diverse group of students representing various cultures, beliefs, experiences, learning styles, and needs. Yet, chances are that when the teacher presents the lesson, it would represent one perspective, one voice, one belief, and be taught in one way (Gay, 2010). “In contrast to the increasing race and class diversity of student populations, there has been a press for standardization and uniformity in the pedagogy and curriculum of the schools that serve these students” (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008, p. 159).

Students that make up the classrooms in our public schools today are much more diverse than the classrooms twenty, ten, or even five years ago. Student demographics have changed but classroom instruction has remained the same. As stated in Chapter One, teachers in the United States continue to be “predominantly middle class, female, monolingual, and of European ancestry, while students are increasingly poor and

linguistically, ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse” (Gay, 2013, p. 64). Public school systems and teachers need to change to meet the needs of the students within their classrooms rather than expecting students to fit within the confines of their school curriculum.

Educational researchers and culturally proficient educators have realized that traditional teaching strategies that were used as they themselves were attending schools are not the most effective strategies for our students of color. Our classroom models are no longer a fit for the classrooms of today. Student demographics have changed significantly so classrooms need to change as well. We can no longer expect students to fit within the confines of our Eurocentric education curricula. We can no longer expect students of color to shed their cultural values, knowledge, and language at the door of their classrooms. Students of color need to be recognized for what they bring to the classroom, their experiences, their histories and their perspectives. Differences are not to be ignored, denied, or resisted. Unfortunately, according to Gay, “individuals are socialized to devalue, suspect, and pretend to ignore differences, especially those that derive from class, race, ethnicity, and culture” (2010, p. 614) Differences are viewed as deficiencies and the ultimate goal of public institutions such as schools is to make everyone behave and act according to the accepted norm, which is the cultural norms established by European-Americans (Gay, 2010; Milner, 2012). Middle class norms, which are typically established by Eurocentric values, are the dominating factor in the rules, procedures and policies that govern and guide our learning institutions (Gay, 2010). Students accustomed to the middle class, White, values tend to do better and experience a



great deal more academic success when compared to students of color (Gay, 2010).

Students that seem oblivious to the unspoken rules and regulations of classroom life are often seen as problem students. Differences in cultural characteristics between that of the student and those of the regulating school norms can “limit students’ learning opportunities” (Milner, 2012, p. 701). Other differences exist between cultures that can cause teachers to view students as problematic, out of control, slow, or defiant. To help our students of color experience academic success within the classroom, it is imperative for educators to have “explicit knowledge about cultural diversity” (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

Communication within public schools can be described as a “passive-receptive style of communication” whereas the communication style of ethnic groups is “active, participatory, dialectic, and multimodal” (Gay, 2002, p. 111). African-American students may find it difficult to communicate in a linear fashion (Gay, 2010). Rather than directly state the answer, students may prefer to dance around the issue, go off on tangents as if they were telling a story (Gay, 2010). Some students of color may also struggle with adhering to the Eurocentric conversational norms where one person talks and the other person simply listens and waits for their turn to talk, rather than engage with the speaker, providing their own feedback and commentary for the story (Gay, 2002, 2010). Some students may also struggle with sitting still in class while they receive instruction from the teacher and these students that are unable to maintain control of themselves within the classroom, or adhere to the norms, are often labeled as defiant, insubordinate, or in some cases, special education students (Gay, 2010). It is the lack of multicultural knowledge that teachers bring to the classroom that often leads them to misdiagnose and mislabel

students of color (Gay, 2001; 2010). Teacher preparation programs need to prepare future educators for the impact that race, ethnicity, and language have on the behavior of students in a culturally diverse classroom (Banks, 2001).

In *Multiplication Is for White People*, Delpit (2012) states “we *can* educate all children if we truly want to. To do so we must first stop attempting to quantify their capacity. We must be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character” (p. 49). Teachers must stop viewing the cultural differences of students of color as deficits or obstacles to overcome, and instead recognize that it is the school system that is incompatible with their learning styles (Gay, 2010). It is this presumption of school neutrality that perpetuates educational inequities within our classrooms (Gay, 2010). We have to accept the fact that our public school systems have not provided an appropriate education for all students, especially students of color.

Students of color can be successful if they are aware of the rules of the game they are playing (Gay, 2010). Teaching students of color the unspoken rules of school success is not going to immediately close the discrepancy between the academic achievement of White students and students of color, but it does serve as a reminder that we cannot assume that all students are aware of the expectations for their behavior within the walls of the school (Gay, 2010). Students should not be punished for not being privy to the unspoken rules and expectations that are the norms of our public schools, teachers need to teach students what is expected of them within in the classroom (Gay, 2010).

Classroom teachers often speak of the importance of students possessing certain basic skills when they enter their classroom, skills that many assume to be universal and

the foundation upon which knowledge is built. Delpit (2012) defines basic skills as the “knowledge of the strategies and conventions of middle-class cultural capital” (p. 55). Basic skills are not universal, and what is considered a basic skill in one culture may not represent a basic skill in another culture. “What we call basic skills are only “basic” because they are one aspect of the cultural capital of the middle class” (p. 53). Students of color that do not come to school with knowledge of these “basic skills” are often seen as slow, or deficient in some way (Delpit, 2012).

One of the highest priorities in teacher preparation, as Chou (2007) tells us, is the necessity of helping teachers, all teachers, develop the skills and knowledge to work effectively with culturally diverse students. Teacher education programs have a huge impact on the attitudes toward diversity teachers bring with them to the classroom and their ability to accommodate for diverse learners within their teaching (Chou, 2007). Teachers need to be cognizant of the differences and challenges presented to students from different cultures and serve as their guides to academic success.

An excerpt from *At the Essence of Learning* (1994), describes the concept of education in America:

Education in the United States is a public creation, a public mandate, a public service. Undeniably, the “American Public” is becoming increasingly pluralistic...To serve its constituency adequately; education must likewise be culturally pluralistic. In symbol and substance it should convey to all students that they and their heritages are important components of what constitutes the essence of society’s cultures, values, and ideals. That is individuals from all social classes, and ethnic, racial, gender, language, and cultural groups have the right to be validated, to have unrestricted access to the full range of opportunities available to citizens, and to have a representative voice in decisions that affect their lives and destinies. The ethics and actions these values engender are necessary conditions for the support and survival of a democratic society. (as cited by Gay, 2013, p. 66)

The message that has been delivered by schools is that “students of color assimilate to the dominant White middle-class culture to succeed in school and life” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31). Gay (2013) reports that culturally responsive teaching can in fact improve the “performance of underachieving ethnically and racially diverse students” (p. 67). Culturally responsive pedagogy can be defined as “an approach to teaching and learning that addresses the sociopolitical context of White supremacy within education and society over time while simultaneously fostering students’ abilities to achieve high levels of academic success and cultural competence” (Hayes & Juarez, 2012, p. 4).

Culturally responsive classrooms do not stop at teaching the appropriate norms for their students of color; they also highlight the experiential knowledge of their diverse students and bring their influence into the school curricula (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Gay, 2010). The perspectives of students of color are brought to life in culturally responsive classrooms.

Culturally responsive teaching may be one of the answers we are looking for to solve the gap problem. According to Gay, “culturally responsive teaching is more about finding solutions to achievement disparities in schools than simply casting dispersions on students and teachers” (2013, pp. 54-55). Gay (2013), arguably one of the leading scholars on cultural relevance in our classrooms, defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 50).

Gay (2010) found that the increased cultural competence of educators does not simply benefit students of color it benefits all students:

If teachers become more culturally conscious and competent then fewer African-, Asian-, Latino- and Native American students will be misplaced in special education, their disproportionate representation will diminish, and those who are appropriately assigned to special education will have a better chance of receiving the quality of education they rightfully deserve. This we must achieve in order to act in accordance with our commitment to educational equity and social justice for all students. (p. 627)

Culturally responsive teaching is not blind to the cultural differences, values, and beliefs that exist in the classrooms, but rather uses those differences to empower our students of color to increase their academic success within the classroom (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Gay (2010) describes culturally responsive pedagogy as being “anchored on four foundational pillars of practice” that include: “teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies” (p. 46).

Educators need to see their students of color as bright, capable, and worthy students rather than a student that is different which can often be viewed as deficient within the classroom. “When a teacher is familiar with aspects of a child’s culture, then the teacher may be better able to assess the child’s competence” (Delpit, 2012, p. 138).

Students of color are often subjected to a curriculum “dominated by White contributions and White norms to the exclusion of curriculum contributions from other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups” (Milner, 2012, p. 700). For students to experience success in their studies, classroom teachers must create a path between the current knowledge of the students and the new material being presented. “If the curriculum we

use to teach our children does not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to school, it is doomed to failure” (Delpit, 2012, p. 21). Richard Milner (2012) suggests that

Instructional practices and related educational experiences need to be constructed in ways that address and are responsive to students’ varying needs because of the range of differences that students bring into the classroom and because of the social context in which students live and learn. (p. 694)

According to the work of Delpit, in her book *Multiplication is for White People* (2012), the following is necessary to create excellence in diverse classrooms:

1. Recognize the importance of a teacher and good teaching, especially for the “school dependent” children of low-income communities.
2. Recognize the brilliance of poor, urban children and teach them *more* content, not less.
3. Whatever methodology or instructional program is used, demand critical thinking while at the same time assuring that all children can gain access to “basic skills” – the conventions and strategies that are essential to success in American society.
4. Provide children with the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of their own competence and worthiness and that of their families and communities.
5. Recognize and build on children’s strengths.
6. Use familiar metaphors and experiences from the children’s world to connect what students already know to school-taught knowledge.
7. Create a sense of family and caring in the classroom.
8. Monitor and assess students’ needs and then address them with a wealth of diverse strategies.
9. Honor and respect the children’s home cultures.
10. Foster a sense of children’s connection to community, to something greater than themselves. (p. xix-xx)

The aforementioned characteristics are necessary to establish a classroom learning community that supports the learning of all students. A culturally responsive teacher recognizes the different experiences brought to the classroom by students of different cultures. Rather than see those differences as deficits, a culturally responsive teacher

uses those experiences to create a classroom that is rich in both knowledge and perspectives, understanding that “diversity in the nation’s schools is both an opportunity and a challenge” (Banks, 2001, p. 203). A culturally responsive teacher caters to the needs of all students within their classroom, regardless of the student’s color, culture, or socioeconomic status.

If we can see all of the children we teach—skin color, culture, learning styles, income level notwithstanding—as complete, deserving, brilliant human beings, then perhaps we will manage to create the educational system we need. Education for *all* children should be “special”—that is specially designed to discover the strengths and accommodate the needs of each child. (Delpit, 2012, p. 103)

### **Quality Responsive Classroom Observation Protocol**

“The QRC protocol is a low inference tool to capture observational data about classrooms that are characterized by a high number of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse” (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca , 2013). Teachers are scored on a scale of one to five (five being the highest) with anchor descriptions at levels one, three and five.

The QRC is an observation tool originally named the Quality Urban Classroom (QUC). The QRC was developed in response to a need for “a tool that was more sensitive to classroom practices that support linguistically and culturally diverse learners” (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb & Viesca , 2013, p. 1). “The QRC tool focuses on observable behaviors and interactions that occur in a typical classroom characterized by significant numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students” (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013, p.1).

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a standardized observation protocol upon which the QUC and QRC were originally developed (Pianta & Hamre, 2009; Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). The CLASS looks at three separate domains in the classroom: Emotional Supports; Classroom Organization; and Instructional Supports.

The emotional supports domain in the CLASS was developed under both the attachment theory and the self-determination theory (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). A teacher's ability to support the social and emotional development of students in their class is considered essential for effective classroom practices. The attachment theory, which has been validated in schools, states that children that are provided emotional support at home from their parents in a safe environment that is both predictable and consistent, those children are able to be more independent and open to taking risks because of that adult support (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Self-determination theory, according to Pianta and Hamre (2009), posits that children are more likely to become academically engaged if they have a supportive teacher.

Research confirms that classroom organization is crucial to the academic success of students and the theory of children's self-regulatory skills are the foundation upon which the classroom organization domain of the CLASS was built (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Classrooms that have effective classroom management, routine structures, and actively engage the students during instruction are less likely to have behavioral problems, allowing the teacher to teach and the students to learn (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Students that are not engaged in their academic lessons are more likely to cause



behavioral issues for their classroom teachers, causing the teacher to stop instruction to deal with the off task students, thereby disrupting the learning of all other students in the class.

When students doubt their own competence, they typically respond with two behaviors: they either hide (hoods over faces, heads on desks) and try to become invisible, or they act out to prevent a scenario unfolding in which they will not be able to perform and will once again be proved “less than.” (Delpit, 2012, p.14)

The final domain of the CLASS, instructional supports, was a result of theories concerning children’s cognitive and language development (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). The focus of this domain was not simply on the curriculum being taught but more about how the teacher was able to support both academic and cognitive development during the course of the lesson (Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

The CLASS model uses observable teacher-student interactions, organized by patterns, which allow observers to identify the interaction levels across various subjects and grade levels (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Systematic observations by standardized tools such as the CLASS, allow researchers the opportunity to analyze results to provide better classroom observation tools and instructional strategies that will eventually impact the classroom-learning environment.

The Quality Urban Classroom tool was validated in 2009 by conducting concurrent observations with the CLASS tool. The QUC was renamed the Quality Responsive Classroom (QRC) tool after educators and practitioners saw success in all classrooms with the tool and wanted the name to reflect that the QRC practices were responsive to the diverse needs of all students (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013).

Education has long served as a source of power for the dominant class. People of color within this country have a long history of fighting for their right to an education. Critical race theory as a framework highlights how pervasive racism is within our society and schools to this day. The five tenets of CRT illustrate how educational policy has continued to allow the gap (opportunity or achievement) between White students and students of color expand over the years as majoritarian stories continue to dictate the school curriculum. “Racism is still a systemic condition of schools and our new teachers are not prepared for the classrooms they are stepping into and are certainly not prepared to oppose the ‘school practices and policies that are both overtly and covertly racist’” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 30).

This study explores what is really happening within our classrooms by examining the beliefs of our classroom teachers, their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy, and their ability to successfully implement such strategies within their classroom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose of Study**

This study examined early career teacher practice and beliefs about students of color in their classroom and the relationship between those beliefs and their classroom practices. This study utilized a sample of early career teachers within the first five years of their teaching career working in schools with students' populations of over 50% students of color. The results of this study will help to inform teacher preparation programs, district professional development departments, and schools to help their teachers meet the needs of the diverse students they will encounter in the classrooms of today.

#### **Research Question**

1. What is the relationship between early career teacher beliefs, teacher articulation of culturally responsive pedagogy and actual observed culturally responsive pedagogy in classroom practices?

#### **Rationale for Case Study**

Quantitative researchers tend to have a narrow focus and a desire to test a specific hypothesis (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Merriam suggests that all data are qualitative because "before something can be quantified, it has to be identified, named, described,

understood” (1988, p. 68). Classroom diversity, and the effect of classroom diversity on the education of students of color is an issue that exists within our schools. Cultural indifference within the public school system is an entity that impacts the lives of countless students. As a researcher, I would like to understand how cultural differences effect how students learn. As Yin states, “The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (2009, p. 4).

Creswell defines a case study as “research that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (2007, p. 73). A researcher that elects to do a qualitative study is looking for insight into a phenomenon that must first be broken down into parts before the whole picture can be understood (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 2007). According to Merriam (1988), “Case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena” (p. 2). Naturalistic inquiry, observation of phenomena within its natural context, requires a sensitive instrument to collect and analyze data, a task best suited for the human researcher (Merriam, 1988). As Merriam (1988) states “the use of human sensibilities such as interviewing, observing, and analyzing” (p. 3) makes humans the most appropriate instrument to use in case study research. Case studies allow researchers the opportunity to study an event, as it is occurring, to allow for interpretation and possible explanations of how the interaction of multiple factors can result in this specific phenomenon (Merriam, 1988).

For this research project, the researcher set out to examine the relationships between the espoused beliefs of teachers and their theories in use as observed within the

classroom environment. The study was bound by the following characteristics: all teachers were within the first five years of their teaching career; teachers were teaching in an urban middle school within the fields of Science, Social Studies, or Language Arts; teachers were observed in two different classes using the QRC observation tool; and they completed a personal, focused interview with the researcher (see Appendix).

According to Yin (2009), there are four tests that are routinely used to establish the quality of case studies: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Construct validity, identifying, and using the correct measures for the study was met in this study by the use of multiple sources of evidence such as the direct observations, and interviews (Yin, 2009). Internal validity, not applicable in descriptive case studies such as this, is appropriate when a researcher is looking for the reasons one event led to another (Yin, 2009). External validity of a case study is the extent to which the results of a case study can be used to describe another similar situation (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) argues that case studies, like experiments, rely on analytical generalizations rather than statistical generalizations. In statistical generalizations, inferences are made about a population based on the results of a survey, or other quantitative measure, from that population, using quantitative formulas that determine the confidence of said generalization (Yin, 2009). Analytical generalizations are used when the researcher is generalizing results to a theory or similar case study (Yin, 2009). External validity was met in this study by using a multiple case design; each teacher was the subject of an individual case study, allowing the research to compare the results of seven different

teachers, which according to Yin (2009) is analogous to the comparison of the results of seven scientific experiments.

Reliability, the final test for research quality in a case study, is the ability for another researcher to conduct the same case study by following the procedures outlined in the study (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), the emphasis of the reliability test is the ability to repeat the same case over again, with the goal of reliability being the minimization of both errors and biases in the original case study. This researcher felt that the reliability test was met by the specific, detailed, replicable nature of the procedural methods involved in this case study, allowing for the replication of this case study by another researcher.

### **Research Design**

This study examined teachers that were within the first five years of their teaching career. The teachers that were observed were currently teaching within the subjects of Science, Social Studies, or Language Arts at an urban middle school. The importance of having teachers within the first five years of their teaching career was to ensure that all participants had completed their teacher preparation programs at approximately the same time and therefore would have been more likely to receive instruction in culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Site and participant selection.** Schools were selected based on the demographics of their student population. Three middle schools had student populations with more than 50% students of color. The following three schools were selected for

inclusion in this study: Rolling Heights Middle School, Blue Creek Middle School, and Twin Falls K-8.

School name	Total enrollment	Hispanic population	White population	Students receiving free or reduced lunch
Rolling Heights Middle School	925	77%	13%	80%
Blue Creek Middle School	834	60%	30%	80%
Twin Falls K-8	852	70%	24%	72%

*Table 1. Schools, Demographics, Students receiving lunch assistance*

When the building principals granted permission and gave the researcher the name of teachers within their building that were within the first five years of their teaching career and were currently teaching within the fields of Science, Social Studies and Language Arts, the researcher contacted the potential candidates.

Candidates were asked if they would be interested in participating in a study that would be looking at their pedagogical practices as well as reflecting on their teacher preparation programs. The candidates were informed that the researcher would be performing two 45 minutes classroom observations on the same day. After the completion of the two observations, the candidates were asked to participate in a personal interview with the researcher. The interview gave the researcher the opportunity to gain personal knowledge of the candidate and to ask clarifying questions from the classroom

observations. Candidates were assured that their names and the name of their school would be kept confidential and pseudonyms would be used for all reports generated by the study. Once teachers agreed to participate in the study they were sent consent letters to sign.

### **Instruments**

**Quality responsive classroom (QRC) observation protocol.** The teachers were observed in two of their classes, each for a period of at least 45 minutes using the Quality Responsive Classroom (QRC) tool. The QRC uses three different observation protocols to examine: teacher focus, student focus, and classroom climate. Each of the three observation protocols delves further down into several domains defined by three to six observable indicators (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). The QRC was selected as a reliable tool to gather data on the theories-in-use in the classrooms of the participants, after concurrent observations with the CLASS tool showed it to be a valid instrument for collecting classroom observational data

The QRC observation protocol examines the teacher focus by looking at the following domains: focusing on clear and challenging learning goals, engaging students in content and learning activities, supporting students in their academic progress, presenting strategies for supporting culturally and linguistically diverse learners, responding to students' questions, and eliciting their personal connections to content (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). Each of the four domains has specific indicators for the observer to look for during the twenty-minute observation period. Some of the indicators include: examining the teacher setting; the referencing of clear content



and language objectives; pacing and scaffolding during the course of the lesson; and the use of proper content vocabulary (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013).

The student focus portion of the QRC looks at three domains: students taking an active role in creating and maintaining classroom norms and protocols; students generating and/or negotiating how to meet learning goals and assignments; and students participating in learning and supporting each other socially and academically in learning (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). During this portion of the observation, students are monitored, and it is the learner and his/her actions that generate what to look for such as does the student know how to access resources? Are the students able to work together to solve problems? Are all students engaged in the activity? These are the questions an observer might be trying to answer during this portion of the QRC.

Finally, the classroom climate check serves as a checklist for the learning environment. The three domains are as follows: the physical characteristics of the classroom support academic learning; the socio-emotional climate of the classroom supports student engagement and belonging; and the interpersonal interactions support the learning community (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). Indicators of an appropriate classroom climate might include some of the following: learning objectives, language objectives and student work are displayed in the room; the teacher is easily able to access all parts of the room to help all students; the walls of the classroom are rich with content material and easily accessible information; and the classroom represents a safe place for all students to learn and all students are treated with respect by the teacher and their peers (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013).

**Focused interview.** According to Yin (2009) “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p. 106). Case studies are about human subjects and their behavior in particular situations. The interview allowed the researcher to ask the teacher questions about their personal career, their teacher preparation program, their beliefs and attitudes toward diversity and the use of culturally responsive pedagogy. The interview was also an opportunity for the researcher to ask clarifying questions that came up during the classroom observations.

As the work of teachers is directly influenced by their own personal beliefs, the interview was an opportunity for the researcher to get to know the teacher’s own past history with education. Questions were developed to examine the background of each teacher and what led them to education. Inquiries were made into their own cultural backgrounds and personal experiences with their own education. Questions regarding their own teacher preparation programs were asked to help the researcher understand how teachers viewed their own teacher preparation in terms of how successful they felt as a new teacher in their own classroom. Teachers were also asked questions regarding their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and their own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher to see if their responses were consistent with the practices observed during the classroom observations.

By using multiple sources of evidence, the researcher was able to establish an accurate and more convincing conclusion with the case study findings by a process called triangulation (Yin, 2009). Data triangulation is defined as the collection of data from

multiple sources with the intent of corroborating the same fact by providing multiple measures (Yin, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

**Classroom observations.** The researcher scheduled observation days with each of the participants. Each participant was observed twice during the course of one day. The researcher used the QRC 3.0 observation tool. Each observation was 45 minutes and followed the observation protocol set forth by the QRC (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). The first twenty minutes of the observation was focused on the teacher, the next twenty minutes focused on the student, and the final five minutes focused on the classroom community (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb, & Viesca, 2013). The protocol insists on a change of focus between the teacher and student to ensure that the observer spends equal time during the observation focusing on each.

**Interviews.** After the final class observation, each teacher had a personal interview with the researcher. The interviews were purposely scheduled after the classroom observations to avoid the possibility of the teacher changing their normal classroom practices to fit what the teacher assumed the researcher was looking for after hearing the interview questions. Each interview was digitally recorded then downloaded and transcribed by the researcher. The interview consisted of fourteen questions to elicit their espoused theories (Argyris, 2000) of cultural diversity and understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy. Each participant was given the transcripts from their interview to allow for member checking ensuring that the researcher accurately captured the participant's shared thoughts and beliefs.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher utilized various sources of evidence within this study, allowing the different sources to complement one another and provide for a more robust case study (Yin, 2009). In addition to the documentation evidence provided in the literature review, examining other studies on culturally responsive pedagogy, and the archival records presented at the beginning of the study on achievement statistics of both White students and students of color from the NCES, the researcher also used interviews and direct observations in this study.

The seven case studies examined the beliefs of teachers by observing classroom practices for evidence of theories-in-use and interviewing teachers to collect data on their espoused theories as they described their beliefs to the researcher. The research design of these seven case studies allowed the researcher to develop a converging line of inquiry, multiple sources of evidence describing the same phenomenon, and a convergence of evidence (Yin, 2009).

The classroom observations and interview data were examined individually for each teacher in the study, resulting in seven separate case reports. Classroom observations were examined for teacher strengths in each of the three foci and specific domains of the QRC 3.0 observation tool. Strengths and weaknesses for each focus were noted on the matrix form developed for each case study. Interview notes were read and reread to determine the espoused beliefs of the teacher shared during the interview session. The responses collected for each teacher case study examined for any possible relationships between: the espoused beliefs of teachers according to interview data and

the beliefs of teachers as expressed in their classroom observations. After all individual case reports were completed, the researcher began a cross case analysis where the teachers' responses and observations, and any relationships found in each independent study, were compared. The researcher looked for trends among the teachers in each of the data collection phases, similarities in strengths and weaknesses in certain foci on the QRC 3.0 observation tool, and the congruency of the QRC 3.0 results and interview responses.

### **Limitations**

Classroom observations were conducted in such a way to minimize any distractions to the classroom environment, but it is unrealistic to assume that my presence had no effect on the behavior of both teachers and students.

As the researcher, I was the main instrument used to collect data in the study. Biases, both known and unknown, of the researcher could be considered a limitation of this study as well. However, it was my personal biases that led me to this study to find solutions.

The sampling technique used for this study was one of convenience. The district was selected for its close proximity to the researcher. Participants recruited for this study were selected based on their years of experience and their current teaching assignment. Building principals at the selected schools forwarded the names of teachers within their buildings, who met the selected criteria, to the researcher for the researcher to contact. Eight teachers were initially contacted, but one was unable to participate due to the timing set for the classroom observations.

Another limitation of this study would include the limited number of classroom observations completed by the researcher. Increasing the number of classroom observations at various times throughout the school year would allow for more insight into the cultural proficiencies and culturally responsive pedagogy of all the teachers. Spreading the observations throughout the year would also show the impact of school culture on the classroom instruction delivered by the teacher.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher practice and beliefs about students of color in their classroom and the relationship between those beliefs and their classroom practices. These findings were examined through the use of critical race theory. Critical race theory is "...a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods and pedagogy that seek to analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). As an analytical tool, critical race theory serves as a "methodology for affecting and disrupting existing power structures and promoting social change..." (ASHE, 2015).

Critical race theory and critical race methodology share the following five tenets that look beyond cultural deficit models when examining race and actually challenges claims that schools are objective, colorblind, race neutral, and providers of equal opportunity to all students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). The five tenets include: the centrality of race and racism, challenging the dominant perspective, social justice, understanding the value of the experiential knowledge of students, and the transdisciplinary perspective (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). As a product of our society, educational institutions are not immune to the

negative effects that racism has on all people (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Yenika-Agbaw, 2013). Critical race methodology challenges the status quo of traditional classroom environments and seeks to understand how race functions in our society as well as within our schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Yenika-Agbaw, 2013).

Middle school teachers within the first five years of their teaching careers, in the fields of Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts, that taught at schools with a high number of culturally diverse students were observed and interviewed to answer the following research question: What is the relationship among early career teachers' cultural sensitivity, their understanding and commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy, and their actual pedagogical practice?

This chapter begins with a narrative of each of the participants' cultural beliefs, teacher preparation experiences, and pedagogical practices as evidenced in both interviews and classroom practices. The importance of a study about the cultural sensitivities of teachers through the lens of critical race theory is that it positions race and culture as central to culturally responsive pedagogy. There is no disputing that a difference does exist between the academic achievement of White students and students of color, but what can be disputed are the reason for those differences. By exploring cultural sensitivities through the five tenets of critical race theory, the researcher was able to frame the study in such a way that allows the issues of race to become the vehicle to critically analyze the beliefs and actual classroom practices of early career educators within the classroom.



I share the stories of seven teachers teaching in schools that are comprised of mainly Latino students. The stories consist of the very words of the teachers themselves, gathered through their own interviews. This study is not a judgment of the teachers being observed but an exploration of the people who teach in public classrooms with diverse populations of students. The study also examined the pedagogical strategies used within the classroom. Again, the study explored classrooms in schools with a high enrollment of minority students, being taught by a teacher within the first five years of their career, teaching within an urban middle school, grades 6-8, in the subjects of Language Arts, Science, or Social Studies.

### **Teacher Narratives**

The first school I visited, Rolling Heights Middle School (pseudonym), was located within the older part of the district and had a student enrollment that totaled 925 that was over 77% Hispanic and just over 13% Caucasian (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The free and reduced population at Rolling Heights was 80%, with 70% of the students receiving free lunch (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

Teacher name	Gender	Race	Years teaching	Grade and subject taught
Ryan	Male	White	3	8 <sup>th</sup> grade science
Kristi	Female	White	1	6 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies

*Table 2.* Rolling Heights Middle School teachers

**Ryan.** The first participant, Ryan (pseudonym), was a third year teacher currently teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade science at Rolling Heights Middle School. Ryan was a tall, White male that had spent his college years playing football for his university. Ryan recalled a strong

family structure when he was growing up with both parents and two older brothers. Ryan's parents valued education and pushed their boys to do well in both school and sports. Ryan originally wanted to study Exercise and Sport Science in college but his football scholarship prohibited him from taking the extra science courses he needed. He eventually entered into a teaching program that was very intensive and geared toward science teachers. The program had him in the classroom his first year, being taught by instructors that had been honored with teacher of the year awards in this particular state.

Ryan felt that his teacher preparation program prepared him to "effectively manage a class." His program was focused on setting up effective lesson plans that correlated with the national science standards, and how to teach those lessons. According to him, his program "wasn't really focused on what type of student you have; it was mainly focused on how can we engage our students to get them engaged in learning science."

Ryan was aware of the different experiences he had as a student compared to those of his own students. During the course of the interview, Ryan acknowledged that his cultural beliefs were challenged during the course of his program, especially when he was assigned to do his student teaching on a Navajo reservation. He admitted that teaching at his former high school the year after his student teaching experience was much easier for him to adjust to, because he was familiar with the culture. At his current location Ryan admitted to experiencing culture shock again.

I'm back into the culture shock but it just surprises me every time I go somewhere you know how different cultures see things and you know believe in things. There

are cultures that believe in hard ethics, cultures that believe in education and all these different things and it's always good to kind of get a different sequence or view into how these people view what is important to them because every culture and every heritage they have something different.

Unlike his own family, where he was expected to perform well in both his academics and extracurricular activities, the families at his school “view education as a way out, and the other people they see education almost like coming here is kind of the social hour. It's to be with your friends.” He goes on to describe how several of his students want to enter the work force as soon as possible, working with relatives in “construction, which a very good thing to get into” because that's what people in their family have always done and they don't know what could happen if they did attend college. Students that do continue onto education after high school do so in two-year skills program to become a welder or something similar and make a “very, very good living.”

When asked to describe his classroom diversity he offered the following response: It's, I want to say, we are probably about 85% Latina, and then everything else in between. So then we got, I wanna (sic), probably about 5% Caucasian, less than 3 or less than, probably less than 3% Africa-American. So we're mainly a Latina school.

Ryan was unfamiliar with the proper vernacular used to describe his students of color. Although it could be seen as a simple error in semantics, it demonstrates how little he knew about the world of his students.

Ryan stated that the diversity of his classroom did impact his daily lesson plans. Finding appropriate reading materials for his students was difficult because the text levels were too high, “Finding literacy to their level and their ability is very difficult for me to do. Sometimes I have to make my own or find like 6<sup>th</sup> grade or 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading material for them.” His long term planning consisted of increasing the difficulty of the reading material “to get them ready for high school.” His students also struggled with translating.

It’s just very hard for them to translate what they know with Spanish and English on the paper because a lot of them they can speak Spanish but they can’t, they can’t write it. They can listen, they can speak it but they can’t read or write it. But now we are kind of getting them reading and writing English only so I think it’s just that. It’s a really hard transition for them.

When Ryan was asked about how he had set up his classroom for success, he claimed that he had started implementing the workshop model this year. He described the workshop model in the following way:

So, it’s how the tables are set up. It’s how when I brought them up into the front, in the grouping, it’s that piece with the small little mini-lesson we did with the transfer thing to start thinking about how we are going from potential to kinetic and it’s them going back to working with the collaborative group, and it’s me being able to go in and talk to each one and sometimes do it individually. I didn’t really have a chance today.

Ryan was able to verbalize, to some extent, the importance of recognizing the experiences his students bring to the classroom; however, observations of his classroom

practices showed little if any opportunities for students to share their personal experiences in relation to the lesson. According to Ryan, the lab, building the skate park, during classroom observations, allowed students to use their background knowledge and personal experiences with skateboarding and apply it within their science classroom. I saw no evidence that his students were actually interested in skateboarding. Although his students did seem to be engaged in the lab, and building their own ramp on the computer, their interest seemed to be more in watching the animated skateboarder fail on the course rather than the opportunity for students to share their own personal experiences with one another. In fact, I did not hear students discuss personal experiences around skateboarding during this lesson. The high interest lesson seemed based on an assumption of what students that age were interested in rather than what his students were actually interested in.

When asked to describe a culturally responsive teacher in his own words, Ryan shared the following:

Someone who's willing to change their culture views to match their students' culture views so you don't get any kind of, what's the word I'm looking for, so there is no fight back or anything like that. Coming from the Navajo reservation like the reason why a lot of times they struggle so much is usually because they have their own calendar and they have their own things for anything like this, so when you go try and change those different views of what they have already been taught and learned, that's where you kind of get the fight and the, you know, the lack of respect no to the student teacher because you're trying to change their

culture when this is what they know. So when a teacher understands the student's culture and then can adjust to understanding that, then that becomes a little bit more powerful teacher because there's no fight back with what the students have been taught from their parents or anything like that.

Ryan was aware of the cultural differences between himself and his students, and was cognizant of the negative impact that disrespecting those cultures or beliefs might cause within the classroom, but that seemed to be the extent of his cultural sensitivities. His classroom differentiation for his culturally diverse students consisted of providing lower level reading material and implementing the workshop model. Ryan had organized his classroom for cooperative learning groups but little academic collaboration took place within the classes I observed. His desire to implement the workshop model, to front load new vocabulary and begin the lesson with classroom discussions, showed that he was receptive to the use of different instructional strategies to help all students learn within his classroom.

**Kristi.** Kristi (pseudonym) was a first year teacher teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies at the same school Ryan was currently teaching, Rolling Heights Middle School. When asked about her family and cultural heritage, Kristi described them as Caucasian American with mostly Irish and Scottish background. Kristi's parents are still married and met in the military. Kristi has one sister and several half siblings from her mother's first marriage. As for her cultural heritage, Kristi described it as the following, "Cultural heritage, I don't know that we do anything in particular that would be specifically unique."

Kristi went into teaching because of her experiences teaching English as a second language when she lived in Cairo for two years. While in Cairo, Kristi learned to speak Arabic and taught English as a second language (ESL) to adults. When she returned to the United States, Kristi continued to teach adult education through a community college and tutored at what she described as a “predominantly ESL elementary” during the day. Kristi was passionate about ESL so she sought out a program that focused on English language development for her teacher preparation program.

When describing why she chose her specific teaching program, Kristi stated the following:

It seemed different and focused on, it had cognitive coaching and seemed like it was really focused on working with what you were strong at and helping to see what you could really improve on and helping you to see how you could improve on, and very reflective, mindful things are integrated into it in addition to the ELL framework for that.

When asked about a specific experience in her program that had an impact on her teaching career, Kristi described her yearlong experience in the classroom with a mentor teacher.

I would say that the year in the classroom with a mentor teacher is probably what makes the program stand out because having that relationship with my students and having that whole year to see how the classroom is set up, what does it look like from day one, how does it look on the last day of school, what testing season look like because I feel way more prepared for that. Kind of like how does the

school evolve, what are the dynamics, how does the staff interact with each other. Like I could kind of see the good, bad, and the ugly because I was there the whole year I could see all of it.

Kristi described some of her cultural experiences within the program. She remembered when she had to reflect on being a “white, middle class woman teaching in a predominantly Latino or African American or minority classroom.” Kristi also had to attend bias training where she engaged in “small group conversations about bias and prejudice” and her program also had its students participate in the privilege walk protocol. Kristi did not see that her cultural beliefs were challenged in her program but rather affirmed.

My understanding of my own cultural beliefs and other’s cultural beliefs were kind of affirmed. I wouldn’t say that I was [challenged], I think my time abroad and other experiences that I’ve had prior to this were more transformative in changing my cultural beliefs than this specific teacher prep program, for me. But I think that people coming from different places in their lives might have been more challenged.

Kristi felt that her teacher preparation program prepared her “well, very well,” for the classroom, which she attributed to her long student teaching experience. Like most new teachers, classroom management had been the most surprising element of running her own classroom.

It’s super challenging all the time and I think it's surprising in terms of, even if you handle the same situation day after day, the student doesn't always react the



same way, you know, I think the classroom management and the unpredictability of particular students has surprised me.

Kristi also described how surprising it was to see how students behaved towards substitutes when she was out of the building. When asked why her students behaved that way when she was gone Kristi gave the following explanation:

Well because they don't have the relationships and the trust and the substitute doesn't have the relationship with the parents and the families and the siblings and the other teachers around the building and so and I think trying to and I don't know I don't like to make generalizations about our student population but I think our student population heavily depends on the relationship building.

When asked about the diversity of her classroom, Kristi gave the following response:

Predominantly Hispanic, Latino, Latino, Hispanic, I've heard Latino is preferred. So, do you want like percentages? I would say like, ok I would say like, 70% would be in that bracket, and then I would say 20% would be African American or from another country such as Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, etc. And then I would say the last 10% would be Caucasian. But there's a difference, and of course with, in that Hispanic, Latino bracket there's bilingual and not bilingual, so it just depends on the students.

The diversity of Kristi's class affected both her short and long term planning. She planned her instructional units with her NEP (non-English proficient) students in mind.

I do have bilingual resources. I have Spanish resources. They can use Google Translate for my NEPs. I do some text to audio, sentence stems, visuals, anchor,

you know, the whole shebang. So I try to do a lot of modifications when I can to help them and help them feel that it's not as inti... but it's still intimidating, and I know that. And so I just think that it's a constant battle between exposing you to what 6th grade standards are like, but also knowing that you just got to America in November or August or what not.

Kristi felt that the addition of an ESL paraprofessional and more technology into her classroom would help improve the academic success of all her students.

I feel like it's either all or nothing. Either I'm modifying for the whole class or I'm not modifying enough for the NEPs and I feel like sometimes I can find a middle ground but not all the time, cause like with a movie or something like that, like sometimes it's not, it's not always possible. And I think the other thing is, I think we could do better as, as a district on technology, and I think it would be nice if we could have one to one. And maybe not necessarily assigned to students but, like every classroom, in my opinion, should have a chrome cart. If we are testing students on, if we are testing students on chrome books, I think, and computers, I think they need to be exposed to them more often. And I'm not saying everyday they need to be using them but I think that they should have the ability to use them.

When asked to describe a culturally responsive teacher, Kristi shared the following:

I think a culturally responsive teacher is someone who sets up a classroom climate from the beginning of the year with, with kind of, I don't know, like an energy and a welcoming environment for all students, no matter where they come from and I

think, I do think a culturally responsive teacher engages students in difficult conversations on any kind of topics and things like that. And I think that, I think that a culturally responsive teacher has to know what they're bringing into the environment.

Of all the teachers that participated in this study, Kristi was the most knowledgeable about culturally responsive practice. Her experiences traveling around the world, teaching English as a second language to adults, and her teacher preparation program that specifically focused on preparing teachers to work within diverse classrooms, caused Kristi to have a sense of confidence in regards to her ability to meet the needs of all the students within her classroom. Kristi was able to verbalize what the needs of culturally diverse classroom were, and the responsibilities of a culturally responsive teacher, but she was unable to successfully implement those strategies within her own classroom.

The second school I visited, Blue Creek Middle School (pseudonym), had an enrollment of 834 students that was 60% Hispanic and 30% Caucasian (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The free and reduced population at Blue Creek was 80% with 66% of the students receiving free lunch (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

Teacher name	Gender	Race	Years teaching	Grade and subject taught
Kelli	female	White	3	6 <sup>th</sup> grade science
Shawn	male	White	5	7 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies and language arts
Elizabeth	female	White	1	7 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies

*Table 3.* Blue Creek Middle School teachers

**Kelli.** Kelli (pseudonym) was a third year teacher at Blue Creek Middle School, currently teaching sixth grade science. Kelli came from a family heritage that included both Polish and German. Kelli’s family all lives in the same state and every summer they meet with about three hundred family members for a family reunion.

She remembers always wanting to be a teacher. As a teenager, she worked as a nanny and briefly served as a social worker after college. Social work proved to be too negative for Kelli and the memory of all the great teachers in her past, led her back to teaching. On the recommendation of several family members, including a principal and a former superintendent, Kelli enrolled in an online teaching licensure program.

Like Kristi, Kelli’s teacher preparation program required her to student teach for an entire year. The school “really wanted us to be there for the beginning, and the end, and all the transitions of before and after break.” The program prepared student teachers to take over the class completely by the beginning of second semester.

Kelli did not recall her cultural beliefs being challenged in her preparation program. Her program was very inclusive but she did remember her cultural beliefs being challenged at a previous school by staff members. According to Kelli, some

teachers had felt that some of their students were “less worthy of an education than others” and had made comments like “that’s just how these kids are.” Being a new teacher Kelli had felt uncomfortable speaking up, and sharing her thoughts about the matter, which included:

I didn’t grow up very well off by any means and I didn’t have a lot of diversity, but I felt like if I could do it, anybody else can and they’re just kids. I mean, you know they are only products of their environment for awhile until they learn to take control on their own, and someone has to show them that.

Kelli felt that her teacher preparation program had done a “pretty decent” job of preparing her to take over her own classroom. What the program lacked was classroom management instruction. She felt that she didn’t leave the program with many strategies of how to manage a class. Although she had worked with a teacher for an entire year she would have liked her teacher to have pointed out the specific strategies she was using and describing why they worked, which would have allowed her to fully understand the classroom management strategy that she was observing.

When asked to describe the diversity of her classroom Kelli responded simply, “that no kid is the same.” She went on to describe it in the following way:

We have students on IEPs. We have special ed students. I have kids that are in SSN program. We have students that speak another language as a first language. We have students that are homeless. We have literally, I feel like every kind of student we have in our classroom. Science doesn't get any support either. It's one of the science and social studies class, so I feel like I get really that full inclusion

feeling of having to differentiate to a million different levels in one class, yet holding them all to the same high standards, so, it's good for me. I think sometimes though with a little bit more support or technology or whatever we would have that would be able to help me do that a little bit better would help with the success because it is so diverse in here but they do learn a lot from each other. They learn about compassion and patience and teaching each other is really helpful when you have a student that doesn't understand and one that does next to each other they can help each other, so those opportunities are there.

Due to the diversity that existed within her classes, Kelli always had a modified version of her lessons available. According to Kelli, she may add a “little bit more scaffolding involved in one lesson or it’s an extension activity for those kids that are, you know, really on top of it.” Kelli also mentioned that wasn’t always the same students that received the extension activities or the scaffolded lesson. It varied with each unit.

Kelli admitted to using different strategies for each of her classes due to the unique needs in each class. In some classes Kelli was able to simply walk around the class while students were working and “add that teacher scaffolding when I needed to.” Kelli also described the benefit of doing whole class instruction with specific classes. Some of her classes required more direction when completing assignments than others, so rather than allow them to work independently, they would complete the assignment together as a class, allowing Kelli to determine the level of student comprehension throughout the entire lesson.

When asked about the impact diversity had on her long term planning Kelli responded that it hadn't really impacted how she planned her lessons. She said

I feel like every student can get where they need to be at the end of the year. It just depends on what I need to do to help that student get there. So, it really doesn't. I expect every student to be, you know, masters at those standards at the end of the year and just having those daily differentiations in lesson plans and, you know, IEPs and stuff I feel like really help majority of the kids get where everybody else is or where they need to be even as far as IEP goals by the end of the year.

Kelli seemed to embrace the notion that all her students were different and that as a teacher it was her job to get all her students to meet the standards. She didn't see the color of their skin or their academic labels as excuses for not excelling within her classroom.

Kelli ended the interview by describing a culturally responsive teacher in the following way:

Just a teacher that is understanding of all cultures, and tries to be respectful and, of everybody's culture and where they come from and the more you get to know about a student's culture helps you deliver the material to that student more successfully. So, as long as you're aware and you're respectful that people come from different stuff and just really try to incorporate it in the everyday learning and be welcome to that. I think that you're definitely culturally responsive as a teacher.

To her, diversity was simply recognizing that all students were different. Kelli's awareness of the views other teachers had on diverse students showed that she was not blind to the struggles her students faced, both in and out of the classroom. As their teacher, she took on the responsibility of helping all her students meet the same standards, regardless of their starting points at the beginning of the year. Rather than expect her students to conform to her style of teaching, Kelli viewed it as her job to determine what she needed to do to help them learn.

**Shawn.** Shawn (pseudonym) was a fifth year teacher currently teaching both 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies and language arts at Blue Creek Middle School. Shawn was still in the same school where he had started his career.

Shawn attended private school all of his life until he attended college. His biggest class was ten students and his graduating class had ninety students. Shawn still lives close to his family, and he stated that his family distrusts the government due to the experiences of his Japanese grandmother who was in an internment camp during World War II. He described political conversations when the family comes together for holidays "which makes for interesting Thanksgivings and Christmases."

When Shawn went to college he did not know that he wanted to be a teacher. The college he chose to attend was selected because it was close to his home and he had heard it was a good school. So the selection of his particular teacher preparation program was based on the fact that he was already attending that college when he decided he wanted to be a teacher.



Shawn described his preparation program as being focused on the “diverse classroom side of things,” such as students on 504’s, students in special education and English language learners. After talking to others about their preparation programs, Shawn explained how he might have been more prepared than others when he stepped into the classroom.

I've heard from other people that they didn't get kind of that diverse focus. They kind of just learned about education, and then when they entered the classroom they had a hard time, you know, they realized, oh my gosh I do have a really diverse classroom.

Shawn went on to share that in his current online Master’s program he is encountering other students that didn’t get the diverse perspective in their teacher preparation programs.

They learned education. They learned theory. When they stepped into the classroom they felt like they didn't have that knowledge of like how do I reach, you know, so many diverse types of kids, and that's something I do feel like I got.

When asked to share an experience from his preparation program Shawn chose to expound upon the class and practicum structure of his program.

They worked really hard to partner you with, or partner you with a practicum site that fit kind of the scope of what that class was looking at. For example, when I was doing a class that was really focused on, you know, kids on IEPs and 504 students, the teacher that they paired me with, during the time I was supposed to observe him had a class that had a lot of kids on IEPs and kids on 504s. So, you

know, there is a direct connection between what I was getting at in my classroom and what I was seeing in the practicum classroom. And I think that was extremely valuable just in the sense of, you know, I wasn't learning about things in isolation. I was learning about things but could see what it looks like in the classroom or in some cases, you know, how it was absent from the classroom or, you know, maybe not implemented the way it should be or fully implemented.

Even with all the practicum experience built into his program, Shawn felt that his teacher preparation gave him a “base of knowledge” that did not prepare him for the real demands of the job.

When I think, you know, all the observations that we got to do were extremely valuable, but I think what kind of lacked in my program is, just because of how things were scheduled and all of that, I was really stepping into an already established classroom and seeing what was happening there. When I did my student teaching it was in the second semester and so for an entire semester those kids had gotten routines, rituals, structure and I really just took those same routines, rituals and structures and carried them out through the rest of the year, and so while I felt very successful student teaching, I think what I lacked was that ability to do it on my own and know the process of doing it on my own. I think a lot of the field experience I got, they were safe experiences, you know, they were in places that were already really well established and instead of getting a chance to build some of those things or a chance to see how those things are built, you know, we were just stepping in and it was already that way. So I think it gave me,

at least for my first year, it gave me a false perception of how much work it takes to get things going well.

Shawn had ESL students, special education students, students on attendance contracts and students that were about to be expelled from school if they did anything wrong in his classroom. He saw the home lives of his students as the biggest predictor of how his students performed and behaved during the course of the day.

I think that, you know, it's really apparent what kids feel valued at home, and what kids feel taken care of at home because when they come to school they're not looking for those things, they're not, you know, seeking attention, those types of things because they're getting that attention at home. You know, I put a lot of off task behavior kind of back to that attention piece of they're looking for attention one way or another. I think those three boys who were sitting up here, all three of them have parents who work all the time, never at home, when they get home they are taking care of younger brothers and sisters and I think some of their not all of it, but some of their acting out and off task behavior is just looking for adult attention, some attention, you know, whether it's negative or positive, they're looking for, you know, someone to talk to, you know, acknowledge that they're there.

Addressing all the learning needs of his students in the classroom was a difficult task. Whenever the class was going to read an article or textbook, Shawn had to make three to four different versions of the reading to address the various reading levels in his

class. Shawn also tried to make connections with his students' experiences and delved into their background knowledge when discussing events in social studies class.

We've been doing a unit about the Syrian Refugee Crisis and a big part of it right now is that countries in Europe are building border fences, they're protesting, they want to keep refugees out of it, so when we introduce that piece we kind of connected it back to the border and immigration crisis here, and you know we kind of all got our background knowledge about that piece out to help us understand this new context. You know kids were able to take, you know, this is what I know about the border with Mexico and apply it to, you know, borders in Germany and France and places like that.

Facilitating those connections between life experiences and new content allowed Shawn to plan for future lessons with his students. If his students didn't possess the background knowledge that would help them connect their new learning to something familiar, Shawn had to find a context that his students could connect to so they would be able to understand the new material he was teaching.

When asked how he set his classroom up for success for all students, Shawn stated that he has desks pushed together to encourage students to work together and support one another. He felt that the biggest strategy he used to help all his students succeed in his class was simply consistency and routine.

Every day when kids come into my classroom, you know, the same things are expected of them, and the same things happen over the course of the lesson. I always start the beginning of class with a mini-lesson that's really focused on

showing kids what skill we are going to be working on that day. After that they have work time, you know sometimes that's independent, sometimes it's group work, but it's that same idea of, after we've seen from the teacher what we are going to do today then we are going to get into work and then I always end the class with some sort of exit slip or exit activity. And so I think it just creates a consistency for kids of like this is the process of learning and the classroom and because they see that same structure everyday and it's done in the same way every day I think it just creates, you know, a feeling of comfort, you know, they kind of know what to expect.

One of Shawn's daily routines includes checking in with students at each table.

I'm sure you noticed during first hour this morning, as we were waiting for announcements, I got to almost every table group, just said a quick hello to everyone and you know it's surprising how much information I can get out of that. One of my kids told me he didn't take his ADHD medication today so you know that created an expectation and, you know, it gave me knowledge that I needed for the class. You know, I got a couple ideas, of you know, how kids were doing that day, you know, especially thinking how many kids I have on attendance contracts this year, I think it's just a good time to, you know, give kids an idea that I'm really happy you're here, thanks for being here. Like you know, my hope is that leads to a feeling of comfort of like this is a safe place. This is a place I want to be.

He did seem to understand the importance of connecting with his students to help with their academic achievement in his class, but his methods for connecting with kids was superficial. He used the few minutes at the beginning of class to greet each of his students, while the announcements were on, to essentially determine their mood for the day. None of the information he collected was information that really described anything more than the current state of the child in his classroom, such as whether the child was medicated or un-medicated.

When asked to describe a culturally responsive teacher, Shawn again described the importance of helping students make those connections between their own experiences and new content.

I think a culturally responsive teacher is someone who's gonna take the time to get to know students individually, but I think also, beyond the individual part, start thinking about who are these kids as a group of learners as well, I think that individual needs are important but I think also making some of those generalizations about what does this group need, or what does this classroom need, I think is a part of it. I think that a culturally responsive teacher is someone who takes the time to think through, you know, when they get into a new unit or a new piece of content, being really aware of, you know, are my students going to be able to connect to this, is this something that they have knowledge of already, and if the students don't have knowledge, I think that teacher's going to take the time to figure out, you know, how can I connect this back to, you know, either experiences they've already had or knowledge that they already have and just

being really aware of, you know, kind of what's the best context to connect the learning back to the student's own life and home experience or you know, cultural background.

Classroom routines and procedures were some of the ways Shawn addressed diversity within his classroom. Shawn recognized the impact home life had on classroom behavior, often explaining the attention seeking behaviors his students exhibited in class. Shawn knew the importance of students connecting new knowledge with their own personal experiences and worked hard to help students make those connections.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth (pseudonym) was the third teacher I observed at Blue Creek Middle School. Elizabeth, both Czechoslovakian and Irish, was a petite, young, first year teacher that taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies. Her family consisted of a long line of teachers on both sides of the family. Elizabeth also shared a story about how she began her teaching career at a very early age.

My actual reason that I went into teaching, when I was in kindergarten, my grandpa when I was two, he had fallen and gotten a terrible head injury. He fell off a roof, so when I was in kindergarten I was learning how to read and I would go visit my grandpa, almost daily, and we would sit down and I would read to him because he lost all cognitive and motor skills. And the family got really frustrated because it was hard to communicate with him and so every day I would read him a book that I learned in school, and I would point to the words as I read along, and pretty soon he started picking up those words and he was able to read, and we would work on sentences together and soon after he was able to kind of speak and

get the necessary information out that he needed. And so fast forward to third grade, I would teach my teddy bears every day what I learned in school, which just reaffirmed everything I had learned, and that's when I really knew I wanted to be a teacher because I saw that light in my grandpa's eyes and I wanted to see that time and time again, over and over, and I see it every day, which is the most rewarding aspect.

She looked at cost effectiveness, class sizes, and specific program delivery when looking at teacher preparation programs. “I really wanted a hands-on, lots of observations, getting out into the classroom and not just reading the idealistic classroom from a textbook but actually getting out there and seeing it happen.”

Experiences that had the most impact on her teaching career were student teaching and being required to observe at least one middle school and one high school class. Initially, Elizabeth was convinced that she wanted to teach high school students, but observing middle school classes lead her in another direction.

Elizabeth admitted that her cultural beliefs were challenged during the course of her teacher preparation program.

I think they were challenged because I visited a range of socioeconomic statuses and saw a bunch of different, you know, students coming from different areas of the city surrounding their school and so it was tough because I grew up in the district and I knew, you know, where I went, I knew the kinds of kids there but coming into maybe lower income schools really challenged me and I really saw



kind of the disparity and differences between learning abilities and kind of having to take a step back and put myself in their shoes really challenged me.

Elizabeth did feel that her teacher preparation program “worked out very well” but “of course, there’s nothing like having the real experience and jumping in with both feet.”

Classroom management, and how it is affected by socioeconomic statuses, has been one of the most surprising elements of running her classroom. Elizabeth shares:

You keep going and you think every kid will listen to you because you're an adult, and that is not true, and they will challenge you, and they will butt heads with you, and you just kind of have to learn what works for them and see where they're coming from.

Elizabeth described the diversity of her classroom in terms of both home life and academic achievement levels.

The diversity of my classroom, going into this job they told me it was an at-risk school, which I was not familiar with. There are kids ranging from homeless to very, very, low-income poverty level. Some of these kids have a bunch of siblings at home and so there's days they don't make it to school because they're babysitting their siblings and they don't have a choice. And then you've got kids coming from, you know, wealthier families, families with lots of support and love and so you have to balance your teaching and show them that you love all of them and make this a place that if home's not the greatest, then this is. So that's the diversity in my classroom. As far as learning levels, we range from prekindergarten reading up to grade level and a little bit above. If you're at grade

level or above, you are considered honors, and so, I have a handful of those kids in each class, so differentiating is time consuming but it's definitely necessary.

Sensitivity to the different cultures within her classroom was a necessity for lesson planning. Elizabeth stated that she created a safe environment within her classroom that gave students the opportunity to voice their opinions about current events. Elizabeth recognized that her students didn't possess the background knowledge necessary for certain lessons so she shared her own personal experiences and always brought back something from her travels or shared pictures with her classes to help them begin to develop their own background knowledge.

Elizabeth seemed to recognize how the lack of her students' personal experiences with the world was creating barriers that kept her students from taking in new content knowledge. Rather than give her students lower level information on a topic, Elizabeth opened her life and shared her own personal experiences with her students, allowing them to use her life as a bridge to building new knowledge and connecting that knowledge to their own limited life experiences.

At the end of the interview, Elizabeth used the following words to describe a culturally responsive teacher:

I would describe a culturally responsive teacher as taking in and valuing your students' culture and your students' backgrounds and beliefs and really building on them and if you don't know them you learn about them and you ask the kids. The kids are excited to tell you all about themselves and about their families and where they come from and why they come from those places. And so really just

kind of getting to know your students on a deeper level will make you more successful as a teacher. And having those kids bring those experiences to life in the classroom. Why did your family move here? What was it like? Were you scared? Having them share.

Elizabeth may have been a first year teacher, but her classroom practices were similar to that of a more veteran teacher. Elizabeth had policies and procedures in place that maximized instructional time. The impact of students' socioeconomic status on her classroom management was most surprising to Elizabeth, as she realized early in the year that her students would not listen to her simply because she was an adult. Elizabeth saw her job as a teacher as a balancing act between showing her students how much she cared for them and teaching them at the same time. Elizabeth also realized the need for her students to make personal connections with the content she was teaching. She tried to facilitate this connection by sharing her own stories and allowing students to share her adventures with her, through photos and stories.

The third and final school I visited in this district was Twin Falls (pseudonym). Twin Falls was a school that served students in kindergarten through eighth grade and had a student enrollment of 852. The student population was 70% Hispanic and 24% Caucasian (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). At Twin Falls the free and reduced lunch population was 72% with 61% of the students receiving free lunch (Colorado Department of Education, 2016).

Teacher name	Gender	Race	Years teaching	Grade and subject taught
Andy	Male	White	2	8 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies
Linda	Female	White	2	6 <sup>th</sup> grade social studies

*Table 4.* Twin Falls teachers

**Andy.** Andy was a young, second year teacher teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies at Twin Falls. Andy described having a strong relationship with his family. According to Andy, his grandparents emigrated from Sicily to America in the early 1920's. When Andy was younger he wanted to be an actor and a writer, and several other professions, that he felt that with teaching he could combine a lot of those occupations into one career. Andy also has always enjoyed working with kids and wanted a profession that would allow him to make a difference.

When selecting a teacher preparation program Andy wanted a program that provided smaller class sizes, a well renowned faculty and the opportunity for many field experiences in different school settings. During his field experiences Andy was able to work at two different rural suburban schools as well as a city school with a great deal of diversity and a student population that was living in poverty.

Similar to the other teachers in the study, Andy described his student teaching as the most impactful experience from his teacher preparation program. He believed that his cooperating teacher was the reason his experience was so memorable.

He was just amazing. I mean, he had just like, it's hard to explain it, and maybe you feel the same way, I just feel like when it comes to certain teachers they just have, they just have it, it's like a certain, I don't know how to explain it, it's, it's, he was just so engaging and you could tell that he truly cared about his students, he wasn't just there you know as a teacher, he was there as a coach, a life coach, a mentor and was really willing to help those kids however he could. And I think that really was an inspiration for me to kind of see that first hand.

Andy did not feel that his cultural beliefs were challenged at all during the course of his teacher preparation program; in fact, Andy felt that he came out of school unprepared in many ways.

It definitely prepared me in some ways, more than others. I think one thing that they did an excellent job of was teaching us about classroom management, was teaching us about differentiation. I had to take two courses just on that alone, which was great, but I didn't really have to put it into effect as much. And then I think I'd say it didn't prepare me very much for diverse classrooms. I mean they taught us about differentiation but again we didn't really put it into effect as if, the class that I have now so to speak. They definitely did not hit on things like sheltered instruction as much as they should have. And, let me think what else, just lesson planning in general. We didn't get too much instruction on how an effective lesson should be planned. We weren't really exposed to the different kind of models that are out there, like the workshop model or anything like that,

and that would have been a lot more beneficial coming in than just kind of winging it so to speak.

Andy described the diversity of his classroom in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

When it comes to ethnicity, the majority of my students are from the Latino community, about 70% of them. When we look at socioeconomic status we're at about 75% on free and reduced lunch. And when you look at language level, about 50% of my students are either still in or being monitored by the ELD program as well, which is huge. When it comes to things like reading level, when I look at my MAPs data, I have students that are reading at a kindergarten reading level and I have students reading at an 11th grade reading level. Same thing when it comes to writing. Students performing at the, on MAPS it doesn't even give them a score, it just says BR. It says beginning reader, but then I also have students scoring as high as 11th and 12th grade. So it's diverse not only in terms of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. It's diverse in terms of academic achievement as well, and that's probably the biggest challenge as far as the school setting here is concerned.

Andy felt that a one to one program, placing a piece in technology into the hands of each of his students would improve his class for the following reasons:

One, every student would have access to resources in and outside of class. Two, there's a lot of online programs that differentiate lessons through readings. They can, you know, select different lexile levels through programs like Achieve 3000

and stuff like that. And I just think with the 21st century model of learning, digital literacy is such an important piece of what we do now. I read an interesting fact that 93% of the way we perceive information now is through the digital format, so I think if that's the new kind of direction we're heading that students need to be prepared for that.

He dealt with the diversity in different ways in his classroom. When it came to ethnic diversity, Andy tried to tie lessons into the student's culture or into their background knowledge. He addressed the diversity among the different socioeconomic statuses by tying the student's current situation into the lesson. Andy's school focused on Problem Based Learning (PBL's) and Andy explained how the most recent PBL addressed the diversity of his students.

For instance, at the school we have to do PBL's, so, I'm sure you're kind of familiar with that model, and presenting students with a problem and having them come up with a solution. So the first PBL I did this year was all around improving literacy rates in areas of poverty. So students had to come up with solutions to improve literacy rates in the community. And I think that makes them not only aware of their situation but makes them aware of the possible solutions to change it.

He also explained how he differentiated for the different reading levels of his students within the classroom, using results from assessment to group students. Andy began his lesson planning with the standard, determined the end result of the unit then he thought of ways to differentiate the lesson for his students based on language level.

Andy described in his interview how he set his class up for success for all his students.

So, I think at the beginning of the year, that's kind of where everything starts, making sure you are consistent from day one on certain issues. One, kind of going back to that cooperating teacher I had, one thing that always stuck with me, he said that your management starts outside your classroom. So, I think that's a big part of it. I make my students line up everyday and we walk into the classroom everyday, same volume, same expectation, that they sit down and get right to work on the prompt. So I guess it's about setting those clear procedures and expectations from the get go. I'd also say fostering a community of respect and also trying to make sure every student's opinion feels valid.

When asked to describe a culturally responsive teacher Andy first stated that it was “someone who acknowledges and respects different points of view,” he then added the following description:

Well it's someone that also embeds different cultures' perspectives into their lessons. Having classroom discussions or debates, about you know, here's two sides of an issue, two different cultures' perspectives on an issue and letting students kind of figure out where they stand.

Despite the fact that Andy shared that he did not believe his teacher preparation program prepared him for his classroom, he was quite competent within the classroom. From the moment his students walked into the classroom, in a line from the hallway, Andy had their full attention. Andy understood the importance of recognizing the



diversity within his classrooms and actually used that diversity to make a connection with the student's current situation and the school lesson. He also shared that not only was his class diverse in terms of socioeconomic status but language and academic achievement as well. Andy recognized those differences and felt compelled to meet the needs of all his students, no matter how severe they might be.

**Linda.** Linda was a second year teacher at Twin Falls where she taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies. Linda was born to a French Canadian father and a Scottish mother, both of whom are doctors. Linda is the oldest of three girls. Linda did not decide to be a teacher until her senior year of college. She had always worked with kids, babysitting and working at summer camps, and she was fairly certain that she could find a successful career in teaching. She remained at the school she was attending while she completed her bachelor's degree and completed her teacher preparation program in another year.

Like the other participants, Linda considered her student teaching experience as the most impactful event on her teaching career.

I really liked the cooperating teacher that I had. And I feel that a lot, a lot of the things, skills, strategies that she used to teach her class were ones I brought straight into my classroom, I guess it was kind of my biggest experience with the way a classroom should run, so, it made sense to kind of, she was a real experienced, well respected teacher, she was a really good teacher, so it made a lot of sense to kind of like well she's been successful with this, I'll try using the same things.

She did not feel that her cultural beliefs were challenged in her teacher preparation program but has felt that perhaps her cultural understandings might have been stretched since working at her current school.

I think that my cultural understanding has been stretched a lot since I've been working here, I've just been exposed to a lot more types of families from different backgrounds and that kind of stuff so my understanding of, yeah, culture through that has changed.

Linda did not feel that her teacher preparation program prepared her for her classroom.

I think there could have been a lot more on kind of classroom engagement structures and classroom management structures. I took a Kagan professional development my first year teaching and I felt like that helped me much more than some of the stuff I had done in my undergrad teacher preparation thing.

Like many new teachers, Linda has struggled with classroom management and was surprised how difficult it was to manage twenty-eight students by herself. Linda also mentioned that the amount of differentiation her students require was barely addressed in her teacher preparation program.

It was a little bit surprising how, how hard it is to get 28 kids doing what they need to be doing and although they had talked about differentiation in my teacher preparation program, the ways that they talked about it didn't really apply to like what I found like between that first class and the second class, I mean, the amount of changes that I'd have to make, in like teaching the same lesson to kids that are the same age is like black and white those two classes. So, I feel like I could have

been more prepared for practical ways to differentiate. Some of the ways that I learned to differentiate were like leveled texts, and there's not always a leveled text available. Sometimes, like well this is the content that I need to teach and they, this is, I've had to kind of, I've kind of done some figuring out on my own, like partner reading, shared reading, versus independent reading but, I feel like there could have been more concrete useful ways that I should have been taught.

Linda's classes are diverse in gender, language, culture and academic abilities. When asked how the diversity impacted her lesson-planning Linda first explained how she addresses cultural diversity.

If we're talking about like cultural diversity, it impacts just being really aware, really conscious of like we're talking about Christopher Columbus, like there's definitely a very sort of white way to teach that about like... He "discovered" the new world, and this kind of stuff, so being aware of like, that's probably not how everybody felt about it, so trying to present both sides in terms of cultural diversity. Another example is, this isn't so much with lesson planning, but in the mornings we watch CNN student news, and there's a lot of stuff about politics on there, and it tries to be really fair about it, which is great but, that's been kind of a challenge with kids like really wanting to call out what they believe and kind of wanting to be like it's okay, you can believe anything you want to, but please don't harass your classmates for disagreeing, so that's been a little conversation that we've had about how to believe, you know, be true to yourself and your beliefs but you don't need to make others feel bad about their beliefs.

To address the diversity in learning styles and abilities, Linda has tried to differentiate in terms of how students are partnered and grouped for activities. She has had some students reading while others are listening to the material, depending on their needs. Linda described the impact of diversity on long term planning in the following way:

I mean what I hope for from each individual student is impacted by like what I see them coming in with, so the outcome, I kind of hope that they all have the same like social studies content knowledge but the outcome of like what I expect to see in their writing, and what I expect to see from their reading levels and that kind of stuff is impacted by like what they come in with. Like, you know, I had one student, who actually left and that's too bad, but she came in from Mexico and didn't speak any English so my hopes for her at the end of the year were much different than a kid that comes in and has like spoken English their entire life and is reading at the 8th grade level in 6th grade... so I want them to know, yeah, mostly for social studies the same content and for like vocabulary around language arts, but in terms of what I expect that they're going to be able to produce in writing depends on where they came in from.

When Linda spoke about her classroom practices, she shared how she has tried to group students during activities, have students read together, progress monitor students and the consistent application of routines and procedures in the classroom.

Trying to live up to what I say that I'm going to do, both in terms of consequences and rewards. It's sometimes a struggle sometimes, you know kids really being off task and I know that the consequence, that I've said that I'm going to give for that,

sometimes I'm like ahh, I don't want to, you know, like follow through on it right now, but trying to be consistent so they believe me when I say that what the expectation is and what they need to do.

According to Linda,

A culturally responsive teacher would not shut down any comment that a kid has about something as being like that's wrong, that's not, that's not the truth, that's not, you know, they'd kind of find out, if it is not something you believe, where is that coming from. They would understand what is going on in the student's home that's affecting what they do in school like whether or not they have access to a computer at home to do this homework, whether or not they have like a really stable home life, how many siblings they have, are they needing to take care of the siblings. I guess the, the biggest like other culture that you see at the school is like Mexican culture, so kind of being aware of like what family structures might look like, and yeah, wanting to like kind of celebrate things with your students around that.

Linda was a young teacher that had the proper schooling, and in theory, she knew what to expect and what to do with her students but struggled when it came to the actual implementation of those strategies. Linda did recognize the sensitivity of her subject matter when discussing topics such as Columbus and his discovery of America. Linda admitted that her classroom management could be better and differentiating for an entire class was not something she had learned in her teacher preparation program.

## Quality Responsive Classroom Observation Protocol Results

The information collected during the classroom observations using the QRC was compiled in tables for each foci area; student, teacher and classroom learning community. Teachers were observed twice for this study. Median scores were figured for each domain to indicate where most classroom practices under that domain were scored. Each domain is rated on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the most culturally responsive.

### Student Focus

The student focus portion of the QRC Observation protocol examined what the students were doing in the classroom, their level of engagement with both their lessons and their peers, their ability to follow classroom rules and procedures, and their ability to access resources within the classroom. For each observation, the median score calculated for each of the three domains under the student focus, were added together for a total score for that observation. After the total score was calculated for each observation in the student focus portion of the QRC observation protocol, the two observation scores were added together for one cumulative score for each teacher on student focus. Teachers were put in order from lowest to highest based on the cumulative score of both of their classroom observations.

	Kristi		Linda		Shawn		Ryan		Kelli		Elizabeth		Andy	
Student Focus	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2
S1 Students take an active role in creating and maintaining classroom norms and protocols important to	2	1.5	3.5	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	4	3	5	5	5	5

learning														
S2 Students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and assignments	1	1	3	1.5	2.5	3	2.5	2	3	3	2.5	2	5	3.5
S3 Students, especially multilingual learners, are simultaneously engaged in language and literacy development as well as content learning	1	1	2	1	1	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	5
Total per observation	4	3.5	8.5	5	6	9	8.5	8	11	9	10.5	10	14	13.5
Total of both observations	7.5		13.5		15		16.5		20		20.5		27.5	

*Table 5.* Student focus composite table

**Kristi.** Kristi was consistent across the student focus area in both classroom observations. She showed the same median score on two of the domains in both classes and only showed a difference of less than one in the other domain. The median scores for both of Kristi’s classes in the following domains was one: students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and assignments, and students, especially multilingual learners, are simultaneously engaged in language and literacy development as well as content learning. Kristi had mentioned in her interview that classroom management was one of her weaknesses and that was observed in the

classroom as well. When students walked into the classroom, they were told to write down their learning targets and grab their learning boxes. Kristi had to repeatedly repeat directions for the class. Although my observation took place in the second semester, there seemed to be more chaos than procedure in this 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.

Students were expected to complete a timeline for their classwork. Resources were limited; the teacher did not have enough books for all the students to work on the assignment at the same time. Students were told to plot two specified events and one event of their choosing. Student desks were together in groups but students did not seem to use each other as resources, students were seen repeatedly asking for help from the teacher rather than collaborating with their peers.

While completing the student focus portion of the protocol I was aware of Spanish being spoken in the classroom. Unfortunately, the Spanish did not seem to be focused on academic content. Students were not engaged in their learning, paper airplanes were flying through the air and students were walking around the classroom.

**Linda.** All but one of Linda's median scores on the student focus portion of the QRC were within one point of each other when comparing the two classes. In the first class observed, Linda showed a median score of three on the following domain: students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and assignments. During the second classroom observation the median score was half that of the other class on the same domain. Students in the first class were using each other as resources, were more engaged in the lesson and actually participated in cooperative learning with their



classmates. Students in the second class were not observed working with their peers and did not show the same level of engagement when compared to the other class.

**Shawn.** The student focus portion of the QRC showed the biggest differences between the two classes when observing the classroom practices that made up the domain that dealt with students being engaged in language, literacy and content learning. In the first class observed, the class where Shawn received a median score of one in this particular domain, students were not heard using any of the content academic language, in Spanish or English, when talking about the lesson with other students or the teacher. In Shawn's other class, which had a median score of three for this domain, students were heard using the appropriate academic language when discussing the lesson with the teacher.

**Ryan.** Ryan was consistent across all domains of the student focus with median scores of two or higher in all areas. During the student focus of the observation, Ryan's students demonstrated their awareness of classroom routines as they entered the classroom. As students entered the classroom, they grabbed their science binders from the bookcase. Students deposited the binders on the same bookcase as they left the classroom. When Ryan asked students to bring their chairs to the middle, students quickly followed directions.

For the assignment, students were given a worksheet to complete. All students received the same assignment with no apparent differentiation for varying skills or reading levels. Although the students were working on a skate park lab, a topic chosen by the teacher, for its supposed high interest amongst students, there was little, if any,

collaboration between students as they worked on designing their tracks. Students were sitting in groups, but they were working independently. Students that had questions raised their hands for assistance and waited for the teacher to come by.

**Kelli.** Kelli showed significant strength in the student focus portion of the QRC with all median scores, in all domains, at three or higher. Kelli's students entered into the classroom and immediately sat down and began writing in their planners. One student entered the classroom and started un-stacking chairs and placing them around the table for his classmates. Students were given choices in how they wanted to complete their assignments. Students were using the electronic textbook to gather information on igneous rocks. Students were able to access videos, use their notes, listen to the book in Spanish or do a search within the book to find specific information.

The classroom culture had shared routines such as Kelli yelling out, "Yo! Yo!", and the students responding, "Yes! Yes!", when she needed to address the whole class during a lesson. Students occasionally used each other as resources but typically just for questions regarding completion of their tasks.

**Elizabeth.** Compared to her other median scores of three and five on the other student focus domains, Elizabeth struggled with the following domain: students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and objectives. Although Elizabeth showed a median score over two in one class, and a median score of two in the other, the results of this domain were significant because of her high median scores in the other two domains in student focus. Students were unable to collaborate with one another

during their lessons, in fact students were expected to be completely quiet, so there was no evidence of academic language being used.

During the interview Elizabeth described how she set up her classroom for success for all her students.

My biggest thing I teach the kids is we are learning together. When I came in at the beginning of the year I told them listen, I don't know everything, and neither does any other teacher, and learning doesn't stop once you graduate. And so, we learn together, and if I don't know the answer, we're gonna find it together. And then, setting them up for success, I really like building strategies and giving them those tool boxes at the beginning of units, you know, we teach them what to look for when they're annotating, I get them into my head. And then I like to have them interact with one another and learn off of each other, and repeat what they've learned because that does something for them. You know they're affirming that they know it and they're teaching someone else in kid friendly language, and so having those structures in place, and then, routines and rituals. The kids know when they come in here, they sit down, they get right to work on their learning objective, on their warm-up, they put their phone in the pouch on the wall, they're not gonna have distractions. So they know that when they come in here it's time to learn.

Unfortunately, classroom observations did not show the collaboration she described

**Andy.** Andy had one class that was almost two points below the median score of the other class in the following domain: students generate and/or participate in the

process of meeting learning goals and assignments. Although Andy's median scores were 5 and 3.5 respectively, it's important to note the difference between the two scores. The difference between the two classes was the higher level of student engagement, enthusiasm for the lesson, and cooperative learning in one class that was not seen to the same extent in the other class.

As stated during his interview, Andy started off each of his class periods by meeting his students out in the hall, where they were lined up, and walking them into the classroom together as a group. Andy believed that classroom management started outside of the classroom, "It's about setting those clear procedures and expectations from the get go."

Once in the classroom, after noticing a visitor in the back of the room, a pair of students approached me, and introduced themselves as the student ambassadors. They welcomed me to the class and explained to me what they would be doing during that class period. Students clearly had an established classroom routine that they followed every day. The students walked into class ready to learn, allowing the teacher optimal instructional time.

Overall, the student focus portion of the QRC showed that teachers had the most room for improvement in the following domains: students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and assignments and students, especially multilingual learners are simultaneously engaged in language and literacy development as well as content learning. Most teachers showed strength in the student focus domain that involved students taking an active role in creating and maintaining classroom norms.

## Teacher Focus

The teacher focus portion of the QRC Observation protocol examined what the teacher was doing in the classroom, their ability to communicate both content and language objectives to the students, the rigor and relevancy of the assignment, the availability of the teacher to students during the class period and the ability of the teacher to control the classroom environment. For each observation, the median score calculated for each of the five domains under the teacher focus, were added together for a total score for that observation. After the total score was calculated for each observation in the teacher focus portion of the QRC observation protocol, the two observation scores were added together for one cumulative score for each teacher on student focus. Teachers were put in order from lowest to highest based on the cumulative score of both of their classroom observations.

Teacher Focus	Kristi		Linda		Shawn		Ryan		Kelli		Elizabeth		Andy		
	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	
T1 Focuses on clear and challenging learning goals	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	4
T2 Engages students in content and learning activities in a culturally responsive way	1	1	1.5	1	3	3	3	3	2.5	3	3.5	4	5	4	
T3 Supports students in their academic progress	1.5	1.5	3	3	2.5	2.5	2	3	3	3	3.5	3	5	5	

T4 Strategies are present for multilingual learners	3	2	2	2	2	4	2	2.5	3	3	5	5	5	5
T5 Classroom management reflects a commitment to fairness, justice, and promote a low conflict environment	2	1.5	3	2	2.5	3	3	3.5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Total per observation	8.5	7	10.5	9	11	15.5	13	15	16.5	16	20	20	25	23
Total of both observations	15.5		19.5		26.5		28		32.5		40		48	

*Table 6.* Teacher focus composite table

**Kristi.** Kristi showed consistency between both her classroom observations on the teacher focus portion of the QRC. The classroom practice of making the lesson relevant to the students showed a difference of one point between the two classes.

Kristi did post and share a content objective for the day. The lesson for the day included simple, recall tasks such as labeling a map and plotting events on a timeline. Teacher feedback to students included simple directions such as “label this,” “eyes on me,” or constant reminders of time remaining, “take about two more minutes.”

Transitions in this classroom were ineffective and disruptive to the learning environment. Students interrupted teacher instruction repeatedly. Kristi spent a great deal of class time redirecting students, repeating directions, and asking for attention. It was

obvious that very few classroom routines had been established, and if they had been established, they were certainly not being followed.

Kristi was one of two teachers that received more than one “1” on the different domains within the teacher focus area of the QRC observation protocol

**Linda.** Linda showed consistent practices for both of her classrooms on the first domain of the teacher focus: focuses on clear and challenging learning goals. Linda scored a one on all practices in this domain with the exception of the practice of referring to big ideas and key learning in her first class. Linda scored a three on this domain because she attempted to connect the lesson with the bigger picture or unit of study. Unfortunately, Linda only made this attempt in her first hour class, which according to her, was the higher class of the two observed.

Linda also showed differences between her two classes under the teacher domain of classroom management. In the higher class of the two, Linda was able to score threes on the following practices: teacher is respectfully assertive and attends to behavior issues promptly and appropriately; and teacher demonstrates use of an established progressive discipline plan. Linda was able to redirect a student by giving a verbal warning and simply continuing with class, whereas in the second class I observed, Linda scored a two on the same classroom practices. The student in this class was told it was their final warning, and sent to another classroom. While one classroom seemed to have gradual consequences for misbehavior, the other one seemed to have only one consequence, removal from the room. Linda was one of two teachers that received more than one “1” on the different domains within the teacher focus area of the QRC observation protocol.

**Shawn.** The teacher focus of the QRC showed discrepancies in two of the domains: focuses on clear and challenging goals and strategies present for multilingual learners. In Shawn's first class, the language objective was not supported, most of the learning opportunities didn't support higher order thinking, and there was no connection made with the lesson to the bigger idea or unit, resulting in a median score of one, two points below the median score of three in the other class. The domain that addressed strategies for multilingual learners had a difference of two points when comparing the median scores from each class. In the first class Shawn had his objectives for the day posted but did not model the strategies and skills necessary to achieve the objectives as he did in the second class.

**Ryan.** All of the domains in the teacher focus of the QRC were within one point when comparing the median scores of the two classes. Ryan's lowest scores were found in the following domain: supports students in their academic progress and strategies are present for multilingual learners. Ryan showed a score of two for both these domains which were both scored from the same class. The first domain, which is supports students in their academic progress was scored lower because Ryan's pace during the course of the lesson was too fast for his students and few opportunities for interactions with peers were given. Ryan's score on the fourth domain, which involved providing strategies for multilingual learners was lower because Ryan's lesson did not involve explicit teaching of both language and literacy skills connected with the content other than the frontloading of one vocabulary word. Although a language objective was posted, it did not correspond to the lesson observed.



It was obvious that Ryan had teacher tried to make the lesson accessible to all students but the assignment was not differentiated or scaffolded to meet the learning needs of his diverse learners. The students seemed to be more engaged with the lab due to the use of technology but conversations between students regarding the lab content were at a minimum.

**Kelli.** Kelli did not have a median score less than 2.5 on this focus area. When students entered the classroom, Kelli was standing at the door waiting to greet them. Kelli had a learning objective, language objective, and question of the day waiting for them on the screen. Her language objective was a sentence with two blanks for students to fill in as they completed it. Students were told that they would begin going over the question of the day as soon as the announcements were over. Kelli clearly stated what her students were expected to know at the end of the class period to participate in the debrief. Student engagement was high during the class discussion as they answer the questions of the day. The class was discussing rocks so Kelli had samples of each type to pass around for her students to see and touch. Kelli modeled for the class how to use the electronic textbook and how to search for information within the book. Kelli made connections between science and language arts by reminding students that they were allowed to use the textbook for their research project on national disasters.

**Elizabeth.** The lowest median score for Elizabeth on this focus area was 3. When students entered Elizabeth's class, they had both a learning objective and language objective on the board. The language objective clearly outlined for students that they would be reading and annotating their articles and would demonstrate their levels of

proficiencies on this lesson by completing a short constructed response. Elizabeth also had vocabulary words posted on the board that they would be using during the class. The teacher consistently tried to engage all students in the classroom activity throughout the lesson.

**Andy.** Andy scored the highest of all the teachers on the teacher focus of the QRC. Andy scored 4s and 5s on all the domains of this focus area. He opened the class lesson with a PowerPoint presentation on rumors. Students discussed the topic with their classmates before they became engaged in a quick quiz over common myths. Andy began the daily lesson with a short media clip from the show Mythbusters, which by the reaction of the class, most of the students were familiar with. After the clip, Andy described the assignment to the class. Students are charged with mythbusting the ancient Greek government, by either busting myths with evidence to support why the myth is untrue or proving that the myth is indeed accurate by also using evidence that supports the claims of the myth

Andy provided all the students with visual templates to use during the assignment. Students worked together to complete the assignment as the teacher moved around the classroom. Andy clearly used strategies and had policies and procedures in place that allowed for the learning of all students within the classroom.

Teachers scored the lowest in the following domains: focuses on clear and challenging learning goals and engages students in content and learning activities in a culturally responsive way.

## Classroom Learning Community Focus

The classroom learning focus portion of the QRC Observation protocol examined the actual physical characteristics of the classroom. This focus area also looks at the classroom management of all students within the classroom and whether the teacher has been able to develop a sense of community within the classroom. For each observation, the median score calculated for each of the two domains under the classroom learning community focus, were added together for a total score for that observation. After the total score was calculated for each observation in the classroom learning community focus portion of the QRC observation protocol, the two observation scores were added together for one cumulative score for each teacher on student focus. Teachers were put in order from lowest to highest based on the cumulative score of both of their classroom observations.

	Kristi		Linda		Ryan		Shawn		Elizabeth		Andy		Kelli	
Classroom learning community focus	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2	#1	#2
C1 Physical characteristics of the classroom support academic learning	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4
C2 Socio-emotional climate of the classroom supports student engagement and belonging	2.5	2	3	2.5	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	3.5	4.5	3

Total per observation	5.5	5	6	5.5	6	6	6	6	6	6	8	6.5	8.5	7
Total of both observations	10.5		11.5		12		12		12		14.5		15.5	

*Table 7. Classroom learning community focus composite table*

**Kristi.** Kristi’s classroom was decorated with content posters on the wall, resources along the front wall and several desks pushed together around the room creating the illusion of cooperative learning groups. Kristi had established positive relationships with her students and although the students were not completely focused on their learning objective for the day, there was a sense of community established in the classroom. Students may not have followed directions and stayed in their seats but there was also no obvious signs of conflict between students.

**Linda.** Music is playing as students entered into the classroom. The document camera shines their entrance ticket onto the front board. Students are easily able to access the needed supplies as they walk into the classroom. The classroom has a word wall, as well as several content appropriate posters around the room.

**Ryan.** Ryan had arranged his classroom into cooperative learning groups. Black science tables were pushed together on both sides of the room as well as the back of the room. Ryan had created a u shape of tables within his classroom with a large space in the middle of the room. Near the teacher desk was a chrome cart, a cart that housed a set of chrome books for student use. The countertops on the sides of the room were littered with empty two liter soda bottles, perhaps for a future experiment, and walls were adorned with posters that showed the school bell schedule and a school poster for writing tips. The

room also had posters, generated by students, the posters showed common contractions and what they meant, such as you're - you are.

**Shawn.** The classroom learning community focus median scores of three in both domains during both observed classes showed that Shawn had been successful in creating a classroom that supported academic learning. Shawn greeted his students at the door and reminds them to pick up both a map and a question sheet.

Student desks are arranged in groups of three to four. The teacher has posted both the learning objective and language objective for the day. The teacher has posted several posters that help students identify a claim, how to read a map, and how to write a claim around the room.

**Elizabeth.** As students walk into the classroom, they retrieved their notebooks on side bookcases and put phones away. No distractions to learning in this classroom. Students begin working on their warm ups. The students are respectful to the teacher and other students.

**Andy.** From the moment Andy's students entered the classroom they are engaged. Andy seamlessly transitioned his students from one activity to the next. Students work together to accomplish tasks and genuinely seem to appreciate and enjoy the company of their teacher. When Andy asks for attention, the response is immediate and rarely does he have to countdown more than two numbers. He uses timers during activities so students are aware of time constraints. The class ended with students being asked to summarize three Greek myths they busted during the class period.

**Kelli.** Kelli scored the highest on the classroom learning community focus. During her interview, Kelli stated that one of the ways she set her classroom up for success this year was the addition of tables to her classroom, which according to her, “give more of a sense of unity” during science labs and other group activities. Kelli had established a safe, nurturing, learning environment within her classroom for her students to thrive.

Another interesting observation regarding the performances of all the teachers was the similarity between all the teacher scores in the classroom learning community focus portion of the QRC. The other foci areas, student focus, and teacher focus had a range of 4, the difference between the lowest possible score and the highest possible score, whereas the classroom focus only had a range of 3 (2 was the lowest score earned on this focus area). This indicates that all teachers were aware of what a culturally responsive classroom was supposed to look like.

To compare the participants in this study using another quantitative approach, the total amount of points scored using the QRC observation tool can be totaled to use for comparison. The QRC has 35 practices, each scored on a scale of 1-5, for a total possible score of 175. The following table shows the total point values for each of the participants’ classroom observations. The teachers are listed in order from lowest to high scores, which was the same for both observations.

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Observation #1</b>	<b>Observation #2</b>
Kristi	65	55
Linda	81	65
Shawn	82	93
Ryan	93	97
Kelli	112	103
Elizabeth	118	115
Andy	158	146

*Table 8. Quantitative Comparisons of Teachers Using the QRC*

Comparing the teachers in this way, calculating the points accumulated using the QRC Observation Protocol, Andy was the teacher that most demonstrated the use of culturally diverse pedagogical practices within the classroom. Elizabeth and Kelli, according to the QRC, were the next two teachers that demonstrated the most culturally responsive practices within their classrooms. According to the QRC, Kristi was the teacher that demonstrated the lowest use of culturally responsive practices within her classroom.

Perhaps the most interesting information gathered from this comparison was that Kristi, according to the interview, articulated understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy and experiences with cultural training more so than any other teacher in the study. Her teacher preparation program was uniquely designed to develop the skills of teachers to be successful in diverse classrooms. Her personal experiences abroad, and with language development seemed to make her more than qualified to meet the needs of a diverse classroom. Yet, the classroom observations showed a teacher that was ill-prepared to run her own classroom. There is no doubt that her teacher preparation program had prepared her with the knowledge necessary to teach in a diverse classroom, but the integration of her own beliefs, content knowledge, and pedagogical practices in

the classroom was not successful. Kristi's students were off task, throwing airplanes and although they were sitting in groups they were not working together. The teacher did not provide the students with enough resources to complete their assignments and she constantly had to stop class to repeat directions. Kristi moved around the classroom from student to student but was unable to keep students engaged in the lesson. Although the knowledge base was there, the practices in the classroom fell short.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine early career teacher practice and beliefs about students of color in their classroom and the relationship between those beliefs and their classroom practices. The following research question guided the study: What is the relationship between early career teacher beliefs, teacher articulation of culturally responsive pedagogy and actual observed culturally responsive pedagogy in classroom practices? This study utilized the interviews and classroom observations of seven teachers that were within the first five years of their teaching career. Through the teacher interviews and the classroom observations I was able to discover the relationship between teacher beliefs and observed classroom practices.

All teachers were interviewed to gather personal information regarding their cultural beliefs, the influence of their teacher preparation program and their espoused beliefs regarding their own culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Each portion of the interview was comprised of four to five interview questions, meant to gather the espoused beliefs of each of the participants. This chapter will interrogate the findings from both the observations and the interviews of each teacher through the lens of Critical Race Theory.

## **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race methodology focuses on the experiences of students of color in the public school systems. The five tenets include: the centrality of race and racism, challenging the dominant perspective, social justice, understanding the value of the experiential knowledge of students, and the transdisciplinary perspective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012).

This study used the definition of racism penned by Manning Marable (1992), “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African - Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (as cited by Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). This definition of racism is more accurate in that it shifts from a Black and White conversation to a conversation that addresses the dominant group and all other minority groups. Critical race theory and critical race methodology recognizes that “racism is about institutional power, and people of color in the United States have never possessed this form of power” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

The five tenets of critical race theory are embedded within this study. Teachers possess the power within the classroom, the power to change their classrooms so that all students feel welcomed, and the power to help all students feel that they can be successful within their classrooms. Teacher beliefs, and classroom practices impact students and their engagement in schools. Teacher preparation programs have an opportunity to impact both teacher thinking and practice to minimize the ignorance, exploitation, and power

used to oppress students who are not part of the dominant culture (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The QRC observational tool is a “low-inference tool to capture observational data about classrooms that are characterized by a high number of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse” (Gutierrez, Seidel, Whitcomb & Viesca, 2013, p.1). Each of the three focus areas of the QRC (student, teacher, classroom learning community) is based on the tenets of critical race theory and the pedagogical practice and learning environment to support learning in classrooms with students from non-dominant cultures.

**Centrality of race and racism.** This concept of the centrality of race and racism was completely illustrated by the schools I visited during my teacher interviews and classroom observations. The three schools that I visited during this study were all located within lower socioeconomic neighborhoods and had an enrollment that consisted mainly of non-White, Hispanic students.

The majoritarian story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools... The silence within statements about ‘good neighborhoods’ and ‘good schools’ indicates racialized and classed dimensions underlying ‘standard’ understandings of these communities and schools.  
(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29)

According to this standard, the schools I visited would be considered “bad” schools and “bad” communities. This perception was evidenced by some of the comments made by the teachers in the study.

Kristi described her concerns about the safety of the neighborhood around her school when describing why she thought students should have access to computers at school rather than walking around with their own personal computer.

I don't think necessarily that it's a safe enough, and this is, this could be my prejudice, but it's not my understanding that the neighborhood is, or the home lives, or things like this would be safe enough for students to walk home with them.

All three schools, according to teachers at my own school and other more affluent communities within the district, were considered to have a population of students that didn't care about education; they were gangbangers with family members that viewed a life of crime or government assistance as a preferred lifestyle to hard work and education. The common denominator for all three schools was the high minority population within their schools and the low socioeconomic factors that affected most of their students.

**Challenging the dominant perspective.** Schools are also seen as responsible for upholding the values of the dominant culture class by a predominantly White teaching force, unfair distribution of resources and a lack of color in the school curriculum (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Educators are in the position to create positive communities of learning within their classroom or they can continue to reinforce a hierarchy of white superiority (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). According to critical race theorists “educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

All teachers observed in this study were representative of the White, dominant, culture. Four of the seven teachers were female teachers while the other three were males. All teachers were products of predominantly White middle class families and all

seven teachers had chosen a profession that put them amongst students of color, in a low socioeconomic neighborhood, where White people are the minority in regard to number.

Kristi addressed this issue of challenging the dominant perspective in her interview when discussing majority and minority environments and the difficulty in navigating such environments when the majority in your school is a minority group. Kristi claimed, “My Caucasian students absolutely recognize they are minority and they are treated differently.” Unfortunately, even when a typically marginalized group becomes the majority in a certain environment, racism still seems to be present. People are unable to deal with differences among themselves and others. People that are different are made to feel as if something is wrong with them because differences are not accepted.

Kelli seemed bothered when she recalled a situation with staff members at her former school that involved teachers making comments referring to “these kids” in a less than flattering manner. Although Kelli did not comment back to the teachers because of her new teacher status, she shared the following insight with me during the interview:

It’s just nice to remember that, you know, developmentally they are kids and they are moldable to good and bad circumstances and so I just want to be that good force I guess.

Even as a new teacher in a building, Kelli seemed to understand the students she was teaching more than some of the veteran staff. Kelli did not view her students as anything other than students that were in her class, that needed to be taught, and that wanted to learn. Kelli’s way of thinking was a challenge to the dominant perspective, which in this case was other staff members in her school. Unfortunately, as a new teacher, Kelli did not

feel comfortable in voicing her opinions to the veteran staff and eventually ended up leaving that school.

Shawn's own private school experience growing up was a challenge to the dominant perspective. Shawn had class sizes of no more than ten students but when he began his practicum hours through his teacher preparation program he was assigned to a public high school. Shawn described this experience,

It was a class of you know, like 33 kids and I just remember, you know, being a little taken aback about how different, you know, a public education can look like compared to what I received as a kid.

If a student from the same country, that speaks the same language, has a type of culture shock when going from a private school setting to a public school setting, imagine the shock students from other countries experience every day in their classrooms. Schools are designed to meet the needs of the dominant culture, which many students do not belong to.

When asked what she wanted for her classroom to help improve the academic achievement of all her students, Elizabeth requested a classroom set of textbooks because currently she was sharing a classroom set of textbooks with two other teachers that taught at the same time. Elizabeth explained that although the department was in the midst of changing their curriculum, a set of textbooks could serve as a reference for all her students. Expecting students to learn without the necessary resources might cause any observer to believe that some schools or districts were trying to maintain the status quo

by the uneven distribution of resources at each building unless all schools have one classroom set for every three teachers.

When discussing his teacher preparation, Andy shared that he was not prepared for some of the situations he has faced in his current teaching assignment.

So I think it kind of ill-prepared me for this job so to speak, kind of in retrospect, because this school setting is the complete opposite of, you know, what my student teaching experience was like. I kind of came in thinking everyone knows how to read and write at grade level and you know, sure enough for a standard class now it's kind of a rude awakening call.

Andy's comment above illustrates that even though our student population has changed drastically over the years, teacher education programs are still preparing teachers for classrooms that no longer exist in the public school systems.

Linda seemed to recognize the issues of cultural sensitivities that might arise within her social studies class. She specifically talked about how the discovering of America by Columbus might be difficult for some of the students to discuss in an appropriate manner due to their own cultural beliefs. Linda pointed out that she realized there is a "White way" of teaching and wants her students to realize that there are different ways to look at historical events. She also talked about how she was constantly telling her students that they can believe what they want to believe but they shouldn't harass others that possess different beliefs. This teacher allowed her students to challenge the dominant perspective with their own beliefs.

All of the teachers interviewed seemed to recognize the impact of dominant culture on their students and their schools. They all indicated the inequities and challenges that their students face both in and out of their classrooms. Andy, who was the most culturally responsive of all the teachers observed, even felt that he was ill prepared to face the realities of the needs of the students he found in his classroom.

**Social justice.** According to the work of Paulo Freire, “Schools either function to maintain and reproduce the existing social order or they exist to empower people to transform themselves, their community, and/or society” (as cited by Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p.69). The comment made by Ryan, regarding his teacher preparation program not being focused on types of students, but how to engage them in science content, seems to be based on the assumption that all students are the same, and therefore can be taught the same. This claim is another example of how White privilege is camouflaged in our educational institutions and that schools; elementary, middle schools, high schools and colleges; are not the objective, colorblind, and race neutral institutions they claim to be (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

When describing the students in his classes, Ryan shared that he has several students in his classroom that speak Spanish and are considered English Language Learners (ELL). Most of his students labeled ELL have limited English proficiency. Students that are non-English proficient are “out in the mobiles...they’re in a different core. It’s because they can, they speak Spanish better than we can so they can help those people out.” He claimed that students are able to use Spanish in class to help each other “figure it out” but later shares that the only time students speak Spanish in class is when



“they’re talking with each other, like about, not about schoolwork, just gossip or something.” According to him, when talking about content, “everyone is usually speaking English and if they can’t then we try to get him or her to the other core because it’s more supportive for NEPs (Non-English Proficient) in the other core.”

Sending students that don’t speak English “out to the mobiles” until they can speak English, does not support the social justice agenda of eliminating racism. Although the teacher and the school may see this as a way of helping students that speak another language, it is also sending the message to these students that until they are able to speak English with a certain degree of fluency, they must remain outside the school, in the mobiles.

During the interview Ryan also referred to English learners as “those people” and “them.” Kristi often referred to her NEP students as “they,” while referring to other students as “my other students” or “the rest of the class.” Both teachers seemed to have separated their responsibility or accountability for some of the students in their class, yet another example of how ingrained racism is within our minds.

All teachers were asked if they could have anything for their classroom that would help improve the academic achievement of all of their students, what would they select and why. Ryan answered that a classroom set of chrome books would help increase the academic achievement of all his students. According to Ryan:

It’s just useful having tools like that so I can constantly say, all right, here are the kids who get it and they’re above, alright you guys can now move on to this to now kind of extend your learning and make it more real life or anything like that.

Although most of his concerns with the students in his classroom were regarding him having to find material that was lower than the age group he was teaching so that they would understand the material, his request for technology was to help extend the learning of his students that “get it.” It is unfortunate that some schools do not have the technology that other schools in the same district might possess, whether that is due to unequal funding or differences in allocation of resources, but a request for technology to increase the academic achievement of all students in your class contradicts what is known about the class. Ryan described the use of said technology as that of extension activities for his students that understand the material, and can move on, leading one to believe that the technology is not for all students, and certainly not for the students that are struggling with the English language.

To help improve the academic success of all her students, one of Kristi’s requests was an ESL paraprofessional in her classroom. Her reason for wanting an ESL paraprofessional was to help meet the needs of her NEP students.

They need so much individual one on one help, that my other students aren't as challenged if I have to do whole class modifications and if I, I think I would be able to give them more help.

Kristi described how the paraprofessional could help her by working with the NEP students in a small group while she instructs the rest of the class. Looking at this request for a paraprofessional for the NEP students, through the lens of critical race theory would indicate that the teacher’s time is better spent with the rest of the class, while the less

qualified paraprofessional works with the NEP students, thereby maintaining the current social order.

Kelli also wanted technology for her classroom but for different reasons than the other teachers. Kelli felt that since the district had moved to online testing her students should be given the opportunity to work on the computer so that when they did test the results wouldn't be skewed by "technology user error." Kelli also mentioned that having computers in class would allow, "More connections cross curricular" and would allow students to access their online science textbook everyday. Kelli mentioned that the tech book associated with their science text offers videos for students to view to help them better understand the content, and Spanish versions to help ESL students with the science content. Kelli intended on using the technology to help all her students better understand the content. Kelli did refer to the situation of the online textbook without computers as an "oxymoron." It is disturbing to me, as an educator, that a school would have resources for a specific population that are inaccessible. What purpose do those resources serve?

Shawn felt that shrinking down the diversity in his classrooms would allow him to target his instruction specifically for the group in front of him. It is obvious that Shawn recognized the danger in grouping students for instruction by part of his response.

In the past they always had tracked classrooms of, you know, like students being grouped together, and I don't think that is the way to go. You know I think a lot of those programs created expectations for kids that this is what they are, and it was hard for kids to get out of those groups and kind of move beyond. I just think about that first hour class though, just with that kind of range of students and how

much diversity is in there, it would be nice if that diversity was shrunk down a little bit, not to the point that you know we're tracking kids up, you know, it's just ESL students or things like that.

This is clearly an attempt to segregate students by placing all the low students in a classroom together. Would the students in the low class still be held to the same expectations as the other class or would they receive a watered down version of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum? These are the questions that go through my mind as I look upon this with the eyes of a critical race theorist.

Elizabeth was the only teacher that talked about the importance of letting her students know that they had the power to change the world if they wanted to. “Hey, this is what’s happening in the world and you guys have the power to change it one day.” Elizabeth turned over the power to change to world to her students just by telling them they could do it. Empowering her students to change the world if they wanted to is one of the greatest gifts a teacher can share with her students.

Students at Andy’s school were given a problem to solve around improving literacy rates in areas of poverty. The problem was real problem to most of the students at the school and the solutions they came up showed not only their resourcefulness but also their ability to see how their current situations could be changed.

One, these kids wanted to, they found a bus on like I think it was on like Craigslist or something, a used bus. They wanted to park it in like the trailer parks and it would make rotations around the different communities, and the bus would be loaded with computers and books that the students could check out. ...

like a bookmobile that would travel to the different trailer parks, cause the problem is too; a lot of them don't have any sort of vehicles or transportation even to get to the library or anything like that. So other solutions, there was a lot, there was a, these ideas to figure out which students were living in poverty, and every Friday they would get like a bag of books sent home with them. They were going to collect the books through donations. There was one group of students created an entire website, like they programmed the whole web site, and on the web site there were links and resources to reading strategies, there were links and resources to places that were giving away free books that you could click on the link and see other places that were willing to give you books. I mean their solutions were awesome. It was one of the PBL's where I actually felt really successful.

By empowering his students, Andy gave them the opportunity to make changes to their own academic lives.

Linda felt that the addition of technology into her classroom would allow her higher students to go onto other activities when they completed their classwork. She also talked about an online reading program that could be used as a filler activity for students when they finished their work. Another example of how technology is seen as a tool to be utilized by students that are not behind.

Teachers in this study had differing levels of awareness of the social issues present in their schools. Although many teachers felt that the addition of resources to support their academic learning within their classes was important, the strategies they

hoped to use with such additions were “remedial” at best and indicated that they themselves did not understand the true social injustices that their students dealt with on a daily basis.

**Value of experiential knowledge.** Experiential knowledge is often described as the voice of people of color as a source of knowledge (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). The voice of marginalized students provides a counter-story to the dominant perspective. Critical race methodology has been used in several studies that have examined the “counter-stories” of students of color that have experienced firsthand the low expectations of teachers, academic curriculums that lack rigor, and the tracking of students into vocational education rather than college preparatory classes (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). It is by valuing the experiential knowledge of students of color that educational systems will be able to teach and improve the educational experiences of all students.

During the course of the interview, Ryan consistently pointed out to me (or perhaps to himself) that the choice occupations of his students and their families were “a very good thing to get into” and were in fact a “very, very good living.” It seemed as if Ryan was trying to make it clear that he was not judging his students, or their families, but simply stating a fact.

Kristi shared concerns regarding some of her fellow teachers and how she felt sometimes they had excuses for why students weren’t learning or why they couldn’t be expected to meet grade level expectations.

I think that I hold pretty high standards for, especially for my NEPs. Like I hold high, hold everyone to high standards and I kind of pride myself in the fact that I expect that students will get there until they demonstrate that they, that they, that they need modification. Obviously not my NEPs all the time, like sometimes I, I modify for them but I think that for most of my students I try to keep the bar high and make sure that they are being challenged in terms of what they're working on. And I think that part of that just comes from that like deep down belief that all students can learn and that environmental factors and other things like that, that they're facing, can't be a reason that they can't learn. And I think I feel really strongly about that. And I think sometimes like, I also get uncomfortable, like I feel sometimes like people, like people bring up issues in students' lives like he's homeless and I don't think they mean it as not holding them to high expectations, but I think I'm very hyper aware of when there could be that, I try to, I try to, like, I don't know, sometimes I think I speak up once in a while if I feel like people are saying well that student is facing this, this, this, I'm like well yes and how can they still be held to a high standard.

Kristi also shared how she felt that teachers should experience how it feels to be in another culture so that they can understand exactly what their NEP student is going through while they are sitting in the classroom.

I do really think that having some kind of experience where you are either the minority or you are not in your own cultural background is valuable to being responsive because until you can understand where they, where students are

coming from, especially my NEPs, until you know what it's like to be sitting in a classroom where you don't understand a single thing that is happening, can you truly be as culturally responsive.

First year teacher, Kristi, does seem to understand the importance of the experiences brought to the classroom by our minority students and how a teacher's own counter-story, an experience of their own in a culture different than their own, might be the only way for teachers to truly understand the impact that culture has on the classroom environment.

Kelli described the diversity in her class as an experience she would have liked to have had as a student herself. She wasn't able to learn from her classmates because "we weren't diverse and I feel like everybody was on the same page all the time and so we didn't get to experience those life skills that I think they learn from here."

When talking about diversity within his classes, Shawn brought up the different home experiences his students bring with them and how those experiences can affect their learning.

So I think that's kind of the biggest piece in diversity I see, just in that range of home experience, in that range of, I guess I would call it like social norms, in the sense of, some kids need a lot of reinforcement to know what to do inside of a classroom, you know what I mean? Even a simple thing like walking in and grabbing a piece of paper, you know. I didn't think when I was in my teacher prep program that would be something that I would have to model, reinforce and teach, but it is because, you know, some kids just because of their home



experience don't have that knowledge of like, you know, this is the way I should do this thing.

Shawn recognized that not only do his students struggle with the academic part of school but they also have to learn the social norms of school as well. Schools assume that students know how to act in school but the truth is, some students have to be taught, over and over, appropriate school behavior.

Elizabeth acknowledged the importance of life experiences and helping students make connections to new material by sharing her own personal adventures to help students build the context necessary to take in the new information. Delpit echoes this idea,

We can and must build curricula that connect to our students' interests, thereby allowing them to collect the knowns to the unknowns. We cannot allow an expectation gap to result in an achievement gap. (Delpit, 2012, p. 25)

Elizabeth also stressed the importance of listening to the stories of her students and asking them about their family and their experiences. She seemed to place a high value on the experiences of all her students and felt that it was important for them to share those experiences with others. Elizabeth gave her students a voice in her classroom.

Perhaps it was due to the structure of his school, and the use of Problem Based Learning activities (PBL's) in their curriculums, but Andy seemed to view the diversity in his classroom as something to embrace and intertwine within the classroom lessons. Andy constantly tried to tap into the background knowledge of his students within his classroom, hoping to make those connections between their past and present events even more stable.

Andy and Elizabeth exhibited a selflessness within the classroom with their students that not only did they want to share their own personal experiences with their students but they wanted their students to share their own personal experiences as well. Andy and Elizabeth seemed to realize how really knowing your students could help you teach and help them learn.

**Transdisciplinary perspective.** The use of critical race methodology in educational studies uses knowledge from other fields such as women's studies, ethnic studies, history, and law to help researchers better understand the effects of racism on marginalized people of color within our classrooms. The transdisciplinary perspective acknowledges the intersections of several groups of marginalized people within our educational institutions. An example of this intersection would be students of color that also qualify for free and reduced lunch and students from lower socioeconomic groups. Another example of this crossover within the schools I visited was the intersection of students of color with first languages that were not English.

Kristi described a classroom situation between a Kurdish NEP student and two Latino students that she witnessed one day.

She was at a table with two students that I would consider low performing but those students still bullied her. Bullied is a strong word, but they still like scratched her name off the group paper and still were like yelling at her for writing too big and things like this, and I think that they might not know what's at play in terms of like you've, you've spoken this language for 11 years and she's just learning. So, I don't know for sure if they see that at play, but I see a lot at

play as the teacher in terms of like, whoa, like and so I think I spend a lot of time thinking about conversations with students, I could have with individual students like be mindful of how you're, and maybe for them that was the only time where they felt like they were, cause, because they're low ability students, maybe that's the one time where they felt like they're better, and so maybe they're asserting that but I don't know.

Elizabeth also described how the socio-economic status could cross over with the color of her students as well. She shared how the interaction of race and lower socio-economic status could impact the academic achievement of her students:

There are kids ranging from homeless to very, very, low-income poverty level. Some of these kids have a bunch of siblings at home and so there are days they don't make it to school because they're babysitting their siblings and they don't have a choice.

Our current classrooms are filled with differences. Students come to school with a myriad of experiences that should not only be embraced but also shared and celebrated as well. The differences that exist within our students is what will make our lessons more interesting, our classrooms more colorful, and our schools more culturally responsive. Teachers need to be aware of what their students are bringing to school with them every day.

### **Implications for School Leaders**

This study has demonstrated to me that our teachers are entering classrooms with a base of knowledge around classroom theory, pedagogical strategies, lesson planning,

classroom management, and a few courses on cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

School leaders need to recognize that teacher preparation programs alone are not enough to prepare teachers for the classrooms of today. Cultural proficiency is not a destination, and if it were, it certainly would not be reached during the course of a teacher preparation program. School leaders need to be prepared to continue the development of new teachers within their own buildings. From this study, it has become apparent that theory alone is not enough to prepare new teachers for the real students that await them in their first classrooms.

School leaders have an opportunity to help teachers transfer their theory to practice by helping them develop relationships with students. Leaders can facilitate the development of such skills by having all staff members address their own biases prior to the beginning of each school year. Leaders must create a culture in the school that does not allow for excuses and holds true to the belief that all students can learn. Not only should teachers be expected to create a safe, nurturing classroom environment, the school itself should create a sense of family with the community beyond its walls. The building leader can demonstrate to the staff how to develop and sustain relationships with students by exhibiting that relationship building behavior everyday with staff, students and parents.

In addition to supporting teachers in the classroom and providing appropriate resources for all students, leaders can also help change schools by adopting asset based language rather than continue to use the deficit language that is so common among school districts and school leaders. Schools should no longer be referred to as “at risk” schools,

and students that receive free and reduced lunch should not be referred to as the “free and reduced population.” The “achievement gap” should be referred to as the “opportunity gap.” Although changing the language we use with our staff and students may not seem significant language does matter. If we want our staff and students to recognize that we see no deficits within our students from different cultures, we need to change our language. As I shared earlier in this study, words hurt and the results of those words can make the difference between students of color achieving at their highest potential or being content to meet the low expectations they have learned to expect from themselves over the years.

### **Implications for Classroom Teachers and Teacher Preparation**

Differentiation, classroom management, cooperative learning, meeting the needs of English language learners, and relationship building with students are skills that must be continually developed within the classroom.

Differentiation is not a strategy used simply for students that struggle with new material. Many teachers in this study viewed differentiation as a way to make tasks simpler for struggling students by changing the expectations of the assignment. Rather than provide scaffolding to the lesson, strategies to help the struggling students achieve the same standards, many teachers seemed to simply lessen their expectations for specific students. One teacher actually spoke of differentiation for meeting the needs of his higher-level students. Differentiation should also not be viewed as a one size fits all. Many teachers felt that if they differentiated for one, they differentiated for all. That’s not

differentiation. That's teaching to a specific group of students, and in most cases it is to the lower level of students.

The importance of classroom management cannot be minimized when looking at maximizing instructional time. Students will not learn if there is chaos within the classroom. Classroom management starts with consistent routines and procedures. Teachers cannot assume that students will come to their classrooms with the knowledge of appropriate classroom behavior. Teachers must be prepared to teach and reteach the behavior they expect to see within their classrooms.

Having students work in cooperative learning groups is a powerful yet often underutilized tool in effective teaching strategies. Many teachers incorrectly assume that simply pushing desk and tables together will result in students working together in cooperative learning groups. As with expected classroom behaviors, students need to be taught how to work within cooperative learning groups with diverse learners to make them effective classroom strategies.

English language learners should no longer be viewed as students that cannot be in general education classes with their English-speaking peers. English language learners should no longer be sent "out to the mobiles" until they can learn to speak English. School leaders should expect all their teachers to be able to meet the needs of all their students within their classroom. It is unacceptable to forego content instruction for students that are not proficient in the English language. Whether that means the school leader needs to purchase additional resources, or bring in additional training for the

teachers, it is unacceptable to keep students from learning because the school is ill equipped to meet their needs with the appropriate resources or instruction.

Finally, perhaps the most important implication for classroom teachers from this study is the importance of building and sustaining relationships with students. Teachers need to connect with their students and get to know them before they can expect to meet their academic needs within the classroom. The experiential knowledge of students is very important when making connections between background knowledge and new material. If teachers are unaware of what their students know, how can they teach them.

The experiential knowledge of students is not to be discounted during the course of teacher planning and certainly shouldn't be deleted from a teacher's lesson plan when the teacher is running short on time. How can teachers be expected to connect new learning material to the lives of their students if they don't really know their students? Relationships are important in classrooms, and the experiential knowledge of students needs to be considered. If a teacher chooses to forgo the relationship piece of teaching, they might as well forgo the teaching part as well.

Teachers must not assume that their students are coming to school without knowledge. Students may not possess the knowledge that is seen as valuable by the dominant culture that decides what is taught within our schools, but they do possess their own wealth of knowledge. The use of CRT in this study has shown that racism is disguised by the universal values and norms that can be found within our schools (Yosso, 2005). Racism within our schools manifests itself in deficit thinking and language, assuming students of color enter schools without a base of knowledge and unsupportive

parents that do not believe in education (Yosso, 2005). Yosso has developed a cultural wealth model that teachers can use to not only help them interact with their students of color but empower those students as well (Yosso, 2005). The six forms of cultural capital include: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistance (Yosso, 2005).

The importance of cultural capital is that it recognizes the knowledge that students of color bring into the classroom, even if that knowledge is not the same as other students. By exploring the six forms of cultural capital with their students, teachers are not only acknowledging the knowledge of their students but they are also showing their students that their life experiences are of value to the classroom (Yosso, 2005).

Students are human beings who need to be nurtured and know that they are cared about before they achieve their potential. It is not enough for a teacher to just know the standards and pedagogical strategies that will allow them to teach those standards: differentiation strategies, graphic organizers, multicultural texts and cooperative learning groups will only take a teacher so far in meeting the needs of their students.

Teacher preparation programs need to recognize that getting to know students and developing relationships with students is the one strategy that always seems to positively impact student achievement. Perhaps a class on developing and sustaining relationships with students would prove to be the most beneficial to new teacher candidate. “Authentic, positive social relations in a classroom are a defining characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy in practice” (Bondy et al., 2007, p. 327). A class that discusses the power of



listening to your students and really getting to know them might prove to be more valuable than yet another class on multiculturalism.

Rather than focus on the brain of students in teacher preparation studies, perhaps our teachers should spend more time focusing on the heart of their students. Education is not a business, and schools are not factories; students cannot be treated like products that need to be assembled by teachers working a production line. It is the integration of student/teacher relationships and pedagogical practices that will improve our classrooms. Both are necessary to show academic achievement, with the relationship piece being the foundational piece of successful culturally responsive teachers.

We must learn who the children are and not focus on what we assume them to be – at risk, learning disabled, unmotivated, defiant, behavior disordered, etc. This means developing relationships with our students and understanding their political, cultural, and intellectual legacy. (Delpit, 2012, p. 37-38)

### **Future Research**

When asked what they would request for their classroom to improve the academic achievement of all their students, many of the teachers requested a classroom set of chrome books or iPads. An interesting study would be to see how the addition of technology into the classroom for daily student use would impact the academic achievement of all students. Would English Language learners experience the same benefit as their English-speaking peers? Would technology prove to be helpful in closing the “achievement gap?”

An investigation into how preparation programs of teachers help teachers to establish and sustain meaningful relationships with students while still expecting all

students to meet the grade level standards for their content, regardless of their cultural background might be a study worth investigating.

After determining that a teacher is implementing culturally responsive practices, it would be interesting to look at the academic achievement of culturally diverse students throughout the school year. A study similar to this one but with additional researchers observing classrooms, so that each teacher was observed by more than one researcher, to eliminate or at least minimize, personal biases from the researcher might provide interesting results as well on this topic of cultural sensitivities of newly career teachers.

### **Conclusion**

This case study was guided by the following question: What is the relationship among early career teachers' cultural sensitivity, their understanding and commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy, and their actual pedagogical practice?

The participants in this study attended various teacher preparation programs, which they chose for various reasons, but most seemed to agree that their schooling could have better prepared them to take over their own classroom. Although all of the teachers had willingly chosen to work in their particular school setting, teaching students from backgrounds more diverse than their own, most of them felt ill prepared to meet the needs of their students.

Teachers were definitely exposed to the language of culturally responsive pedagogy in their teacher preparation programs. The teachers in this study were able to espouse their cultural beliefs and how their own life experiences had prepared them for the challenges and students they would face within their own classrooms.

Based on the espoused beliefs of the teachers during their interviews, their teacher preparation programs had given them some guidance on cultural diversity within the classroom. Although all of the participants were able to verbalize strategies that should be used within a culturally responsive classroom, few actually demonstrated these strategies during the classroom observations. In fact, when calculating the total points accumulated on the QRC Observation Protocol, only one teacher, Andy, scored over 75% of the possible points on the QRC during both classroom observations. Three teachers, Elizabeth, Kelli, and Ryan scored over 50% of possible points on both classroom observations and three teachers fell below the 50% mark on culturally responsive classroom practices. Interestingly, the teacher that exhibited the most culturally responsive pedagogy, Andy, felt ill prepared for his classroom and even doubted his own abilities to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The student focus portion of the QRC is where teachers struggled the most during the classroom observations. Overall, two of the three domains in this area consistently received some of the lowest marks of the teachers. The first domain that teachers struggled with was: students generate and/or participate in the process of meeting learning goals and assignments. Teachers can help their students in this area by giving students options on how they demonstrate their knowledge on specific topics. Teachers should create a classroom learning community that encourages students to work together to solve problems rather than relying on the teacher for answers to their questions. Students should be encouraged to monitor their own progress, whether it's through goal setting, the use of self-assessments or rubrics. The teacher should create a classroom

atmosphere that encourages students to share their own experiences with classmates when they relate to the current topic. Teachers should challenge their students, all of their students, to use the appropriate academic language when discussing lessons with both the teacher and other students. Finally, students should be aware that the use of their first language is always acceptable in class, especially when asking for clarification from classmates.

The second domain that challenged teachers in the student focus area of the QRC was: students, including multilingual learners, are simultaneously engaged in language and literacy development as well as content learning. This domain requires teachers to have differentiated resources for their students to access during the lesson. Teachers should help their students improve their language by having them speaking, reading, writing and listening within their content area. Finally, students should be using the same language that is present in both the language and learning objectives.

The examination of the data analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory showed another side of the preparation of our new teachers taking over culturally diverse classrooms. The five tenets of Critical Race Theory guided this examination of the pedagogical practices of seven teachers through classroom observations and interviews.

As educators, school leaders and teachers need to be ready to serve the population that exists within their schools. To properly serve a community, the educators must be knowledgeable about the people that make up that community. The analysis of classroom practices through CRT clearly showed that our teachers do not really know their students. The experiential knowledge of students needs to be both acknowledged

and valued by educators. Students of color need to know that the skills and knowledge they are bringing into our classrooms do not go unnoticed. By empowering all students to have a voice, and share their personal knowledge and experiences within the classroom, we are enriching the learning of all students.

According to the results of this study, race plays a part in how our students of color are taught within the classroom. According to the works of Vaught and Castagno (2008), “racism is a vast system that structures our institutions and our relationships” and “racism adapts to socio-cultural changes by altering its expression, but it never diminishes or disappears” (p. 96).

Andy, the most culturally responsive teacher in the study, made connections with his students, which allowed him to help his students make the new connections necessary for learning. This relationship is described as a reciprocal relationship between a culturally responsive teacher and student where the teacher, “can use their professional knowledge and skills to help students academically, socially, and culturally. In turn, the students can use their cultural and community knowledge to help their teachers more fully integrate into the students’ (and their parents’ and communities’) worlds” (Beckett, 2011, p. 72).

From this study, it has become apparent that theory alone is not enough to prepare new teachers for the real students that await them in their first classrooms. The level of cultural sensitivity of these new teachers was at the awareness level, they were aware that differences existed between themselves and their students. The new teachers were able to articulate their beliefs on culturally responsive pedagogy and what a culturally responsive

classroom should look like but in most cases they were unable to transfer that knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy into their classroom practices. According to this study, espoused theories were not consistent with theories in use.

Although I have completed my study, I will continue to work with teachers, building leaders, and district personnel to provide all of our students, regardless of race, the opportunity to feel welcomed and successful in school. I will continue to use the lens of CRT to help guide me on decisions regarding policies and procedures that may negatively impact my students of color.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Consent Form

**Principal Investigator: Michelle Steinberger**  
**University of Denver**  
**IRB # 692493-2**

### Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a case study that will examine the pedagogical practices and preparation experiences of middle school teachers. Your participation is completely voluntary, but it is very important. Your participation will help me acquire knowledge that will provide assistance and guidance for teacher preparation programs, district level professional development departments and school based professional development to help classroom teachers meet the diverse needs of their students.

Participation will involve allowing me to observe two of your classes using the Quality Responsive Classroom observation protocol during the course of one day. Participation will also involve one 60 minute interview that will occur at a scheduled time after the classroom observations. I will digitally record the interview.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation involves no penalty. The risks associated with this project are minimal.

As the researcher, I will treat all information gathered for this study as confidential. This means that only I will have access to the information you provide. Any reports that are generated as a result of classroom observations and the interview will contain pseudonyms. The classroom observations and the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed by myself. You will be sent a copy of your transcribed interview via email (personal delivery is available as well if preferred) for review. You will have the opportunity to add comments and/or corrections to your interview responses at that time. Upon completion of the transcription and member checking process, all digitally recorded data will remain locked in a cabinet in the researcher's home until three years after the conclusion of the study. At this time, audio recordings will be deleted and destroyed. I will be the only person to have access to any identifying data.

There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be

the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

If you have any questions at all about my study of cultural sensitivity and pedagogical practices, please feel free to contact me, Michelle Steinberger, at (303) 903-9045 or [ste002549@gmail.com](mailto:ste002549@gmail.com) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Korach, at (303) 871-2212 or [susan.korach@du.edu](mailto:susan.korach@du.edu). If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions please contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects, at (303) 871-4015 or by emailing [IRBChair@du.edu](mailto:IRBChair@du.edu), or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu), calling (303) 871-4050 or in writing at University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver CO 80208-2121. Thank you again.

“I have read and understand the above description of the study on cultural sensitivity and pedagogical practices of middle school teachers. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation for any language I did not fully understand. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about my participation. I agree to participate in the study, and I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.” (Please sign below.)

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign below if you understand and agree to participate

“I have read and understand the above description of the study on cultural sensitivity and pedagogical practices of middle school teachers. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation for any language I did not fully understand. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about my participation. I agree to participate in the study, and I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.” (Please sign below.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_ I agree to be digitally recorded during my interview.

\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be digitally recorded during my interview.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

#### Teacher and Cultural Beliefs

1. Tell me about your family and your cultural heritage?
2. Tell me about your reasons for going into teaching?
  - a. How long you have been teaching?
3. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
4. As a teacher what do you see as your strengths and weaknesses?
5. How would you describe a culturally responsive teacher?

#### Influence of Preparation

1. When selecting a teacher preparation program, were there specific qualities you were looking for in the program?
2. Is there a specific experience from your program that had a large impact on your teacher career?
3. How were your cultural beliefs challenged during the course of your teacher preparation program?
4. How well do you feel your teacher preparation program prepared you to take over your own classroom?

#### CRT in Practice

1. What has been the most surprising element of running your own classroom?
2. How have you set up your classroom for success for all students?
3. If you could have anything for your classroom that would help improve the academic achievement of all your students, what would you select and why?
4. How would you describe the diversity of your classroom?
  - a. How does diversity impact your daily lesson plans?
  - b. How does diversity impact your long term planning?