

EXPLORING THE STORIES OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY  
IN TEACHERS' PRE-EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION IN  
Curriculum and Instruction  
and  
Social Sciences

Presented to the Faculty of the University of  
Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by  
JULIE DAWN TAYLOR

B.S., Central Missouri State University, 1998  
M.S., University of Missouri Kansas City, 2005  
M.S., University of Central Missouri, 2018

Kansas City, Missouri  
2022

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Julie Dawn Taylor, Candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2022

ABSTRACT

As the diversity in the United States increases year after year, it is critical for teachers to be provided with the skills and knowledge to teach diverse learners, whether through their pre-service educational program, higher degree courses, or professional development. To meet the needs of diverse students in the classroom, educators need to be equipped with culturally responsive pedagogy or “using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). The theoretical and conceptual base of the need for culturally responsive pedagogy has been clearly articulated in literature. However, this previous research is focused on the urban education settings, as the growth of diverse students in this setting is growing yearly. However, the developmental process of how individual teachers, both pre-service and current educators, are attaining these much needed culturally responsive practices is an area of needed investigation. Further, there is an obligation for research to reflect the academic needs of diverse students in the suburban setting, as the number of underserved students also continues to grow yearly. This dissertation aims to contribute to the knowledge of culturally responsive development by

examining teachers' perspectives about development and practice of culturally responsive pedagogy, both in pre-service education and professional development.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Exploring the Stories and Experiences of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Teachers’ Pre-education Programs and Professional Development” presented by Julie D. Taylor, candidate for the Doctor of Curriculum and Instruction, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Nora Peterman, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
Division of Language and Literacy/Urban Teacher Education

Douglas Bowles, Ph.D., Co-Committee Chair  
Division of Arts and Science

Candace Schlein, Ph.D.  
Division of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies

Loyce Caruthers, Ph.D.  
Division of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations

Connor Warner, Ph.D.  
Division of Urban Institute for Teacher Education

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was made possible only through the many contributions of my participants, committee members, colleagues, my students, and friends and family, and it is a tribute to their continued support and encouragement. These brief words cannot express how grateful I am to each of you for the ways in which you have enriched my work and life and have always encouraged me to follow my dreams.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Peterman, for her guidance, patience, support, and encouragement. You continually pushed me to be critical of our education system and to be an agitator for change—something that I hope to instill in my profession and research as I continue on my journey. This appreciation is further given to each of my committee members who have supported me throughout my doctoral studies. Dr. Loyce Caruthers, thank you for pushing me to always think further into what I needed to research, what I needed to say, and how I needed to say it. Dr. Bowles, thank you for giving me the knowledge that I didn't even know I needed to have to understand the stories of my students more fully. Dr. Werner, thanks for being a part of my dissertation committee, though from several states away. Dr. Schlein, thank you for showing me so much about the stories of people, educators, and how those stories give the best data for research.

I would also like to personally thank my family. Brett—you never allowed me to give up. You always allowed me to pursue my dreams, and I can never say thank you enough for that. Mom, you were there for me through my emotional roller-coasters, when I was overwhelmed and needed the extra push to make it through. Emma, everything I do, I do for

you. Thank you for always being the reason I push through everything. I love you all. I dedicate this dissertation to each one of you.

Lastly, for my students, without you... your stories and your impact on my life, I would have never known how much this research needed to be done or known how much education needed to change to make education better. Toni Morrison once said, “Why didn’t you reach out, touch us with your soft fingers, delay the sound bite, the lesson, until you knew who we were...No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us start strong?” And so to my students, over twenty years ago, the love for each and every one of you made me want to reach out and touch each of your daily lives and hearts. It wasn’t always about the lessons, the literature, or the song. It was about seeing each of you for who you are—your past, your future, your struggles and your successes, your culture, and what you could bring to my classroom every day to ensure that your strength grew and when you left me, you stayed strong. I hope my research sends a wave of change that I can see continue through your children, their children, and for generations to come.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

During these times of racial injustice and inequity, it seemed important to discuss what led me to my dissertation topic. I have been asked frequently why I, as a White, middle-class woman, would choose culturally responsive pedagogy as my dissertation topic. As an educator, I know and understand the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in schooling; however, I acknowledge that I do not have firsthand knowledge of a diverse student. However, through my chosen experiences, where I have taught, and the lessons I have learned from my students, I have determined that there is a substantial need for educators to know and understand the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and its need to help all students be successful in the classroom.

When I think of my years in education, I have always reflected on the use of culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom and how teachers and students translate this into academic success. I have determined that there is a definite issue before teachers ever enter their classrooms; it begins the moment that they enter their undergraduate work. When education majors enter college, they assume they will be given the knowledge needed to be successful in the classroom. However, much of the information given to teachers, in regard to best practices, does not include information on how to teach students of culturally diverse backgrounds. Many times, classes on culturally diverse pedagogy are not addressed until a teacher is enrolled in a Master's class or is pursuing a certification. By then, many teachers have already been immersed in their teaching career for years, which has caused a disservice to the diverse student in their education, as well as the educator in their teaching methods and experiences.

When I started my undergraduate studies in education, there was never a class that taught me how to teach diverse students. In fact, I almost did not become a teacher after an incident during my senior year of college, when I requested to be put into an alternative school for my student teaching. It was a fight from the time I put in the request to the day I graduated, as I was told it was a safety issue, that it was an unproductive use of time, and at one point, that it was a misuse of my talent as a teacher to spend my time on kids that will never amount to anything. There is a part of me that feels that if these comments had not fueled my passion to be in that setting, I would not be where I am today.

Although the comments were harsh and undeserving for the students I would encounter over the next 20 years, I am blessed every day that I was told “no.” I knew where I belonged, and I fought for what I was passionate about. I have always wondered if their refusal was because there was an understanding that they had not prepared me to teach to all students, but to only teach to the students that fit the mold of higher education and theory taught inside university walls. What they deemed as “good” practice, theory, and teaching did not include diverse students.

When I went into my student teaching at a transitional juvenile detention center, I realized I was lost. I was never going to make it through my student teaching with the mindset that had been drilled into me by my pre-service education classes. Luckily, my mentor teacher had had 24 years of teaching in inner-city public schools and was patient, understanding, and without knowing it, knew some of the best ways of teaching students of diversity without having any cultural educational training herself. She taught me to think about the students’ experiences, their culture, democracy in the classroom, and how to ensure that each of their voices was heard with equity and respect. At the time, I had no idea that

these concepts are key themes in the success of culturally diverse students in the classroom, and that the methods to achieve this need to be taught in undergraduate programs for proper preparation of our future teachers.

Over the next 15 years, I practiced what I learned from my mentor teacher. I observed; I reflected; I changed and challenged myself to be the best teacher I could be to ALL my students. After 15 years of inner-city, prison, and at-risk students, I knew that I needed a change—mentally, physically, emotionally, and professionally. I made a decision to move to a predominantly White suburban school district. This was a struggle for me because I had never, other than in my own schooling, experienced teaching in this kind of setting. I did not know how I would fit into a school or in a community that was almost foreign to me. I realized that my mindset about education had drastically changed through my experiences, and I did not want to go back to the practices I had been taught in my undergraduate classes. However, I realized on my first day in the suburban setting that although I may not have been in a school that was completely made up of students of diversity, those students were still there, and they also needed to be reached in ways that were not currently being delivered. This change in setting made me recognize that something needed to be done, whether at the university level or through professional development, to ensure that teachers are receiving the training and education that they need to teach ALL students, not just the ones they have been taught to teach.

### **Background, Context, Framework, and Significance of Problem**

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was introduced to all school agencies to “consider the rates at which low-income and diverse students have access to excellent educators” (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education,

2018). Although funds were set aside to help with educational resources, very little research was conducted on how these funds should be best distributed and minimal data was collected about how these resources were meeting the expectations of the ESEA. Even with these newly set expectations for equality education in place, state test scores were still declining in districts of diversity. In the early 1990s, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings began to realize that race and economic class, combined with the feeling of connection to a student's community, school, peers, and teachers, were critical factors in a student's success in their education. As these new connections were being accepted, Ladson-Billings coined the term culturally responsive pedagogy and defined it as the "empower(ment) of students to maintain cultural integrity, while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 465).

Building on the foundation laid by previous scholars, Geneva Gay developed a more substantial, narrower focus than culturally responsive pedagogy that directed attention to teachers' strategies and practices in a classroom of diverse students, also known as culturally relevant teaching. In 2000, Gay coined the term culturally relevant 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" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Further, in Gay's work, entitled *Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, she confirmed and supported her work through Ladson-Billings' perception: "[W]hen academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (2002, p. 106). As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught

through their own cultural and experiential filters (Alim & Murphy, 2013; Gay, 2000; Irizarry, 2011; Jensen, 1969; Paris & Ball, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2010).

Even after developing these newly founded terms and their connections to positive student achievement, there was still very little research or implementation of effective practices for teaching diverse students. With the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, culturally relevant pedagogy has become a growing field of research and teaching practices. However, despite the growing numbers of diverse populations in schools, and the growth of this research, current and future educators are not being taught effective practices to meet these students' needs. This is noted by Milner (2003), who posited that most teacher education programs offer one or two multicultural education courses, and by Popkewitz (1991), who discussed the gaps in teacher education, on the collegiate level and in the lack of professional development occurring within schools. Popkewitz also noted the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy and the need to "re-educate" teachers to meet the needs of the rapidly changing demographics of the United States' schools.

### **Problem Statement**

When education majors enter college, they assume they will be given the knowledge needed to succeed in the classroom. However, much of the information given to teachers regarding effective teaching practices does not include information about how to teach the student of diversity. In a 2014 study, Lin and Bates looked at 60 Midwestern teachers to determine how teachers attempted to understand different "ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, languages, customs, values, ceremonies, and symbols of the children and families in the community in which they teach" (p. 5). Their findings determined:

teachers...are not adequately prepared to work with children of diverse backgrounds...participants in this study did not recognize that varying abilities, learning styles, and linguistic abilities are all part of diversity. Their limited understanding of diversity sheds light on how teachers can better prepare themselves in this regard. Moreover, we gained an understanding of how little perceived support there is from administration at the school and district levels in this particular community when it comes to preparing teachers to better serve all children. (p. 10)

According to Darling-Hammond (2005), the idea of teacher education reform in schools is critical to improving effective teaching practices, which, in turn, leads to better student academic performance. Furthermore, the education of educators is central to improving teacher quality and teachers' deep understanding of whom they are teaching, what they need to teach, and what pedagogical practices can help in the academic success of students, notably culturally diverse and impoverished students (Ball, 2000; Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). Wang, Odell, Klecka, Spalding, and Lin (2010) further supported the need for teacher education reform of culturally relevant pedagogy: "If teacher education is central to teaching reform and to the quality of teaching and student learning...we need to invest more in the conceptual, empirical, systematic, and sustained inquiry about teacher education reform" (p. 7). As Ladson-Billings suggested, "If we are to help novice teachers become good and experienced teachers to become better, we need theoretical propositions about pedagogy that help them understand, reflect on, and improve their philosophy and teaching practice" (2014, p. 83).

The ethnic, racial, cultural, economic and religious diversity of the United States is increasing (Banks et al., 2005). The current demographic trends of underrepresented population growth indicate that there will soon be no majority racial or ethnic group in the U.S. (Aud et al., 2010). Trends such as these indicate significant increases in U.S. Latino populations and steady increases in African American and Asian populations. Thus, the

overall makeup of the United States population is becoming more diverse as the percentage of the White population decreases and Latino, African American, Asian, and other populations make up larger percentages of the total population (Aud et al., 2010).

The National Center for Education (2013), in data collected in 2012–13, stated, “83 percent of public-school teachers [were] white” (p. 13). Ortiz (2012) reported that the teaching workforce is 84% White monolingual females, 7% Hispanic, and 7% African American. Just two years previously, statistics had shown the gap in the lack of diversity in the teaching workforce and the growing number of diverse students. This demographic breakdown showed the differing percentages of diversity, or lack thereof, between teachers and public-school students: Fifty-four “percent white; 21 percent Hispanic; 17 percent African-American, 5 percent Asian, and 1 percent Native American” (Aud et al., 2010, p. xvi). More recent data show that more than half of diverse students were born to immigrant parents in the United States with various backgrounds and heritage; furthermore, close to 70% of these families live in poverty (Kent, 2015). Even more significantly, these students perform at levels notably lower than those of their peers (Gil & Bardack, 2010). In 1996, Osborne determined that statistical data indicated that the vast majority of students from diverse cultural/social groups in Western nations were not receiving a quality education and that inequality continues to expand rather than contract. With data showing the growth of diverse students in the classroom, the heightened problem is now in establishing ways to improve learning opportunities and academic success for students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Lockard & Farmer, 2010). Thus, there is a distinct discrepancy between who is teaching the classroom and the student makeup in these classrooms.

With these changing statistics, it would be difficult for a teacher who does not know or understand the everyday lived experiences of their students, which can include their backgrounds, dialects, families, or teachers. Therefore, they would not be able to make meaningful connections with their diverse student population or help them achieve their academic goals. According to research by Bandura (1977), people tend to be influenced by their pre-existing knowledge, which is made up of their identity, culture, and experiences. This can correlate with teachers and the foundation from which they build their classroom pedagogies about culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching (Lave, 1988; Schoenfeld, 2000). These specific pedagogical practices of learning and development of diverse students are particularly salient to education, given evidence that pre-existing knowledge systems can inform various instructional behaviors, such as the selection of pedagogical techniques and the interpretation of subject matter (Schoenfeld, 2000). Further, these knowledge systems formed by teachers' experiences and identity are built and can change over time with expanded learning situations, such as professional development or further education (Beijaard et al., 2004).

If current and future educators are not receiving the proper education on the knowledge and building of culturally responsive pedagogy, they cannot construct knowledge that changes as the diverse student population changes, which creates a disservice to the diverse student regarding their education, as well as to the educator in their teaching methods (Banks et al., 2005; Gay, 2002; Hayes & Juarez, 2012). According to Olszewski-Kubilius, "On almost every indicator of achievement, including grades, standardized achievement tests, and college attendance and completion, minority children do not achieve at the same levels as non-minority children" (2006, p. 28). Statistics from Aud et al. (2010) show that

students of color, in relation to their White peers, demonstrate consistent academic underachievement that is apparent through Pre-K through 12th grade, and they are inadequately represented in graduation rates. For instance, Latinx students have a dropout rate that is almost four times the rate of their White peers, and African American students are expelled at a rate that is three times more than that of their White peers. Swanson (2008) wrote, “high school graduation rates for most ethnic and racial under-represented groups continue to stagnate at just over 60%...and high school graduation rates substantially below 50% (p. 21).

Often, classes on culturally relevant pedagogy are not available until a professional development is presented or a teacher is enrolled in a master’s class, and by then, many teachers have already been immersed in their teaching career for years. In their pre-service education programs, teachers may take a “multicultural” or “diversity” course, which is an “add on” to regular teacher education programs, rather than seeing proper methods on how to integrate this pedagogy within the curriculum (Feistritzer, 2011). This can be problematic because “the very coursework that comprises teacher education fails to take up notions of culture and learning in robust and substantive ways” (Ladson-Billings, 2011b, p. 14). This is further supported by a study done by New America that measured the use and knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. This survey determined that teachers in 45 states were not being trained on how to best teach students from diverse backgrounds (n.d.). To successfully teach all students, not just those who most closely reflect the mainstream, teachers must have the knowledge, disposition, and skills to effectively implement and assess a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ware, 2006).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study is to explore and examine the perceptions and experiences of teachers in a suburban high school regarding their stories and experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy. The study consisted of six tenure and non-tenure teachers located in a Midwestern suburban high school. This study's unit of analysis is the past and current experiences and perceptions of teachers' of culturally relevant pedagogy in a suburban school district with an increased population of diverse students. For the purpose of this study, the definition of culturally responsive pedagogy is one that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 16–17). Further, this study defines and determines that Gay's framework of culturally relevant teaching has a fluid movement between Ladson Billings' (1994) culturally relevant pedagogy, hence establishing that one cannot occur satisfactorily without the other in regard to the needs of diverse students' academics. Narrative inquiry is defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as research that is "expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (p. 70). As this approach grew from a storytelling tradition, it is fitting that as my research tells the stories of tenured and non-tenured teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy, narrative inquiry is most appropriate.

## **Research Question and Sub-questions**

The research question is, what are the stories of teachers' of culturally responsive pedagogy? The sub-questions are:

- a. What are the underlying themes identified in the stories of teachers regarding their preparedness of culturally relevant pedagogy in their pre-education programs?

- b. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and professional development?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review of the literature is to explore and connect the central issues about the research questions. To be able to understand how an increasingly diverse student population can be better served through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), it is important to identify how teachers view their perceptions and experiences in relation to how they are taught in culturally responsive ways, since these findings have implications for schools of education and teacher professional development. These experiences and expectations of teachers can vary through the understanding of what culturally relevant pedagogy is and is not and its benefits to students' academic success, their pre-service teaching experiences, and professional development opportunities available in schools.

#### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy has a long history of research, even before Ladson-Billings (1994) coined the term. Au and Jordan (1981) asserted that knowing the difference between school and informal learning is crucial in facilitating students' academic success. This is specifically applicable to culturally relevant pedagogy as "the context of school learning is often different from that of informal learning and often unrelated to the child's culture. Bringing the relevance of the text to the child's own experience helps the child make sense of the world" (pp. 149–150). This concept illuminates the importance of the teacher as a bridge between home-community and school cultures.

Cazden and Legget (1981) also observed that teachers need to recognize differences in student learning styles and understanding by stressing that teachers should be actively involved in their students' learning styles. Further, Macias (1987) examined the Papago

Indian tribe's learning environment and found that there was a correlation between home culture and a student's academic success. If culturally competent teachers, regardless of race, can learn enough of the student's cultural context and behaviors, they can structure the curriculum to be an effective facilitator of student learning. Further, it is noted that each focused on the broader concept of culture rather than the ethnic diversity of race.

With research occurring without a definite term, Ladson-Billings (1994) began to link that race and economic class, combined with the feeling of connection to a student's community, school, peers, and teachers, were all critical factors in a student's success in their education. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy should be defined and demonstrated as teaching that empowers students intellectually, socially and emotionally (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant pedagogy also demands using culture as an instrument to provide knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is a theory that allows teachers to build a connection between their home and school lives while meeting the teaching standards set by the district and state. This marriage of home culture and school culture occurs when experienced teachers build supportive relationships with students and facilitate classrooms that value differences and invite cultural variations into the curriculum (Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, the knowledge students bring to the classroom represents their reserve of knowledge, which are products of the students' home cultures and life experiences (Moll & Gonzalez, 2001).

Through her inquiry research on African American students and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching, Ladson-Billings (1995) was able to determine that "students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge

the status quo of the current social order” in relation to their White peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). Once students understand their own cultures, teachers can empower their students to identify inequities, challenge social norms, and solve problems in their community, city, state, and world through sociopolitical consciousness. This broader perspective of the world allows students the opportunity to critique what is considered the norm, what is wrong with said norm, and to change the world through social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 466). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (1995) determined that the more teachers put into teaching and bonding with their students, the more they excelled. Conversely, teachers need to teach their students about their culture and incorporate it into their lessons to allow them the ability to embrace and perpetuate their “cultural integrity.” This is crucial to diverse students’ academic success as it allows students to see their culture as valuable and builds pride in it, almost as a “vehicle” for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467).

Further, in her research, Ladson-Billings showed that when teacher investment in good teaching practices and a students’ lived experiences intertwine, teachers are afforded a perspective that helps facilitate a classroom setting conducive to their diverse students’ overall academic success. In 2009, Ladson-Billings continued to maintain that culturally responsive pedagogy is “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically [because it uses] cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). By using a culturally responsive teaching practice in their classroom, teachers see culture as a strength, which can be used effectively to enhance academic and social achievement of diverse students. This is further supported in Gay’s (2002) work, entitled “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” in which she confirmed Ladson-

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

An educator cannot have culturally responsive pedagogy without culturally relevant teaching and vice versa. Ladson-Billings' call for a pedagogical change over 25 years ago has driven educators and researchers to determine what students of diversity need in order to be academically successful. By daring to ask what was right about students of diversity and their needs rather than looking at the "wrongs," she determined that diverse students can find success and explored how this success was being found in individual classrooms through culturally relevant teaching practices.

### **The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

All students, regardless of socio-economic status or cultural background, deserve access to education that is challenging, appropriate, equitable, engaging, and robust (Tomlinson & Javrus, 2012). Thus, the only way to transform schools into an equitable experience is to include the stories and cultural realities of each student by making teachers communicatively competent across cultural categories. Ladson-Billings (1995) provided a name, context, and direction for the growing body of research. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which has also come to be called culturally responsive pedagogy (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Gay, 2000), culturally appropriate pedagogy (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally compatible instruction (Vogt et al., 1987), culturally congruent pedagogy (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and now culturally sustaining pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012), has become one of the most popular and enduring conceptualizations of the needs of diverse students. Regardless of nomenclature, the goal of this pedagogy was to

create a program that effectively put theory into practice, thus addressing the scholarship-practice gap by creating a paradigm that could not only be effectively carried out in one setting, but also replicated in order to change the educational landscape (Ball, 2016; DeAngelis, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Singh, 2011). Ladson-Billings (1995) envisioned a pedagogical entity that would encompass culture (across categorical differences), pathways toward achievement for all students, and social justice or sociopolitical consciousness. This pedagogy would ultimately “produce students who can achieve academically, and produce students who demonstrate cultural competence” (p. 474). She wanted students to have “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75).

The main push behind culturally relevant pedagogy in its original form is the ability of teachers to connect learning ideologies with a richer understanding through an appreciation for culture (Ladson-Billings, 2014). It is predicated on the idea of first empowering students by acknowledging their cultural norms, focusing on their potential, and nurturing them to become leaders who are intellectually stimulating, emotionally competent, politically educated, and socioeconomically aware by introducing and presenting scholarly information through multiple lenses (Thompson, 2016). More specifically, Gay (2010) described the process of being culturally relevant or responsive as encompassing five components. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities. It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies

that are connected to different learning styles. It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages. It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. This enriches content and assists students in making information meaningful in order to encode it and process it at deeper levels. In addition to this, teachers who are culturally responsive embrace the following traits and practices (Hsiao, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

While culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on how students achieve academically, demonstrate cultural competence, and the understanding and critiquing of the existing social order, Django Paris provided a more recent addition to the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy and the need “to honor, explore, and extend” the cultural foundations of students (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Building on the work of Ladson-Billings (2014) and Gay (2000), he expanded on culturally responsive teaching and developed a new perspective for culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is an approach that takes into account the many ways learners' identity and culture evolve by “seek[ing] to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling,” as well as “support[ing] young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, pp. 93–95). This approach seeks to sustain and cultivate the culture of communities that have been affected by structured inequality. By combining Ladson-Billings and Gay's culturally responsive pedagogy with Paris's theory, teachers can intertwine culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching to design a student-centered curriculum and promote cultural pluralism.

In 2012, Paris and Alim proposed that culturally sustaining educators do not just draw on students' culture; they also sustain it, whether seen in static culture (e.g., heritage ways and home language) and/or evolving culture, thus allowing culturally sustaining educators to help students develop a positive cultural identity while also teaching math, reading, problem-solving, and civics. Here is where we see a conflict between the works of Ladson-Billings (2014) and Gay, as Paris (2012) critiqued culturally responsive teaching by arguing that the relevance of culture and curriculum cannot guarantee that students will be prepared to be academically successful and be prepared to live in an ever-changing diverse society.

Further, Paris and Alim (2012) expressed that culturally sustaining practice “has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers” (p. 87). This is an important note to make during this time of social unrest and injustice as schools increase racial segregation and students are grappling with racially motivated occurrences between themselves and the greater society. Paris and Alim, in an interview with Ferlazzo (2017), stated that it is not as much looking at the differences and similarities between culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) and culturally relevant pedagogy; it is more about “the ways CSP can contribute to the ongoing work of educational justice that CRP and other asset pedagogies have forwarded. CRP continues to guide our work, even as we continue to develop needed pedagogical theory and practice” (para. 8).

In 2014, Ladson-Billings reflected on the findings of Paris (2012) and the history of her theory on culturally responsive teaching. In the article, “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a.” Ladson-Billings (2014) argued that because of important and dynamic advancements in research of this topic, it was time for a “remix” of her original theory and recognize its place within culturally sustaining pedagogy developed by Paris (2012). In this

article, Ladson-Billings (2014) stated that “culturally sustaining pedagogy uses culturally relevant pedagogy as the place where the ‘beat drops’”; it does “not imply that the original was deficient” but instead speaks “to the changing and evolving needs of dynamic systems” (p. 76). She determined that Paris and Alim produced a critical turn in what people think culturally relevant teaching is by showing the benefits of incorporating “the multiplicities of identities and cultures that help formulate today’s youth culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). Eisner (1993) further supported Ladson-Billings (2014):

Curriculum development as a form of educational research is also likely to be influenced by an expanding vision of the forms of understanding schools can foster. Film, video, narrative, dance, music, the visual arts, as well as more proportionally formulated descriptions of events all have the potential to reveal aspects of the world we want students to understand. (p. 9)

By not focusing on the distinctions of one’s race or ethnic group, Paris and Alim’s work propels educators to think about “the global identities that are emerging in the arts, literature, music, athletics, and film,” which then directs educators to look at “the shifts of identity [as it moves us] toward a hybridity, fluidity, and complexity never before considered in schools and classrooms” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82).

Storey (2019) stated that the “underlin[ing] notion that popular culture is the site where our taken-for-granted interpretations of the world are made: what we ‘know’ about the world is primarily formed through our interactions with popular culture and turned it into a learning experience” (p. xvi). Cornel West stated, “Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions such as families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries (television, radio, video, music)” (1993, para. 5). Through this, educators cannot allow “Common culture [to], increasingly, undertake, in its own ways, the roles that education has vacated” and must think about “how

youth make meaning of, negotiate, resist, and remake popular culture.” This then leads to helping them form new “cultural practices [that] are a force in shaping and reshaping that world” (Dolby, 2003, pp. 258–261).

Collectively, Ladson-Billings (2014), Gay (2000), and Paris (2014), through their research and building of theory of culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy, allows one to understand the need to promote culturally beneficial approaches to diverse students as alternatives to popular deficit-oriented teaching methods. The pairing of the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy positions the languages, cultures, and identities of students as barriers to learning when they need to be seen as crucial to their academic success. While these scholars’ thoughts are not identical, they share a common goal in ensuring students see themselves, their experiences, and their communities reflected and valued in the content taught in school.

### **The Case for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Though there have been some successful models of cultural relevance or response, Ladson-Billings (2014) stated that it has also been misused, misapplied, and mislabeled over the years, thus reducing it to “the idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting ‘diverse’ images makes one ‘culturally relevant’” (p. 82). Each of these things are surface actions of cultural acknowledgement and do not add to a deeper level of cultural understanding. Ladson-Billings (2014) discussed her struggle with the inability to maintain and control the very meaning of a concept she was instrumental in creating once it is introduced into the classroom by an individual teacher. Thus, this struggle called for Ladson-Billings (2014) to call for a “remix” of the culturally responsive pedagogy that would honor the original purpose set forth in 1995, while also

acknowledging that change is constant in the educational sector, as well as in individuals and cultural spaces. Ladson-Billings (2014) agreed with Paris (2012) that CRP should grow with the times, shifting from what they describe as the “golden age” to an updated and dynamic model of culturally sustaining pedagogy. This new pedagogical model would also factor in the recent research focus on teachers working to create critical thinking, global minded citizens (Agbaria, 2011; Miller & Slocombe, 2012).

This shift in thinking is important, as Villegas and Lucas (2002) stated that the process of learning involves teachers guiding students through “questioning, interpreting, and analyzing ideas in the context of meaningful issues” (p. 2). Further, Paris and Alim (2014) explained that the word relevance was not a strong enough term to reflect the goals of CRP and did not necessarily support continuity in learning and practice. Thus, the name needed to transform in order to reflect the multifaceted and dynamic aim of the concept. The goal of CSP is to create a pedagogical system that is culturally informed, relevant, student-specific, dynamic, linguistically centered, and sustainable through time, space, and experience. This system would be led by educators who are culturally appropriate and open to continued growth, understanding that the system would continue to flow with time and through encounters with new students and colleagues.

This process, which should be instilled through teacher education programs (Ladson-Billings, 2014), would promote multiculturalism by employing paths specific to each cultural community (McCarty & Lee, 2014) through the use of culturally relevant teaching.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Just as research had driven the thinking of Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (2000) traced the origins of culturally relevant teaching to the 1970s when Abrahams and Troike (1972)

posited that teachers must understand and learn about their students' cultural differences to use them as an agent of learning. Although it was in slight contrast to the origins of culturally relevant teaching, Geneva Gay (2018) offered a broader conception of culturally responsive pedagogy to also look at the "paradigmatic shift in the pedagogy used with non-middle-class, non-European American students in U.S. schools. This is a call for the widespread implementation of culturally responsive teaching" (p. 25) that addresses the multiculturalism found among students in classrooms.

Building on the foundation laid by previous scholars, including Ladson-Billings (1994), Geneva Gay (2000) developed a framework with a stronger focus than culturally relevant pedagogy that directed attention to teachers' strategies and practices in a classroom of diverse students. In 2000, Gay coined the term 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" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Further, Gay's notions of culturally responsive teaching insisted that a different pedagogical model was needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups. Gay explained that culturally responsive teaching is both routine and radical:

routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans. That is, it filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master...radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes. (p. 32)

Culturally responsive teaching can also be described as a pedagogy that embraces ethnically diverse students' strengths, such as their cultural knowledge, frames of reference,

performance style, language ability, and prior experiences (Gay, 2000). Therefore, as Gay (1992) stated:

Education must be specifically designed to perpetuate and enrich the culture of a people and equip them with the tools to become functional participants in society, if they so choose. This education cannot progress smoothly unless it is based upon and proceeds from the cultural perspectives of the group of people for whom it is designed. Since all Americans do not have the same set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, values, and norms, a single system of education seems impossible to serve everyone....[Educators] must accept the existence of cultural pluralism in this country and respect differences without equating them with inferiorities or tolerating them with an air of condescension. (p. 35)

This can be shown through how teachers educate their students through the understanding and knowledge of the students' cultural experiences, perceptions of their ethnicity, and their cultural features to help facilitate teaching.

By building on these foundations, and with the use of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies, teachers can learn methods to teach to each individual student's strengths. Gambrell (2017) stated, "problems will come when we ignore identities of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and social class. Ignoring these key characteristics of students' lived experiences is detrimental to learning outcomes and reinforces dominating narratives" (p. 1). Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching is necessary for connecting the cultural knowledge of students, their style of performance, and their previous experience to the knowledge of academics to validate what the students already know. Therefore, culturally responsive teachers teach cultures to their students, which helps them reflect on the communities that they come from and the communities that they can encourage to grow. Through this process, the teacher plays an important role in mediating academic and social curriculum.

Gay (2002), further postulated that diverse students “have been expected to divorce themselves from their cultures and learn according to European American cultural norms. This places them in double jeopardy—having to master the academic tasks while functioning under cultural conditions is unnatural...to them” (p. 114). If a researcher thinks about students of color and their current lack of academic success, it can be assumed that because of the predominance of White educators and White curriculum, it would be very difficult for diverse students to find social, cultural, and academic success. She also suggested that to remove this burden is the responsibility of the culturally responsive teacher. However, a problem with this is that teachers need to be prepared by culturally responsive teaching in their teacher education program before they enter the classroom. With classes and pedagogical study, teachers would gain vast, critical knowledge about cultural diversity and learning styles, design and implement culturally relevant curriculum, and learn how to build classroom communities that are a critical factor in diverse students’ academic success. Ladson-Billings (1994) stated, “these cultural denotations are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (pp. 17–18).

Culturally responsive teaching also focuses on understanding and knowing that students identify their cultural strengths to promote a sense of well-being and achievement within their academics. When scaffolding on students’ cultural and personal cultural strengths, it motivates them to access previous knowledge and beliefs. In most cases, culturally responsive teaching builds students’ capacity to handle complex problems. By using newly available materials and connecting them with experience, students learn from what they know to a more complex state.

In addition, culturally comprehensive teaching understands and considers all the cultures represented in the classroom by knowing each of the students and making the classroom inclusive of all cultures. Thus, the teacher needs to provide clear expectations to the students and to avoid misinterpreting cultural differences as misbehaviors (Gay, 2000). According to Ladson-Billings (2001), another critical factor is that teachers should seek out an understanding of the various cultures represented in their classrooms through conversations with parents, students, and community members. Developing cultural competence is not a simple act of reading one article and having one conversation; it is about becoming immersed within the society that surrounds one's students.

When it comes to culturally responsive teaching practices, there are several characteristics that assist in making learning more appropriate and effective. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the validity of the cultural customs shared by several ethnic groups. Moreover, it considers whether different approaches to learning are necessary and worthy in formal learning. Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching is fundamental because it creates a link between school experience and home and between lived social-cultural realities and academic abstraction (Gay, 2000). In addition, culturally responsive teaching uses strategies that fit and match the teaching style of the individual teacher, demonstrating that culturally responsive teaching is crucial to student learning. It depicts a crucial role in appreciating their culture and the cultural heritage of others.

According to Ladson-Billings (2014), "Cultural competence refers to the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture" (p. 75). Further, cultural competence includes resource materials in all subjects and multicultural information disseminated in schools.

Culturally responsive teaching practices consider every student's cultural customs; thus, it ensures that the content is worthy and fits in all cultures of the students. Banks and Banks (2001) supported Gay's findings when stating that, teachers [need to] acquire the knowledge, values, and behaviors needed to work effectively with students from diverse groups "[they] also need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help students from mainstream groups to develop cross-cultural knowledge, values, and competencies" (p. vi).

Culturally responsive teaching is comprehensive, empowering, and transformative. Teachers who use culturally responsive teaching practices develop emotional, intellectual, political, and social-cultural references when teaching skills and knowledge. Teachers teach the whole child as they maintain the student's cultural identity while emphasizing the importance of academic achievement. Culturally responsive teaching practice empowers students in being successful learners in the future through initiative, academic competence, and self-efficacy. Further, students should believe that they are able to succeed in any task as long as they have motivation and perseverance. Nonetheless, teachers need to be ambitious and show support to the students in their academic success. Ultimately, they assist their students to become successful by providing resources, personal assistance, celebrating collective and individual achievement, and retraining attribution (Gay, 2000).

In 2002, Gay detailed that culturally responsive teaching and providing teachers various academic options in their pre-service education programs would give them the tools to improve their diverse students' success in academics. Conversely, Milner (2003) posited that most teacher education programs offer one or two multicultural education courses. In light of this lack of exposure to diverse populations and the absence of intense study and reflection, teachers may rely on stereotypical conceptions of diverse students to inform their

work. Ladson-Billings (2014) stated, “If we are to help novice teachers become good and experienced teachers to become better, we need theoretical propositions about pedagogy that help them understand, reflect on, and improve their philosophy and teaching practice (p. 83). But, she also said, “the very coursework that comprises teacher education fails to take up notions of culture and learning in robust and substantive ways” (Ladson-Billings, 2011a, p. 14).

In her 2002 study, Gay primarily looked at African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American students and how they can learn and retain knowledge more successfully if they are taught to understand the differences between cultures and learned experience. She argued in “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (2002) that in order for teachers to be prepared to teach culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, they must saturate themselves into the cultures of their students to understand their needs and educational requirements so that they can understand the educational requirements of their diverse students. Ladson-Billings (1995) agreed, stating, “In the midst of discussions about improving education, teacher education, equity, and diversity, little has been done to make pedagogy a central area of investigation” (p. 2). Popkewitz (1991) also discussed the gaps in teacher education, both on the collegiate level and from lack of professional development occurring within schools concerning culturally relevant pedagogy. He wrote of the need to “re-educate” teachers to meet the needs of the rapidly changing demographics of U.S. schools.

Gay established that teachers cannot just have a surface knowledge of the different cultures; instead, they must learn extensively the realities of the students in their classroom. In culturally responsive teaching, this is “the primary source and center, subjects and

outcomes, consumers and producers of knowledge” (Gay, 2000, p. 33) and having a “deeper understanding of multicultural education theory, research, and scholarship” (Gay, 2002, p. 107). Once teachers gather this knowledge, they can convert it into the designing of culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies to help diverse students find academic success: “Teachers have to care so much about ethnically diverse students and their achievement that they accept nothing less than high-level success from them and work diligently to accomplish it” (Gay, 2002, p. 109).

Ladson-Billings (1994) supported Gay’s (2000) statement further in that “culturally responsive teachers must “believe that all students can succeed” (Ladson-Billings, p. 44). As Gay furthered her research, she added to the definition of culturally responsive teaching: “Culturally responsive teaching does not incorporate traditional educational practices with respect to students color” (2010, p. 202). By extension, this means that teaching respects the cultural diversity of different ethnicities. Culturally responsive teaching practice is transformative because it recognizes and acknowledges all students’ existing achievements and strengths. In Gay’s *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2010), she once again emphasized the term 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 [students]” (p. 31). Teachers who practice culturally responsive teaching understand that education is the need to inspire, motivate, instill values and knowledge, empower racial pride and the need for equality: “Academic achievement is shaped and built around how the learner values himself or herself” (Alim & Murphy, 2013, pp. 41–42). This is further supported by Bishop and Glynn’s (1999) assertion that culturally relevant teaching helps students

appreciate and praise their cultural backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1994) stated that culturally responsive teachers contain “an overriding belief that students come to school with the knowledge and that this knowledge must be explored and utilized in order for students to become achievers” (p. 52).

In her writings, Gay called on culturally responsive practitioners to make positive changes on multiple levels, including “instructional techniques, instructional materials, student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and self-awareness to improve learning for students” (New America, n.d., para. 4). Cultivating relationships is one of the most important elements of culturally relevant teaching as it aids teachers to “organize and structure social interactions and relations between and among themselves and their students” to encourage a diverse learner (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 54). Davilla (2003) suggested that perceptions of relationships with teachers are significant influences on student engagement, achievement, and expectations. Cranley-Gallagher and Mayer (2006) reflected on what it means for teachers to put relationships with students as a priority in their classroom. They presented four themes that they believed were at the heart of a good relationship: (1) recognition, (2) familiarity, (3) respect, and (4) commitment. It is emphasized that teacher-child relationships are essential for social-emotional and cognitive development as well as academic learning. Positive relationships between teachers and children, constructed in a context of warm, respectful interaction, are central to developmentally appropriate practice. This is especially true in developing relationships to establish a positive rapport with students. Nieto (1997) stated, “the nature and the extent of the relationships between teachers and their students are critical in promoting student learning” (p. 167). It is important to note that Gay (2010) also recognized that the emphasis on the concepts of culturally

relevant teaching have shifted over the years, as teaching was an underlying theme to curriculum; however, the focus should be switched to show that teaching should be the primary theme, with curriculum content as one of its components. According to Gay (2010):

Culturally responsive teaching: simultaneously develops, along with academic achievement, social consciousness and critique; cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange;...individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring. It uses [different] ways of knowing, understanding, and representing various ethnic and cultural groups in teaching academic subjects, processes, and skills. It cultivates cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students, and between students and teachers. It incorporates high-status, cultural knowledge about different ethnic groups in all subjects and skills taught... Thus, [it] validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by...cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. (pp. 45–46)

Through Ladson-Billing's (2014) and Gay's (2000) work on culturally relevant responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching, it is apparent that culturally relevant teaching helps educators better understand the concept of education because it provides an example of how conservative, progressive, and liberatory education can fit together.

According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant teaching (CRT) empowers students "to critically examine the society in which they live and to work for social change" (2002, p. 97). Further, according to Gay, CRT and learning recognize the legitimacy of diverse students' cultural background and its significant effect on the dispositions, behaviors, and learning strategies students need and use to be successful in their academics.

### **Issues in Culturally Pedagogy/Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Educational Understanding and Preparation**

Research has shown that despite the growing population of diverse and ELL students in American schools, pre-service teachers are not adequately prepared to effectively deal with the current reality of a diverse classroom (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hsiao, 2015;

Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2008, 2014; Renner et al., 2004; Zhao et al., 2008). The reason for this is revealed in two main concepts. First, the teaching force is not diversifying at the same rate as the student population; overall, U.S. teachers are overwhelmingly middle-class, White, monolingual English speaking, and female (Renner et al., 2004; Sleeter, 2008; Thompson, 2016; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This brings with it potential cultural, gender, and socioeconomic conflicts. Second, teacher preparation is lacking as it pertains to cultural competence (Hsiao, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Renner et al., 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and is largely responsible for maintaining the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2008). Most teacher preparation programs cover content, methods, and basic pedagogical features (e.g., content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, assessment, and professional dispositions), giving pre-service teachers the knowledge and skills needed to perform the job of teaching, but tend to treat culture as supplemental information to be focused on in one course (if even that) because it is a topic that is highly charged emotionally or politically. These programs are not, however, integrating culture within overall programmatic pedagogy (Hsiao, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2008, 2014; Renner et al., 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Renner et al. (2004) calls out teacher preparation programs, asserting that they are shirking their responsibility to assist pre-service teachers in developing as global citizens living in a diverse world, which the authors also state is causing serious harm to their future students. Due to this inadequate education, some novice teachers also employ the term culture as both the “problem and answer” to struggles and frustrations with students with backgrounds differing from their own (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Researchers have also raised concerns that, without the proper guidance, teachers can assume simplistic views of what it means to teach in culturally responsive ways (Sleeter,

2012). This concept is further acknowledged by Gay (2002) as she suggested that for culturally relevance to be successful in the classroom, teachers must be prepared during their teacher education program. Such programs would help teachers gain explicit knowledge about cultural diversity and learning styles, design culturally relevant curriculum, critically address how ethnic groups are presented in popular culture, and help teachers learn how to build classroom communities. Working from a critical and emancipatory perspective, Gay (2002) further argued that the academic success of diverse students is dependent on the culturally preparedness of educators.

Lambeth and Smith (2016) studied teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teacher education and determined that pre-service teachers "are frequently unclear about how to approach students from diverse backgrounds or they typically avoid discussions about culture and race with students of color" (p. 46). Pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching in a culturally responsive classroom were studied by Lambeth and Smith (2016). The study involved interviews and a questionnaire with a total of 21 pre-service teachers across two teaching cohorts at a teaching-centered university in the United States. The researchers did field observations in the pre-service teachers' practicum classes, and the pre-service teachers also conducted self-evaluations of their skills and knowledge acquired. The findings included two main themes: (1) Pre-service teachers felt that an education program training teachers should teach not only to accept differences in their students, but also teach best practices to teach culturally diverse students; (2) Pre-service teachers believed in the importance of student/teacher relationships through understanding their interests and personalities to aid in diverse students' academic success.

Further, in a quantitative study, Neumann (2014) analyzed teacher preparation core requirements of 302 universities in courses dealing with culturally relevant pedagogy. Using online course descriptions, he determined that CRP was not strongly represented in pre-service education programs. This suggested that “many new teachers are beginning practice with little understanding of social, democratic purposes of education, and cultural diversity and its implications for schooling” (p. 14). Hill (2007) stated, “when teachers enter the workforce, their education is far from complete” and “the first years of teaching are themselves powerful instructors, as teachers gain familiarity with the students, materials, and content that they teach” (p. 112).

In a study by Gross and Maloney (2012), they determined when pre-service teacher education, was partnered with service learning, pre-service teachers were able to understand culturally relevant pedagogy more clearly than university classes by themselves. Through interviews with the participants, the researchers were able to determine that the interviewees were able to express increased cultural competence that reinforced their desire to effectively teach all students. In addition, this model of service learning offered opportunities to experience diversity indirectly through reading books, watching videos, or directly by interacting with people from other cultures (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Furthermore, Sleeter (2001) argued that stand-alone courses do not provide a structural approach for teachers to develop culturally relevant knowledge, attitude, and beliefs and there is a need for significant developmental educational models for culturally relevant pedagogy for pre-service teachers.

Many times, classes on culturally relevant pedagogy are not taught until a professional development occurs or a teacher is enrolled in a master’s class, and by then, many teachers have already been immersed in their teaching career for years. In regard to

future teachers' education programs, teachers may take a "multicultural" or "diversity" course which is an "add on" to regular teacher education programs (Feistritzer, 2011). This can be problematic, because "the very coursework that comprises teacher education fails to take up notions of culture and learning in robust and substantive ways" (Ladson-Billings, 2011a, p. 14). A study done by New America (n.d.) measured the use and knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom; results from this survey determined that teachers in 45 states were not being trained on how to best teach students from diverse backgrounds. This lack of training can also be seen in a study by Lin and Bates (2014) as they looked at 60 Midwestern teachers to determine how teachers attempt to understand different "ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, languages, customs, values, ceremonies, and symbols of the children and families in the community in which they teach" (p. 5). Their findings determined:

teachers...are not adequately prepared to work with children of diverse backgrounds...participants in this study did not recognize that varying abilities, learning styles, and linguistic abilities are all part of diversity. Their limited understanding of diversity sheds light on how teachers can better prepare themselves in this regard. Moreover, we gained an understanding of how little perceived support there is from administration at the school and district levels in this particular community when it comes to preparing teachers to better serve all children. (2014, p. 10)

These professional development opportunities, according to Hill (2007), are not useful because the professional development workshops are mini-professional sessions that have little effect on teaching and student learning. Further, as teachers remain in the classroom longer, according to Harwell (2003), when professional development content and strategies contradict participant beliefs and previously taught skills, professional development ultimately fails and teachers return to previous teaching methods. Bruch et al.,

cited in Thompson, 2016) asserted that professional development in regard to attempting teaching reform is a simple attempt at utilizing “inputs” such as professional development, as a means by which to promote high achievement. This is shown through many individual schools and larger school districts that focus on professional development that presents culture as supplemental and still focus on students from marginalized backgrounds as disadvantaged and deficient (Thompson, 2016). Culture could be treated as supplemental in ongoing professional developments because it is not integrated nor considered as salient during pre-service education.

As Ladson-Billings (2014) suggested, “If we are to help novice teachers become good and experienced teachers to become better, we need theoretical propositions about pedagogy that help them understand, reflect on, and improve their philosophy and teaching practice” (p. 83). The education of educators is central to improving teacher quality and a teachers’ deep understanding of who they are teaching, what they need to teach, and what pedagogical practices can help in the academic success of students, notably culturally diverse students, which is all central to culturally relevant pedagogy (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). Wang, Odell, Klecka, Spalding, and Lin (2010) further supported the need for teacher educational reform of culturally relevant pedagogy: “If teacher education is central to teaching reform and to the quality of teaching and student learning...we need to invest more in the conceptual, empirical, systematic, and sustained inquiry about teacher education reform” (p. 7).

Although there seems to be a wide depth of culturally responsive pedagogy literature, empirical research on teachers’ understanding of what culturally relevant pedagogy is and is not, the perception and experiences of pre-service teacher training and professional development is lacking. There is an explicit need to affirm and refine culturally responsive

pedagogy based upon the study of the “lived experience of teachers” (Ladson-Billings, 2011b). It is time to revamp teacher education programs and professional developments aimed at diversity to provide teachers with the proper tools and ability to reach all students regardless of background or circumstance.

### **Curriculum Studies, Theory and Research: Theoretical Framework**

Maxwell (2015) defined the theoretical framework as “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 39). In regard to my dissertation study, exploration and examination of the perceptions and experiences of teachers in a high school suburban classroom, in connection with their use of culturally responsive pedagogy, I recognized that to fully understand the scope and sequence of my research, I would need to understand the inner workings and assumptions of several different theories that comprise one framework.

The first curriculum theory of my dissertation study is seen through the lens of the interdisciplinary nature of my research that lies within critical theory of schooling and curriculum in relation to Marx and capitalistic society. It is directly assumed that education prepares individuals for the world of work, whether it be as a carpenter, a teacher, or a doctor, which then leads to their acceptance of their position in a capitalist society. However, when looking at curriculum theory, Marx (Willis, 1977) made the claim that the education system benefits only the wealthy and White in society—those who are considered the ruling class. This is seen when Marx and Engels stated that education is “determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention, direct or indirect, of society by means of schools” (1999, p. 3). Further, they stated that society “ha[s] not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that

intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class” (Marx & Engels, 1999, p. 5).

The second curriculum theory that supports the research perspective for my dissertation study assumes that teachers are being taught effective practices of culturally relevant pedagogy. In a mixed-method study of 27 pre-service teachers completed by Kea and Trent (2013), it was determined that there is a need for multiple opportunities, whether through professional development or collegiate classes, for teachers to design and deliver culturally relevant pedagogy. With this in mind, teacher education programs and professional development must “reposition ‘culture’ at the center of all teacher preparation” (p. 93). Thus, the need for restructuring programs both at the college level and the district level, as well as curriculum revisions, are needed to meet the culturally diverse pedagogical needs of all students. This will be further evaluated through the historical changes of deficits in thinking in regard to culturally relevant pedagogy.

If Marx’s theory is true, then it infers that our education system is doing a disservice to students of diversity by not teaching to each student, but merely to the students who will benefit society. Because of this, and based on my own experience in education, students of diversity are being left behind in their academics. These assumptions of curriculum theory and research can be supported through critical race theory and Marxist perception, social constructivism, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

## **Critical Theories of Schooling and Curriculum: Marxist Perception and Critical Race Theory**

### ***Schooling and Curriculum: Marxist Perception***

Evidence from studies shows that schools all over the world appear to run in much the same way since they follow similar ideas and policies about education. This can be seen in an empirical study presented by Baker and LeTendre (2005). In this study, the authors presented their findings of a four-year research study conducted in 47 countries that examined many aspects of K-12 schooling. Some of the topics examined were how schools are run, what teachers teach, and how students learn these topics. Baker and LeTendre (2005) presented the results of their findings in a non-technical and accessible fashion, outlining the implications of current trends for both education policy discussions and theoretical explorations of the role of education in society. In their findings, they further discussed how world educational trends and the forces behind them will work to change and shape the possible directions education may take in the future, whether that be in a positive or negative fashion. These concepts have been formed through neoliberalism, which shares its foundation in Marx's capitalism. Thus, neoliberal educational reforms are justified by globalization, as it calls for educational restructuring to enable nations to compete in the capitalist system, moreover leading to a change in those who have been oppressed by the majority as discussed above. This can also be seen in Apple (2013):

This denial of reality leads to the trend of deadly conditions under which people (barely) survive, the lack of a meaningful future for the thousands of children...Educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of these realities (and this understanding cannot evaluate a serious analysis of political economy and class relations without losing much of its power) is in danger of losing its soul. The lives of our children demand no less. (p. 5)

Bowles and Gintis (2002) stated, “the educational system does not add to or subtract from the overall degree of inequality,” but merely mirrors and duplicates existing patterns of inequality (p. 11).

Willis (1977) used the concepts of Marxist theory to discuss how schools do not necessarily always produce compliant students, which then leads to a compliant workforce. This is referred to as “counter-school culture.” This developed concept is seen in Willis’s two-year study of two groups of boys, known as the lads and ‘ear’oles, in a school called Hammerton. Through interviews and observation, Willis built the theory that the education system is not only a site of manufacturing cultural replication, but that it also becomes the site of the beneficial replication of capitalism. Willis wrote, “Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and a partial penetration of those structures” (1977, p. 175).

Expanding on these thoughts, Willis also proposed how educators can continue to break through the “norms” of society by doing the following: (1) Understand and acknowledge the competitiveness in education merit; (2) Learn to communicate with students in a way that does not belittle their social and cultural identities; (3) Be able to discuss students’ cultural norms, even if it is things like fighting, sexism, or rebellion; (4) Determine the limits of educational pedagogy and paradigms in reaching students that are different from the mainstream students and make changes (1977). This is crucial in looking at how culturally relevant pedagogy is used in the classroom and its benefit to the academic needs of diverse students.

In a more recent view of Karl Marx’s theory, one can look at Jean Anyon’s writing (1980) in which she discussed the claim that education and the income and occupation of a

students' parents are correlational. She discussed four classifications of schools and how the students are educated differently: "working-class schools," "middle-class schools," "affluent professional schools," and "executive elite schools" (Anyon, 1980, p. 32). Although I conducted my research in a suburban school setting, it can fall under the definition of the "working class" school, as seen in Anyon's description. In the "working class" school, students are taught to follow procedures, as well as have very little personal interaction with teachers and other students; furthermore, students are to do what the teacher—the authoritarian figure—asks of them without question, and their work is "often evaluated not according to whether it is right or wrong but according to whether the children followed the right steps" (Anyon, 1980, p. 73). For the students attending this type of school, this is the exact opposite of what is needed to break from the cycle of poverty. As Green (1982) stated, "maintaining a society of quiet ones, of mere 'job-holders' and consumers" is "to rear a generation of spectators...not to educate at all" (p. 5). Much of the student population of this type of school are in need of a different approach to learning to be socially and academically successful, which can be seen in culturally relevant pedagogy, as discussed later in this chapter.

Students need the ability to build relationships with both teachers and students, as well as to have the ability to think critically. Furthermore, students in these "working-class" schools need to be able to use their own experiences to make connections to their education and have a voice as to what they learn and how they will learn it. This can also be seen in Knoblauch's "Literacy and the Politics of Education" as functional literacy or the "readying people for the necessities of daily life" (Lunsford et al., 1990, p. 3). If schools continue to teach this way to this population of students, I fear that the cycle of poverty will not be

broken, as they have not been taught to achieve more than what their parents have in their daily lives, whether that be in an urban, suburban, or rural school setting.

### **Schooling and Curriculum Theory: Critical Race Theory**

A discussion of culturally responsive teaching is incomplete without a discussion of critical race theory in regard to schooling and curriculum. The first principle states that racism is normalized and embedded in the practices and policies of all institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1999). The second principle states that racism can be understood by listening to the voices of those who experience it. Through the stories of people of color, teachers can become more aware of the existence and the harmful impact of racism on a student's emotional, social, psychological, academic, and economic needs.

As this study encompasses the social sciences, it is important to look at Horkheimer's critical theory paradigm, which also applies. Critical theory is described by Seiler (n.d.):

it is necessary to understand the lived experience of real people in context....Critical theory approaches examine social conditions in order to uncover hidden structures....Critical theory teaches that knowledge is power. This means that understanding the ways one is oppressed enables one to take action to change oppressive forces. Critical theory makes a conscious attempt to fuse theory and action. Critical theories are thus normative; they serve to bring about change in the conditions that affect our lives. (p. 1)

Simply stated, "critical theory is oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory [which is] oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Critical theories aim to dig beneath the surface of social life and uncover the assumptions that keep us from a full and true understanding of how the world works" (Mills, 2000, p. 22).

A further sub-category of critical theory is one that deals with race, which is connected with the previous discussion of Marxism's perception of education. The research indicates that, in the United States, discussions based on race/ethnicity and education focus

primarily on social class. Several researchers believe that improvement in an individual's social status will also improve their achievement in school; however, there is a determinant factor of race that affects this theory. McCarthy (1990) asserted that many theories about race are inconclusive and do not adequately address the inequality experienced by racial minorities. Giroux (1992) discussed specific theories that dismiss the power relations being at the core of education, academic success, and race.

This can further be perceived in DeCuir and Dixson's (2004) study as they studied the experiences of two African American students in a wealthy, predominantly White school in the southeastern United States. These two students' counter-stories were studied because they felt that, although they were from upper and middle-class families, their race prevented their voices from being heard, and they were ignored. Their experiences, as shown in this study, are an illustration of the issues of race and racism in education. Their stories "transcend most school contexts and demonstrate the subtlety and the pervasiveness of racism....their stories show the insidious nature of racism and how it manifests in a variety of educational contexts" (Decuir & Dixon, 2004, pp. 30–31). Through studies such as this, educators, students, families, and communities are able to devise strategies to counteract, resist, and/or preempt the practices and policies of critical race theory within our schools and its effect on students of diversity. Kellner's "Toward a Critical Theory of Education" also complements theorists like Marx, as mentioned above, in regard to critical race theory:

[to] reconstruct education [is] not to fulfill the agenda of capital...but to radically democratize education in order to advance...in cultivating learning that will promote the development of individuality, citizenship and community, social justice, and the strengthening of democratic participation in all modes of life. (2003, p. 14)

Another perspective on critical race theory is seen in Vaught and Castagno's (2008) work, as they define it as "racism not as a singularly individual pathology, but as a collective, structural phenomenon that is pervasive, adapts to socio-cultural changes, is permanent, and must be challenged through scholarly efforts that disrupt assumptions of colorblind neutrality" (p. 546). Vaught and Castagno reverted back to a historical stance as they discussed how the origin of critical race theory was in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, as its purpose was to "redefine equality, not as a fair and just distribution of resources, but as the absence of formal, legal barriers that separated the races" (2008, p. 565). It is interesting to see how this theory can be seen as correlational.

In Leonardo's "Race Frameworks: A Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education," (2013), he discussed critical race theory, Marxism, Whiteness studies, and cultural studies. He analyzed the previously mentioned topics while also including a chapter on his own theory of "race ambivalence" (2013, p. 154). For instance, Leonardo acknowledged that critical race theory "provides a deep critique of racism"; however, he also showed that CRT is not a complete theory because it does not clearly define the idea of race (2013, p. 5). Further, he saw critical race theory as a way to make "race visible, maps its operations, and enters its interpellations. It is ambivalent not about these commitments, but on the issue that racial distinctions should be an endless ride without a destination" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 157). Marxism is further seen in critical race theory, and in the current study, as Whiteness is considered the aspect of freedom, the aspect of property, and the aspect of achievement. Thus, critical race theory, in the context of education, requires the researcher to look through a diverse lens to recognize that culturally responsive teaching supports critical race theory and vice versa.

## **Schooling and Curriculum: Social Constructivist Paradigm**

For this study, the social constructivist paradigm is most suited. Social constructivism emphasizes that learning occurs as an exchange of cultural meanings in a social context. As seen in McLeod (2018), Vygotsky was the first to examine what social constructivism was in four main constructs: “1. Emphasis on culture affecting cognitive development. 2. Emphasis on social factors contributing to cognitive development. 3. Emphasis on the role of language in cognitive development. 4. Emphasis that adults are an essential source of cognitive development” (McLeod, 2018, paras. 5–9). Further, social constructivism, as seen by Vygotsky, emphasizes the need for social transformation that can be found in education. It also reflects that individual development is acquired from social interactions within which cultural meanings are shared by the group and are eventually internalized by the individual (Richardson, 1997).

As time went on, the social constructivist paradigm was rooted in the developmental work of Piaget (1971) and Kelly (1991) as “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 16). Constructivism is “based on scientific study about how people learn.” It further purports, “that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (Mertens, 2009, p. 16). Thus, if the environment in which an individual was to learn was altered, the knowledge they may construct would change as well (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Conversely, as seen through Asmussen and Creswell (1995), constructivism “constructs scenarios for specific problems” (p. 270). This also “leads researchers to look at the complexity of views rather than a narrow meaning

of experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). In my study, this is relevant as I look at why teachers are not receiving the proper professional development or pre-service education to best meet the needs of their diverse students.

Constructivism is further said to be subject to the traditional teaching and learning theory. Social constructivism theory includes fundamental ideas of knowledge, learners, and learning because objective knowledge is existent and can be realized. Furthermore, the acquisition of knowledge is not accepted or duplicated, but rather is a constructive process that is composed by the individuals’ interaction and recognition to allow learners to actively seek and find information from their personal experiences and construct understandings.

In regard to culturally responsive pedagogy, this is fitting because many researchers and educators support such perspectives recognized by the value of multiple cultural viewpoints, life experiences, and how people learn. Not only do researchers and educators support these perspectives, but it also helps in the construct of experiences based on these perspectives. This can be seen in Gay’s (2002) work, *Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching*: “when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (2002, p. 107). As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters. In Audrey Gray’s (1995) study, entitled “The Road to Knowledge is Always Under Construction: A Life History Journey to Constructivist Teaching,” she followed a teacher, Pat, through a five-year study of his teaching career and how he implemented the constructivist paradigm into his classroom. Through Pat’s story, Gray (1995) recognized that constructivism plays an integral part in

how curriculum is viewed and implemented in the classroom. Thus, if the environment in which an individual was to learn was altered, the knowledge they may construct would change as well (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). This is further supported by Apple (2018), who asked, “Can schools change society?” and further posited that because of cultural activists, such as Freire (1971) and Freeman (2017), practicing educators at all levels of the educational system and social movements can initiate this change. Similarly to other theorists, such as Lipman (2012), Apple (2018) can see this initiative of change through “relationships among culture, politics, and the economy, and on the ways in which educational sites and institutions can be worked on—and worked with—that have been developed during the past decades of intense conceptual and political progress” (2018, p. 687) through education. This concept will aid in making learning experiences meaningful and relevant to the learner’s life and in the development and growth of the learner as a whole person (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Mertens (2009) also further described social constructivism as those who seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that social constructivists look for the complexity of views rather than narrow meaning into a few categories or ideas. They rely on the participants’ views of the situation through interaction with others and through the historical and cultural norms of their lives. Social constructivists generate a theory or a pattern of meaning, unlike post-positivists, who start with a theory. During the research process, social constructivists form questions that are general and broad in order for the participants to construct the meaning of a situation. They tend to focus on specific contexts of the participants’ lives at home and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. The framework being used and the researcher’s approach varies when using interpretive

frameworks. Research focuses on understanding specific issues or topics such as racism, sexism, identity, hegemony, hierarchy, unequal power relations, or inequities in society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The procedures are sensitive to the participants and context. The researcher makes it a point not to further marginalize the participant, and they provide reciprocity by giving or paying back the participants in the research. In social constructivism, researchers primarily focus on the teller of the stories, as they are co-constructors of knowledge.

For this study, schools are the socio-cultural settings where teaching and learning take place and where “cultural tools,” like culturally relevant pedagogy, are needed to best teach students of diversity. This is further seen as the reality of the learning process, and its components are “constructed” on the basis of certain individual preconceptions, and new knowledge is integrated into the existing structures (Siebert, 1999). Teachers need to construct knowledge with action through increased experience in pre-service and professional development programs, as shown through the understanding of teachers’ stories and the themes that appear.

### **Growth of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as an Agent for Educational Reform and Change in Schools and Curriculum**

According to Valencia (2010), deficit thinking is the thought process of a person or situation focusing on that which is negative. Deficit thinking posits that it is a common way of thinking that affects the way in which we exist and construct in the world. Portelli (2013) posits:

Differences from the “norm” are immediately seen as being deprived, negative, and disadvantaged. It never questions the legitimacy of what is deemed to be normal nor does it consider that differences may actually go beyond expected norms. It

discourages teachers and administrators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, disposition, and actions. Deficit thinking leads to stereotyping and prejudging. It marginalizes certain people on the basis of misinformation and misconstructions. (p. 213)

These deficit theories have led to the growth of research in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy studies and curriculum. There are two predominant deficits in theory in regard to culturally relevant pedagogy and student academic success. The first deficit brings focus to the IQ deficit theory. “According to the IQ deficit theory, students of under-represented and lower socio-economic backgrounds do poorly in school because they are lacking in intelligence” (Jensen, 1969, p. 35). In Jensen’s qualitative study, he determined,

80 percent of the variance in IQ has a genetic basis; a little more than half of this genetic variance accounts for genetic differences between families, and a little less than half accounts for genetic differences between siblings within the same family. Only about 20 percent of the variance in IQ is attributable to non-genetic or environmental factors. (Jensen, 1973 as cited in Sowell, 1973, p. 35)

In the development of this argument, Jensen “provide [d] evidence for a pattern of differential IQ, with under-represented and lower-class group members generally attaining lower scores on IQ tests than their majority and middle-class counterparts” (Villegas, 1988, p. 9). Jensen further explained that intelligence is inherited. Therefore, since IQ is considered the better predictor of scholastic performance than any other measure of the student, they concluded that the lower achievement rate of diverse children is due to genetic deficiencies and not the way the student is taught. Therefore, this deficit would say that a diverse student who is not successful within the classroom is due to DNA, not due to the pedagogy used to meet the needs of diverse students. This is nullified in a study done by Turkheimer, Haley, Waldron, Donofrio, and Gottesman (2003), who discussed the research done on “623 sets of twins that were 43% White, 54% Black, and 3% other. The sample included a high

proportion of impoverished families” (p. 624). The findings of this study suggested that intelligence cannot be “partitioned into independent components attributable to genes and environments [because] it is too simple for the dynamic interaction of genes and real-world environments during development” (Turkheimer et al., 2003, p. 627). Instead, it is environmental differences that cause differences in observed intelligence through the socio-economic status in which the child was raised.

The second deficit is that of socio-cultural factors, also known as the cultural deficit theory.

According to this theory, the difficulties of minority students are socio-cultural in origin rather than genetic. Specifically, deficiencies in the home environment (e.g., “disorganized family life,” “inadequate sensory stimulation,” “inadequate child-rearing practices”) deprive minority children of the types of experiences they need to do well academically. (Moll, 1986, p. 104)

This deficit can be nullified by Coleman’s “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (1966) as he gathered data from over 3,000 schools, 600,000 students, and thousands of teachers in the United States. In this study, Coleman determined that the association between a student’s home life and their school performance is actually driven by disparities within the school rather than familial influences. Thus, Coleman believed that uncovering the determinants of a student’s academic success needs to not simply be within family background deficits but a separate factor from any school effects. A more recent study completed by Norman (2013) determined by observing three seventh-grade science classrooms (two regular and one advanced) and then interviewing ten seventh-grade African American students, that “the majority of the seventh-grade African American science students were out-performing the remaining ethnic groups, although they receive free-

reduced meals” (p. 107). Thus, Norman showed the theory of socio-cultural factors as a nullified theory for this particular study.

Due to deficit perceptions, the public schooling experience for most racially marginalized students has become a negative experience that limits their social class mobility (Reay, 2004). This repeated pattern of deficit thinking reproduces negative experiences. Valencia (2010) defined deficit thinking in the context of schools as blaming students for their own internal deficiencies. Hence, “the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal defects or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest...in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (p. 7). According to Martin, Smith, and Williams (2018), a deficit mindset places the responsibility of social class inequalities on a group of people rather than on the system of class oppression that created inherent advantages and disadvantages. Deficit thinking has become more prevalent when designing programs and considering campus needs for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds (McKay & Devlin, 2016). When deficit thinking is the foundation of designing a program, there is no benefit to students. While there is some difference between IQ deficit theories and socio-cultural theories, they share one common feature: both show the lack of success in a diverse student’s education in school with often viewed scientific teaching that evolved from the lack of focus on the student and their family as a reason for deficits in the student’s education.

### **Schooling and Curriculum Studies: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

According to Ford (2012), “The United States public schools are more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse and different than ever before, yet the racial and ethnic

demographics of educators remain relatively unchanged or stable” (p. 392). Osborne (1996) found that statistics indicate that the vast majority of students from diverse cultural/social groups in Western nations were not receiving a quality education and that inequality continues to expand rather than contract. Research findings suggest that some teachers lack the background knowledge, skills, and disposition to teach children from diverse backgrounds effectively because there is a limited cultural knowledge and exposure to diversity. Ortiz (2012) reported that the teaching workforce is 84% White monolingual females, 7% Hispanic, and 7% African American. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001) contended that a focus on culturally relevant pedagogy is needed in order to address cultural differences in today’s schools.

Ladson-Billings (1992) posited that culturally responsive teaching requires three components. Students must experience academic growth, develop and or maintain cultural competence, and develop a skill set that will allow them to think critically in order to challenge the society in which they live. Based on Ladson-Billings’ (1992) work, Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified culturally responsive characteristics that are necessary to educate diverse student populations:

(a) are socioculturally conscious, (b) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) know about the lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar. (p. 20)

In 2000, the National Academy of Sciences began a review of learning theory and research, as Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) created a brain-based model in the so-called student-centered approaches. Developing a knowledge base that is grounded in the

notions of culturally relevant teaching is a substantial leap forward in understanding the gap between students' experiences and histories and teachers' knowledge and expectations about what schools and classrooms are supposed to look like. In terms of empirical research, culturally relevant pedagogy revolves around the concept of ethnography, the scientific description of people and culture with their customs, habits, and differences.

The topic of culturally relevant pedagogy has been frequently criticized and has charged researchers with heightening the discussion of what effective teaching practices will give diverse students an equal education as their counterparts. First, the current debate within literature concerns "both locating efforts at social reform in schools" (Popkewitz, 1991, p. 288.) and the possibilities of "re-educating" typical teacher candidates for the variety of student populations in the U. S. public schools (Haberman, 1991a, 1991b). This is further discussed by Ladson-Billings (1995): "In the midst of discussions about improving education, teacher education, equity, and diversity, little has been done to make pedagogy a central area of investigation" (p. 467). It is noted that the need to challenge the above notions concerning the crossing of culture and teaching is not sought "solely on microanalytic or macro analytic perspective" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 466). This can be further determined by a report conducted by the AERA Panel on Research in Teacher Education, presented by King, Artiles, and Kozleski (2009):

the preparation of new teachers is only recently addressing the link between culture and learning in substantive ways. Thus, the current teaching force has had little formal preparation in conceptualizing and framing practice as cultural work and/or through a cultural prism. Professional learning must therefore assume an important role in engaging practicing teachers in examining and transforming their own practice in ways that acknowledge the critical role that culture and language play in learning. (p. 4)

Further empirical research is used to support this research study of 315 sixth to twelfth-grade students. According to Byrd, in her 2016 study of the relevance of culturally relevant pedagogy and its success on diverse student populations, she determined that “elements of culturally relevant teaching were significantly associated with academic outcomes and ethnic-racial identity development” (p. 3). Li’s (2013) study also supported this: “a cultural approach to teaching and learning has yielded satisfactory outcomes and schools are becoming more involved in the process of change” (2013, p. 137). Sharma (2015) stated, “teachers believe culturally relevant pedagogy is the best approach for educating diverse students and is appropriate because the demographics are changing rapidly in U.S. schools” (p. 1).

### **Schooling and Curriculum: Personal Reflection**

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been a topic of research in schools since Ladson-Billings (1994) first coined the term in the 1990s. Most research studies have been collected in urban school districts, leaving a gap in the understanding of how culturally relevant pedagogy plays a role in suburban school districts and the experience of their teachers. Thus, in framing my own study, previous curriculum theories and curriculum research focused mainly on the effect of culturally relevant pedagogy within inner cities, where the growth of diverse and impoverished students has been occurring for years (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 2000, 2006; Sleeter, 2001; Weiner, 2003). However, suburban districts are now beginning to see an influx of diverse students as parents look for better education and environments in which their children can learn.

This is seen on a national level through data collected from the Pew Research Center (2015): “The student population of America’s suburban public schools has shot up by 3.4

million in the past decade and a half, and virtually all of this increase (99%) has been due to the enrollment of new Latino, black and Asian students” and “Suburban and small metro counties have grown since 2000 because of gains in all the drivers of population change. They gained 11.7 million new residents by drawing former residents of U.S. urban and rural areas” (p. 1). In the setting of my study, the school demographics of underserved students has shown a rapid growth of under-represented students in this district in the past five years (a 23% increase), while the White population has steadily decreased by 9% (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

As schools rapidly transition, teachers need to reexamine what constitutes best teaching practices, through curriculum theories and research, for diverse students and how these practices can encourage success in the classroom. Without this concept continuing to be researched and implemented in inner cities, and now being discussed and researched in suburban schools, it could “mean failure or mediocrity for too many of our students, as the data related to racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic achievement gaps demonstrate” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, para. 3). Rapidly changing demographics demand that we engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systemic process of professional development to prepare all educators in the school to function effectively in a highly diverse environment, which is not occurring with rigor in our suburban schools. Thus, Sleeter (2001) stated that there is a significant need for more research in the field of curriculum study:

[There] is a clear need for evidence-based research that documents connections between culturally responsive pedagogy and student outcomes...a need to educate parents, teachers, and education leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom...[and] a need to reframe public debate about teaching, especially teaching in diverse and historically underserved communities. (pp. 578–579)

Without research in curriculum studies, such as my own, the assumption is made that the idea of teaching to the masses, or the dominant culture of society, will continue, rather than teaching to the student and their experiences and their needs to achieve academic success.

### **Gaps in Research**

While research has made progress in exploring the theoretical framework of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2012), there continues to be a disconnect in the preparation of educators, both in their pre-service education and professional development (Gay, 2010). Although the conceptual frameworks of multiculturalism and cultural responsiveness have been solidly explored, defined, and developed, facilitation of cultural responsiveness can still remain a vague, abstract, and elusive concept (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012). Therefore, educators must continue to explore detailed pedagogical tools and strategies for fostering sustaining pedagogies since this is an area with which many teachers struggle (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006; Paris, 2012).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I highlight the data analysis measures in relation to the narrative interpretations that I drew from the data, as well as the methods used for participant selection and data collection. This framework helped me to understand connections between findings and stories as they related to the participants' experiences and perspectives as a whole. The purpose of using the framework was to understand the stories and related narrative themes from the stories of the participants and their perceptions of the research questions. The narrative inquiry framework is particularly useful to structure the stories of participants so that detailed insights could be extracted from among the storied data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted the stories that we tell are reminiscent of our remembered past selves as well as our current selves. They stated, "all these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Consequently, this study considered the past experiences of participants' pre-education and/or higher education, their professional development, and their ability to understand and use culturally responsive teaching practices. This structure provided me with the tools to cultivate an in-depth understanding of the participants' stories and to better understand the research questions. This is important, since in education, the past, present, and future reveal extreme interplay as teachers function in their role of culturally responsive teaching.

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this narrative, qualitative research study was to explore and examine the stories of teachers in a suburban high school regarding their preparedness to teach culturally diverse students. The study includes six teachers located in a local Midwestern

suburban high school. This study's unit of analysis are these teachers' stories regarding their academic and professional preparation to enact culturally sustaining pedagogies in a suburban school district with an increased population of diverse students. This analysis draws from Ladson-Billings's (1994) perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy "that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 16–17), as well as from Paris and Alim's (2012) subsequent theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Creswell and Poth defined narrative as research that is "expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (2018, p. 70). As this approach grew from a storytelling tradition, it was fitting that my research tells the stories of tenured and non-tenured teachers' experiences of culturally responsive pedagogy, narrative inquiry is the most appropriate approach to my research. To support this study, the goal and findings of the study are driven through one central question and two sub-questions:

### **Research Question and Sub-questions**

The research question is what are the stories of teachers' of culturally responsive pedagogy? The two sub-questions are:

- a. What are the underlying themes identified in the stories of teachers regarding their preparedness of culturally relevant pedagogy in their pre-education programs?
- b. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and professional development?

In addition to these research questions, it was important for me, as a researcher, to remain open to the possibility of other questions arising or the need to explore more topics as they were raised by the participants and the findings through data analysis. This design flexibility is one of the "hallmarks of qualitative methods" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 135).

This qualitative narrative study examines the perceptions and experiences of teachers about their knowledge and use of culturally relevant pedagogy through their own stories. By focusing on their stories, beliefs, and assumptions, I was able to hear their voices about how culturally relevant pedagogy has or has not been a part of their past and present educational experiences and the extent to which they have been prepared to teach diverse students. This study brings new understanding for the need of educators to have the educational training to best reach their diverse students' academic needs.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the design elements of the research study beginning with the rationale for qualitative research, which includes the traditions and narrative theoretical perspective that guided the methodology. Secondly, I describe my role as the researcher followed by a description of the setting, sampling strategies and participants, data collection, and analysis procedures. Next, the details of the data sources are explained with a description of how they were used, organized, and analyzed. Finally, I outline the limitations and issues of validity and reliability, and delineate ethical considerations needed when working with human subjects.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a method of investigation and analysis utilized in numerous academic disciplines with a variety of methods. According to Stake (2010), qualitative research “relies primarily on human perception and understanding” (p. 11). Hammersley (2013) and Merriam (2014) discussed its strength as the ability to describe how people experience a particular research topic, which can include their belief systems, behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and relationships. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) further defined qualitative research as “a multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its

subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret...in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 2).

Since data are usually collected through contact with people in the settings in which they live and work, in-depth interviewing is the most common way to collect data.

The researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know, be known, and trusted by them, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed. This material is supplemented by other data such as [artifacts], school memos and records, newspaper articles, and photographs. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 23)

Through the experiences and perceptions of teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy, I looked at and interpreted the data of their stories. Glesne and Peshkin further discussed this: “Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect” (1992, p. 71). Thus, for this research study, qualitative inquiry was best suited, as the experience of the participants were a particular focus of narrative inquiry, a type of qualitative research. “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, [circumstances] in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). Qualitative methods, such as narrative inquiry, are uniquely suited to address complex multicultural issues because they investigate people’s experiences directly (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, responses given by the participants allow the researcher to better understand the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants (Patton, 2015), thus allowing the qualitative researcher to understand the experiences or perspectives of others without trying to limit them to preset categories or assumptions. Qualitative data simply recounts the circumstances and describes

what has occurred (Patton, 2015). Through interviews, I gained knowledge about the stories of teachers and their perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Qualitative researchers believe that “multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality. Reality, consequently, is ‘socially constructed’” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 40). Qualitative research also utilizes a theoretical tradition in which the researcher builds a foundation for the study by shaping research questions and developing study design and methodological procedures. These beliefs helped in clarifying the variety of qualitative methods used in this type of research as it also contributed to the aim of the study, as each tradition revealed the perspective I conducted through my research.

Qualitative inquiry, because it is both inductive and flexible, tends to lend itself to producing results that make sense to the people who are studied and others, generating comprehensible and credible results, and offering formative evaluations that aim to improve current practice and collaborate with/among participants in the study (Maxwell, 2015, pp. 22–24). It is a way of using a research question to gather detailed data from a small number of participants and to help to form conclusions (Patton, 2015). Also, because qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed...[it is important to understand] how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). For this study, since the experiences and perceptions of the participants are distinct and personal, the generalization of analysis is not the objective of this research study. Qualitative inquiry is flexible, which allows for the processes to unfold naturally.

## **Narrative Inquiry**

For this qualitative study, the constructivist narrative was most suited. In regards to narrative as a guiding framework, I turn to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as they give the following definition:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories...Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience....To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

The purpose of the narrative can also be seen through Phillion:

Narrative is about understanding the complexities of experience, honoring the subtleties of experience, and understanding the dynamics between individual experience and contexts that shape experience. Narrative reaches out to the past, is rooted in the present, and turns an eye to the future. (2002, p. 21)

She further stated that narratives are a “a close-to-life, intimate quality, a reflective, reflexive quality, a flexible, fluid quality, and contextualized, historicized quality, which enables inquirers to explore and portray the shifting, evolving, often paradoxical nature of experience” (2002, p. 16). Further, narrative inquiry, as seen through Clandinin and Connelly’s work entitled “Narrative Inquiry,” is seen as:

a relatively new qualitative methodology, is the study of experience understood narratively. It is a way of thinking about, and studying, experience....Narrative inquirers think narratively about experience throughout inquiry. Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field texts (data) to interim and final research texts. Commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place create a conceptual framework within which different kinds of field texts and different analyses can be used. Narrative inquiry highlights ethical matters as well as shapes new theoretical understandings of people’s experiences. (2000, p. 1)

Thus, by collecting data of the participants' lived experiences, past and present, I was able to understand their view on the phenomenology of culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms.

Through researchers like Hattie (2003) and Marzano (2003), it is important to recognize how “the knowledge and pedagogical ability of teachers is the most important factor for student success across subject areas and age groups” (p. 13). Thus, researchers who have studied narrative inquiry have recognized that teachers have a unique set of skills that can be used as a framework, due to their personal knowledge in their field and the types of stories that are told by educators and classrooms (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Three types of narratives to be seen in my research are as follows.

[Sacred stories are] the official version of classroom events as presented in formal curriculum documents and published school communication. Sacred stories are the ideal to which teachers and students strive. “Cover stories” are told by teachers to explain events that happen in the classroom. Teachers may tell cover stories to colleagues, parents, or even researchers. “Secret stories” reveal the real happenings of the classroom. Usually only the teacher and students are privy to these secret stories. (LaFollette, 2019, p. 14)

“Sacred stories” were not necessarily demonstrated in the findings of this study, as it was concerned more with the official positions of school policy and curricular standards. However, the “cover stories” that teachers tell other professionals, administrators, or even researchers were evident in the analysis, which highlighted these stories through the interviews and document analysis. Finally, there are the “secret stories,” which are the real and true experiences of the teacher. These stories were evident within the interview with the participants' stories being told in a safe community of trusted fellow professionals but reveal the more detailed and difficult day-to-day interactions. It is these stories that I uncovered utilizing narrative inquiry methods, including interviews as a trusted fellow professional

working collaboratively with teachers. Without these stories, collegiate institutions, school districts, and teachers cannot hear the voices and stories of teachers and their experiences and perceptions, or lack thereof, of culturally relevant pedagogy. As I used narrative inquiry, I hoped that hearing these “secret stories” would enhance my understanding and analysis of data to reveal teachers’ personal practical knowledge and the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy for diverse learners.

Further in this research study, the uncertainties, apprehensions, and understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy were heard through, as Clandinin et al. (2006) referred to, the participants’ secret stories. By being a both narrative inquirer and a participant observer within the setting of my research, it was my intention to experience some of the participants’ secret stories and to analyze what they may reveal about teachers’ experiences and stories in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy. These stories were evident in the interviews, with the participants’ stories being told in a safe community of trusted fellow professionals and revealing the more detailed and difficult day-to-day interactions. It is these stories that I uncovered utilizing narrative inquiry methods, including interviews as a trusted fellow professional working collaboratively with teachers. Without these stories, collegiate institutions, school districts, and teachers cannot hear the voices and stories of teachers and their experiences and perceptions, or lack thereof, of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Connelly and Clandinin explained the skills and unique experiential knowledge of educators as “teachers’ personal practical knowledge” (2000, p. 25). In this research, “teachers’ stories” (Clandinin et al., 2006) illuminate some of the complex and interconnected attributes of teachers’ personal perceptions and experiences and the use of culturally relevant pedagogy. Here, in this research study, “teachers’ stories” are the

narratives that individual professionals tell to describe their lived experiences. These are related to narrative inquirers during qualitative interviews. Narrative, with the stories of teachers and their experiences and perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy, is suited as a form of personal experience methods, as it is “a way to permit researchers to enter into and participate with the social world in ways that allow the possibility of transformations and growth” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 425). Schwandt (as cited in Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) explained the importance of conducting research that reflects one’s view of the world:

Our constructions of the world, our values, and our ideas about how to inquire into those constructions, are mutually self-reinforcing. We conduct inquiry via a particular paradigm because it embodies assumptions about the world that we believe and values that we hold, and because we hold those assumptions and values, we conduct inquiry according to the precepts of that paradigm. (p. 9)

The narrative and story incorporate a different textual form and a different way of understanding and making meaning. Narrative researchers situate these individual experiences in time and place by attending to stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This narrative inquiry focuses on collecting “stories of experience” as the primary source of data...and interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, “Narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience” (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005, p. 156).

### **Practitioner Inquiry**

According to Campbell and McNamara (2009), there are a “plethora of terms” (p. 10) that have been used to define practitioner research. Practitioner research has been described in “any number of hybrid forms” (McWilliams, 2004, p. 113). In the field of education, the term practitioner research can also be known and defined through interchangeable terms such as teacher-research, practitioner inquiry, action research, and action learning (Cochran-Smith

& Lytle, 2009). For example, Kemmis (2006) referenced the terms “practitioner research” and “action research” interchangeably; furthermore, Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) mentioned, “action research, or as we name it practitioner research” (p. 3). This is an important factor as we look at the historical framework later in this dissertation.

Cordingley (2008) acknowledged the different terms, stating that practitioner research is “often falsely differentiated,” “variously described,” and its “strategies have a great deal in common with each other” (p. 46). Researchers such as Kemmis (2006) and Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) note that practitioner research must have a humanitarian purpose as shown through “a matter of addressing important problems in thought and actions, in theory and practice...in and for our communities, in and for our shared world” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 471). While various traditions exist in the practitioner research movement, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) defined practitioner research as the systematic, intentional study of one’s professional practice that applies to each.

*Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation* (2009), written by Cochran-Smith and Lytle, established that the improvement of school and educational reform does not occur through politicians, parents, or even researchers, but in teachers and other educational practitioners who are willing to make the changes needed in the educational success of diverse students. This can be seen in practitioner research, including teachers, administrators, university faculty, community-based educators, and activists. Within this thinking, Cochran-Smith and Lytle stated that if educators are to be the agent of change in the educational world, practitioner research should be considered as an essential key for extensive educational reforms and for the development of teacher knowledge and practice.

There is a broad scope of practitioner research as educators contribute to their growth and the growth of others in their field, in the knowledge of skills and understanding of teaching and learning to enact the school setting as an agent of change. This is shown by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) when they argued that practitioner research should be “collaborative in its nature and transformative in its intent and action” (p. 7). Further intentions of practitioner research are to benefit professional practices (Dadds & Hart, 2001), to improve practice (Middlewood et al., 1999), and for meaningful change (Gitlin et al., 1992).

### **Reflection: Methodology of Practitioner Research**

Zeichner (1999) posited that practitioner research is an important and epistemic pathway to understand pedagogy, and is the “single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research” (p. 8). Practitioner research is grounded in an inquiry stance; because the questions that this study answers were grounded in inquiry stance, practitioner research is appropriate for this study (Campano, 2009). These questions seek to shed light on the perspectives and experiences of teachers on the use and preparedness of culturally responsive pedagogy and relevant teaching. Since practitioner research also assumes that all participants in an inquiry group are simultaneously teachers, learners, and researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), this is consistent not only with the framework of inquiry as a stance, discussed later, but also regarding my choice to acknowledge and make visible the multiple identities I inhabit in this research as a teacher, scholar, and inquiry group facilitator and participant. Taking an emic, insider perspective allows me an “understanding of the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

## Characteristics of Practitioner Research

Practitioner research is often considered an unusual formal study format, because most practitioners do not experience research as something outsiders do or as a self-initiated method. This is seen by a shift in research production as practitioner research as local, relevant, and under the practitioner's control. Akin (1991) suggested:

a feature that distinguishes this type of investigation sharply from conventional research is that the researcher...becomes a different professional as the research process unfolds, and as a result of it. His or her practices are modified continually because of the inquiry. (p. 9)

Within the last 25 years, several researchers have influenced the advancement of practitioner research through the act of inquiry and reflection, such as Stenhouse (1975) and Schön (1987). Stenhouse (1975), Carr and Kemmis (1986), and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) asserted that educational situated inquiry and research should be immersed in the culture of the school setting. Within this setting, another important feature of practitioner research is the collaboration among teachers for the primary purpose of changing and improving their educational practices collectively. In this way, practitioner research offers a rare opportunity for teachers to build inquiring communities that produce and debate knowledge that is relevant within the context of their practice.

These concepts are further seen in Handscomb and MacBeath (2003) when they discuss practitioner research as utilizing the school expertise of the practitioner and collaborating with others to share educational practice through inquiry where the professional learning centers on a learning focus. This is further supported by Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009), McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins and McIntyre (2005) who stated that teachers need to examine learning as a life-long occurrence. Practitioner

research is a powerful way for the investigation of educational practices in order to reconceptualize and transform such practices (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2010).

The characteristics of practitioner research focus on practitioners themselves, usually with a lens of evaluation and improvement (Campbell & McNamara, 2009). Practitioner research is approached through individual teachers or groups of teachers, where the study is conducted in an educational setting and is often supported by a university to improve classroom practice and results in shared learning (Merritt, 2003). Rather than serving the purpose of improving educational practices through traditional academic research, practitioner research focuses on societal injustices or equity problem, as noted by Anderson et al. (2007), who stated that “Practitioner action researchers are seldom studying a problem in their classroom or school divorced from their own personal and professional beliefs and actions” (p. 32). Therefore, practitioner research benefits teachers by contributing to their growth of knowledge, skills, and understanding of the link between school improvement and teachers’ professional learning.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) also discussed five main themes that are apparent when looking at practitioner research development over the last several years. They are as follows:

- (1) addressing the concerns of equity, engagement, and agency;
- (2) developing new conceptual frameworks;
- (3) continuing the development of inquiry communities;
- (4) the use of practitioner research to shape educational reform and policy; and
- (5) re-forming research and practice in universities. (p. 5)

All five of these themes, taken as a whole, can help educators learn and maintain the best practices of teaching that promote student learning and help in implementing educational reform with success. It is interesting to note that Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1990) opinion

of reforming research and practice in universities, just ten years earlier, stated that teachers do not need more findings from university-based researchers, but more dialogue with other teachers that will generate theories grounded in practice.

This is further supported by Greenwood and Levin (2000) who stated it is essential when discussing university research that it should host a social change, specifically in the form of social research connecting theory with practice. While they acknowledged that some social scientists do integrate practice and theory effectively, they note that the bulk of university-based social research “has a decidedly anti-praxis orientation” (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 86). They saw practitioner research, specifically action research, as the “answer to the dilemma” if social research is “to achieve valid results, bring about useful social change, and reconnect universities to the larger society” (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 92). Fitchman (2016) also stated that practitioner research is relevant and crucial for today’s researcher in education, because it calls for:

(1) The calling for teachers’ implementation of evidenced-based practices, (2) The requiring of teacher education programs to provide evidence of their teacher candidates’ impact on K-12 student learning to earn program accreditation, (3) The growing need for robust teacher leaders, (4) The demand for powerful mechanisms for principal professional development, and (5) The increasing complexity of the teacher educator’s work. (p. 1)

While practitioner research exists in “any number of hybrid forms” (McWilliams, 2004, p. 113) and is often “variously described” (Cordingley, 2008, p. 46), all variables of practitioner research share the following characteristics: they view the practitioner as researcher; professional contexts are the sites of study; there are blurred boundaries between inquiry and practice; community and collaboration are important constructs; and they act to

make new knowledge public and have this new knowledge lead to improved practice (Letts, 2013).

### **Definition and Characteristics of Practitioner Inquiry**

Cochran-Smith and Lytle defined inquiry as a stance where “knowledge, practice, communities, democratic purposes, and social justice ends” and “the asserti[on] that educators’ experiences share a sense of the practitioner as knower and agent for educational and social change” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, pp. 36, 126). Further, they stated that inquiry as a stance needs to be “a worldview, a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice that carries across professional careers and educational settings” (2011, p. 20). This is further shown by Zeichner and Conklin (2008) as the pedagogy of teacher educators is directly correlated to the experience of teacher education, awareness of deliberative and immediate pedagogic reasoning through self-study provides multiple vantage points that can advance a more holistic understanding of pedagogy.

As the implications of practitioner research and inquiry have broadened over the years, it has been determined that educational research is a series of “continuous professional learning,” and it is postulated that by engaging in methodical inquiries into one’s own practices, the possibilities for improvements in practice are made real. The emergent notion is that teachers should adopt “a ‘researcherly’ disposition” (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010, p. 27). Through this, they can be and should be both the teacher and the researcher. Practitioner research differs from other, more traditional forms of education research because it is undertaken by practitioners as part of their daily work.

A critical characteristic of practitioner research/inquiry is built on reflective practice. Practitioner-based inquiry is a process in which teachers, tutors, lecturers, and other education professionals systematically reflect on their institutional practices to produce assessable reports and artifacts. Through reflection, as practitioners, teachers can determine what issues within education need to be investigated through their teaching and how they assess their research studies. In practitioner research, the main idea of reflection “is understood as an enhanced perceptual and cognitive ability—one in which reconsideration, consultation with self, recapitulation, and self-criticism blend with insights largely stimulated through confrontation with the obligations immanent in the research methodologies adopted” (Murray, 1993, p. 191).

When looking at inquiry as a stance, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011) established that it rests on three foundational ideas and four critical pillars. To begin, they look at the foundations of inquiry as a stance as

a theory of action grounded in the problems and contexts of practice and in the way practitioners work together to theorize, study, and act on those problems in the best interests of the learning and life chances of students, educational institutions, and communities. Second, inquiry as a stance is a counter hegemonic notion that repositions the collective intellectual capacity of practitioners at the center of educational transformation. Third, inquiry as a stance assumes that the knowledge and expertise needed to transform teaching and learning resides in the questions, theories, and strategies generated by practitioners and in their interrogations of the knowledge, practices, and theories of others. There are four key dimensions of the construct of inquiry as stance: knowledge, practice, communities, and democratic purposes. (p. 20)

Within inquiry, it is important to recognize that inquiry as a stance does not look at the formal knowledge of teachers but rather the practitioner’s use of practical knowledge that is bounded by the situation and setting in which they are situated. This is in contrast to many researchers’ views of knowledge, because in inquiry as a stance, the knowledge produced by

the practitioner researcher is considered crucial to educational transformation. This leads to reflection on the second dimension of practice as transformative as well. In this, the practice of the researcher is “about inventing and reinventing frameworks for imagining, enacting, and assessing daily work in educational settings” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 21). This paradigm is further seen in what practitioner researchers choose to do. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011), stated that practitioners’ actions:

[are] understood to be informed by their nuanced sense-making about learners, languages, culture, race, class, gender, literacies, disciplinary content, social issues, power, institutions, neighborhoods, histories, communities, materials, texts, technologies and pedagogies. In this sense, practice is deeply contextual, but also and always theoretical and interpretive. (p. 21)

The third dimension is community, which is a crucial factor for enacting inquiry as a stance. This dimension is not only about the individuals, but also about how these individuals work towards the collectivities of “pairs, groups within or across schools, face-to-face or virtual networks, school-community partnership groups—that are linked to larger change efforts” (Cochran-Lytle, 2011, p. 22). As Wood (2007) stated, over the last 10 years, “the concept of learning communities has become extremely common, with some iterations of communities becoming catalysts for change, and others a new infrastructure for the status quo” (p. 701). Thus, in a practitioner inquiry community, inquiry as a stance is about practitioners working together to “uncover, articulate, and question their own assumptions about teaching, learning and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 21). This construct “permits closer understanding of knowledge-practice relationships as well as how inquiry produces knowledge, how inquiry relates to practice, and what teachers learn from inquiry within communities” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 250). This is supported in a literature review by Wilson and Berne (1999), which posited that successful models of

practitioner inquiry allowed teacher interaction and building collegial relationships between colleagues.

The fourth dimension of inquiry as a stance is situated within democratic purposes and social justice. These purposes demonstrate that learning communities are not just tools for more effectively producing the nation's labor force and thus preserving its place in the global economy. However, these purposes also emphasize that learning communities are not intended to elevate the role of practitioners in educational change efforts and to solidify their professional status in research. When practitioner researchers take an inquiry stance, "they are engaged in work both within and against the system—an ongoing process, from the inside, of problematizing fundamental assumptions about the purposes of the existing education system and raising difficult questions about educational resources, processes, and outcomes" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 152). This supports practitioner inquiry because it is assumed that as students' academics rise and practitioners become more effective, practitioners generate knowledge from their practice as they challenge research about education in today's democratic society. This is seen through Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2011) "inside-outside" approach that has been at the forefront of the framework of the practitioner research movement. Subsequently, dilemmas of practice in practice—how interactions between teacher educator and student shape teacher learning and attempts to forge deeper understandings of practice—are aspects of research about teacher education that are rarely considered (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Dinkelman, 2003; Johnston, 2006; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), which is crucial to the research and understanding process.

## **Working the Dialect of Practitioner Research and Inquiry**

Over the years, like many other researchers in this field, Cochran-Smith and Lytle have always been working for a university; they never were simply practitioners or researchers. They were working for “negotiating the borders of educational practice and research by wrestling with the daily dilemmas of practice and simultaneously theorizing the emerging domain of practitioner research” (2011, p. 19). Their emphasis on research lay with the challenge of the inequities between advantaged and disadvantaged students regarding educational opportunities, resources, and academic success. However, through their work, they also began to question the way that practitioners “were being positioned in the discourse about teacher education and professional development and with the way university-generated knowledge was assumed to encompass everything there was to know about teachers, teaching, and reforming the schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Reflecting on their studies and writings, they determined that although they had assumed that they had covered “everything we need to know about teaching and learning, there was not a single citation to teachers’ research or to insiders’ perspectives and knowledge about the issues being discussed” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 17). Once this omission had been acknowledged, through a prominent feature of practitioner research and inquiry, reflection, they determined that it was their work with teachers and their collaboration with them that heightened the understanding of the gap between the research of universities and the research of teachers in their daily lives. In this, they determined that change did not lie within the university but within the teachers’ discourse and the reality of daily life in schools as agents of change.

Thus, through learning, collaboration, and reflection, Cochran-Smith and Lytle began to think about their research as “working the dialectic” (2011, p. 19). From this, Cochran-Smith and Lytle determined that the term dialect referred to

the tensions and presumed contradictions between a number of key ideas and issues that have to do with research, practice and knowledge, in particular, the assumed dichotomy between research and practice and the assumed disjuncture between the role of the researcher and the role of the practitioner, (2011, p. 19)

Thus, inquiry and practice can work together in and are shown to have “a reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationship” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 19) allowing the role of practitioner and researcher through inquiry as a stance to be dialectically interwoven (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

### **Reflection on the Positionality of Practitioner Research and Inquiry**

As has been discussed elsewhere, most research on culturally responsive pedagogy occurs within the urban setting, and little research has been done to see how teachers’ experiences and perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy affect the diverse and traditionally underserved students in a suburban high school. As the numbers of diverse and impoverished students continue to grow in this setting, it is important to determine the “hows” and “whys” of teachers’ experiences in pre-education and professional development studies. It is also important to establish what suburban districts are or are not doing to help teachers find quality teaching practices to meet the academic needs of all their students.

When I arrived five years ago in my first suburban setting as a teacher, I knew that things would be different. Coming from being a teacher in an urban setting (alternative and juvenile facilities), I had crafted ways of becoming a culturally responsive and relevant teacher, not because of classes I had taken, but through reflection, observation, mentors, and

learning from my students about what they needed for success in their academics. Coming to a suburban setting, the myth that I had lived with for 15 years was that suburban kids were the kids I had been taught in my pre-education classes: White, middle-class, and sponges of knowledge. It was not very long before I realized that even suburban schools had the same issues as I had seen in my own experience as well as in my research. The main discrepancy was that these issues were not as high in volume as I had seen in the urban setting. As I am entering my fifth year in this setting, I have watched our underserved student number increase every year and our White student population decrease every year; thus showing that a change is occurring in the demographics of our students that our teachers are not prepared for, nor has the district done anything to support the needs of staff and students with these changes.

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) discussed, the idea of immersion into the setting of one's research is needed. By immersing oneself into the setting of their research, not only is the researcher's voice heard, but also the voice of all participants is equally heard in collaboration as the study grows to form a theory, is reflected upon, and works in the best interests of that community. Also, in regard to the setting of the research study, Cochran-Smith and Lytle discussed how a researcher must continually work through a cycle of questioning, observing, acting, and learning. If inquiry plays a crucial part in teaching practices, research cannot be about just one activity or occurrence; it must be thought about in the mindset that "every site of professional practice becomes a potential site of inquiry" (2009, p. 121).

Throughout the years, I have observed my district act like these changes are not coming, and for some under-represented students, these changes are already here. Last year, I

proposed a change in our professional development at the high school. I wanted to begin doing professional development on diversity and equity in the classroom to begin the process of seeking change for my staff and for the academic success of all my students, knowing that many of them had little to no training when it came to the academic needs of our diverse students. This is supported through Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2006):

[T]he preparation of new teachers is only recently addressing the link between culture and learning in substantive ways. Thus, the current teaching force has had little formal preparation in conceptualizing and framing practice as cultural work and/or through a cultural prism. Professional learning must therefore assume an important role in engaging practicing teachers in examining and transforming their own practice in ways that acknowledge the critical role that culture and language play in learning. (p. 4)

It began by forming a diversity committee of like-minded staff members who saw the changes that were occurring at the high school and, who, like me, wanted to seek change to better help in serving diverse students' academic needs. Through collaboration, we were able to determine that there was a definite need for change in how our teachers were currently trying to teach, as there was little diversity occurring in most classrooms. Without knowing it, my committee had become practitioners and researchers, along with me, as we began to make resource lists of diverse and equitable lessons, articles, books, videos, and research studies that would help our staff in the process of a changing their mind frame. Early last year, the diversity and equitable professional development began and has continued into this year. As teachers recognize their bias, their experiences, their stories, and their need for change in their classroom and the curriculum that they teach, I can see the roots of change begin to be planted into the culture of our school and how we teach our students through culturally responsive teaching and relevance to their lives. Practitioner research is an empowering and developmental tool for teachers as an agent for change.

As the seed had been planted by previous work in my school, I continued to lean on my committee, as many of them were participants in my study, to continue to “work the dialectic” of inquiry and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) by generating insider knowledge that is simultaneously deliberative, contextual, social, and political (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Thus, my positionality as both researcher and practitioner in the context of my research, is integrated in much the same way the work of teaching itself integrates these roles. My inquiry as a stance perspective allowed me to take advantage of the experienced insider insights and understandings that I brought to this study by expressly informing my analysis and interpretation of the data that were produced. Through involvement in practitioner research, teachers can improve their practice and make their voice heard by systematically, and perhaps collaboratively, providing evidence from their teaching. This evidence can guide and inform policy, which ultimately empowers teachers by making them central to the educational decision-making process.

As I think about the future impact of my research, I turn to Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s *Beyond Certainty: Taking an Inquiry Stance on Practice*, in which they stated that academic knowledge and curriculum should be about “building, interrogating, elaborating, and critiquing conceptual framework that links action and problem-posing to the immediate context as well as to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (2011, pp. 51–52). I am seeing the impact of change through my school’s current passion and drive for the change within my own building. As my research continues, I am interested in how my work will begin to impact the other schools in my district, the central office, other suburban districts in the Kansas City area, and nationwide. As Cochran-Smith posits, educators need to stop being sheep (the scripted curriculum) following the shepherd (teacher-proof materials). There

needs to be a new wave of thinking in suburban schools with the understanding that curriculum and teaching practices are not a “one-size-fits-all,” and a change in mindset needs to occur to ensure the education and success of all students.

### **Design of the Study: Context of the Research**

This section outlines the specific plan for the research study. It begins with a thorough description of the setting and sampling procedures and then explores each narrative data source of documents and interviews. Finally, I describe the steps for narrative data analysis.

Previous research has focused mainly on the effect of culturally relevant pedagogy within inner cities, where this growth has been occurring for years; however, suburban districts are now beginning to see an influx of diverse students as parents look for better education and environments in which their children can learn. This is seen in data collected from the Pew Research Center which stated, “The student population of America’s suburban public schools has shot up by 3.4 million in the past decade and a half, and virtually all of this increase (99%) has been due to the enrollment of new Latino, black and Asian students” (Kent, 2013, p. 17). As schools rapidly transition, teachers need to reexamine what constitutes best teaching practices for diverse students and how these practices can encourage success in the classroom. Without this concept continually being researched and implemented in inner cities, and now being discussed and researched in suburban schools, it could “mean failure or mediocrity for too many of our students, as the data related to racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic achievement gaps demonstrate” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, para. 1). Rapidly changing demographics demand that we engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systematic process of professional development to prepare all

educators in the school to function effectively in a highly diverse environment, which is not occurring with rigor in our suburban schools.

I conducted my research in a former rural town that has seen significant growth in the last 10 years. According to the 2021 census, Grain Valley shows an annual growth of 1.7% and in the past ten years, the city has grown close to 17%. The average household income is around \$78,000 with a poverty rate of close to 5%. The median age of the population of the town in which the research took place is 34 years for male and 35 for females. According to the most recent American Community Survey, the racial composition of Grain Valley reflects the following ethnicities: White (89%), Multi-racial (5.41%), Other Race (3%), Black or African American (1.50%), Native American (1%), Asian (.32%). In this city, there are eight total schools made up of 4,571 students: five elementary, two middle schools, and one high school that has an alternative school attached to its population and testing numbers. Of these numbers, 612 students receive special education services, 523 are on free/reduced lunch, and 32 are ELL. In the past five years, the student population has grown by 11%. In regard to educators in this district, the numbers are as follows: 304 teachers (69 with Bachelor's degrees, 215 with Master's degrees, and 21 with Specialist degrees). Additional information for these educators by race is as follows: Black (1), Hispanic (3), Multi-racial (1), and White (299).

My research occurred in one Midwestern suburban high school in this district, which is located outside a larger metropolitan area. Within this school, the teacher demographics are as follows: 85 teachers (20 with Bachelor's degrees, 56 with Master's degrees, and 9 with a Specialist degree). The ethnicities of these teachers break down to one Black, two Hispanic, and 82 White.

In regard to the school population data, there are 178 students who receive special education services and 11 ELL students. Further, the school has a growing population of African American students (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). This growth can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1***Student Demographics*

Academic Year	Total Student Pop.	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Am Ind./ Alaskan	Multi-Racial	Hawaiian/PI	White	Free/ Reduced
2020-21	1,357	14 (1%)	50 (3.6%)	76 (5.6%)	8 (.5%)	40 (3.0%)	8 (.5%)	1,161 (85.6%)	22%
2019-20	1,311	17 (1%)	36 (2.7%)	88 (6.7%)	7 (.5%)	45 (3.4%)	5 (.3%)	1,113 (84.9%)	23%
2018-19	1,256	11 (.9%)	34 (2.7%)	109 (8.7%)	3 (.2%)	62 (4.9%)	2 (.2%)	1,035 (82.4%)	21%
2017-18	1,277	14 (1.1%)	28 (2.2%)	111 (8.7%)	5 (.4%)	63 (4.9%)	0	1,056 (82.7%)	19%
2016-17	1,198	6 (.5%)	22 (1.8%)	102 (8.5%)	6 (.5%)	49 (4.1%)	2 (.1%)	1,011 (84.4%)	21%

## **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Creswell's (2013) comprehensive qualitative text presents three considerations of a purposeful sampling strategy: deciding the participants or sites, selecting the sampling strategy, and determining the sample size. Merriam (2014) noted that the process for selecting a sample depends on the research question(s), the data collected, the data analysis, and the availability of resources. Patton (2015) explained that purposeful sampling involves selecting information rich cases. Patton further supported purposeful sampling, which is appropriate for this study:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230)

This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By choosing purposeful sampling, the stories and experiences of the participants are saturated in this study.

### **Sampling Procedures and Selection of Participants**

For this study, six participants from one Midwestern suburban high school were chosen based on their participation in a committee that focuses on the implementation of diversity and inclusion in the classroom, school, and district. Email addresses were accessible through the school district's email portal. An invitational email was sent out to the 16 members of this committee asking them to participate in this study.

The committee was initially formed at the high school in 2018 by an assistant principal in response to student survey data collection from the 2016–2017 school year. The

concerns that drove the formation of this committee came from the low numbers of how our students of diversity felt within our school concerning their safety, inclusion, fairness, discipline, and equity in learning.

In the beginning stages of this committee, it was open for any employee in the high school based on their interest in ensuring the diversity and inclusion needs of our students were met. Once staff had responded that they were interested in participating in this committee, a meeting was held to discuss the criteria by which the committee would proceed.

In this meeting, teachers decided that the members' role would be to offer professional development to teach staff about the awareness of diversity, inclusion, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. It was important for the growth of our students' progress that teaching practices be incorporated that encouraged the belief that all students can succeed and that teachers and students must utilize culture to impact student knowledge and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It was further noted that it was important that teachers participate in ensuring these characteristics were apparent in their classroom, and that they be comfortable with hard conversations if the committee was to be successful.

Of the 24 staff members that showed interest, 11 members decided to join the diversity committee, because they understood the increasing diversity in our school, district, and community and shared a passion to address the needs of our students. The demographics of these 11 members were as follows: four White males, two of which are part of the LGBTQ community; six White females; and one multiracial female. The team members had varying amounts of teaching experience, from two years to 30 years in the education sector in multiple departments, including special education, social work, and administration. As we

have grown together as a committee in the last three years, we have learned from each other and have discussed the need for change within our classrooms, schools, and district. Difficult topics are many times risky to discuss freely; however, through the relationships formed in this committee, there is a mutual respect and vulnerability to help bring to light the need for culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies. Because of this, I understood that the data I collected would be richer and deeper. Thus, in the words of Patton (2015):

a research synthesis [that] would involve selecting studies that are excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases...cases that manifest sufficient intensity to illuminate the nature of success or failure, but not at the extreme. (p. 234)

An email was sent to 11 members asking if they were interested in being a part of the research study, along with an explanation of what it entailed. If they responded positively, I asked them to choose a date and time that was convenient to meet for the initial semi-structured interview.

### **Participant Overview**

The participants for this qualitative study included three female educators and three male educators. All but two named themselves as White in our interviews, and the other two designated themselves as having Hispanic origins. Their teaching experience ranged from six to 33 years in variety of subject matter; there were two Spanish teachers, four English teachers, and two social studies teachers (see Table 2). In the past 35 years, there has been an evolution of teacher preparation in universities, and changes have occurred within pre-service education programs of the past and the present. However, for this particular study, it is important to understand that the field of teacher education is evolving, and the information gathered for this study pre-dated state standards, that were introduced in the last ten years.

**Table 2**

*Overview of Participants*

Name	Ethnicity	Degrees and Universities	Years in Education/Subject	Years on Diversity Committee
Ms. Nells	Hispanic (per participant's statement)	Bachelor's degree in Special Education, K-12, and English education	21 years in same district: elementary, middle, and high school (ELA, Special Education)	3
Mr. Dios	Hispanic (per participant's statement)	Bachelor's degree in secondary Spanish education from a small public East coast university located outside of Oakland	6 years high school Spanish teacher in both urban and suburban districts	1
Mrs. Qualls	White	Bachelor's degree in secondary education with an emphasis in English from a large public university located outside of the Kansas City metro area	7 years of experience teaching English in two suburban high schools	2

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Table continues

Mr. Talon	White	Bachelor's degree in Secondary Speech and Theater and English from a medium-sized private university located in St. Louis	8 years of teaching Theater, Speech, and English in rural and suburban settings	3
Mr. Theodore	White	Bachelor's degree in Secondary Teaching with an emphasis on Social Studies from a large public university located outside the Kansas City area	30 years of teaching Social Studies in both rural and suburban high schools	3
Ms. Lead	White	Bachelor's degree in Secondary English Education from a small, private university in Kansas City	Seven years teaching ELA in the same suburban school district	2

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## **Role of the Researcher**

I have spent 15 years teaching in an urban, at-risk classroom and seven years teaching in a suburban high school. My experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy was non-existent while I was earning my bachelor's degree and during my first 12 years of teaching. There were no classes offered and no professional development on how to teach students of diversity. Through trial and error, I learned how to deal with the diverse cultures of students in my classroom, and in my 13th year of teaching, I received my first collegiate class on culturally relevant pedagogy and its importance in the classroom. In my 20th year of teaching, I received my first professional development on the subject. These experiences began my quest to determine what other teachers' perceptions and experiences were concerning their stories of culturally relevant pedagogy.

It is important to note that although this study originated from my own experience and perceptions, my focus was to gather data and accurately interpret meaning from the experiences of my participants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for me to address potential personal biases and expectations by carefully reflecting by documenting my own thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. According to Patton (2015), the researcher's role is "to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both valid and nonvalid information" (p. 231). I understood that I needed to identify and document my own reflections, feelings, and biases throughout the research process, ensuring I separated my own stories from those of the participants. During the data collection of my study, I constantly turned to researcher memos and a reflexivity journal to help in recording my personal thoughts independently from the data collection and analysis of said data. Clandinin

and Connelly (2000) referred to this as the researcher practicing “wakefulness,” because as the researcher and observer, they must remain awake and alert to the possibility of bias or misinterpretation. Creswell further discussed this as, “reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings” (2013, p. 216). As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, I also ensured that in my role as a researcher, I worked on establishing trust and rapport with the participants. In the next section, I describe this progression through the data collection and analysis process.

There are several limitations to my study in regard to my positionality as a White woman, classroom teacher, and professional development educator on diversity and inclusion. Although my career choice and experiences as a classroom teacher laid the foundation for this study, the access to my setting and participants, my relationships with the participants, and my assumptions and experiences may limit my perspective as a researcher. These factors also led to the understanding that because I knew my participants, they were more open and saw me as an ally in working with them to understand their stories of culturally responsive pedagogy in relation to my own stories. To ensure that this was kept in check, I used reflexivity through journal writing in regard to my role as the researcher, my understanding of being a privileged, White woman in my field, and the personal relationships that I have with my staff, who were also my participants. I continuously recognized these positionalities through constant reflection and self-check of my biases based on these positions as I walked in both worlds. Through my research journey, I wrote consistently in my field notes to record all aspects of the participants’ interviews, using my senses to see and hear their experiences through a broader lens. I then used my reflective journal to reflect on the field notes during the interview or through the transcripts I was analyzing. These were

handwritten and kept in a bound journal; I used to the journal to expand and further my thinking about my findings, as well as navigate through my qualitative research study to acknowledge the relationship between myself as an instrument as I processed the information collected (Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

### **Data Collection and Sources**

Qualitative research is a methodology that illuminates the interpretation of the world through theories and identities, while helping researchers to surpass their initial conceptions to reveal the deeper meaning of the themes being shown through the data collection (Miles et al., 2013). In qualitative studies, data analysis is “a continuous, iterative enterprise” that “needs to be well documented” (Miles et al., 2013, p. 14). It is the process of turning observation, interviews, and documents into codes, patterns, themes, and findings. It is also the process of casting people, events, and realities into a way of meaning. This undertaking begins by first understanding the natural world through the perception of the participants’ story and allowing it to contribute to the meaning to the world or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Data are gathered in a naturally occurring setting through events to ensure the meanings discovered are accurate from the perspective of the participants. This allows the data to become visible to the researcher through data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015). Mathison (1988) described the importance of using multiple data sources and methods as a means of crystallization of the researcher’s findings, thus aiding in the validity of the study. Moreover, Denzin (1978) and Patton identified methods of crystallization as a way of checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several methods of

data collection occurred through interviews and document collection. The following paragraphs describe the strategies for collecting each type of information and the purpose each served in the narrative analysis.

### ***Interviews***

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. With this type of format, “[t]he semi-structured interview can change the order of questions, omit questions or vary the wording of questions depending on what happens in the interview. The interviewer also might add questions during the interview to probe unexpected issues that emerge” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 124). Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that most studies “rely quite extensively on in-depth interviewing” (p. 142). They can be described simply as conversations with a purpose. deMarrais and Lapan (2004) discussed how researchers use interviews when seeking detailed information about experiences. When describing the importance of interviews, Patton (2015) explained that “an interview...takes us inside another person’s life and worldview. The result can help us make sense of the diversity of human experience” (p. 426). Narrative researchers take the interview process further with the understanding that interviews can change the participants into narrators, who can relate the meaning of their experiences in a unique way. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that interviews are a critical method of eliciting narratives of experience, as participants construct their own realities.

Since interviews are “part technique, part ethics, part theory, part method, part intuition, part collaboration, and part openness to deep vulnerability,” the flexibility of using this method allows adaptations based on the etiquette, customs, and individual nature of each interview (Lodico et al., 2011, p. 43). These interviews took place in 30 to 45 minutes to

respect the participants' time. Interview responses were handwritten and recorded for bias checks and understanding, as well as to allow the participants to review their responses. These questions led to the data collection of the interviewee's past and present experiences, as well as allowing the participants and I to be reflexive in our questions and answers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 142). This data then underwent a thematic analysis of responses to focus on the stories of the study in order to produce themes of the stories and experiences of culturally responsive pedagogy.

According to deMarrais and Lapan (2004), interviews are conversations that have purpose. For the researcher, this purpose is a method to collect data that helps to address the research questions of the study through understanding the experiences of those being interviewed. Considering that my study is qualitative narrative in nature, it was fitting to look at Patton's (2015) thoughts on qualitative interviewing. He stated, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (p. 341).

Further, because of the narrative feature of my study, it was appropriate to hold face-to-face interviews with the participants to allow them to tell the stories of their experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), face-to-face interviews are best because the researcher and participant are able to clarify questions as the interview is being conducted, the researcher can verify the responses of the participants for clarity and validity.

According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative interview consists of open-ended and semi-structured questions to allow participants to describe their perceptions and experiences

openly and fully. After the conclusion of each interview, I recorded my thoughts and feelings in my reflexivity journal to help maintain my researcher positionality. For each interview, I used an interview guide (see Appendix B) that was based on my research questions (deMarrais & Lapin, 2004; Patton, 2015). The questions of this guide led to discussions of the experiences and perceptions of the participant's past and current stories of culturally relevant pedagogy. The guide reflected a semi-structured interview format that allowed me to adapt the interview to each interviewee's responses with follow-up questions or clarification of the transcript. The questions began with simple questions to help build a foundation of comfort and ease in response, I followed Patton (2015) in reserving the more complex and challenging questions until the second half of the interview.

### **Documents**

In qualitative research data collection, Creswell (2013) stated that there are a variety of ways and reasons to collect data; therefore, there are many reasons why researchers choose to use document analysis. Documents are an efficient and effective way of gathering data because documents are manageable and practical resources. Documents are commonplace and come in a variety of forms, making them an accessible and reliable source of data. Also, documents are stable, "non-reactive" data sources, meaning they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). According to Patton (2015), "documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing" (p. 377). Document analysis in a qualitative study is essential for data collection.

As a researcher goes into the field of study with the understanding of the importance of documents, they must determine the best methods for data collection. Documents in research are often used because of the many different ways they can support and strengthen research. Documents can be used by researchers in many different fields as a primary source of data or as a complement to other sources. Documents can provide supplementary research data, which is a useful and beneficial method for most research. Documents can also contain data that no longer can be observed, provide details that informants have forgotten, and can track change and development. Documents used in research can also point to questions that need to be asked or to situations that need to be observed, making the use of documents a way to ensure the research is critical and comprehensive (Bowen, 2009).

In relation to my own narrative inquiry study, acquiring multiple types of data allowed me to check and cross-check one form of data to another to determine the reliability, as well as see the types of themes that were occurring throughout analysis of the data (Maxwell, 2015). In a narrative inquiry study, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested data sources can be from journals, field notes, letters, interviews, documents, and photographs. Collecting multiple types of data helps to “gain information about different aspects of the phenomena that you are studying” (Maxwell, 2015, p. 102).

Documents are used to capture different aspects of the greater context, as well. Documents are broadly considered any “written materials and documents...captured in a way that records and preserves the context” (Patton, 2015, p. 15). In this research study, I used several documents that focused on the professional development being given in the school setting of the study, because they “reveal[ed] aspirations, arrangements, tensions,

relationships, and decisions that might be otherwise unknown through direct observation” (Patton, 2015, p. 376).

### *Documents Collected*

To acquire the collected documents, I turned to the professional development that had been occurring in the setting of the study for the previous three years. The first ongoing professional development was not a district-led initiative and occurred only within the setting. It was spearheaded by administration after receiving student survey statistics for the school years 2017–2019. This particular survey was initiated in March of 2015 as a way to obtain students’ viewpoints about their school, their classrooms, and their teachers. The primary source for the student survey questions was a resource listed on the U.S. Department of Education website. This survey program provides information on the condition of public education through the Common Core of Data (CCD) survey that is then processed through national, state, district, and school analysis. These questions, located in the Department of Education question bank, are given to the superintendents of schools, where they are discussed by the superintendent, administrators, and the diversity committee. They can then determine whether questions that are a priority for their district are present. If not, and they wish to capture further data, they can craft their own questions. Each year the survey is subject to change based on the needs of the district; however, for purposes of this study, almost every question has stayed the same since its introduction.

After the development of the survey, the superintendents send the survey to every principal in the district. At this time they meet to agree on a date for the survey to be given. An email is distributed to all staff in the building about what the survey is for and how to present it to students; a password is given to them that their students can use to access the

survey. All teachers in the building give the survey on the same date at the same time to maximize student responses. Those survey answers are then processed through the district main office and then sent back to administrators to use as a method to look at the number fluctuation, what is being done right, and what needs to change for the following school year.

It is important to understand that the 2017–2019 survey data was in large part the reason for the creation of this professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy. When these data were analyzed in July, it was noticed by administration that over the past two years the underserved student population had a growing disapproval about the school setting. For the purpose of this survey, underserved is defined as any student not representing as White, including multi-racial. It is not broken down by race or by grade level. The main questions from the survey that led to the formation of the professional development are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Student Survey Data*

Question	2017–2018 Results	2018–2019 Results
I am happy to be at this school.	22% Disagreed	40% Disagreed
Adults at this school treat all students respectfully.	38% Disagreed	40% Disagreed
People of different cultural backgrounds, races, or ethnicities are treated equally at this school.	26% Disagreed	36% Disagreed

After the administration met to discuss the survey data, it was determined there was a need to incorporate professional development training on diversity, equity, and culturally relevant pedagogy to educate teachers on how to be better for our diverse students. The professional development would focus on “What are the Stories of our Teachers and Students and Why Does it Matter?”

For this document analysis, Google slides of the last three years of professional development (PD) given to all teachers were collected. This document was divided into five sections, each labeled clearly with beginning assumptions and closing reflections. The following describes the sections of the document that were collected for analysis. Section one looked at the need for CRP in the school and in the classroom. It introduced teachers to the survey data listed above and had them reflect on the following questions:

- How many of you would return to a restaurant where 42% of the staff treated you with disrespect?
- How many of you would stay for four years in a place where you were not happy?
- How would you feel if for four years, someone did not understand your background, socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity?

Section two helped teachers to define what the term culture encompassed and asked them to reflect on how it is seen by staff and students. In this document, culture was defined as the following: the experience, beliefs, roles, values, attitudes, hierarchies, religion, notions of time and space, concepts of the universe, material objects and acquired, and course of generations through the striving of an individual and/or group.

Section three reviewed the definition of culture that was given in the previous PD and then branched to discuss the image of the 16 cultural groups (see Figure 1) and the cultural iceberg (see Figure 2). These visual images prompted teachers to reflect and discuss the following questions:

- What are we missing in not only our staff's lives, but also our students' lives that tell their stories?
- What are five things, that if taken from you, would not make you the same person you are today?
- What do we miss when we only look at the surface of who are students are?

**Figure 1**

*16 Cultural Groups*



Source: Corwin Press (n.d.), adapted from Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV.

**Figure 2**

*Cultural Iceberg*



Source: AKGTC, 2018.

Section four had staff look at the differences between equality and equity. Data from this section began with a visual representation of what equality and equity look like in a familiar setting—a ball game (see Figure 3). The staff was asked to analyze the picture with these questions in mind in reference to our students:

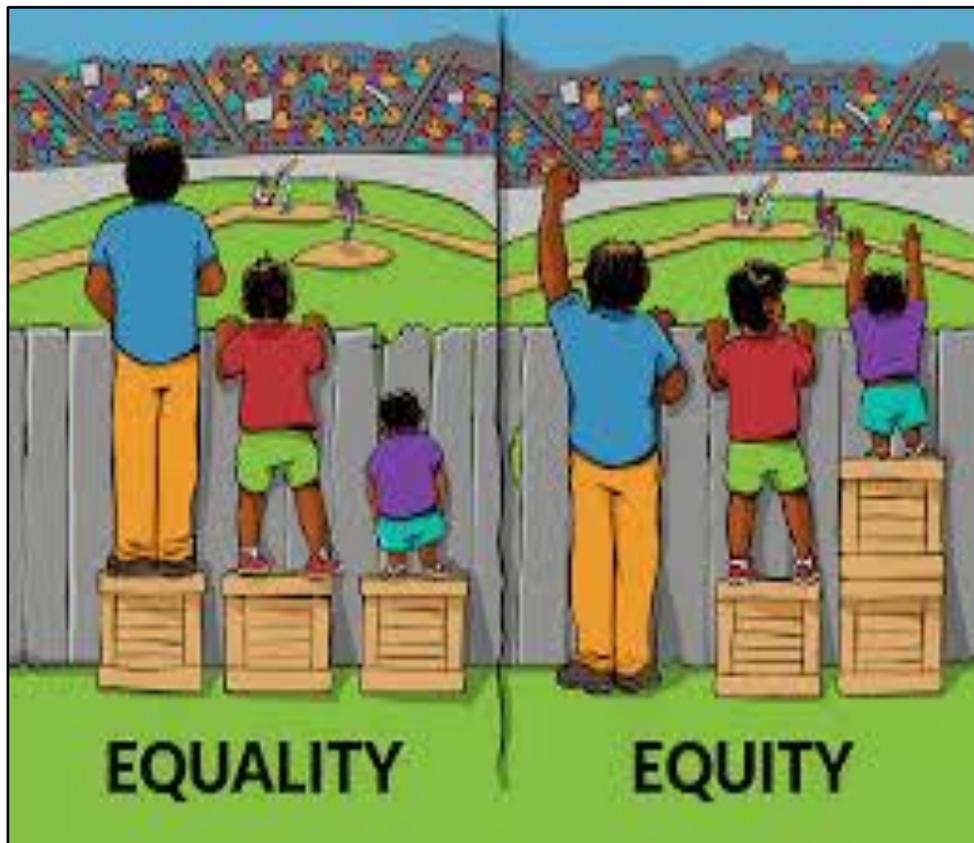
- What does the box represent?
- What does the game represent?
- What does the differing sizes of the people represent?

- What does the fence represent?

After a discussion of the questions, staff were asked to reflect on a picture centered more on their students' starting points, barriers, tools, and belief systems and how they might view elements that might show up in their students when they come into the building to learn.

**Figure 3**

*Equality and Equity*

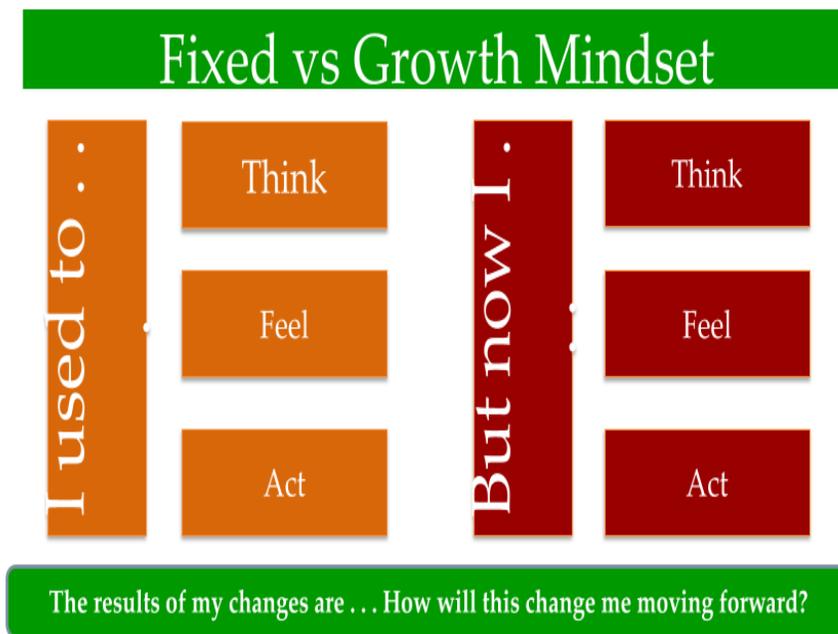


Source: Interaction Institute for Social Change (2022) and madewithangus.com (n.d.).

After the discussion, staff were asked to complete the chart (see Figure 4) as a way of reflecting on the PD for that day, with the idea of a fixed versus growth mindset pertaining to culture in education.

**Figure 4**

*Growth Mindset*



Source: Author.

Section five asked teachers to reflect on the previous four professional developments by considering the following questions:

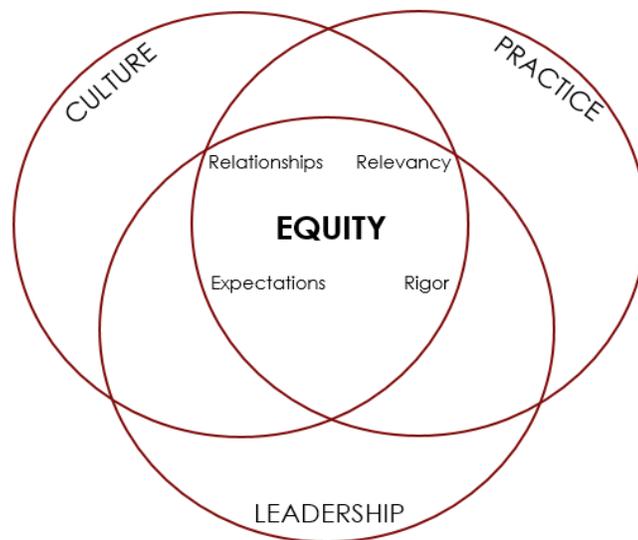
- Does our school build an effective learning culture where teachers can safely develop cultural competency wherein they learn about the culture of themselves and their students? If so, how? If not, what needs to change?

- Does our school develop the practice of teachers and help them implement effective learning strategies, curriculum alignment, assessment methods, classroom management, and intervention? If so, how? If not, what needs to change?
- Does our school develop leadership through vision, direction, and accountability as well as improve the effectiveness and skills of administrators, support staff, teacher leaders, and informal leaders? If so, how? If not, what needs to change?

After a discussion, teachers were shown the image in Figure 5 to stimulate discussion about the main aspects of CRP in the classroom with the intertwined nature of culture, practice, leadership, relationships, expectations, rigor, and relevancy, which in turn leads to equity.

**Figure 5**

*Equity Diagram*



Source: Author.

To lead to understanding, facts from several researchers were shared about the main aspects of the diagram. In regard to relationships, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) stated that high-quality teacher-student relationships are associated with smaller discipline gaps and lower suspension rates for diverse students. Brackett et al. (2011) emphasized that relationships are a core element of excellent instruction and student engagement. Teachers and other educators can build positive, caring relationships with students by showing interest in their welfare, wanting them to succeed, being sensitive to their academic and social needs, respecting their perspectives, and giving them positive recognition. To support the discussion of rigor, relevance, and expectations, statistics were shared with staff (Brackett et al., 2011). Gregory et al. (2011) stated that teachers and administrators who set high academic and behavioral expectations for students of diversity have fewer classroom management problems. These teachers and administrators are also very vocal about their beliefs that all students can succeed in school, and effective teachers show students they believe in them by using instructional strategies that require active learning and encourage higher-order thinking (Brackett et al., 2011). The teachers were asked to reflect on approaches that could improve this strategy in their school and to identify the benefits and challenges to planning and implementing improvements for this CRP strategy.

To bring this professional development training to the application stage, teachers attended a session called Theater for Change, which is based on theater techniques developed by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theater artist. He used this unique form of theater performance to promote social change by lifting up voices of the oppressed in society. This performance was interactive in nature; the audience creates the change they want to see in their institution.

The questions that drove this PD were as follows:

- How do we respond when we hear a student or staff member say something prejudiced or insensitive?
- What do you say when you are a student of diversity being treated unfairly?
- How do our students' stories affect their interactions with other students and adults?

The play incorporated the following scenes:

1. **Adult/Student Interaction:** The setting was during picture day as the visiting photographer was taking student pictures. Two White students went through the line with no interaction. The third student was a Black female. As she sat on the stool to get her picture taken, the photographer went to check her name for yearbook purposes and mispronounced it. The subject of the picture addressed her and told her how to properly state her name. The photographer then asked if she could shorten her name to something that was “easier to pronounce.” While situating her for the picture, the photographer continued to make statements such as “your skin is so pretty for a Black girl” and “that weave must have cost you a lot.” The Black female blew it off and sat for the picture. As the photographer began to lift up her camera, she noticed the shirt that the girl had on—Black Lives Matter. She asked the young lady if she had another shirt because she could not take her picture in that one.
2. **Student/Student Interaction:** Two female students are sitting in a classroom taking Snapchat pictures. One of the girls responds that Estrella commented back on the picture they had just sent. This same girl then begins making fun of Estrella's name, commenting on how her dad lost his job to Estrella's dad because he was

an immigrant who would work for less and now they had had to move into a smaller house because of someone who did not even belong in this country. She stated that she wished he would just “go back to his country.” The other girl began to stand up for Estrella, but in the process called the other female a piece of White trash who didn’t need to be here in America at all because she was so trashy.

This forum led the staff to work through three interactive stages:

Phase 1: The audience watches a scene in which characters experience verbal oppression.

Phase 2: The characters share their background with teachers in an “interview style.”

Phase 3: The scene starts again and the audience gets the chance to intervene and correct the oppressive comments made in the scene.

In Phase 1, staff were informed that the interactive play they were about to see was written by the students based on comments and situations they had heard and observed at school. While staff watched the performance, they were to circle any cultural group they felt were being oppressed during the scene.

Phase 2 had the performers introduce themselves to the staff. In these introductions, they told their stories. The photographer’s story told of how her husband had been a police officer and had recently been shot in the line of duty by an African American man. The student getting her picture taken discussed her experiences with the recent Black Lives Matter movement, not only as a female, but as a Black female. The girl whose father had lost his job spoke further on the emotions she felt when she learned that Estrella’s dad was the one who took her dad’s job and was the catalyst of their move and socioeconomic status. The

final girl told her story about her disgust for people who have no understanding of other cultures and the stories they bring to our society.

The final stage, Phase 3, had staff reflect on the question, how do we respond when we hear a student or staff member say something prejudiced or inciting? They were then asked to watch the performance again, in which the students performed the exact same performance in Phase 1. This time however, staff were asked to interrupt the performance anytime they felt that someone should speak up against biased remarks. This happened in the moment, without exception, by having staff yell STOP and walk onto the stage to address the comment at hand. Prompts were given to help them in thinking about how to address these issues. They were asked to try saying, “I don’t like words like that,” or “That phrase is harmful.” They then were given the advice to ask simple questions to find out why the speaker made the offensive comment and how the situation could best be addressed. Suggested prompts were “Why do you say that?” or “Tell me more.” After these steps were addressed, teachers were asked to educate or explain why a term or phrase was offensive in that situation. They were encouraged to choose a different expression than the one that was being demonstrated. For example, “Hate isn’t behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work, or lack of exposure to a diverse population.” Instead try saying, “Do you know the history of that word?” It was emphasized that there is no perfect way to respond to racist or insensitive remarks; however, the wrong way to respond is to not respond at all.

After the PD, teachers were asked to respond to a Google form asking them to reflect on the following questions:

- What was the most impactful part of today’s PD?

- Do you hear oppressive comments in your classroom? In your school? Give an example.
- How can you intervene to correct hurtful comments and support students from diverse cultural groups?

### *Document Analysis*

Once the decision had been made about which documents were to be used for analysis, it was then important to understand how to incorporate coding content into themes—similar to how focus group or interview transcripts are analyzed (Bowen, 2009). This analysis identified emerging findings and grouped them into categories to be used for further analysis. This process includes careful, focused reading and re-reading of data, as well as coding and category construction. The emerging codes and themes may also serve to “integrate data gathered by different methods” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Bowen summed up the overall concept of document analysis as a process of “evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed” (2009, p. 33). Through this process, the researcher must maintain a high level of objectivity and sensitivity in order for the document analysis results to be credible and valid (Bowen, 2009).

In document analysis, it is important to understand the issue of bias as a researcher (O’Leary, 2004). A researcher must consider the subjectivity of the author and also the personal biases he or she may be bringing to the research. Bowen (2009) added that the researcher must evaluate the original purpose of the document, such as the target audience. They should also consider whether the author was a firsthand witness or used secondhand sources. For the document analysis of the professional development pieces, it was important for me to keep the possibility of bias in mind, being both the researcher and writer of these

documents. To do this, I used field notes and a reflection journal to write and reflect on the stories of my participants.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis is the process of collecting and organizing data, then bringing together explicit data chunks to make sense of the research and to answer the research question(s). This process of data analysis in qualitative research was not linear or fixed. I used specific narrative analysis techniques to analyze the data since these techniques can be used within narrative inquiry.

Collection of stories obtained through in-depth interviews and document analysis told the experiences of the participants and then were chronologically ordered by the meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This analysis is shown through biographical study, life history, and oral history of the participants' stories. Throughout the participants' stories I kept detailed field notes, noting not only the body language and vocal tones of the interviewees, but also writing comments and symbols to note the need for reflection during the listening, transcribing, data analysis, and reflection about the interviews.

For the process of narrative analysis, I began by identifying stories that were told during the interview sessions. After reflecting on these stories, I analyzed the data for common narrative themes that appeared through interviews and identified commonalities and differences in the types of narratives that were told by each participant. After this analysis was completed, three-dimensional narrative inquiry occurred (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By looking for interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical and cultural context), these stories and the data they revealed were seen from multiple perspectives.

In practitioner research, the first step of the researcher in familiarizing themselves with the data not only involves conducting and transcribing the participants' interviews themselves, but also requires field notes and research journals to document reflections on the stories being given. This step allows the researcher to "become intimately familiar with literally every word that was exchanged between you and the participant" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 44). By closely interrogating the data and undertaking the iterative thinking and reflective process, I incorporated and interwove different data sources, interviews, documents, field notes, and reflective journals, to determine the themes illuminated in Chapter 4 through the stories of the six participants. Additionally, excerpts from the stories of the participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and the researchers' analysis of these stories are brought together in reporting the findings (Tuckett, 2005). The final findings are demonstrated through not only the participants' stories and experiences, but also through data immersion, deep thinking, and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Data crystallization is an important part of the process to gain insight into the participants' experiences. Janesick (1998) claimed that data crystallization does not embody a particular structure but functions more like a "still-life" (Janesick, 1998, p. 35) to help the researcher to process as deeply as possible the stories of the participants. After all interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and verified by participants, I used the process of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) to carefully examine the findings from each data source in each setting. This process allowed me to examine the stories and experiences of teachers from multiple angles to visualize multiple themes to form understandings of my research, enabling me to draw together a layered understanding of the participants' stories of experience.

## **Organization and Management**

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and stored on a password-protected computer and a password-protected flash drive through the use of Google Docs. Interview transcriptions were analyzed and then shared with the participants to allow them to read and verify the narrative analyses, discuss findings with me, and make corrections or additions as needed to ensure validity and reliability.

## **Limitations, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research, bias is unavoidable and can affect the trustworthiness and findings due to the specific nature of the researcher's experiences, stories, and assumptions. This is further seen in the theoretical framework of the narrative, as described by Patton (2015): "Th[ese] variety of philosophical and theoretical orientations reminds us that issues of quality and credibility intersect with the audience and intended research purposes" (p. 322). Further, Patton (2015) stated that researchers have an obligation "to be clear about and own our authorship of whatever we propound, to be self-reflective, to acknowledge biases, and limitations, and to honor multiple perspectives while accepting incredulity and doubt as postmodern responses to ourselves" (p. 65). Thus, because "all researchers bring value to a study," the researcher must address these biases and address them through trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 18). In qualitative research, this can be done by how "researchers routinely employ member checking...thick description, peer reviews, and external audits. Researchers engage in one or more of these procedures and report results in their investigations" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 129).

## **Limitations**

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), because of the complexity of the social world, limitations remind the researcher that no study is perfect, findings are tentative and conditional, and knowledge is elusive and approximate. This narrative study deals with only one school site and only eight teacher participants; therefore, it cannot be said for certain that the conclusions drawn from this study apply elsewhere. As a result, I cannot guarantee the sample of one Midwestern suburban school and a sample of teachers from this study is representative of all teachers. However, according to Maxwell (2015), this limitation can be addressed through transferability or the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. In a qualitative study such as this, transferability is the responsibility of the researcher, and can thus be enhanced for validity by completing a thorough description of the research context and the assumptions that led to the research. Bowen stated, “To provide for transferability, my study presented findings with “thick” descriptions of the phenomena” (2009, p. 216).

## **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research studies can help to “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1993, p. 58). This correlates to the need for quality research and reliability as a purpose for “generating understanding” (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). Patton (2015) further supported this, noting that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results, and judging the quality of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posed four questions for conventional researchers to think about when considering the reliability and validity of their study:

1) How can one establish confidence in the truth of the findings for the participants and the study's context? (internal validity); 2) To what extent can the study's findings be applied in other contexts or with other participants? (external validity); 3) Can the findings be repeated if the study was replicated with same or similar participants in the same or similar context? (reliability); 4) To what degree are the findings of the study determined by the participants and its conditions instead of the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the researcher? (objectivity). (2012, p. 290)

Further, to ensure reliability and validity, crystallization is a way to confirm and validate research findings by looking at data from more than one perspective. Stake stated that "knowledge is being constructed, no two observers construct it exactly the same" (2010, p. 125). By using crystallization as a way to create a narrative of my chosen setting and the participants' stories of culturally relevant pedagogy, I was able to recognize different perspectives into the study (reliability). These narratives further add to the reliability and validity of the study as seen in Beverley's (2008) proposed "Testimonio," "These first-person narratives find their validity in their ability to raise consciousness and thus provoke political action to remedy problems of oppressed peoples (e.g., poverty, marginality, exploitation)" (cited in Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 325).

These differing perspectives that crystallized through face-to-face interviews and theoretical literature about culturally responsive pedagogy helped in establishing internal validity of the study. Other checks in the trustworthiness of the study came through member checking among participants by asking interviewees to review their interview transcripts and my observational field notes to see that their ideas were portrayed accurately. As Creswell (2013) discussed, member checking is soliciting participants' views on the emergent findings and interpretations. Traditionally, this refers to reviewing transcripts, pieces of writing, or conflicting data sources with the participants in order to value and bring forth their voices rather than the potential biases of the researcher (Ellingson, 2009). According to Paris and

Winn (2014), the purpose of this approach to research is to build relationships that, through care, dignity, and dialogue, challenge both the researcher and the participant. Cho and Trent explained that member checking is, “an interactive process between the researcher and participants” (2006, p. 321). Employing crystallization to ensure trustworthiness allows the researcher to cross-check insights gained through one type of data with other methods (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Further, I engaged in external checks by meeting regularly with my dissertation advisors so that through debriefings, I established increased rigor of the methods, as well as clarity of the data analysis as I reflected on their responses to “hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues must be considered when beginning any research study and the analysis of the data from the said study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) described three theories of ethics: (1) The ethics consequences —What happens because of this action? What are the probable consequences to whom and under what circumstances? (2) The ethic of rights and responsibilities—All people have fundamental rights that may not be denied, even for the greatest good for the greatest number; (3) The ethic of social justice—Use of the principles of fairness.

This is how I view each of these principles in regard to my study. No researcher’s intent is to have their study in any way harm their participants, although we have seen through research in Tuskegee and Stanford Prison Experiment that harm can occur. When thinking about my study, even when thinking about how the study could continue to grow, I feel I am keeping my participants safe. First, participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. Since the participants of my study originated from a diversity committee, they

were aware that I was working on my dissertation and the topic that would be researched. When it became time for me to begin my interviews, I initially sent out an email describing the study and the requirements of the study. At this point, participants were free to opt out and not to participate, ask questions for clarity, or move forward. As participants were chosen through purposeful sampling, after their confirmation of wanting to participate, I sent another email of information that once again stated the next steps of the study, time commitment, and understanding of the study. This led to the participants moving forward in the study, asking clarifying questions, or opting out of the study once again. As the study continued, I assured participants that their real names and the name of the study setting would be replaced with pseudonyms, even allowing them to choose their own names. This was important to my study because if any future research was to be done in the same school, the same teachers, and/or the same topic, my findings would continue to protect the anonymity of the participants. The participants were able to review their responses to ensure their voice was heard. These ideas are confirmed through Rossman and Rallis' (2003) outline of standardized language for informed consent:

1. Participants are as fully informed as possible about the study's purpose and audience; (2) they understand what their agreement to participate involves; (3) they give that consent willingly; and (4) they understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. (p. 75)

As the researcher and main instrument of this study, it was my ethical responsibility to protect the rights of those who chose to participate in the study, as well as to ensure that the research did not have any unfavorable impacts on them, presently or in the future. Further, in regard to researcher positionality, it was considered a necessary process of a principal investigator to have critical self-reflection and determination of self within the

social constructs, biases, contexts, layers, power structures, identities, transparency, objectivity, and subjectivities for the viewpoint assumed within the research (Ruuska, 2017).

I am also aware that although I am an employee at the setting of my research, I am not in a supervisory role that would impact my co-workers in any way, as I am not responsible for their evaluations. I further acknowledge that as I am doing research with colleagues, it could potentially be harmful to engage in a discussion that might be a critique of colleges, districts, and/or schools. It was explained to participants during recruitment and throughout the study that they were welcome to drop out of the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable about their responses or participation in the study. Further, when it came to research responsiveness, I ensured that my questions and methods were responsive to the purpose/question stated—the experiences of teachers who utilize culturally responsive pedagogy in a suburban high school classroom and feel that through face-to-face interviews and document analysis, I was able to achieve responsive crystallization of data collection through these varied methods.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to “experience the experience” of teachers’ stories of their preparation and understandings to teach culturally responsive pedagogy to diverse students. Experiencing the experience allowed me as the researcher to understand the individuals within the context of this research study, as well as understand the experience of the individuals and make meaning of such experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Although these participants were interested in working on aspects of diversity and learning in their school and classrooms, I was unaware of many of their stories and/or knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. I was unaware of their culturally responsive practices in their own classrooms. My hope was that because of their passion for working on the diversity committee they would provide rich descriptions in their stories of educational background and professional development that would provide insight into their lived experiences of culturally responsive pedagogy.

The participants in this study told overwhelmingly similar stories about how their pre-service education left them feeling unprepared to teach and understand culturally diverse students, especially from their pre-education program experiences. This story of being underprepared echoed throughout all their responses as they felt that there was no applicable experience to help support what they were or were not learning in their college classrooms. On the other hand, many of the participants felt that when they entered their student teaching they were able to begin to gain some experience in understanding culturally responsive pedagogy that had been lacking in their pre-education preparation. The final story that

illuminated their stories in regard to culturally responsive pedagogy were those of the professional development that they were currently receiving in the school setting. All participants emphasized the important role that professional development had played in their growth as teachers and their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As mentioned earlier in the Introduction section of this study, it is important as the researcher to reflect again on my positionality in the process of analyzing the stories of these teachers and their experiences and perspectives of culturally responsive pedagogy. Before beginning the interviews, I began to write in my reflective journal about how I felt going into listening to others' stories about something I was so passionate about. I remember writing about my own experiences as a White female with little to no diversity. I put pen to paper.

*“I was raised in an upper to middle class home, attended some of the best schools in my area, and had very few interactions with anyone of diversity until I went to college. I went into teaching because it was what I loved: I thought that it is where I belonged, making a difference in other's lives, like my previous teachers had done for me. I then went to a college that was known to be a “great” teaching preparation college and worked hard to maintain the idea of education that I had grown to know in my own life. However, what I did not realize is that I lacked the understanding of culture, the lack of diversity, the lack of understanding socio-economic status because I had never experienced it. My life had not prepared me for the classrooms I would experience. My college classes did not prepare me for the experiences in the classroom: I was made to think that every class would be filled with students anxious to learn and waiting to be educated.*

*“When I chose my student teaching placement, my heart led me to teach in a school for juvenile offenders. This was so far from my realm of knowing and understanding, people thought I was crazy, even having a professor tell me I was “wasting my time and talent on students who were never going to amount to anything.” This was so different from what I heard in my pre-education classes, because according to them all students can learn, all students can succeed, if and only if, I put into action educational practices that they had shown were for “all students.” I walked into that classroom on the first day full of privilege and my Whiteness, and suddenly I was in the minority. It showed in the way I dressed, the way I introduced myself, the way I “tried” to interact with them. I recognized that I had nothing to bring to the educational table for these students because these were not the students that I was taught to teach.*

*“Without that student teaching experience, and my teaching jobs in alternative education, I would never be who I am today, as a person or as an educator. Although during this time and the next 15 years of teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy was not something that I even knew about, I took every opportunity to learn from mentor teachers and my students about what they needed to have in place to be a better educator. I reflected on every lesson and every interaction to understand how I needed to be the best educator possible. In my 16th year of teaching, I learned about culturally responsive pedagogy in a certification class through a local university. Suddenly, what I knew I had needed that first day in my student teaching experience and what I was lacking in understanding my students had a name—a foundation—culturally responsive pedagogy. I recognized that what I had been trying to teach myself and understand about how my students learn best had purpose by*

*incorporating my students' culture, race, ethnicity, experience, and voice in everything they did in my classroom"* (Reflection Note #1, 2021).

As I was writing my reflections in my journal, I noticed my handwriting became more pressed into the page and the words became narrower and closer together. I realized through my reflection of my own journey, it had taken me 16 years to understand what I should have left with in my pre-education preparation to be an educator. I had become agitated writing the words that I already knew had been a huge issue in my own thoughts of preparation as I wrote, "*culturally responsive education is crucial to the needs of students of diverse backgrounds and without it, I, we, are doing a disservice to each of those students*" (Reflection Note #1, 2021).

It was at this point, I stopped writing about my own experience. I knew that because of my lack of experience in my college preparation I had missed a lot of opportunities to educate my diverse students, and I knew that I was blessed to be given the teaching experiences that taught me everything I knew about culturally responsive pedagogy, even though I did not know it held a name, a framework, in which I could support diverse learning. I recognized that reflecting on it only fueled the passion I now held for knowing about other people's stories in their journey of knowing and understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. I hoped that they would have different stories than my own, considering the differences in our culture, schooling, and experiences. I wondered how the stories of the participants I had chosen would mimic or vary from my own stories of culturally responsive pedagogy. I put my pen down, took a deep breath, and began to listen, to know, to understand where others teachers' stories began and ended on the road to culturally responsive pedagogy.

## Ms. Nells

I noted at the top of the consent form that Ms. Nells came to me with a smile and a hand on her hip. Ms. Nells was the first participant to sign and return her form—32 minutes to be exact—from the email being sent, her signature on it, and her placing it in my hand. As she handed me the consent form, I remembered vividly her asking me if I was ready to tell the story, with an additional flare of *“Let’s get this ball rolling” attached to her statement* (Field Note #1, 2021). I wrote it down quickly at the top of her form as she walked away, and I put a star next to it, as a reminder of the need to sit down and reflect on her excitement in beginning her interview process. I knew Ms. Nells well; we were not only co-workers, but also friends. The trust established by working closely together and sharing a bond of friendship would allow for more open and free conversation. She was always enthusiastic about everything she spoke about or did; however, for me, this was an indication that she wanted to be a part of this story, the story of what I was to write about culturally responsive pedagogy. After I had time to sit down and write about her words and actions in my journal, I began to think about Ms. Nells’ story and why telling her story was so important to her. I began to write a list of what I knew about Ms. Nells: *“Female, Hispanic, Special Education and ELA Teacher (21 years), Suburban Setting (Always), Diversity Committee Member-3 years”* (Reflective Note #2, 2021).

I stared at the list for a while, thinking about why those were the main things that came to my mind when I thought about her readiness to tell her story. I wrote female first; it was the first thing that anyone would most likely note about her, including her students; however, for me, I recognized that through the lens of a researcher, I had written it because female teachers are predominantly represented in the field of education in percentages close

to 80%. Secondly, I wrote Hispanic. I remembered in our first diversity meeting, and as we introduced ourselves, she was asked to state her name and how she identified. It was the first time I had realized that she was Hispanic. By looking at Ms. Nells, you would not recognize that her ethnicity reflected that she was diverse from the majority of her students and the staff with whom she worked. I found this notation necessary and important to her story, to discuss further with her in her interview, because although we had worked together for several years, I had never seen her as Hispanic and female: embarrassed, I saw her like myself, White and female. Through this, I recognized how many times teachers only see the outward appearance of their students, and in this moment of cultural blindness, miss the experiences and stories that their students bring to the classroom every day.

This recognition led me to pull one of the artifacts from my document collection and set it next to my journal. This artifact was one that the staff had received during one of their professional development sessions, and it seemed to not just be coincidence that it came into my mind at this particular reflection. It was a picture labeled the Cultural Iceberg; its tip, small and narrow, peeking out of icy blue water and its base forging down to the depth of the body of waters, the color of the water changing from a light icy blue to a dark blue as the base became submerged deeper and deeper in the water. At the tip of this iceberg were the words age, clothes, gender, language, physical characteristics, and behaviors—anything that can be seen about one’s culture. It is the tip of how others see each other, how teachers view their students many times—only seeing the surface of who they are, something that is not part of the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Although, I knew Ms. Nells and had worked with her for many years, I, like many other teachers and their students, seemingly looked at the tip of the iceberg to see who she was, and in doing so missed out on

one of the parts of her that would help me understand her story better and place it more accurately with her experiences of culturally responsive pedagogy.

I continued to look at the part of the cultural iceberg that lies underneath the surface of the water. It was labeled “less visible,” and I “dove” into the “waters” of deeper reflection of this document. The words directly below the surface of the water were words such as body language, family traditions, talents, and social skills sitting right below the surface. As educators, if we just dipped our toes into the “cold waters” or surface level of our students’ lives, how much more we could learn about who they are and the experiences and perspectives they bring to our classrooms daily. I think that for many teachers, this is hard or uncomfortable for them because they do not know how to dive deeper into who their students are and what they can bring to the table in terms of culturally responsive pedagogy. I dove a little further into the last section of the cultural iceberg. The words began to get even more in depth, and the water became a darker shade of blue. It made me recognize that this is a depth of learning about students that might be even more uncomfortable for some to discuss with them, about how we should talk with them about their culture and their stories. For me, this is the heart of what drives culturally responsive pedagogy—social status, personal values, world views, experiences, and assumptions. The “waters” of culturally responsive pedagogy are deep and vast for educators to dive into, especially when they are not prepared to make that “dive” that allows them to recognize, reference, and teach in a culturally responsive manner. At this time, I questioned my own reflection by bringing these thoughts back to my research questions. I wrote, “*Could this be because of the lack of what teachers know about culturally responsive pedagogy, whether that is through their education, their lack of understanding of their own selves, or lack of professional development?*” (Reflective Note

#3, 2021) I knew this was not a question that I had an answer for yet, but I was anxious to see how the interviews and document analysis would help me understand this piece of the puzzle.

### **Exploration of Her Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Ms. Nells and I set our interview later in the week, and as I walked to our meeting spot, I kept playing this first entry in my reflective journal over and over in my head, the need of understanding her story of being Hispanic at the forefront of my mind. I sat down with Ms. Nells and went through the introductory portion of the interview protocol with her. She began her story of where she received her undergraduate and graduate degrees, what those degrees were in, and how many years she had been teaching, subjects, and where. In my field notes, I wrote that her responses were short, rushed, uninterested, and seemed like she did not have much to say about the logistics of her educational past. For me, based on my previous experiences, I would also find myself responding to any questions such as these in a succinct manner. I could tell that for her, much like myself, this is not where her story lay; she had a different story to tell.

I was anxious to get to the question where I would be able to ask about her ethnicity and to hear more about this particular part of her story. I asked her to think back to the first meeting of our diversity committee and how she had presented herself as Hispanic to the group.

Me: “Ms. Nells, in our first diversity meeting, when I asked you to introduce yourself, you stated that you were Hispanic” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: “Girl, I remember the look on your face when I said that. You looked like someone had delivered some news you weren’t expecting.” She laughed, “Don’t worry, I don’t blame you; it’s really on me” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

I was puzzled about how this became about an error she had made, because for me, it was my fault that I had overlooked, never asked, never noticed that she was Hispanic. I put a large question mark next to her statement in my field notes, because she suddenly seemed to take the blame for me not knowing about her, but I felt there was something further there. I hoped that through the rest of our interview, I would get more of her story and why she responded the way she did to my statement.

We continued with our interview, with me leading the conversation and starting from the last comment she made about “it’s really on me.”

Me: “First, let me apologize that you noticed that, but no, I didn’t know you were Hispanic, and honestly, I was embarrassed that I did not know that, but I had never heard you mention this in any conversation before or after that moment” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: “It’s okay. I guess I wanted to just be looked at like everyone else. I didn’t want people to assume things about me because I was Hispanic...like oh she speaks Spanish or she can relate better to our Hispanic students because she is Hispanic. I didn’t want that because it wasn’t true” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021). .

I paused at this moment in our interview and wrote in my field notes, “*IMPORTANT: STUDENTS!*” “*IMPORTANT: HER!*” I knew that this was an important factor that tied into my thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy (#2, 2021). Later that night, I began to analyze Ms. Nells’ comment about not wanting others to see her or label her as being Hispanic. This was important to her and thus allowed a secret story about her own

understanding of her cultural identity to emerge. She specifically said she did not want others to think she spoke Spanish or that she would be the best to relate to Hispanic students because she felt like it would limit her as an educator. For her, it came down to assumptions—that if she is Hispanic, she must know Spanish, and when we need someone to speak to our Spanish-speaking parents, we can go to her. Also, the assumption if we have a Hispanic student who is struggling, send them to Ms. Nells because she can relate to and understand them better because they share a commonality. I wrote in my reflection journal, “*Is this how our students of diversity see themselves in this school and classrooms?*” (Reflective Note #4, 2021). Going further with this, as educators, how often do we make assumptions about who someone is or is not, and understand their own story.

After reviewing her transcript and looking back at my field notes, I made the following reflective note: “As teachers, we need to understand that no matter the ethnicity, race, or cultural features our students bring into our classroom, educators must *understand that it is not a one size fits all mold. There is so much more to each of our diverse students than one piece of the story they bring to the classroom*” (Reflective Note #5, 2021). This is something that Ms. Nells recognized in her own life, but she kept this secret story to herself to avoid being labeled by how she related to her own culture. I wondered how the rest of her story about cultural responsiveness would play out through the rest of our interview because this seemed to be a crucial part of the understanding of being a culturally responsive educator. Before I could expand on this further in my analysis, I noted at this point in her transcript that I needed to go back and ask her to expand on her lack of showing her true self as Hispanic and her “why” of thinking this.

When I went back to Ms. Nells and asked her to read through her transcript, I asked her to pause when she got to this particular part of our conversation together.

Me: “Ms. Nells, you noted in your initial interview that you did not speak about your Hispanic culture because ‘I guess I wanted to just be looked like everyone else....I didn’t want that because it wasn’t true.’ I wondered if you could expand on this further for me to help me understand” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: When I was in school, most people associated being Hispanic with the fact that you spoke Spanish. My family did not speak Spanish in the household, and if we did, it was broken, and even then, it was intermixed more with slang and English. I associate myself as Hispanic because it is how my parents, grandparents, and family refer to themselves. I guess you could say that it is more about how our ancestors spoke of themselves, and we have come to just accept that is how we also should be seen as. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

It was important for me to note in my field notes that she said, “When I was in school,” as if her education had defined who she was in her dismissiveness of being Hispanic. This then led me to ask about her thoughts on how she was educated. As I stopped and thought about how best to do this, I could hear in my voice the reluctance of asking her, “Why do you feel it was your education that made you feel as if this is how you needed to present yourself?” My concern about this question came from her previously mentioning that she grew up in New Mexico, a state where the Hispanic population is approaching 50%, as of 2021. My reluctance came from assuming that as a Hispanic, in a state that is reaching a majority population of Hispanic people, that these numbers were reflected in their schools daily. I had not expected the ways in which she was schooled to be a dominant factor in how or how she did not view herself. I made the conscious decision to possibly come back to this, but I wanted to see if she addressed it further in her interview. Consequently, as she continued to tell her story, the connection between the two did become more apparent.

## Explored Stories of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs

As Ms. Nells and I went through the interview questions, there came a point where I knew I had begun to understand her readiness to give her story about culturally responsive pedagogy. Her responses became more in depth and more impassioned with rich detail in the story of her educational preparation to teach culturally diverse students.

Me: “Ms. Nells, how would you describe your academic preparation to teach culturally diverse students?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: I had only one multicultural class that gave some useful information in my pre-service education classes...If you think about where I went to school, the place I grew up in, that area is extremely diverse and they were sending students out to teach in the schools in that area as well. How could they only have one class that looked at culture in the classroom? Like now that I think about it, I realize how messed up that is. I do not feel that I was taught the way I needed to be taught, not just in my college career, but also as a student in the school district in which I attended. If I remember correctly, many of the teachers I had were born and raised in the same areas in which they taught. They went to college there. They weren't getting anything more than I got, and just thought this is the way it should be, just teach to every student, not each student. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

At the time, in my field notes, I wrote the words “*secret-story: anger— ties in with her own story of being Hispanic in the education system, now also in her pre-education program...voice tone rose—Important—New Mexico*” (Field Note #1, 2021). This was significant to note because it took me back to when she had previously stated, “When I was in school,” The connection she was making to her lack of preparation as an educator in terms of culturally responsive pedagogy was reflected in how she viewed herself. She recognized that she had had only one class that included “some” teachings about multiculturalism, and because of the diversity within the state and district in which she attended school, she understood that there needed to be more. She connected her pre-education program to her

own teachers' preparation that she had in her schooling years as similar—lacking in the needs of culturally responsive pedagogy for a diverse set of students. She felt that her previous teachers had not demonstrated culturally responsive pedagogy in the classes in which she was educated, hence why she just related herself to being Hispanic, as being one who spoke Spanish, even if she did not. Her teachers just placed her into a demographic box, a box that limited her cultural understanding of herself, which limited how they could best teach not only her, but the other diverse students in the classroom.

Ms. Nells also saw this in her own pre-service education program—the lack of understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Her experiences in her own schooling impacted who she was as a teacher, and her years of experience made her reflect about what she had missed in her pre-education. As she continued to speak on this question, I noted her voice changed to sadness and her eyes dropped; she no longer was looking at me as she finished her thought.

Ms. Nells: I have spent my whole teaching career in this same school district (in Missouri), but what if I stayed there, in New Mexico, how could I have been an effective teacher to my students? Maybe that is why my teachers were not effective in teaching me when I was in school. One class and done...maybe they didn't even get the luxury of having that one class. That could explain a lot, now that I think about it. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

She paused—53 seconds to be exact. Fifty-three seconds of reflecting on her story. Fifty-three seconds of recognizing the connection between her own schooling and her pre-education experiences (Field Note #1, 2021).

Me: “Ms. Nells,” I finally asked. Her eyes rose back to meet mine. I noted the sadness in them as she seemed to be brought back to the present moment (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: I apologize. I just began to think about through my years of teaching here [in Missouri], I have reflected often about was I even effectively trained to teach the

students I see here every day? The diversity in my students isn't even as great as I would have seen in New Mexico, had I stayed. So, if I feel that teaching here, I was not prepared, then I definitely was not prepared to teach in New Mexico. It makes me sad to think about all the times that I missed out on reaching a student, had I known how to do it properly, by sprinkling in some of their culture, their story, their experience into a lesson, a writing, a reading...hearing their voice... (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

She stopped with her voice trailing off in that moment. Her silence spoke volumes.

Her voice took me back to my own reflection of Toni Morrison's quote I reflected on in my introduction in Chapter 1. It is apparent that Ms. Nells, in her 21 years of experience, had grown to understand what culturally responsive pedagogy was. She understood that to be a culturally responsive educator she needed to connect a student's culture to the learning, allowing them to make connections and draw on their own experiences to aid in their learning. This moment of introspective reflection was another example of one of her secret stories. As she expressed her disappointment in her own lack of knowledge, she told the story that because she had not had not seen culturally responsive teaching in her own education, and then had not seen much of any of it in her preparation, she became disappointed in herself for missing moments that she thought could have changed an experience with students had she been given the educational preparation needed to teach students of diversity. Listening to this part of her interview, I wrote, "*How special it was to have this moment with Ms. Nells. This secret story showed her vulnerability, her understanding of the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom*" (Reflection Note #1: 2022).

When I was reflecting on Ms. Nell's stories, I always kept the fact that she discussed her ethnicity and culture as Hispanic at the forefront of my analysis. This was important in thinking about the cultural relevance of her comments concerning a topic dealing with cultural importance. Not only as a teacher, but also as a former student, she was a person of

diversity in her own discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy. She seemed very self-aware that even as a person of color, she did not feel she was prepared to teach students of diversity and she spoke of her own experiences in school as not culturally responsive.

I stepped back into reflection more at this point, and in my journal began to think back to a comment she had made earlier in her interview when we had discussed my misunderstanding of her being Hispanic. Her discouraged response made me think about how her thoughts and feelings are probably very similar to what many of our pre-education students must feel exiting their teaching programs. She had said, “Don’t worry, I don’t blame you; it’s really on me.” I thought how perfectly this summed up her thoughts as well as her preparation to teach in a diverse setting. I was watching—listening—to her taking the blame for not feeling like she had educated her students enough by not having a foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy. In reality, the script should be switched. Through Ms. Nells’ secret story, it was seen that teachers cannot blame themselves for not knowing or understanding the ways in which we should teach if we are not being taught in the very education classes that are preparing us to be teachers. It is the responsibility of the colleges that they are attending to prepare future educators to be culturally aware and competent when entering the classroom.

As I continued to reflect, I thought back to my own experience in my pre-service education program, and although very different in a smaller, predominantly White setting, I understood her emotion behind this statement because I felt the exact same way leaving my teaching program. If culturally responsive pedagogy is to attempt to bridge the gap between teacher and student by helping the teacher understand the cultural nuances that each student brings to the classroom and these aspects, in turn, help in the academic success of these

students, there is a need for education programs to demonstrate how this can and should be done in the programs that teachers enroll in seeking to understand how to best teach all students.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs**

After working through the emotional moment with Ms. Nells in her thinking about all the moments she had seemed to have missed because she did not know about culturally responsive pedagogy, I asked her if she was ready to continue. I noted that her smile and the brightness came back to her eyes. I wanted to find out more and went back to my interview guide to see if there was anything further she wanted to share with me about her pre-service education.

Me: Ms. Nells, I have heard your dissatisfaction with your pre-service program in reference to how you felt you were prepared to teach culturally diverse students, but I do want to ask you one more thing. Were there any classes, assignments, and/or experiences that stand out to you in your pre-service education that impacted your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy? (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

Ms. Nells laughed. “That is an interesting question to ask after I just spilled how much I didn’t care for just about anything in my pre-education program (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Me: “ I completely understand if you do not have anything to add, but wanted to give you an opportunity to...”

She interrupted me.

Ms. Nells: “ Say something more positive?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Me: “Not if you don’t have anything, no. This is about you and your story, so you can determine the story you would like to tell” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

I noted in my field notes that she paused, her eyes and mouth both turned up in an inquisitive manner, and her hands came to the top of the table and she folded them in a firm manner. Her actions told me that she was trying to switch her thinking from the angrily spoken comments before and regroup herself to think about how to best answer the question I had just presented to her. When she spoke again, I wrote that her voice was quieter, smoother, and she spoke more slowly, as if processing every word she was about to say.

Ms. Nells: I don't have much to say here, but I do think back to the one time I had observations, my junior year I believe, part of our fieldwork, if that is what you would call it, was to observe classrooms close to the campus. When I think back to those students, I would consider those students that I observed to fall under a diverse population, especially considering being in New Mexico. And so, we were directly exposed to diverse students through that experience, but exposure is a small step in the large picture of understanding how to teach and know about the students and teacher we were observing. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

Reflecting on this comment, it made me think back to one of the previous comments Ms. Nells had made about the teachers she had had and the teachers she was observing coming from the same pre-education programs that left her with dissatisfaction in her own schooling. It made me recognize that at the time of her observation, she was probably experiencing much of how she was taught—in the classroom she was observing—the lack of cultural connectedness to the students and the curriculum they were learning. It also made me recognize that if pre-education classes are not teaching, demonstrating, and recognizing the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the training they are giving future teachers, if there was something culturally responsive occurring in the classroom, she probably would not have known how to recognize this or understood if it were occurring because she had not had the exposure to recognize culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

I did not prompt the next response that came from Ms. Nells as she moved from her previous response to this one seamlessly.

Ms. Nells: I will say that I had one experience that gave me hope, but not before it humbled me that I was not ready to be a teacher and was not ready to step foot in the placement I was given. You know how excited you felt when you finally got your student teaching placement? (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

I remembered well this moment that Ms. Nells was speaking about—the giddiness, the excitement, ready to change my students’ lives. I nodded to her, to show that I understood, as well as to encourage her to continue with her statement. I also wrote in my field notes, “*Have a feeling we might have felt the same way about this—stay tuned*” (Field Note #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells continued: For me, you feel like you are ready to take on the world. You have been so hyped up for three and a half years that you are ready to go out and teach the young minds of the world and make a difference. But you know what, when I walked into my new classroom it wasn’t anything like I had experienced. It was nothing like they had talked about in my classes. There were only two White students in the class. It was full of culture, and when I walked in the teacher was giving lessons in English and Spanish (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

I did not want to stop her by writing down my full thoughts, but I knew that I would need to go back to her previous responses and bring those discussions into this statement. I wrote, “*Put in a classroom expected to know how to speak Spanish and English? Any Spanish classes taken? Any ELL classes taken?*” (Field Note #1, 2021). I drew another star to remind me to come back to reflect on this after our conversation. However, she answered some of these questions as we continued with her interview that would help me reflect later.

Ms. Nells: This wasn’t anything that I had been prepared for through my pre-education classes. I didn’t even speak enough Spanish to understand what they were saying. I watched my mentor teacher effortlessly flow between the two languages depending on the needs of the student. It seemed so easy for her, and all I could think of was “Who put me here?” “What did they expect from me?” No one prepared me for this. I had had no classes in any situation I currently saw myself in. I had not been

given any ELL training. I had observed one class, and it definitely did not look like this, and this is where I was placed? (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

Her voice filled with emotion and anxiety as her words became more rushed and I heard a slight sense of franticness as she spoke about her student teaching placement. I could hear the panic in her voice she felt on that first day as she realized that because of not only the lack of cultural teaching practices being taught and demonstrated in her pre-service education, but also her lack of field experiences and observation left her feeling lost and confused about how she would be a successful teacher in her student teaching experience.

Ms. Nells: I found out after our first debriefing meeting that her class had nine ELL students in her class alone. In my own home, we spoke some Spanish, but I was far from fluent, fluent enough to teach like I was seeing. I remember I went home and cried that first day. How was I going to teach in a classroom that I had zero training in? I may not have gotten the information I needed to be a good culturally responsive teacher through my pre-education program, but my mentor teacher gave me hope. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

As I reviewed her transcripts, I realized that with her next comments, another finding was emerging and so I stopped my analysis to reflect in my journal. Ms. Nells told two stories in her responses of thinking about the lack of real-world experiences in her pre-education training. First, she reflected on her one observation. It is obvious through her words that is important that one observation in a four-year program is not enough to allow pre-education students to grasp the key understandings of a classroom. Further, the nuances of culturally responsive pedagogy would be absent, based on the lack of observations in their pre-education program. Her story demonstrated that she recognized the ways she was taught in her own education was also being shown in the observation that she was completing. Based on her previous story of her educational experiences, these methods treated each student the same, without recognizing the differences, through culture or ethnicity, of the

students in the classroom. Hence, she was observing how to teach in the way in which she learned how to teach. However, when she went into her student teaching, she was placed in a classroom where on her first day, she was able to pick up on the cultural teaching needs immediately through sensory details—the sound of the students speaking Spanish and English, as well as the majority of the students in the classroom being non-White, and White students as the underserved in the classroom. The very students she had encountered in her pre-education program and even through her own experiences were not applicable to her current classroom setting.

As I continued to reflect on this part of Ms. Nell's story, it reminded me of my own observation and student teaching experience, which I have spoken about in earlier chapters. I was able to draw a connection from my own life to hers to support her feelings of being lost entering the student teaching experience, because I had also lacked diverse experiences in not only my class work, but also in my observations. Like her, it was my mentor teacher, in a setting not much different from Ms. Nells', who helped me begin to make my first connections with what I would learn was culturally responsive pedagogy.

Through the story of Ms. Nells' real-life experiences in observations and her lack of preparation when it came to culturally responsive pedagogy, she allowed me as a researcher to hear her story of when she began to understand what culturally responsive pedagogy was and how it was shown in the classroom.

As Ms. Nells continued her story about her mentor teacher, her hands loosened their grip on each other, much like I feel she was loosening her grip on her frustration and dissatisfaction in her pre-service education and her lack of real-life teaching experiences to help her. She stated:

That first day, in that debriefing meeting, was the first time I can recall beginning the start of understanding what culturally responsive pedagogy was. The biggest thing was that she told me that as long as I came with an open mind, cared for those students, respected them and their culture, and made learning about them, those students were going to love me through all the trial and error that I would experience over the next few months. I walked in the next day ready to learn from her, but also ready to learn from my new set of students because I knew that they would be the most valuable education I could ever receive to be the best culturally responsive teacher moving forward. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

While she was speaking, I noted the smile on her face as she spoke about this conversation with her mentor teacher. It was obvious at this moment, she knew she was going to get the “education” she had desperately needed and wanted in order to be a better teacher, I wanted to clarify that I had heard her voice and reached out to her with one last question on this topic before moving to the next step of our interview.

Me: “So would you say this was an enlightening moment for you, now that you reflect on how you view culturally responsive pedagogy? (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: “Without it and the professional development we have received here, I am not sure where I would be in my journey of teaching or if I would even be teaching. I am just thankful for that one moment my mentor teacher was able to make things obviously clear to me when it came to how I needed to be a culturally responsive teacher” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Me: “Is there anything further you think I need to know about this or your pre-service educational experiences?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells, her smile beginning to fade, “Nope, I think I have said all I need to say” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Through her facial expression and her short response, I knew that we had spent the time she felt comfortable giving to these topics and it was time to move onto the next topic.

As I was working through the analysis and the reflection of this statement from Ms. Nells, I pulled another document that had been a part of the professional development to help pick apart the pieces of culturally responsive pedagogy that she was able to recognize and understand through her student teaching experience and the comments from her mentor teacher. The document was a simple Venn diagram (see Figure 5) that had been given to teachers about the way in which the key aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy intertwine for success in the classroom. The transcript and the document sat side by side as I began to write about the ways in which the diagram demonstrated the connectivity of culture, practice, relationships, relevancy, and expectations through culturally responsive pedagogy. These elements were shown by Ms. Nells' mentor teacher.

Her mentor had highlighted each of these to her when she discussed with her. The idea of culture being first in her suggestions notes that a student's culture comes first in the classroom. She then discussed how making the learning about students and their lives would open the door to building relationships and have reflective relevancy of the learning. As I reflected on the similarities between our stories, I recognized that even though culturally responsive pedagogy can be seen through a teacher's actions and choices in the classroom, for many, without the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy spoken, demonstrated, and infused with real life experiences, many teachers will not be able to recognize the need for culturally responsiveness in the classroom or be able to definitely point out which practices are being done in the classroom that make it a culturally responsive classroom. Although Ms. Nells did not know that these suggestions from her mentor teacher were what she would learn as culturally responsive pedagogy later in her professional development, she

was now aware through her student teaching the actions that were associated with the foundation of it.

### **Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

As noted through the previous stories of Ms. Nells' dissatisfaction with her undergraduate work, her observational work, and then the hope she received from her mentor teacher in regard to culturally responsive pedagogy, she recognized the first time she had an understanding of it, through the actions of what a culturally responsive teacher does in the classroom. I felt like I had received very rich, and at times, secret, stories about these experiences and wanted to switch to how she experienced culturally responsive pedagogy through the professional development she had received. I was noticing the time ticking away on my timer, and to respect her time, I asked if she was able to just answer a few more questions for me. She agreed, but asked to take a break to clear her head before we continued. I could tell the first section of our interview had worn on her as I noted that she slowly stood, tilted her head from right to left, and let out a long whoosh of breath, as well as a push out of her hands, like pushing out bad energy or nerves, before sitting back down to begin again.

Me: "Ms. Nells, are you ready to begin again?" I asked, as I turned the recorder back on (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells, looking down at the interview guide, "I guess it's time for us to talk about professional development and culturally responsive pedagogy, huh?" (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Me: “Yes, that is my next question for you. Could you tell me about any professional development experiences that have influenced your understanding and/or approaches to teaching culturally diverse students?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: “Until I joined the diversity committee and we began talking about what we needed to do to better educate our teachers on how to rethink their teaching practices, I can’t say that I have. Is that sad?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

I did not want my facial expression to show or lead her one way or the other in responding to the question, but I did note in my field notes, “*It is sad. She’s been in the same school district for 21 years and the last three years is the only point she has gotten any professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy*” (Field Note #1, 2021). It took her 17 years to draw a connection between what her mentor teacher taught her in her student teaching and when she began to get some professional training on culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

Ms. Nells jumped in without further prompting to begin telling me about her thoughts of the culturally responsive pedagogy she had received. She asked me, “Do you remember the statistics that were given, not only to the diversity committee, but to staff on that first day of professional development?” I remembered it well, because it had been the survey data that had driven the formation of the diversity committee. Considering this information was part of my document analysis, I happened to have this document printed and with me, and so I pulled it out and laid it in front of her.

Me: “Ms. Nells, is this the statistics page you are talking about?” (Nells: Interview #1, 2021).

Ms. Nells: Yes, this is it. Even though I saw this once in a meeting with diversity members, seeing it with my peers was embarrassing. When I saw the data, I was shocked. I thought that our students felt welcomed, safe, and had a sense of belonging within our school. When I saw these numbers, I knew that this (professional development) had to happen. We weren't doing something right. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

The document to which she was referring to is a document that was taken from student survey data (see Table 3), as mentioned in Chapter 3, broken down into a slideshow for staff reflection.

I noted that Ms. Nells picked up the document with one hand and pointed a finger at the data, touching it with the tip of her finger several times, and stated:

When it was presented for us to look at these stats in our own lives and in the school in which I teach, it hit home. I remember when we were asked to think about if we would return to a place of business where the staff treated us with disrespect or why would you stay for four years at a place you weren't happy or didn't feel like you were equal to others. And then it was asked, and this stood out to me the most as a Hispanic woman, how would you feel if for four years, someone did not understand your background, socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity? Like what are we doing? If we wouldn't go back to a place of business or stay at our own job, why would students want to be here? (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

Ms. Nells' retelling of this experience about the statistics and the moment of reflection of connection to her own life to her students' lives was powerful. I could tell that she was connecting the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, and the need for professional development of it with teachers, as a crucial factor in reversing these numbers to a positive trend for our students of diversity.

This was something that I came back to my reflective journal to think more about. Because I was part of the creation of this professional development, I had to reflect on this not as a producer of this knowledge, but as a practitioner in research and its analysis. I recognized that the use of the documents with statistics-driven reflection was worthwhile for

Ms. Nells because it allowed her to place culturally responsive pedagogy as needed in her school and her classroom. If research shows that culturally responsive pedagogy is about students needing to feel understood, to feel safe, to feel a sense of belonging, and to feel connected to their learning, the data showed that within her school that was not being done. Putting the stories of the students into how teachers would feel if they were in a place where they experienced the discouragement allowed Ms. Nells to firmly understand that she would not stay, and she questioned why our students would want to stay in a place where they felt the same way. I reflected that this was an impactful way for teachers to look at the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, through the use of culturally responsive practices in the classroom to help in transforming diverse students' perspectives of the school they attend for four years.

It is apparent that Ms. Nells was impacted by the student data delivered through the PD. The conversation lagged as the realization of the disservice we were providing for our diverse students was spoken. It was as if she and the data had spoken of the problem of the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, and the importance and need for it in our school. It was as if recognizing the problem was the first step in her thinking process. I decided to go to one of my sub-questions to see what else I could get from her by asking her how this particular piece of professional development influenced her current practice. She talked to me about how she enjoyed going to the professional development about culturally responsive pedagogy and then sharing her new knowledge with the rest of her department and new ways of thinking through lessons or speaking out about the cultural needs of students. She also reflected on how her new learning helped her understand that "a lot of us were brought up learning one perspective, so naturally, when we go into the classroom, that's the perspective

that we bring.” Through this professional development, she had learned to question that perspective. In my field notes, the star appeared again and I wrote, *“This is a reflection back to her previous stories of pre-education preparation and field work dissatisfaction”* (Field Note #1, 2021). This was such an important part of her story. I was able to reflect on how many other teachers’ stories look very similar, because they never received professional development about culturally responsive pedagogy, and there was nothing to show them the need to change their perspectives of proper teaching practices or the need of incorporating culturally responsive teaching into their classrooms because they had never been given the opportunity to understand, view, or experience this cultural way of teaching.

Her final statement about how professional development enlightened her understanding and practices of culturally responsive pedagogy was a story of relief and thankfulness. In my field notes, I wrote down “hands to chest,” “eyes closed,” “smile.” Her body language reflected the way she felt about the new ways of thinking about culture in the classroom and that she finally knew what it was that she had learned from her mentor teacher many years earlier (Field Note #1, 2021).

Me: “Is there anything further you would like to add to your thoughts on the professional development we have talked about today?”

Ms. Nells: The professional development made me feel more prepared to be a culturally responsive teacher because I feel like by using some of the skills we were taught, my students will feel safe in my room. I think back to the picture we looked at of the three people at a baseball game. I think about how each student comes into my classroom like those three people. Some come in with all the advantages to be successful every day in school. Others come with just enough and others come with nothing. Because of this professional development, I have had to rethink what I can do to ensure that I am giving my students the ability to have equity and equality in my class. I need to think about how I communicate with them. I care about them; I care about who they are, and I care about issues of cultural diversity. This professional development helped me understand what I learned through my student teaching,

although I didn't have a name for it. Now I do, and I don't know if I would feel as prepared with the culturally responsive pedagogy part of it without this PD. (Nells: Interview #1, 2021)

I flipped quickly through the printed documents that I had next to me. I pulled out the equality and equity picture that she had mentioned and set it down in front of her.

Me: "Is this the picture you are talking about?"

Ms. Nells: "Yes, it is such a simple picture, but it shows so much about our students and what they bring to the classroom."

I wrote in my field notes, "*come back to this*" and "*something here*" as a reminder for me to come back to reflect on her mention of this document and her comment (Field Note #1, 2021). Later that evening, I reflected on this part of Ms. Nells' story. I began by writing, "*a picture can be a powerful method to communicate complicated messages*" (Reflective Note #5, 2021). Talking about culture in regard to students and the classroom can be a difficult and complicated task. Ms. Nells' story proved that this particular picture had impacted her enough to discuss how it influenced her thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

This image suggests that if we give every student the same thing in education, "equal assistance," we don't actually meet them where they are, which is one aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy. Many teachers assume that equality means that students all come to the classroom in the same position, whether that is culture or socio-economic status. This is demonstrated in the image of all the people being given the same box. However, the people in the picture, which represents the differences that our students bring with them to school every day, are all trying to see a baseball game over a fence. Because all the people in the picture are not the same height, they cannot equally see over the fence, an analogy for

students' education. Through reflection, teachers can use this document to recognize the pursuit of equality, and the need for helping students of diversity "see over the fence." This means that as educators, by recognizing and practicing culturally responsive pedagogy in our classrooms, we can begin to give assistance to all students by ensuring that the understandings that we have of our students' stories are reflected in curriculum, conversation, and their experiences.

It was clear that Ms. Nells had embraced what she had learned through the professional development she had experienced; she discussed and grasped the work that needed to be demonstrated and practiced to be a culturally responsive educator.

**Summary: Ms. Nells' Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Through Ms. Nells' explored, and at times secret, stories, the findings of her experiences and perspectives illuminated her dissatisfaction with her pre-education preparation, her understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy, and benefits of her professional development experiences. She expressed that her pre-service education left her feeling dissatisfied as she was not given the skills or the foundation to support the culturally responsive needs of the students in her classroom. She further communicated that if she had not had the mentor teacher in her student teaching, she would have floundered in her new teaching experiences, because she did teach her some ways in which to be a culturally responsive educator, but at the time she did not know the terminology to support what she was being taught. Further, through her experiences, Ms. Nells was able to recognize her understanding of the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, in what she lacked in her own schooling experience, as well as how it was lacking in her pre-education

experiences. However, through the professional development she received in her current school setting, she recognized the opportunities that culturally responsive pedagogy provides for educators: both the ability to reflect on the efficacy of their teaching and to apply strategies designed to positively impact student learning that were not previously given to them in their pre-service classes.

### **Mr. Talon**

Mr. Talon was the second person to come to me with his signed consent form. His reaction to handing it to me was much different than that of Ms. Nells. He was more hesitant, as he asked, “There’s nothing that I should be worried about doing in this interview, right? Like, no one will know that it was me who said these things?” (Field Note #2, 2021). We held a brief conversation about the requirements and the anonymity of the research itself and hearing it, rather than reading it on the consent form seemed to sit better with him in his comfort level. At the top of his consent form, I put question mark and quickly wrote down the above description of his hesitancy. Ms. Nells had been so confident in wanting to be a part of the study. I knew that I needed to take time to reflect on why Mr. Talon did not feel as strongly.

Later that day, I was able to sit down and reflect on his apprehension. I followed the same steps that I had taken with Ms. Nells and wrote the words that I knew about him: “*Theater Teacher, member of LGBTQ+, White, 8 years in education, 3 years on Diversity Committee*” (Reflective Note #6, 2021). I then began to think about previous interactions with Mr. Talon through our conversations through the diversity committee. I presented the notes from a meeting we had in February of 2021, as we discussed professional development.

We were discussing using the Performance for Change forum, mentioned in Chapter 3, to

help our teachers to learn and practice using their voice in uncomfortable situations to stand up for what is right. At this time, Mr. Talon was not yet tenured in the district and was concerned about putting on a performance that challenged our teachers' thinking so heavily because of the topics of race, gender, socio-economic status, and sexuality. I reflected on his hesitancy in both the presentation of professional development and his participation in this study. The story that was being told was the fear of, should I say, losing his job for his beliefs, or possibly sexual orientation, because he had a platform to speak about being culturally responsive. Although Mr. Talon was a part of the diversity committee and a member of a diverse group of people, he showed hesitancy in speaking up about his ideals about culturally responsive pedagogy for fear of offending or not having his contract renewed. I held this thought close as I began to interview him later that week.

### **Explored Storying of His Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

As Mr. Talon and I sat down, I made a point of checking in with him one more time about his comfort level while participating in this interview. I wrote in my field notes that he sat back in his chair, put his hands across his lap, as if trying to relax and process what he was about to say. I was thoroughly prepared for him to let me know that he had chosen to withdraw from the study based on his previous reluctance and conversations from the diversity committee. He brought his body back to the front of the chair, sat up a little straighter, pushed his glasses back up his nose, and simply said, "I'm ready" (Field Note #2, 2021). There was still a slight tension in the room, but I hoped that as we began to talk, he would become more comfortable.

We began the interview based on the interview protocol, getting the basics of his background out of the way; I knew many of these things already based on our previous conversations in our diversity committee, but I wanted to stay as close to the interview guides as possible. After he gave brief statements about his background, I wanted to repeat what he had said to see if he would add anything further to this conversation. That he was a member of the LGBTQ+ community was an important part of his story as a culturally responsive educator.

Me: “Mr. Talon, I just want to clarify that you attended private institutions for your pre-education programs; you have been teaching theater or English for the past eight years in rural and suburban settings” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

Mr. Talon: “That is correct. Do you want to address my tie to the LGBTQ+ community? I can if you feel it will be useful” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I didn’t want to lead the conversation, still trying to respect the level of hesitancy he had shared with me earlier. I noted in my field notes that he began to twirl his wedding band as he waited for my response.

Me: “That is up to you. You can speak whatever you feel I need to hear” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I noted, “*He may not say anything here... and that is ok*” (Field Note #2, 2021). I didn’t know if he would expand on his response, because, as mentioned before, he had shown hesitancy in our diversity committee, so I could respect that he could also stop here. I noted him continuing to twirl his wedding band and slide it up and down his finger in what seemed nervous anxiety. I started to tell him we could move on, but he leaned forward, hands in his lap.

Mr. Talon: I am not sure how much I want to say here, but I guess I will see what comes out. I went to a private school; we were not wealthy, but for the area we were in, it was the best option for my parents to ensure I got a good education. I knew I was gay from a young age, maybe 11 or 12, but growing up, it was not acceptable to discuss it. Since we are talking about education, I will talk solely about my experience in that way. In my middle and high school years, I found myself just accepting that I wasn't going to probably run into a teacher like me, and I sure wasn't going to learn about people like me. When I got to college, I felt like I belonged more, but that was because I was around people who were like me, not because my professors were giving me anything to identify with my identity, but because the student body was more diverse. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I noted that at this time he paused. I was not sure if the pause was because he was done or if was processing his next thought. I wanted to encourage him to keep going because I did not feel like he was giving me all the story.

Me: “So, if you were thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy and the ways in which your educators and professors taught you, how would you explain it?” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

Mr. Talon: For my teachers, I feel like they defined me as a White male. I mean, if I think about it, I am not sure we had a person of diversity until my junior year of high school, but even then, teachers taught the way I had known for those past 11 years. As far as I can tell you, they probably just looked at him as one of us. When I got to college, it wasn't much different. This time, I just recognized my identity and told my story outside my college classroom walls and was still just a White male, but now sprinkled with a flair for theater, music, and dancing. I just never felt seen. If my teachers understood how important the diversity of each of their students were would I have found my voice sooner? Would that one person of color in my high school not just have blended in with the rest of us? I am not saying I didn't get a good education, but I can't say that I got a diverse education, but at the time, I didn't know I should be getting anything different, does that make sense? Like you know, the iceberg we talked about in PD? Just know your students; know who they are. It's not just about the color of their skin. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I drew a small broken heart next to a field note statement I had taken while he was talking; “*sad he could not identify as who he was throughout the majority of his schooling and felt the need to live another life outside college classroom walls—recognition of CRP*”

*importance. Iceberg mentioned again*” (Field Note #2, 2021). He paused again; I noted that he looked down at his hands, and I chose to leave this part of the conversation here.

As I read over his transcript, his uncovered story began to blossom. I reflected in my journal the connection between his hesitancy not only in being a part of this study or Theater for Change performance, but his hesitancy to talk about the stories that made him who he was. It was obvious that Mr. Talon understood the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy in his remembrance of his schooling and college years. It was uncovered that his teachers and professors just saw him as a White male and that was how he was taught. He made sure to note that even the one person of color that attended his school, starting his junior year, was treated and looked at as just another one of the majority in that school. By telling these short snippets of his story, he was able to articulate the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. He demonstrated the need for teachers to understand the lived experiences and stories of their students and how those aspects could influence their learning and thinking.

Mr. Talon, like Ms. Nells, brought up the cultural iceberg in his interview. For him, the tip of the iceberg, gender and physical characteristics, was all that his teachers saw, but he also noted that they did not view the person of color—even that small tip of the iceberg, his physical characteristics—by treating and educating him the same as the other 99% of the students in that particular school. I noted in my journal, *“It is apparent once again that educators, to best understand their students and the diversity that they bring to their education, must dive deeper into their students’ lives and allow them to bring the part of them like their nationality, talents, life experiences, personal beliefs, and even sexual preferences”* (Reflective Note #7, 2021). Although Ms. Nells had discussed her story of

being Hispanic and the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy in her own schooling, Mr. Talon invested his understanding of why culturally responsive pedagogy for LGBTQ+ identities was important to him and the ways in which it can inform the lived experiences of students in the classroom.

### **Explored Storying of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs**

Mr. Talon had said more than I had expected so far in his interview, but as a researcher, I wanted to ensure his comfort during his interview and let him continue to lead his responses without much pushing from me. I had already begun to see his story unfold as he talked about himself not feeling able to be himself growing up, not being recognized for his differences by his educator because he did not feel seen. I had also noted in my field notes, “*see if he comes back to the way he felt about his college education here*” (Field Note #2, 2021). This was something that I hoped he would continue to discuss as he began to speak about his pre-education experiences.

Me: “As you are aware, part of my study is looking at the stories of teachers and their perspective on their preparation to teach culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. How would you like to speak about your experiences?” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I made a researcher’s note in my field note that said, “*asked the question a little differently here to still give him the sense that he was more in control of what he wanted to say*” (Field Note #2, 2021). I was still trying to keep in mind his hesitancy and wanted him to feel like he was in control of the interview and speak his truth in the way he was most comfortable. He jumped right into his response.

Mr. Talon: Ya know, there was no preparation to teach culturally diverse students. At my undergraduate program, there was next to none. I remember briefly touching on it

when we were talking about differentiation and some of my beginning education courses, but there was not very much time spent on it. As I reflect on it, when I entered my first teaching job, this left me feeling dissatisfied with the money I spent to learn how to teach all students, when I only got the basics to teach to the majority. One of the things I remember thinking during my first teaching job was why didn't I get more in-class experience during classroom management classes and more culturally responsive teaching skills...like knowing how to teach that in classroom management. There just wasn't a whole lot of real-life experiences. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

In my field notes, I wrote "*dissatisfied*" and underlined it heavily, along with "*secret story*" (Field Note #2, 2021). The word dissatisfied said a lot about how Mr. Talon felt about his pre-education experience. I knew that I would reflect on this further, but I felt the need to push the topic of what the word "dissatisfied" meant to him in his pre-education program. Ms. Nells had not specifically used the word "dissatisfied" in her story, but her words ensured that those were her thoughts as well when speaking out about her pre-education preparation. I pressed further to understand Mr. Talon's story of dissatisfaction.

Me: "Mr. Talon, I couldn't help but note that you used the word 'dissatisfied' in your description of your pre-service education. Could you expand further on what you mean by this?" (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

He paused for a moment; I waited, and I noted the deep breath he took before he began to answer, and then wrote "*eyes down*" and "*looking at hands*" (Field Note #2, 2021). After his hesitancy about being a part of the study, I knew he was getting ready to deliver something honest and real. He spoke softly as he responded, his eyes finally looking back at me.

Mr. Talon: "If we want to get technical, it kind of embraces two things...I was dissatisfied with my professors and because of my dissatisfaction with them, I was

dissatisfied with my preparation to teach culturally diverse students” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I hurriedly wrote, “*connection to professor’s lack of knowledge and education he received*” (Field Note #2, 2021). This was something I knew I needed to once again come back to when reflecting on this very important connection to why he felt his dissatisfaction. He then began to tell the story of how he was not only dissatisfied, but also unsatisfied with his pre-service education. Through his words, filled with passion and honesty, he told a story about his dissatisfaction with his professors who had not been in a classroom environment for years.

Mr. Talon: In regard to my dissatisfaction with my professors...you can’t tell me that if I have been out of a classroom for 10 years or more that I am going to bring the best and most updated classroom practices, theories, experiences, and application to these newbies who are paying a lot of money to become educated in their field. Think about other professions. Can a doctor who has not practiced medicine in ten years teach pre-med students about all the ways that medicine and patient care has changed effectively in those past ten years? (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I noted in my field notes: “*Analogy—comparing the practice of medicine to the practice of education*” (Field Note #2, 2021).

Mr. Talon continued: They may know because they have read the latest literature, but they don’t know how that information is applicable in patient care because they are not actively practicing on their patients. It’s the same thing in education. We can’t have professors who are not familiar with all the newness and diversity that our students bring to the classroom every day if they haven’t been a part of it. Reading a journal article doesn’t constitute that I know what is best for students or the teachers I am preparing to enter the classroom. They were definitely not intentional about teaching us how to respond or relate, or even teach, culturally diverse students. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

When I reflected on this part of Mr. Talon’s story, I found it perplexing—the lack of preparedness he felt in his understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, but also that his professors shared in that sense of lack. In any other college prepared profession, or trade, for

that matter, it is expected that students exit their programs with the knowledge and skills to be successful on the next stage of their journey. For example, Mr. Talon had brought into his interview the skill factors doctors needed in order to be able to perform their job on a daily basis. I reflected in my journal, *“Could this be another secret story? Mr. Talon used the word intentional here. What does the word intentional look like when we are thinking about education and culturally responsive pedagogy? For Mr. Talon, I feel that he was noting the word “intentional” as teaching that is explicit, purposeful, or deliberate. Further, being intentional would have professors intentionally demonstrating and educating future educators on how to plan and guide cultural diversity in guiding students’ learning to explore their own selves and their experiences that they bring to the classroom to be able to assist in those teachable moments that are so crucial when incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom”* (Reflective Note #8, 2021).

As I connected the medical analogy with education, I noted, *“The practice of education and medicine have changed significantly over the years. Just as, we as a society, would never expect a doctor to just teach how to do the latest surgery on the heart from simply reading current journals or studies, while placing their own outdated knowledge for future doctors to take into their practices and operating rooms, we cannot expect professors, who are not experiencing current classroom situations, to simply teach from the mindset of how things were in the past while they were in the classroom”* (Reflective Note #9, 2021).

This led me to closely examine how whether it be a doctor’s practice or an educator’s practice, it is important to recognize that those leading the charge in preparing the next generation of doctors and/or educators, need to be current in their understanding of a 21st

century classroom and the best practices, theories, experiences, and application needed in a diverse classroom.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs**

As the above was only one part of Mr. Talon's story of dissatisfaction, I prompted him after his discussion about his professors to see if there was anything further he wanted to add to his story.

Me: "Mr. Talon, before, you mentioned that you were also dissatisfied with your preparation to teach culturally diverse students when it came to your pre-education program. Would you like to expand?" (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

Mr. Talon chuckled. You are just trying to get it all out there, aren't you? Just think about it, if the people I am supposed to be learning from, the professors, aren't knowledgeable or really speaking about current educational practices, how am I supposed to learn about it? On top of that, if they aren't teaching me, what I need to know for today's classroom, how was I supposed to know what to do going into my student teaching or even my own classroom right after that? (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I noted in my field notes that he had begun to spin his ring again. After observing this several times in his interview, I recognized that any time he was getting ready to criticize someone or something, he turned to his ring as a comforter, as if to ground his thoughts before speaking negatively (Field Note #2, 2021).

Mr. Talon continued. I remember my student teaching experience, the only real-life experience I was truly going to get before I entered the classroom. I asked to be placed to student teach in a more diverse school. Lord knows my observations were in the local school districts, private at that, and I didn't see much of anything different from the ways that I was educated. I remember one school; I never saw a person of color in the classroom I was observing. Can you imagine what it was like getting my first teaching job, and I had nothing... and I mean nothing... to go off of how to teach anyone other than students who looked like me? I mean... going back to the cultural iceberg, that is what everyone sees first... White and male. Sorry, I digress, so when I asked to be placed in another setting for my student teaching, I was told no. Students were always sent to this one school, the same one where I did my student teaching. It

was like they were ensuring that what we saw in our student teaching was what we had seen in our pre-education program. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I didn't make a field note during this time; once I was reviewing his transcript, I was surprised. It seemed to be a perfect connection between his own schooling, his pre-education program, and his field experience. I began to write, "*Without even knowing it, he brought his story full circle. He was able to work his way into showing how, because he went to a private school central to where he also went to college, everything reflected a 'majority' educational mindset*" (Reflective Note #10, 2021).

Mr. Talon's story of thinking about his field experience, and how it reflected how he was educated and taught by his professors in his pre-education program illuminates the cycle that many education majors experience as they move from one institution to another. If pre-service educators are being shown only what they are familiar with, what the professors are familiar with, and then being sent out to do their student teaching in the same "cookie cutter" environment, there is no understanding of the need for anything different—anything different about students' cultures, experiences, and their stories that they bring to the classroom. To be effective culturally responsive educators, teachers need to have real life, applicable knowledge and experience, to help them in unlearning what and how they have been educated, calling out and rethinking the perspectives of homogeneity and pivot towards being able to educate through a new lens of cultural responsiveness.

### **Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

Mr. Talon, even through his hesitancy, had given his stories about his dissatisfaction with his pre-education program and the lack of real-world experiences to prepare him for his

student teaching. I knew it was time for us to begin our conversation about professional development and to explore if, or how it had allowed him to grasp culturally responsive pedagogy. He had already mentioned the cultural iceberg as being impactful to him, but as mentioned earlier, a professional development in which he played a part was the Theater for Change presentation. I wrote in my field notes before I asked him to talk about his story of professional development and culturally responsive pedagogy, “*Will he talk about the theater professional development or speak about something else that impacted him?*” (Field Note #2, 2021).

Me: “Mr. Talon, one of the last things I wanted to ask you about was if you could recall any professional development experiences that have influenced your understanding and/or approaches to teaching culturally diverse students?” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

In my field notes, I wrote “smiled” (Field Note #2, 2021). This was important for me as a researcher to note because it was the first time I had seen him seem to drop his guard a little in his interview, and it was the first time he had smiled throughout the whole time we had talked.

Mr. Talon: The most impactful moment I have ever had in a professional development was the Theater for Change one. It first was eye opening for myself because I remember the first time we talked about doing it in our diversity meeting. Do you remember how nervous I was to do that? When I think about the success I saw in the thinking of, not only myself but others in the staff, and diversity, I was kind of ashamed that I was so reluctant to share these experiences with the staff because I was scared for myself. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

I made a comment in my field notes, “*his words confirming why he felt the way he did about presenting this challenging PD*” (Field Note #2, 2021).

Mr. Talon: From that performance, I was able to witness authentic representation of interactions between my colleagues and students. It was a conversation about culture, voice, and experiences brought together with action shown through the staff on

learning how to speak up and speak out when they heard or saw something that was not okay. It was refreshing. I liked seeing how the different teachers brought their own personalities into the scene and gave me different examples of how I might handle a similar situation in the future. I felt like we had been building to that moment with other professional developments, but this was different. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

As I listened to his interview after the initial transcript, I came back to my reflection journal. I wrote, *“I remember this PD well. It was fascinating to watch our students interact with the staff over real-life situations they had seen happen in our school and not speak up for them. I did not show much emotion and lead the conversation much when he was discussing this PD because I did not want my facial expressions or comments to lead to his responses—but I remember...I remember the teachers who stood up and stepped in on the third part of the performance: Their voices demonstrating the embracement of the PDs that had come before, preparing them for putting into practice the understanding of diversity and inclusion needed in the school to embrace all students. I remember those who chose to not stand up, allowing those students to see them in a new light—a light that was not flattering to their strength, or willingness, to speak up about disparaging comments to students or their cultural willingness to grow and learn how to intervene”* (Reflective Note #11, 2021).

Mr. Talon continued his comments about the impact this particular professional development led him to understand culturally responsive pedagogy in a growth mindset. I noted in my field notes, *“sat back in his chair, slouched slightly, pushed glasses back up his nose, and folded his hands in his lap”* (Field Note #2, 2021). Mr. Talon’s actions demonstrated that he “felt” something about what he was getting ready to say.

Mr. Talon: This is a model that should be duplicated in every school. I was so moved. I’ll tell you what I thought was the best part of it. Teachers who I know personally are somewhat hardened, somewhat stuck in their ways, couldn’t help but be moved by the stories coming from the students themselves. They also could not help but be

impacted by those staff members who chose not to speak up. There seemed to be a clear line drawn between those teachers who had been listening, growing, and ready to show how these conversations needed to be intervened using the knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy professional developments we had gone through. It is very difficult to disconnect from a student who is explaining their story and their point of view directly in front of you. There were tears; there was a clear connection made. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

In my field notes, I wrote “*connection between this PD and connection to staff, student experience and voices*” (Field Note #2, 2021). Considering that culturally responsive pedagogy is about allowing the experiences, voices, and cultures to be intertwined in learning, it was impactful to see how culturally responsive pedagogy demonstrated learning and development through the lens of a teacher and a student simultaneously.

At this time, I wanted to see if Mr. Talon had any further input to his story of the impact that this particular professional development had on him and/or his teaching.

Me: Thank you for that, Mr. Talon. Do you have anything further to say about this particular professional development?” (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I noted that he was still sitting farther back in his chair, but this time he crossed one leg over the other and folded his hands around his one knee. I wrote, “*from where we were to having him be very involved and relaxed—comfortable telling his story.*” This was important for me as a researcher because it was like he was releasing his hesitancy with each story he told and with each reflection he made.

Mr. Talon: “Ya know, yeah, I do. After this professional development, part of me has started to feel recently that like, I need to kind of make a point, not in like an aggressive way, but like make a point of addressing it (diversity) in a way that the whole class can hear, so the whole class understands... (Talon: Interview #2, 2021).

I noted that he stopped—paused for an uncomfortable amount of time. When I looked back at his transcript, it was close to 23 seconds—23 seconds of a long, uncomfortable silence and I did not know where he would take this comment. I made a note on the side of his transcript that said, “*he addressed the change he needed to make in himself to be an ally for diversity in his own classroom—PD helped him recognize this*” (Reflective Note #12, 2021). This was important that he could recognize how this specific professional development had changed him in the classroom to want and need to be a more culturally responsive educator. However, where was he headed with his statement?

As we sat in silence, I did not make eye contact with him. I noted that he had placed his feet back on the ground and with his hands hooked together, ran his hands through his hair, resting his hands on the back of his neck. His body language and the trailing off of his response left me confused. I wrote, “*awkward silence, not responding, seems deep in thought*” (Field Note #2, 2021). He finally continued and I brought my gaze back to him to hear what had caused him to reflect for so long.

Mr. Talon: I take that back, it’s not just about my students. I can’t be a culturally responsive educator if I think culture and talking about it stops at my classroom door. This is also about my staff—like saying, making culturally insensitive comments is not acceptable. They can’t continue to just be idle and act like our demographics aren’t changing. With that, I also cannot be idle in staying silent. I think for so long I thought avoiding conversations was the way to go because of the politicalness of it all. However, I realized through this PD session, and just in talking with you, it’s not about like being political—it’s about personal courtesy and treating others the way we want to be treated. (Talon: Interview #2, 2021)

In my journal, I jotted a few notes here, thinking that he had said everything so clearly that I didn’t know how to expand on his thinking. I began, “*It is obvious, picture-perfectly clear, that the professional development that Mr. Talon received through the Theater for Change production impacted his thinking about being a culturally responsive*

*educator. Not only did it allow him to reflect on his classroom practice, it also allowed him to recognize the need for talking with staff when things arise that are not promoting a culturally inclusive environment and ‘call them out’ to be better, not just for themselves, but for the students they encounter everyday” (Reflective Note #13, 2021).*

Through Mr. Talon’s story, it became clear that educators need to experience professional development that allows them to interact, apply, and connect the concepts being addressed—in this case, culturally responsive pedagogy—to allow them to recognize the purpose of cultural responsiveness not only in the classroom, but in how they can hold staff accountable, demonstrate being an ally for students, and begin to implement the recognition of culture as part of the academic process of learning.

### **Summary: Mr. Talon’s Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

In Mr. Talon’s explored and secret stories, the findings of this study were illuminated through his experiences and perspectives of his pre-education preparation, understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy, and professional development experiences. Through the story of Mr. Talon’s experiences as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and his perspective of how he was educated in private schools and university, he recognized that there was little to no culturally responsive pedagogy demonstrated in what he was taught from his teachers and professors. Because these institutions reflected the majority—White and male—even the one under-represented student seemingly was taught as if he was just like everyone else. In his student teaching, he received the same infrastructure as other student teachers at the local university as they were funneled back into the school which he previously attended. The illumination of culturally responsive pedagogy came, however,

through the professional development he had received, particularly through the Theater for Change. Having teachers and students actively involved in understanding culturally responsive pedagogy was a game changer for him in how he rethought his own classroom, and also learning to speak up and speak out for the betterment of his students and staff and recognizing how culture plays an important role in learning and teaching in the classroom.

### **Mr. Dios**

Mr. Dios was the third to return his consent form, and thus he was my third interview. I found his consent form sitting on my desk one morning when I came into school. Leaving the document on my desk rather than handing it to me personally was unlike the other two participants who had previously submitted their forms. I sat down quickly with my journal and began to write. I continued the same process: *“Male, Hispanic, Spanish Teacher (6 years), Suburban and Urban Setting, Diversity Committee Member-1 year, speaks Spanish fluently”* (Reflective Note #14, 2021). Considering that Mr. Dios and Ms. Nells were the only two Hispanic educators in our building, I was curious to see how Mr. Dios’ story would unfold. Would it be similar to Ms. Nells’ story, or would he have different experiences that led to his story? Unlike my embarrassing findings with Ms. Nells in learning she was Hispanic, in our diversity committee introductions, Mr. Dios carried his heritage with him everywhere he went. He was proud of his Hispanic heritage and embraced the help he could offer other staff, students, parents, and community members. As I reflected on this, I wrote, *“Thinking about Mr. Dios’ story of his ethnicity—he wears it proudly in this building. It is also apparent that Mr. Dios is willing to use his ethnicity as a way to help the stakeholders in a culturally responsive school”* (Reflective Note #15, 2021). By embracing his own culture, his own story through his actions, it was apparent that he recognized that his Hispanic culture

was beneficial to helping students and parents connect with the school of which they or their students were members. I closed my journal and went to find Mr. Dios to schedule our interview before we both became consumed with the day ahead.

Mr. Dios' classroom was on the other side of the building, but I didn't get far before I heard his voice, speaking Spanish, echoing down the hall. I turned the corner and saw him speaking with one of our ELL students, who had recently moved here from El Salvador. I waited patiently for them to finish their conversation, taking in the dance the two were having in their conversation, not knowing what they were saying, but hearing and seeing an example of being a culturally responsive teacher by sharing their stories in their native language. When he finished his conversation, he turned to me and said, "You found it. When would you like to meet?" (Field Note #3, 2021).

### **Explored Storying of his Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Mr. Dios and I agreed to meet two days later during our plan periods. He found himself constantly busy before school, checking in with students, and after school translating for IEP meetings or working with ELL students. I noted in my field notes that when he walked in, his demeanor was much different than that of the other two participants I had interviewed. I wrote, "*Came in, relaxed, sitting back comfortably in his chair, one leg crossed over the other, smiling*" (Field Note #3, 2021). The difference in the way he sat showed me that our conversation was going to be different, maybe a little more laid back, and conversation-like, which is exactly how his story flowed—more of him, less of me.

Me: "Good afternoon, Mr. Dios. I hope you are having a great day and appreciate you meeting with me. Today I want to ask you a few questions about your story and culturally

responsive pedagogy and wanted to begin by asking you how you felt you were prepared to teach students of diversity...”(Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

I didn’t get to finish my sentence because he interrupted me. He leaned forward towards the table and asked, “What’s culturally responsive pedagogy?” I had minutes earlier given him an interview guide, gone over the definition we would be using (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and asked him if he had any questions. He had told me no, and so at this moment, I wrote in my field notes, “confused?” When I was transcribing this part of his interview, I wrote in my reflection journal, “*Concerned where our interview would go if he did not even understand the foundation of what we were beginning to discuss in this interview,*” I was also confused because I had watched him in the hallway just a few days before embracing another student’s cultural literacy. I wasn’t sure where to go. Luckily, he spoke up first.

Mr. Dios, laughingly said, “I’m playing. You came in so serious, and it’s not how I normally see you, so I had to get you just a little” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

He was right. In our diversity meetings, I am always energetic, excited, and ready to talk about the topics at hand. I wrote in my field notes, “*Maybe relax a little more when doing these interviews, see if it leads to more openness. They see me every day, especially as the leader of their diversity team, be more like you, and less like a researcher*” (Field Note #3, 2021). I then starred it as a reminder to come back as I moved forward. Later in my reflection journal, I noted, “*For the first two interviews I had been very focused on being a researcher, playing the part. However, this is not how my participants saw me every day. They were used to me being free and open in discussion, checking in with them, helping them with questions that would arise freely—listening with intent*” (Reflective Note #16, 2021). I realized at this moment that I had taken the role of the researcher seriously, but I realized that

maybe I was not getting the same stories and experiences I would have gotten if I just seemed more like myself. This was important to reflect on to be able to get the most authentic stories from my participants as I moved through the rest of the interviews.

Mr. Dios continued: I never really knew that there was a need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Better yet, I didn't even know what it was, especially growing up, and actually not till a few years ago when we began putting a name to the practice in our professional development. Being a Hispanic in a diverse city such as Oakland, one would assume that the understanding of the need for recognizing a student's culture would be abundant, especially considering how many Hispanic students begin formalized schooling without the economic and social resources that many other students receive, and schools are often ill equipped to compensate for these initial disparities. Something that culturally responsive pedagogy could begin to address, yet it is not being addressed. Ya know, I could keep this just with Hispanic students, but it is actually any underserved student in our schools today. Culturally responsive pedagogy is about connections, connections with the curriculum, their experiences, their teachers, their classmates...if these things are lacking, much like I saw in my own education, it undermines their academic success. If my teachers had been more diverse, more open to their diverse students, and had the foundational tools under their belt to best serve their students of diversity, what kind of change could take place? I was one of those Hispanic students that was just going to be a number, a statistic, a dropout, but my parents kept pushing me. I finished not because of my teachers, but because my parents wanted so much more for me than they had for themselves. Now, before I realized what culturally responsive pedagogy was just changed my thought process of teaching to reflect what I had needed in my own schooling and now ensure it is in my teaching practice. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

I noted "PAUSE" in my field notes (Field Note #3, 2021). I sat for what seemed like forever after this comment. He brought in so much to this response that I had to wrap my head around when it came time to reflect back on his transcript, making sure this was one of the first things I addressed in my reflection journal. Later that night, I listened to this part of the interview again...not once...not twice...but three times, each time hearing the layers of Mr. Dios's story. I began to write, "*Mr. Dios was a student that was almost lost because of the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. He was raised in a diverse area, with no connection in his school with Hispanic culture and heritage to make him feel as if he*

*belonged, his teachers understood him, and recognized the importance that his culture played a role in him being successful in school”* (Reflective Note #17, 2021). I continued to think about how this impacted him as a current teacher, one that I saw demonstrated culturally responsive pedagogy every day in the halls and in the classroom. He understood without initially knowing what culturally responsive pedagogy needed to be, how it needed to look in the classroom for students, and how, as a student, he had not experienced it, and made changes in his own practices to be more for his students than what he had received.

Mr. Dios continued: As Hispanic, I understood my culture, but my culture does not encompass all Hispanics, just like culture isn’t just about race or ethnicity and just be about those two things. I remember the cultural iceberg being up on the screen. The way it was described as we only see our students as the tip of the iceberg because that is what they walk in with and what we can see. It made me think back to my own education and realize that many of my teachers viewed me just at the surface; they never actually got to know all the parts of what made me, me. I recognized that based on my own experiences, I make an effort every day to be more than what I have before and no matter how difficult it may be some days to dive deeper into my students’ lives, I have to do it. I have to know the whole story to best educate them. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

I made a note here in my field notes, *“he is leading this interview...and that is ok...he is giving so much of the authentic story that I wanted to hear”* (Field Note #3, 2021). However, as I reflected later in my reflection journal, I found it interesting that he did, indeed, lead the interview. This was an interesting aspect that I had not thought about at the time of the interview. Later, I began to realize that his interview leading was unlike my previous interviews. I began to reflect: *“Mr. Dios was the second man I had interviewed. The first, being Mr. Talon, seemed reserved in his responses, while Mr. Dios seemed to take over the interview. Why was this? What could I conclude about this? I honestly, don’t know what to think here”* (Reflective Note #18a, 2022). I had to take a moment and do some research.

Because it had caught my curiosity, I went to do some research on the idea of women

conducting qualitative research with men as participants. As I began to read, I realized that in research there was an aspect called “men’s spaces.” According to Twitchell (2006) and Fine (2013), the idea of “places” may become associated with certain identities over time and with shifting socio-political, cultural, and/or economic circumstances. Further, in the context of masculine research, it was important for me to recognize and understand how gender and cultural norms may inform how the interview was conducted and the need for holding power in the conversational stories that were being told. Knowing that Hispanic culture is a more patriarchal system, this new idea of “men’s spaces” allowed me to understand Mr. Dios’s involvement in his interview through his gender and cultural norms.

Once I had moved past this thinking, I was able to go back into Mr. Dios’s transcript and begin a different path of thinking about the field note I had left. I wrote in my reflective journal, *“Mr. Dios’s story of his cultural experience in school was not far off from Ms. Nells’ reflection of her culture in her schooling experiences. The difference here is that Mr. Dios embraced who he was and did not seem to hide from the things he could offer others based on his culture. Further, the cultural iceberg was brought up again in Mr. Dios’s story. This visual seems to be something that has been very important in the interviewees’ understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy when reflecting on their own stories and experiences. Each of the three, Ms. Nells, Mr. Talon, and Mr. Dios, have discussed how the cultural iceberg has illuminated their understanding of what they were lacking in their own educational experiences, and it was no different here for Mr. Dios. Being able to recognize that there is so much more to students than what one can see visually is crucial in building a culturally responsive classroom that is inclusive and connected to its students’ experiences”* (Reflective Note #18b, 2021). This highlighted for me that each of the participants was able

to recognize the moment they understood the need for culturally responsive pedagogy and begin making changes in their own educational mindset to better teach students of diversity.

### **Explored Stories of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs**

Mr. Dios continued to lead into this next finding on his own, still stemming from the question I had asked at the start of our interview. I noted in my field notes, *“interesting when I let myself be seen as a person they know and are familiar with, rather than a researcher, how much the participant takes the lead in telling their story”* (Field Note #3, 2021).

Mr. Dios continued, “But in reality, think about your question.” I noted he had sat back in his comfortable position at this point in the conversation. “You asked me about culturally responsive pedagogy and my pre-education preparation. I hate to break it to you, but I had none. And if I had none, it would be hard for me to tell you how I was prepared, at that time, because I didn’t even know what it was” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

I noted in my field notes, *“Honest...brutally honest”* (Field Note #3, 2021). I came back to this comment for reflection because it said a lot to me, especially based on the other participants’ stories of their lack of preparation to teach culturally responsive pedagogy. I wrote, *“The first two interviewees examined their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy only through the professional development that they had received through the diversity committee’s initiative. If that had not existed, would any of my participants have brought to their stories about being a culturally responsive teacher?”* (Reflective Note #19, 2021). I knew that I still had four interviews left, but the answer to this question, thus far, was concerning.

Me: “Interesting point, Mr. Dios, could you expand on that for me?” I noted he unfolded his one leg and pulled his chair closer to the table, setting his hands on it. He proceeded.

Mr. Dios: I was born and raised in California, Oakland to be exact. I went to school there, did my college education there, and taught there for two years. When you think of Oakland, I don’t know about you, but I think of diversity, especially diversity of people who look like me. So, you would think that my college preparation would have reflected the state, the city in which I grew up and the diversity that is there. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

I made a quick notation in my field notes, “*wanting his pre-education to reflect him as a student, although he didn’t feel this in his own schooling or preparation*” (Field Note #3, 2021).

Mr. Dios continued to connect the lack of diversity he had in his pre-education program to not just the surface level foundations he received; he recognized the lack of diversity in his own professors.

Mr. Dios: My college experience was lacking in diversity anything. At that time, I had professors that were old and weren’t really equipped, or weren’t even considering any of that. Now that I think about it, considering where I went to school and the diversity that lived, worked, and were educated there, I am not even sure how this topic was not addressed in my classes. I honestly only remember one person of color as a professor in my four years of attending college. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

Processing through this section of Mr. Dios’s transcripts, I noticed here how he felt his professors in his undergraduate program were old, out of touch, and not well equipped to teach in culturally responsive classrooms. At this point, I just sat and listened while I looked at the words of his transcript on the screen. I looked down at my page to start writing, but found that I had tapped the page so much with my hot pink Paper Mate that it had several dots over the page. As a child, I loved to connect the dots, and as I looked at my page, I began to connect the “dots” of Mr. Dios’s story. I wrote, “*Connection point #1: Mr. Dios*

*shows concern with the lack of diversity he was shown and taught within his pre-education programs. Connection point #2: Mr. Dios was concerned with the lack of diversity he saw within his professors. Connection point #3: Undergraduate preparation his professors were lacking in the very thing that pre-educators in this area needed to be taught on—diversity of themselves and the education which they brought to the pre-education preparation for future educators. Connection point #4: Mr. Dios, who was educated in California, made a point to note that his professors, except for one, were all White in all four years of his undergraduate preparation” (Reflective Note #20, 2021).*

It was interesting thinking about this point, especially in a diverse setting such as a major city in California, that the professors in higher level education seemed to be predominantly White. These connections led back to the research discussed regarding Ms. Nells’ stories, that over 80% of our current teaching staff in our classrooms is White and predominantly female. In cultural diversity, it is important to understand that students should be able to see something of themselves in their educators. This leads to the question, how do we encourage more people of color to teach so our students can see people like them who have achieved academic excellence and make a connection with them? Should this same expectation not also be in our colleges? This led me to think further about the current growth of diversity in the United States, making me write one last reflection, *“To know about diversity, is to see and experience diversity”* (Reflective Note #21, 2021).

It would seem that in the current growth of diversity in the United States, there is an assumption that professors are teaching with cultural blinders on as the “majority” seems to be reflected in the teachings and the educators we see in both higher academia and schools today. However, if these professors were in the classrooms more regularly and understood

the changing demographics in our schools, this could help to close a gap that our pre-service educators are feeling between their learning and their first years of teaching.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education**

Mr. Dios and Mr. Talon both began their stories about dissatisfaction with their pre-education programs in the professors they had experienced in their preparation classes. I had given both of them an opportunity to expand on his story, but Mr. Dios did not want to add to his statement. Thus, we began to discuss his story of the absence of real-world experiences in his pre-education program.

Me: “Thank you Mr. Dios, I appreciate your input about your thoughts on why you felt like your pre-service education was lacking. Is it okay for me to move on to my next questions?” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

I noted in my field notes that his demeanor had begun to change slightly. He had seemed to become more serious as the interview went on; his smile disappeared, and he did not seem as relaxed as when we had first begun. I wrote a “?” at this point in our interview. I later wrote in my reflection journal, *“Underlying secret story? With the way he conducted himself changed, could it reflect his realization of how his pre-service education had affected not only how he taught in his classroom, but also how he had viewed that this was the right way to teach, because, he, as a diverse student himself had never known anything different?”* (Reflective Note #22, 2021). This was important to think about as we continued to move through his interview.

Mr. Dios nodded that it was okay to continue, and I noted he had shifted in his chair a little, as if he were trying to get comfortable with the next part of his story.

Me: “Mr. Dios, is there any part of your pre-education that stands out to you or is memorable about your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

Mr. Dios: Memorable... stand out... hummm...those are some interesting word choices. If you think about it, if we weren't given any foundation in our pre-service teaching for culturally responsive pedagogy, and our professors weren't giving us any information to teach culturally diverse anything, how can I say it is memorable? That is the sad part; the memories I have stand out are because I didn't get what I needed to be an effective educator to all my students. Then we got exposed in our student teaching that every student in our classroom did not fit the mold they teach you in your classes. Like this isn't funny, but it is. Do you remember the old show Candid Camera? That is how I felt. I entered the classroom ready to teach like I had been taught, not only in my earlier years, but my college professors. I didn't have the education to back up my experiences, like none of them. I had been told for three and a half years in pre-education programs, teach like this. I recognized that this teaching to the “majority” wasn't going to work for me. It wasn't going to work for these kids. However, my mentor teacher just taught... taught exactly how I had been taught. Seeing this from the other side of the table, I realized this wasn't how you educate. Then when I got my own classroom, it was like scratch most of that it won't work. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

I found it interesting that he had used the word scratch, and I commented in my field notes, *“like a record scratch...at this point he just stopped talking”* (Field Note #3, 2021). It was something that needed to be noted because he had been so free with his conversation up until this point. As we both just sat there looking at each other, I made another note, *“this moment is impactful for him and uncomfortable for me”* (Field Note #3, 2021). I came back to this field note later in my reflection stage, and I wrote in my journal, *“The fact that he felt he had received nothing to teach culturally responsiveness in his future classroom, did not see culturally responsiveness taught in his students teaching classroom, and felt like he was part of a game show where he was put in a situation where everyone was watching him, ready to laugh at him, and in a situation he surely felt like he couldn't succeed...it made him think about the lack of real-world experience he had not gained in any of his pre-service*

*education. I wonder how many other future educators feel the same?"* (Reflective Note #23, 2021). Since this wasn't the first time I had heard this in my interviews, it further solidified how pre-education programs are doing a disservice to our future educators by not setting them up with the skills that are needed to teach to the changing demographics reflected in the current classroom makeup.

Coming back to the interview, I decided to break the silence to see if Mr. Dios had any further comments on his feelings of lacking in real life experiences in his pre-education experiences. With the pause he had given, I did not feel like his story was over, more like he was taking a moment to reflect.

Me: "Mr. Dios, is there anything further you would like to talk about when it comes to this topic?" (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

I noted that there seemed to be that overall feeling of heaviness as he began to speak. I noted in my field notes, "*This is weighing on him. You can tell he has thought about this a lot as he has moved through his career*" (Field Note #3, 2021). This showed how Mr. Dios was a reflective educator as he moved through his own stories of culturally responsive pedagogy—an important factor in growing as an educator, but for being a culturally responsive educator, even more crucial to understanding how students learn, connect, and experience learning.

## Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development

Mr. Dios continued his response, leading to the next finding of this study, how his reflection of his lack of pre-service experiences had impacted his thinking as an educator later on in his teaching career.

Mr. Dios: “So when we did professional development, that one picture that was shown...ya know...the one with the mindset thinking on it? It was like one side had one thought to take away and the other side another?” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021).

I wrote in my field notes at this time, “*fixed and growth mindset chart?*” (Field Note #3, 2021). I believed that was what he was speaking of, but from his description I wasn’t sure. I began to look through my documents, finally coming to the relevant picture (see Figure 4 in Chapter 3). I pulled it out, placing it in front of Mr. Dios.

Me: “Mr. Dios, is this the picture you are thinking about?” (Dios: Interview #3, 2021). I noted that for the first time in a while, he smiled as he glanced down at the picture. He continued.

Yes, this is exactly what I was talking about. Everything that I talked about above came after we were asked to do this exercise that ended one of the professional developments. We were asked to reflect on how we previously think, feel, and act when it came to thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy in our classroom. When I started here, I can honestly tell you it was a lot of emotion that came forward. I honestly got sad, thinking about what my teachers didn’t know, what I didn’t know, and in turn what my students didn’t know based on lack of knowledge in this. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

I noted the following in my field notes at this time, “*fingers touched the paper....He began to touch each part of the picture, starting with the I used to*” (Field Note #3, 2021). I later reflected in my journal, as I came back to this point, “*He touched each one, like each had*

*impacted his thoughts and feelings about how important it was to be a culturally responsive educator”* (Field Note #3, 2021). Mr. Dios, finger tapping through each rectangle on the paper, stated:

First, I used to think that every student just learned the same way. I didn’t understand how important it was for education to embrace so much of a student’s story to ensure the best outcome for the academic career. Then, I felt short-changed because not only had I missed out on these connections to my own education, but I had also short-changed my students throughout the years not understanding how this impacted them. Then, I used to act like I had always seen reflected in my own education. However, when I was able to reflect on what I was learning from the professional development series on culturally responsive pedagogy, I realized that now I think about each student that walks in my classroom. I think about the cultural iceberg I mentioned earlier, I think about how I can, daily, dive deeper into the stories of my students and use those stories to help in my teaching them. So, how do I feel now? I feel refreshed, renewed, in my teaching. I feel like deep down, I had been doing some things in my classroom that reflected culturally responsiveness; however, without knowing what it was, or what it entailed, it made it difficult to know if what I was doing was actually that. Now, I act on my confidence of what culture can bring to my classroom. This leads to the results of my changes... I already notice the difference in how my students feel in my classroom. They are open. They want to build a relationship. They make connections. My classroom management is non-existent because it doesn’t have to be. They are there to learn and I am there to learn from them. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

As I reflected on his transcript, I found myself tapping my pen once again. I looked down to see the dots scattered across the page. I figured if I had begun his interview with connecting the dots, it only seemed fitting to connect these once again. I found dot 1 and began to write, *“Mr. Dios’s professional development and the piece of fixed vs. growth mindset was so important to him in understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. By processing through the fixed mindset he had experienced through his own education and his pre-education, he recognized how much he had not received to be a better educator of culture in the classroom”* (Reflective Note #24, 2021). This was important in thinking about future educators. How many of them felt, or would feel, the same as Mr. Dios—lacking in

pedagogical practices that were relevant to the current state of the classroom? Had he or others not engaged in professional development such as this, would they still not recognize the need for cultural responsiveness in the classroom? Sadly, my answer based on his, and previous interviews, was revealing that they most likely would not.

Dot 2: *“His connection to PD renewed him as an educator. It made him change. He recognized that incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy opened the door to a more successful classroom where students were engaged, building relationships, and making the connections needed to experience academic success”* (Reflective Note #25, 2021). This made me think about how different things could be for pre-education students if they received this training on culturally responsive pedagogy in their college courses and how it would reflect in their student teaching and in their first years of teaching. Would we see a difference in how teachers viewed the classroom? Would it lead to less teacher burnout because they had the tools they needed to be successful in the classroom? If Mr. Dios felt a sense of being reborn by this professional development; what could it offer to future educators if it was implemented in their educational programs? How would it change their perspectives entering the classroom, whether that be during their student teaching or the first years in their own classroom?

Dot 3: *“Through the story of Mr. Dios, it is shown how impactful professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy can be in the classroom.”* This led me to think about what is being done currently in other school districts. How are they addressing the need for understanding culture in their everyday classrooms? Are they giving their teachers the training they need to make an impact on their students of diversity or is it being by-passed? I went back to writing. *“I am the one who pushed the PD on culturally*

*responsive pedagogy. I saw the numbers on the dissatisfaction that our diverse students felt about being in this school. They were not positive. If I had not pushed the agenda, would this PD even have been established, pushed as an important piece of being a teacher of efficacy? How many other schools are in the same boat?"* (Reflective Note #26, 2021). This is important to think about as a researcher and as a teacher. This professional development was only occurring in the high school. It was not pushed, or even discussed, in any of the other schools in the district. As other schools in our district are not receiving the same professional training, the question is constantly being asked, "Why are we not getting the same training?" When other suburban school teachers hear about how this particular professional development is occurring, the same question is asked. For me, it is imperative to note that teachers want to grow and learn best teaching practices. Teachers understand the importance of being a culturally responsive teacher in today's classroom, but the question arises, why are they not receiving it? Mr. Dios seemed to respond to my questions as we continued our interview. He continued:

It seems that districts, even ours, are scared of speaking about diversity. It is like they think the wrong thing will be said or done, like they are going to mess something up. However, think about it, when we are not practicing culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, we are doing it wrong. When we aren't showing that we recognize culture in the classroom, we are messing things up. Teachers need professional development like this to recognize the expectations of a growing diverse community of students, they won't grow. Professional development like this needs to continue to develop more awareness of individual cultural differences and incorporate them into classroom activities. (Dios: Interview #3, 2021)

As I came to the end of his interview and I was transcribing and reflecting, I noted, *"Another secret story...the silent staff...the silent district...the silence...it is deafening when I think about the needs of our diverse students. As I have heard through three interviews thus far, the silence of culturally responsive pedagogy is shown in the pre-education programs,*

*professors' lack of knowledge in the foundation of this crucial pedagogy, and if a school, or a district, is not providing professional development to their staff on cultural responsiveness, how will they understand what their diverse students need to grow?"* (Reflective Note #27, 2021). The recognition of the need for culturally responsiveness is crucial, not only in pre-service education but also in professional development. There the need is even more apparent, as it is shown that teachers are not receiving the needed cultural pedagogical foundations to break through this silence and allow the voices of our diverse students to be heard in the classroom.

### **Summary: Mr. Dios's Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Mr. Dios's explored and secret stories promoted the findings of this study by examining his experiences and perspectives on his pre-education preparation, understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy, and professional development experiences. These stories demonstrated the growing need for pre-education programs to consider the changing demographics of current classrooms. Further, it was shown that professors need to know and speak about the cultural pedagogical features needed to reach all students as well as for schools to promote professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy. This will allow teachers to grow from a fixed mindset, set in motion by collegiate thinking, and move to a growth mindset..

### **Ms. Qualls**

Ms. Qualls was the next to bring me her consent form. Known for her quirkiness, there was no question why she walked in the room the way she did—bouncy, exuberant, flashy, as she handed me her form. As she put it in my hands, I she said, "Remember what

Shakespeare said, ‘The game’s afoot’” and bounced right back out of the room. On the top of her consent form, I wrote these exact words and put a large “?” next to it. Later that day, I reflected on her action and her words and followed the same protocol as I had with the other participants: *“White, female, English teacher, 7 years in suburban schools, 2 years on diversity committee”* (Reflective Note #28, 2021). I went back to the notes of our first diversity meeting to verify that I had not missed any pieces of how she identified. I saw that this was almost precisely how she had introduced herself. I didn’t feel like I had much to say for my description of her. Unlike it had been for Ms. Nells, Mr. Talon, and Mr. Dios, who all had defining characteristics that could be labeled as “diverse,” it was difficult for me to reflect on much about her as an individual when it came to diversity. I continued, *“Gender...gender is something that I can see as an aspect of diversity for her; however, in education, her gender is the majority of what is seen in schools today, and with that, I can’t seem to discuss who she is except by the things I have noted”* (Reflective Note #29, 2021). I made one connection to her, as a female student might see this reflected as a diverse aspect of identity. I thought about how the aspect of female was reflected in the classroom, the readings, and the discussions. I wasn’t sure what to think about this, especially as a researcher, because I had made connections with the other three participants before her. However, I made a note *“clarify this with her and see if she would like to add anything about her identity”* when I spoke with her in her interview (Reflective Note #29, 2021).

After addressing the routine, I found myself in my thinking of my participants. I now went back to the comment Ms. Qualls had made when she turned in her consent form. Her words had been, “The game’s afoot” (Field Note #4, 2021). I wrote these words at the top of a new page and began to reflect: *“As an English teacher myself, I am not sure I have ever*

*thought about an interview as a game. I certainly have never referenced this phrase in anything I have ever done. Ms. Qualls seemed excited about her interview, the ability to tell her story about her experiences. However, as I think about her words, for me as a researcher, she is right. The game is afoot...This term means to be excited for something to begin. This 'thing' for her is telling her story about culturally responsive pedagogy*" (Reflective Note #30, 2021). The notes from our first diversity meeting were sitting next to me; I happened to glance over at them as I paused in my reflection, and I saw something I had forgotten I had written: *"Joined diversity committee to start changing the mind frame of our school and teachers. Joined to be a proactive learner. Joined to be a better educator"* (Reflective Note #31, 2021). Although I was not able to reflect on her diverse identity, I had unknowingly written two years before, about her excitement in talking about culture in the classroom.

### **Explored Storying of Her Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Ms. Qualls and I met early on a Saturday morning, before she had to complete ACT testing. I noted in my field notes that we both represented a more casual feel in our interview, as we were not in our normal "work" attire, both wearing active wear and a baseball cap. I made another note: *"Early in the morning, and in comfy clothes, reflects a more casual interview setting for us both. Will this interview seem relaxed as well, allowing her story to come out more freely?"* (Field Note #4, 2021). The only way I could know is by jumping right in. We began, as did my other interviews, with background information, and then I moved into the notes I had retrieved from our first diversity meeting.

Me: “Ms. Qualls, good morning! Thank you for meeting with me before you go about your day. I wanted to start by bringing up some notes I had taken the first day you introduced yourself to the diversity committee” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I noted she sat up straighter in her chair with this comment and smiled. I wrote, “*The game is truly afoot now for her. You can tell in her demeanor she is ready to see what I have to say and tell her story*” (Field Note #4, 2021).

Ms. Qualls: “Oh my! I didn’t know you had been taking notes. I honestly don’t remember what I said that day. What do you have?” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

Me: Well, on that day, I had asked you all to first tell everyone how you identified and then why you decided to be a part of this committee. In regard to the first question, you stated, “White and female.” In your second response you had stated that you “joined...to start changing the mind frame of our school and teachers...to be a proactive learner... to be a better educator.” Does that sound correct? (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

I looked up just in time to see her face change a little. I noted, “eyebrow on right side raised, mouth turned up in a confirming smile” (Field Note #4, 2021).

She responded:

I mean that sounds about right. I am. I can’t deny that I am White and female and, yes, I joined the diversity committee exactly for those reasons. I guess though there are a few other aspects to that story that I didn’t talk about that first day because I didn’t recognize all the different ways in which identity, ya know, culture, can look. The 16 Cultural Groups image that was shared in a later professional development made me think more about what I identify with...let’s see... where should I start? (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

I wanted to ensure that she had a visual to lead her conversation about her identity connections, so I once again turned to my pile of documents, searched for the colored boxes, and put it on the table for her. This chart of 16 Cultural Groups had been a handout the staff had received in their first professional development to demonstrate all the ways in which

educators needed to think about students when they entered the classroom. This chart (see Figure 1 in Chapter 3) held the following groups: race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, body shape/size, socio-economic status, family structure, family, gender identification, native language, geographical location, sexual orientation, occupation, and 21st century. I noted, “*it is apparent that this visual helped Ms. Qualls in recognizing her own cultural identities and how she was able to think about culture, not only for herself, but her students as well*” (Field Note #4, 2021). I noted that as she continued to talk as she pointed to the upper left-hand corner of the visual. She continued:

Okay, first... religion. I had no idea that this could be considered a part of someone's culture, like it makes sense because what I have learned about culturally responsive pedagogy is that it's a part of what makes people who they are and how they think, so I am White, female, and Christian. Another part of me is the socio-economic aspect. I never thought about where I landed in the class system would count as something that would identify me, but I will add it to my list—White, female, Christian, and middle class. Just in those four things, I am already, what's the word the kids use... flexing... what many of my students bring to my classroom every day that could be similar to my own identity or vastly different. When you think about those 16 cultural groups, I realized it is not just about what I can visualize. That's not teaching to the whole student. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

During analysis of this particular piece of Ms. Qualls's interview, I paused to reflect on her recognition of how her cultural identity allowed her to make connections to her own classroom. “*Before seeing the 16 Cultural Groups chart, Ms. Qualls not only did not recognize her own cultural identity, but also had not recognized how that might come across as a hindrance to making connections with her own students. At this moment in our interview, she was reflecting on her understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. She understood that she came into the classroom demonstrating different aspects of herself, in ways that may not relate to her students*” (Reflective Note #32, 2021). From a research perspective, this was important in regard to future educators. If something like the 16

Cultural Groups was presented in their coursework early in pre-service educators' college careers, they could begin to reflect on their own cultural identities and how it is portrayed in their daily lives and in the classroom.

At this point in the interview, I noted that Ms. Qualls had pulled her chair back up to the table and leaned in closer to me, her hands resting on the table. I not only noted her body language, but I couldn't help but note my own. I wrote, "*I pulled my chair up closer to the table and leaned in like she was getting ready to tell me a secret*" (Field Note #4, 2021). Her response was not a secret, but a silent reflection that she had made about her understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy that she seemed to be speaking for the first time. I noted she lowered her voice as she began to speak again:

Now when I think about it further, I think about my own upbringing. You would think that I would be embarrassed about how clueless I was about culture or diversity, but, honestly, I can't help the way I was raised. My parents decided my initial identity, and this left me not knowing about anyone else's culture. I came from a family of teachers; both my parents taught in the local schools that paired up with my neighborhood. We lived in a nice house, in a nice area, and to be honest, I didn't even meet my first person of color until I went to college. Because I had not had any experience with someone outside of my identity, I hate to say this, I avoided making connections to them because I automatically assumed we had nothing in common. I wanted to become a teacher because I had watched how that looked in my own home, in my own school; however, I wasn't willing to learn. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

I drew a star in my field notes at this point, and I noted it with an exclamation point as well.

As I reviewed her recorded interview, I stopped here to reflect because there was so much said in this small part of her story. "*Ms. Qualls emphasized the challenge of having a narrow understanding of culture based on her own identity growing up. As she came into teaching, she discussed the idea of having a skewed mindset—that all students would have the same goals and experiences that she had had growing up. This is so important in her story of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy because she did not, and could not,*

*feel like she could relate to a person that did not share a similar identity or culture as her own and, therefore, especially if she had not gotten any foundation of the understanding of culture in her pre-service education, she would find it difficult to make connections to others, specifically her own students”* (Reflective Note #33, 2021). If pre-service educators come to the classroom with the experiences that Ms. Qualls had discussed, it would be a challenge to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom because of their narrow understanding of cultures . They would falter in understanding the assets of their students, and would also result in a potential disconnect and decreased likelihood of embracing this framework. If our pre-service teachers are not familiar or do not have experience with people who are different from themselves, they may perceive differences as less valuable or deficient. This lack of experience could be impacted by the pre-education curriculum that they should be receiving in their collegiate preparation for the classroom. By learning about culturally responsive pedagogy, future teachers would be able to look past their narrow lens of identity and move forward in thinking about the broad lens that culture can bring to the students of their classrooms. Further it benefits all participants involved in growth and understanding, while making connections to others and their cultural impacts.

### **Explored Storying of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs**

Following the interview guide, I proceeded with the next question.

Me: “Ms. Qualls, how would you describe the education you received in regard to culturally responsive pedagogy and your pre-education program? (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I looked up to see if her body language or reaction would hint at where her story would go. She did not disappoint. I noted, “*she raised her eyebrows, sighed heavily, her shoulders exaggerated the tale she was about to tell*” (Field Note #4, 2021).

Ms. Qualls: “My pre-service education was misleading—lacking; they didn’t prepare me to teach at all...I do not feel like I was prepared to teach in a diverse classroom or how to handle these students” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I noted immediately in my field notes the choice of her words here. I wrote, “*‘these students’* and *‘misleading’*—*what does she mean by this?*” (Field Note #4, 2021). These words could hold so much about the story she was telling about her dissatisfaction with her pre-education program and preparation to teach in a culturally responsive classroom. After pausing for a moment, I prompted her to expand on what she meant by these word choices. Me: “Ms. Qualls, I couldn’t help but notice your word choice in the statement you just gave. Could you explain what you meant by the words “these students” and “misleading”? (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I wasn’t sure how she would react to the questions. I noted in my field notes, “*for me, the use of the term ‘these students’ doesn’t hold a positive connotation... I would personally be embarrassed to have to explain why I used that term to define my students of diversity,*” so I made sure to note her reaction as I asked (Field Note #4, 2021). I noted that her face dropped, the smile she had had on her face during the initial part of our interview faded, and she looked down.

Me: “Please don’t be upset by my asking this question. I just want to clarify how you personally think about these two words” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I noted that she half-smiled back at me and pushed her chair away from the table. I wrote, *“it is like she is pushing herself away from this conversation and this topic—she is not happy I caught these words so quickly in her statement”* (Field Note #4, 2021). She paused for a moment, took a deep breath, and responded slowly—like she was watching each word she was getting ready to say.

Ms. Qualls: Well, that is kind of embarrassing. “These students” sounds like how my professors back in the day used to talk about any student that wasn’t White in my college classes. I can’t believe that I just used those words. So, I will clarify, by “these students” I mean students of diversity. I said it that way because I felt that was how my professors thought of students of color; some even spoke of them as such. Funny, how you can trigger a memory just thinking about the past, and that is what I just did, by you asking me about my pre-education program just did that. It was like when we were taught about our students, there was this assumed group out there that we might run into, that we might have to teach, that we might experience. It seemed like “these students” were in a whole other world of understanding, and my professors weren’t able or willing to teach us that all students in our classroom were not going to be middle class, Christian, and White. They especially didn’t discuss any aspects of being a culturally responsive educator. It is so disappointing for me to think about—it is disappointing how some of the most beautiful experiences I have had have been with “these students.” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

I noted in my field notes her use of air quotes when stating “these students” this time, almost leading to the ambiguity of a group of people, or students, which would be unnamed. As I was listening to this section of Ms. Qualls’ interview, I began to reflect. Her experience had so many connections to my own pre-education experience that I had to draw connections from her story to my own. *“Ms. Qualls’s interview struck an emotional chord with me. Her story of her professors and her pre-education program spoke loudly. Just like Ms. Qualls, I too remember sitting in my pre-education classes and feeling as if I was only being taught to teach one particular type of student. Her words triggered my own past when I had asked to be placed in a student teaching experience that my college did not approve of because, as I had reflected before in Mr. Talon’s interview, “those” students did not fit the mold of how*

*they had taught me in my foundational class work. I vividly remember the day that I had to present a request to the members of the education board that I be placed in an alternative school setting, preferably in the inner city. They looked at me dumbfounded as I discussed my passion for these students, how I wanted to impact their lives and their educational success. When it came time for questions, I remember one woman in particular who would catapult my thinking of cultural diversity and my teaching career into the culturally responsive educator I have become today. She looked at me and asked, ‘Why would you ever want to waste your time and talent on those kids? They are never going to amount to anything anyway’” (Reflective Note #34, 2021).*

I had to pause. The paper had become blurry with tears of anger. I had replayed this moment in my head time and time again. It made me reflect almost daily on what drove me to ensure culturally responsive pedagogy in my classroom. However, I had never heard another person speak about their experience that was so similar to my own. If two people in the same suburban school and ironically attending the same teaching college, would share similar experiences, and have heard similar words from professors in their pre-education program there, how many other teachers, or future teachers, would hear or experience this same terminology?

I continued my reflection, *“College programs need to reassess how they think, how they speak, how they demonstrate, and how they form the foundations of their future teachers in their pre-education experiences. We are doing a disservice, not only to our future teachers, but to the students, as they will not be able to grasp and understand best teaching practices when it comes to thinking about culture in the classroom”* (Reflective Note #35,

2021). If every interview I had held thus far told the same story across different institutions

and in different states, the need for change in the thinking about culture in the classroom needs to occur, starting at the level at which training is obtained, the college classroom.

I did not need to prompt Ms. Qualls after her explanation to go further into her previously made statements; as I noted, she simply leaned forward at the table and took a deep breath. She continued:

So, by “misleading” I would have to say this. Not one of my classes were designed to be culturally responsive, and that is how they [my professors] made me feel, like what they taught me would be applicable to all students. In reality, they taught me how to teach the majority. I wish that there had been a crystal ball in those classes, looking at how the demographics across the nation would change. Aren’t they saying that by like 2050, White will be the minority? Don’t quote me on that one, but I swear that is what I have heard. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

I stopped and noted, “*check out the demographic changes for majority and minority...what could we know as educators if we did have a crystal ball back in the day?*” (Field Note #4, 2021). I put a star here, noting to myself to come back to this when I was reflecting.

Ms. Qualls: “I know I have only taught in suburban schools, but the demographics are changing every year as more diverse students move into the suburban areas, and I was not prepared to teach culturally diverse students” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

At this point in reviewing her transcript, I had to go in and do some research on her comments that she had made about the majority becoming the underserved at some point in the next 28 years before I could continue to process her story. I decided this would be good to write in my reflection journal as part of the documentation process. “*I turned to the U.S. Census of 2018. Ms. Qualls was not wrong. According to the data collected in that year’s census, it is projected that, ‘by the year 2045, Whites will comprise 49.7% of the population, as opposed to the minority groups, which will make up the majority.’ Her crystal ball*

*statement with these facts seemed to hit the researcher in me hard. What are colleges doing to promote the rising change of the majority to be the minority in many classrooms across the nation? If they are not currently giving teachers the opportunity to learn about culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching in the classroom in 2022, what will that look like in approximately 30 years?"* (Reflective Note #36, 2021). I had participants with a range of classroom experience, and currently, all their stories, whether from 6 or 33 years in the classroom, they all shared the same stories. If they were not prepared to teach students of diversity in their pre-education classes then, what does that look like for our future educators as the demographic numbers increase? Colleges need to recognize change their pre-education classes and begin to move forward in how they are presenting their students' student teaching experience. It does not take a crystal ball to see that the face of education is changing and advocate new curriculum in preparation for teachers needs to occur.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs**

Listening to her story of dissatisfaction in her pre-service education and the emotional connection I had to her story, I wrote before asking her the next question, *"There's a hope that there is something positive she experienced. I simply hope she had real life experiences that made a difference in her thoughts about culturally responsive pedagogy—feeling discouraged"*(Field Note #4, 2021). In interview four of this study, and seeing the connections that Ms. Qualls and I shared in our pre-education experiences, I hoped for a change in the narrative.

Me: "Ms. Qualls, thank you for your responses about your pre-service education classes. Do you mind if I ask you a question about your experiences in your pre-service that

are related to any real-world experiences in the classroom and the understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I had been looking down at the interview questions when I asked this, and I looked up barely in time to catch the following behavior: “*shaking her head, slowly back and forth, right to left, slight chuckle as she leaned back in her chair, away from the table*” (Field Note #4, 2021). I immediately knew that my previous hope was going to be dampened.

Ms. Qualls: I wish I had a better story to tell you about the connection to culturally responsive pedagogy and being able to see this through my observations or student teaching, but I didn’t. There was so much about my lack of real-world experience that left me not prepared to be a true educator for all my students. Honestly, those lacking experiences almost made me quit my first-year teaching. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

At this point in the interview, I noted her body language change: “*her face—flushed bright red—hands clutched firmly together*” (Field Note #4, 2021). To me, these were signs of being either embarrassed or angry about her situation. Later, as I reflected on this note, I wrote, “*I don’t believe this was a moment of embarrassment for her. I feel like it was a moment of anger or disappointment. Her lack of preparation to teach in a culturally diverse environment led to her almost quitting a job, a passion that she felt was almost extinguished because she did not feel prepared to teach in the classroom she was given.*” The thought of teachers being pushed out of the field that is already narrowing, with fewer new educators entering the field, should be a call to colleges to rethink the preparation being given so that all aspects of each student are met.

She continued:

I guess I can start with my observations and thinking about being culturally responsive, or the lack of it, is better said. I had two observations in my four years of college. I was placed in two, I would call them well off school districts. That is all we were given. Considering my college was not too far from an urban setting, I always

found it odd that we didn't do our observations near there. Yeah, I feel like the colleges were definitely intentional about that. Considering that in the pre-education classes, we did not talk about culture, or the differing needs we might see in those students, why would they place us in schools that we would see something other than the picture they had painted for us in our college classes? We wouldn't have any idea what we were even looking at. You can't observe and learn if you don't know what you are even looking for. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

As I was transcribing, I began to think about the placement of students in both their observations and their student teaching. Ms. Qualls' wish to be placed in different settings was something I had thought about often. I wrote, *"As I have experienced both urban and suburban settings in my educational career, I have always thought back to my student teaching where I was able to truly learn about diverse groups of students and the ways that they best learn. For my one and only placement, I was able to go to two rural school districts for my choices. It couldn't be further from where I would end up for my student teaching or for the first 15 years of my career. Pre-service teachers need to have a variety of placement options to see the whole picture of education, not just the snapshot college classrooms, and learning, have shown them. It's kind of like a Polaroid picture. Analogy: Placements need to be shaken to ensure that the whole picture of what classrooms look like in today's schools, the good, the bad, and the ugly, the majority and the minority, is reflected. If you think about a Polaroid picture, if you don't shake it, nothing develops. If you don't shake it enough, it comes out blurry and unfocused. This same thing happens to our future teachers if they are not given the ability to see all aspects of education and the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in their learning and their experiences"* (Reflective Note #37, 2021). Through this reflection, it is shown that colleges need to promote all aspects of the different classrooms and students that future teachers will come into contact with. Education is about being well-

rounded; leaving these crucial perspectives out is detrimental to the success of these teachers and the students they teach.

I noted that Ms. Qualls had not changed her positioning or her facial expressions as she continued:

So, observations not great; student teaching, not great. I recognize the first day in seeing, not even working with my new group of students, that there were students in here that did not reflect me...a White woman...let's throw middle class in there too. I remember feeling so nervous because I had no idea how to make a connection, especially given what I spoke about earlier with you about my own life and schooling. That first day solidified what I think I already knew...I had not received it because I didn't feel like I had been given any tools to work with diverse students. After just a few days in the school, I began to realize that my learning began the first day I entered the class, not in my college classes. It was my mentor teacher and the students who were going to teach me how to be a great teacher and how to understand the differences we share and how to grow together to be more inclusive. I didn't know at the time that this was what I would later learn to be culturally responsive pedagogy, but it was there. It was like that first day was the first day of class for me, and I had a lot of learning to do (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I paused the recording again. There seemed to be a lot to process in Ms. Qualls's stories. They reflected too much of my own story and experiences, and so I was able to dive deep into my reflections about her thoughts. I began to jot some notes in my reflection journal: *"She mentioned tools...I remember taking a certification class at UMKC in the subject of culturally responsive pedagogy. I remember that the professor constantly referred to the foundations of it as a tool box. Ms. Qualls's toolbox was empty entering her student teaching; however, I didn't feel like it was empty because of her own doing, it was empty because she had not been prepared in her pre-education classes"* (Reflective Note #38, 2021). Through her student teaching, she felt that she was able to begin to fill her toolbox with the instructional tools needed to be a culturally responsive teacher. It shouldn't take getting to the student teaching phase of a future teacher's educational journey to fill their

“toolbox” of teaching students who might look different than themselves or who have experiences that may not be the same as their own. It needs to be apparent from year one, class one, to final year and final class that culture has a place in the success of our students in the classroom.

### **Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

Ms. Qualls had discussed an aspect of professional development that had impacted her thinking and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy in her story. With this in mind, I prompted her to see if there was anything further she would like to discuss about her professional development experiences.

Me: “Ms. Qualls, earlier you had mentioned that the 16 Cultural Groups had played an important role in your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Are there other aspects of professional development that made an impact on you?” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

I wrote down that she smiled and relaxed more in her seat, her eyes widening a little more as she began to speak.

Ms. Qualls: One of the main things that stuck out to me was the triple circle Venn diagram that made me envision how all the pieces of culturally responsive pedagogy come together in the classroom” (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021).

This diagram (see Figure 5 in Chapter 3), was something that Ms. Nells had mentioned in her interview as being a crucial piece to her story of enlightenment. Like I had done with my other interviewees, I searched my stack of documents and pulled out the

diagram so she might tell me why it had made such an impact on her. She looked at it and continued:

The best learning experience for a teacher is to be a student. It's not all about the curriculum we are teaching in our class. That diagram was kind of a reflective moment for me. Part of culturally responsive teaching is about the environment in our classroom. It is about keeping what I am teaching is relevant to my students through my practice by bringing their culture and experiences into their learning. With these inclusions, my students are meeting higher expectations because they are able to connect to their identities, and it allows them to be equitable learners in my classroom. It is about them feeling safe and belonging. Before, if a student didn't hand in something, it definitely would get recorded in my grade book and perhaps I'd even give the student an opportunity to do it later. Now, I'm really concerned about the why, because I'm realizing that students are coming to school with so much on their plate that before they can complete the assignment, they need to feel safe, they need to feel a sense of belonging, they need reassurance, some of them are looking for a sense of security. The list goes on and on. So, I think finding out a "why" and how each of those things connect to culturally responsive pedagogy has helped me as a teacher and has built relationships in my career. I think, overall, it's made me a better teacher. (Qualls: Interview #4, 2021)

As this was at the end of our interview, I completed the closing notes of the transcription and went back to this last statement given by Ms. Qualls. I wrote in my reflection journal: *"The first thing from Ms. Qualls' last statement reflected many things she had spoken about during her interview. She had said, 'The best learning experience for a teacher is to be a student.' This spoke volumes from the start of her interview about learning and her understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. She had recognized that through professional development, that she had been a part of, she had been taught how to recognize how to be a culturally relevant teacher. Further embracing the professional development, she once again was the student in learning about the in-depthness of learning about her students applies to how she teaches in the classroom and their needs and stories outside of her classroom door"* (Reflective Note #39, 2021). I reflected on her previous stories about the

lack of pre-education preparation and real-life experiences. In these situations, she was truly

the student, the one seeking knowledge on how to be the best teacher she could be, and her learning had failed her. It had failed her students until she was able to make connections to the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom. This is important to note that it further supports the findings of this study that future educators are not receiving the foundational needs to support culture in the classroom, and if educators are not receiving this information in their pre-service years or not receiving any form of professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy, when would they receive this critical foundation of understanding the culture and experiences students bring to the classroom every day.

### **Summary: Ms. Qualls's Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The stories of Ms. Qualls told a tale that until she had received professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy, she did not have an understanding of her own cultural identity in relation to how her students might see her and in the curriculum she taught. Like the other participants, she spoke of a feeling of dissatisfaction with her pre-education work and her unknowingly filling her “toolbox” with the foundations needed to be a culturally responsive teacher during her student teaching. She then spoke of how impactful the professional development had been in helping her recognize the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

### **Ms. Leads**

Ms. Leads was the second to the last of my participants to bring me her consent form. She did not say anything as she returned it; I noted she “just smiled,” said, “Let me know when you would like to meet,” and went on her way. I did not know Ms. Leads as well as the others in my research study. She had been a member of the diversity committee for the past

two years, and she had been what I had labeled as an “observer” in the notes I had taken the day she had introduced herself to the committee. I turned to my reflection journal, as I had done with the previous participants. I wrote, “*Female, English Teacher, White, Seven years in the same suburban school district*” (Reflective Note #40, 2021). This was the extent of what I could say about Ms. Leads. As I only reflected briefly on her, I did come back to the notes I had taken during that diversity meeting and the word “observer” that I had written in those notes. This prompted me to go back to other notes I had taken over the last two years and look for any input she had given that could draw me into her story before I began her interview. I began again: “*Observer...an interesting word for me to describe her. As I look through the last two years of documentation notes, there was little to no input given from Ms. Leads. This led me to think about her participation and her silence in these meetings, present, listening, but never providing input*” (Reflective Note #41, 2021). I was not sure how to bring this up to her in an interview, as it could lead to a minimization of her story that she would tell. I did make a note at the top of my interview page for her that said, “*see if this silent observer comes up in conversation to reflect.*” Later that week, we set up a time to meet during her plan period (Reflective Note #42, 2021).

### **Explored Storying of her Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

When I arrived for the interview, Ms. Leads was already sitting in the office with a sheet of paper in front of her. I remember feeling confused; no one else had come with anything to the interviews. I didn’t know if this was a piece of paper that she just happened to have with her or if it had something to do with the interview we were about to begin. We

greeted each other, and I sat down across from her, writing in my field notes, “*sitting very upright, proper, expressionless as I began to speak*” (Field Note #5, 2021).

Me: “ Ms. Leads, thank you for taking the time to let me interview you about your story of culturally responsive pedagogy through your pre-education and professional development experiences” (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

At this time I noted that she leaned forward and reached out her hand on the table to touch the paper that was sitting in front of her (Field Note #5, 2021).

Ms. Leads: “I hope this doesn’t seem weird, but I looked over the questions you had given me before and tried to prepare my responses for some of your questions before we met” (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

I paused a moment to write in my field notes, “*This interview already has a different feel to it than any of the others. No one else came with prepared answers to the questions they would be asked. How will this look for her interview?*” (Field Note #5, 2021). There was nothing I could do at this point but see where she would go, and so for the first time, I stayed silent in the interview and allowed her to continue her thought.

Ms. Leads shyly spoke: “I hope this is okay. I just wanted to make sure that I was prepared to answer the questions. I didn’t want to say anything wrong or get tied up in my words. So, I took a few notes about how I wanted to answer your questions” (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

As I analyzed this first part of our conversation later that week, I turned to my reflection journal to connect my previous comments about her as an “observer” and the comment she had just made. I reflected, “*Ms. Leads...one who does not speak during diversity meetings but is always seen as present. Ms. Leads...prepared her answers before*

*coming to the interview...afraid of saying the wrong thing in her interview...Why?"*

(Reflective Note #43, 2021). Ms. Leads was not confident, at least when discussing diversity and inclusion. She did not hold confidence in herself to speak up in those meetings and was not confident in speaking now. It was like she was afraid to say the wrong thing or something that would embarrass herself. This made me reflect on how not just pre-service teachers, but veteran teachers like Ms. Leads may not have confidence in their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy because they have not been given the opportunity to learn about it or experience it.

Coming back to the interview with Ms. Leads, I quickly confirmed that however she would like the interview to go, I would follow her lead. I noted that she smiled and brought her paper closer to her. I wasn't sure if I should lead into the next question or allow her to speak, and so I noted that there was an awkward silence. I began to speak, but as quickly as I began to open my mouth, Ms. Leads also began to talk.

Ms. Leads: "So, I am nervous; I just want to be honest. This topic is something I believe in, but I am always so scared that I am going to offend someone or say the wrong thing. For me, this is a hot topic, and sometimes I just don't feel I know enough about it to speak on it" (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

When I was transcribing her interview, I jotted next to the previous notation in my reflection journal, *"This was the evidence I needed to support her story of lacking confidence in speaking about culturally responsive pedagogy, whether that be in our meetings or in this interview. She is an observer because she wants to show her support, but is afraid to speak up because she lacks the confidence in herself to discuss it. Will her stories explain why she*

*feels this way? Is her story already beginning to unfold because of her lack of pre-education experiences or lack of real-life experiences unfolding?”* (Reflective Note #44, 2021).

She continued:

So, I, my first comment that I wanted to address was about something that had made me think about culturally responsive pedagogy, or better yet, culture in my classroom. I always thought as an English teacher that I was giving my students what they needed in the curriculum that the district provided and then the extra pieces I brought in, but I was never really pushing the conversation of diversity or culture in those pieces. The cultural iceberg that was discussed in one of those first PD meetings was very effective for me to recognize that I was just taking safe, baby steps in my classroom, but I was missing so much that I could be doing to help my students connect to the world of literature. I put that chart on my desk, like taped it down, so that every time I was planning, I had to look at it. I recognized that when you see what we are missing below the surface of the water, the surface of our students, you almost feel guilty for not recognizing how we (as educators) must dive deep to know our students—who they are, what makes them who they are, and their beliefs and values. If I am not teaching to the whole student, then I am not making the difference I signed up to do in this job. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

I had not brought my documents to this interview, although I had brought them to every other one. For this one, I was not able to bring out the visual for her to look at while she spoke. I noted, *“Forgot documents today...however, I don’t feel like I need it. It seems it is ingrained as a constant reminder of her reflection as a culturally responsive teacher as she reflects on her curriculum and how she teaches currently”* (Field Note #5, 2021). I also had not noted any body language change thus far in our interview; her comfort level seemed to be in that she was able to lead the conversation and speak about what she was most comfortable with. Ms. Leads continued to speak; I had still not prompted any conversation with her; she allowed her story to flow, with her piece of paper as her outline of what she wanted to speak about.

Ms. Leads: It was asked for us to think about what we were missing when we only looked at the surface of who our students are. At that moment, it wasn’t about me seeing my students by their skin color, it was about seeing them through a cultural lens of the whole

student. I suddenly understood what that term meant and knew that my mindset had to change. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

During analysis, I noticed that other participants had also reflected on—the fixed versus growth mindset. As mentioned in Mr. Dios’s interview, this was part of a professional development where staff were asked to think about how they used to think, feel, and act when it came to culturally responsive pedagogy. After being given time to reflect, they were then asked to think about where they were now in their process in how they thought, felt, and acted with the knowledge given to them through the professional development sessions. Although Ms. Leads did not specifically state this, it was apparent in her story that this was a part of her understanding of where she had been in her thoughts of culturally responsive pedagogy and where she had begun to make the shift to be better for her diverse students.

She continued her thought, still without a single prompt from me:

The results of me thinking about this allowed me to recognize what the results of my change and growth are...you know, like, where I was, where I am, and where I am going...It allowed me to understand that although I felt that I was a competent teacher, I was not competent to teach all of my students to meet their individual needs. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

Listening to Ms. Leads’s interview later that evening, I put the story of her understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy into perspective. Although she had immersed herself in the diversity committee, she remained a silent participant because she did not have the confidence to speak up about this topic.. However, in discussing her moment of understanding, she firmly spoke about what culturally responsive pedagogy should look like in her classroom and with the cultural iceberg and the fixed versus growth mindset professional development figures, she had the foundations she needed to implement culturally responsiveness into her classroom. Nevertheless, she needed to continue to be

prompted that her voice was valuable to the conversations we had about diversity. By having others hear her voice, she could build confidence in this area. I wrote in my reflection journal, *“I wonder how many other teachers feel like Ms. Leads. Whether it be through a pre-education program, a professional development, or even their own self- initiated learning...how many other teachers are afraid to talk about culturally responsive pedagogy to others? How many are using this in their classrooms daily and maybe do not even know that this is the foundation they are using to develop curriculum or lessons each day for each student?”* (Reflective Note #45, 2021). This led me to confirm that teachers, no matter where they were in their journey, needed to have moments to be educated in culturally responsive pedagogy and then be allowed to openly have dialogue with others to build not only culturally responsive teaching in their classroom, but also in having conversations with other teachers to help them become better in this as well.

### **Explored Storying of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs**

As we moved past this initial, thought-out response of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy, I inserted myself into the interview more. I wrote in my field notes, *“it felt awkward not going through the motions of the interview guide and having her just seem to take over, speaking out the things she felt comfortable talking about. What was I missing in her story if I continued to let her just go down the list she had on her trusted piece of paper?”* (Field Note #5, 2021).

Me: Ms. Leads, thank you for that feedback on when you began to feel your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy began to grow and how you began to rethink your classroom. I'd like to move into another question for you. How would you describe your pre-service education experiences when it came to culturally responsive pedagogy? (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

Since I had taken back the interview at this point, I wanted to see if there was any change in her demeanor. I noted, *“I took away the safety blanket of that sheet of paper. I need to get her full story, not just the one she wanted to tell from that piece of paper.”* I further noted, *“While she was thinking on how to respond, she pulled the piece of paper towards her and looked over it again, still using it to search for what the “right” answer was for her to this question. Her mouth in straight, serious line”* (Field Note #5, 2021).

Ms. Leads: Truthfully, my pre-service education left me with no preparation to teach culturally diverse students... It was bare bones, never anything cultural... just the usual array of classes that you take, but nothing specific pops up in my mind... There was nothing about diverse groups of people. We were just informed on how to educate a student, not a diverse group of students. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

I asked Mrs. Leads to expand on what she could remember of her pre-education experience that made it “bare bones” in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy. I was not going to let her just use the cursory responses she had written on the paper. She told me that in her four years of pre-service education, she could only remember:

The topic of diversity had been discussed in passing, but more needs to be done to prepare students for the diversity they will find in the classroom. I remember that during the methods course I had to write a one-page essay about diversity in the classroom. That is one essay through four years, and I couldn't even tell you what was read, it was like, only two pages long, and without foundation of what I was reading, I couldn't even tell you what was discussed for that essay. This was not enough to prepare me for the real-life classroom experiences. Like how does someone give you one essay to talk about diversity? Where's the application of that? Why isn't culturally responsive pedagogy introduced our freshman year and then incorporated into every class we take from then? You know, seeing it through different lenses? Plus, this was in a methods class—methods of teaching. One essay can't even begin to touch on all the key pieces a teacher needs to know about how to teach students of diversity in the classroom (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

In my notes, I wrote *“Got her... I heard her voice... her true voice... not scripted... real”* (Field Note #5, 2021).

As soon as I got back to my office, I wanted to write in my reflective journal about her true thoughts coming out. I wrote, *“Ms. Leads showed frustration in her voice, questioning the priorities taught in her pre-education program and where culturally responsive pedagogy was placed, for a brief moment, and then discarded and never spoken of again. Her experiences seem to echo the other participants’ stories of pre-education and culturally responsive pedagogy feeling dissatisfied and not prepared to teach in a culturally responsive classroom. I was shocked, but not surprised that she spoke about ONE page essay about diversity in the classroom...one. She emphasized that this occurred in a methods class. Methods classes are literally there to help in preparing pre-education teachers to build on what they had learned in previous foundational courses. It is there to focus more closely on processes and procedures for teaching a specific population or teaching in specific disciplines. However, if they are not receiving anything from their previous foundational classes on the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy, how can they apply it to a methods class, when they haven’t discussed it previously? How does one essay and one reading prepare educators for the current demographics seen in their classrooms?”* (Reflective Note #46, 2021).

I remember in my first few classes that were foundationally based, we spent days or even weeks on how to implement small group instruction or inquiry-based instruction, but we never spoke about cultural responsiveness in the classroom. While there are several years between Ms. Leads’s and my experiences, her story seemed very similar to my own. The one good thing is that in her methods class, she was able to get a small piece of culturally responsive pedagogy, but it was not expanded upon. There were no conversations, no application, no connections to what it might look like in the classroom, demonstrating to me

that it was not held as an important “foundation” of what pre-education programs value in how they view preparation for future teachers.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs**

It was at this point in the interview that I noticed Ms. Leads fold her “security” paper in half, closing up her prepared responses. I noted, *“Although she has not changed much about her facial expressions throughout our interview, nor her posture, this was maybe more important that any body language piece she could give me”* (Field Note #5, 2021). She was not worried about having others hear the right thing in her responses, but saying what she needed to have heard.

Me: “Ms. Leads, thank you for giving me your perspective on your pre-education experiences. Next, I would like to ask you about any real-world experiences in your pre-education program and culturally responsive pedagogy (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

I noted, *“she reached for the paper, touched the edges, but didn’t open it...progress”* (Field Note #5, 2021).

Ms. Leads: I feel a lot of time you take all this coursework, classes, you study, take a test, but you don’t really learn until you’re inside the classroom. Student teaching makes you think if you really want to do this. It prepares you because you get thrown in there and you’ve got to survive. This is where you learn your management, where you learn how to talk to different kids, you learn how to handle behavior. Books are not going to tell you because every situation is different. So, I feel once you’re in that situation, that’s when you decide what you want to do, you sense what you should do. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

In the process listening to and transcribing her interview, I began to reflect on her statement: *“She was tying her pre-service program experience into why she was also not prepared for student teaching. Her thoughts echoed those of the other participants, emphasizing the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy in her coursework, the cursory*

*nature of class-study-take a test-write an essay with no application had made her recognize that it was real life experience that put her in the position to understand what she needed to do and learn about how to run a classroom. The issue here is that she did not specifically speak of her real-life experience to culturally responsive pedagogy” (Reflective Note #47, 2021).*

After she had spoken about the start of her story, I wanted to see if she had anything further to add about the aspect of real-life experiences and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Me: Thank you, Ms. Leads, for making that connection, or better, lack of connection, of your pre-education program and how you did not feel like the student teaching classroom set you up to learn about what you need to do in the classroom to be a good teacher. However, I was wondering was there anything you could speak of with this specific question and culturally responsive pedagogy? (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

She made her first movement in some time, and I noted she *“pushed her chair back, crossed her legs at her ankles, lifted up her shoulders, moved her head towards her chest, and shook her head in a no. She slipped her hands back up to that piece of paper, drew it into her lap, and unfolded it, looking at her writing”* (Field Note #5, 2021).

Ms. Leads: I’m sorry. I know you would like me to speak more on this, but I can’t. I didn’t have any required observations, so I didn’t see anything there. I also student taught with a family friend, and I would rather not speak about my student teaching experience. I will say one thing, in what I know of culturally responsive pedagogy from professional development, it was not apparent in the classroom in which I was a student teacher. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

I did not make any field notes at this time of meaning. I did put a “?” on the page because I needed to process later how to address this particular question (Field Note #5, 2021). Back in my office, directly after our interview, I wrote, *“This was the shortest response I had had when it came to this question. Everyone else had a story to tell, whether it was one of learning about best practices in the classroom or what they did not recognize at*

*the time they were getting pieces of culturally responsive pedagogy, without knowing that it actually had a name that went with those new-found skills. Ms. Leads's story, although short, said so much about her own experiences. Her unwillingness to speak about her student teaching experience because she did not want to speak poorly about her advising teacher. Her small hint that she did not receive any input on how to be a culturally responsive teacher during this time was heard by her final comment"* (Reflective Note #48, 2021). Ms. Leads's story made me question why observation had not been a part of any of the pre-education program requirements. How are future teachers supposed to learn their field if they are not even being sent out to observe others or seeing what a classroom looks like outside of the university walls? Observation must be a part of any pre-education program to ensure that pre-service educators are able to recognize the different features of classroom practice. Further, student teaching should be an experience that you can speak about, from which you can apply skills to your future classroom. Ms. Leads did not speak on the aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy, even though I had tried to push the topic by asking a follow-up question. Her lack of response allowed me to see that she had not received anything in her student teaching experience in regard to culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

I had not expected Ms. Leads to reach out again for her "security" paper when I mentioned her real life experience and culturally responsive pedagogy. I noted that I had written "*pause*" and "*folding the paper back up in her hands, clutching it in her right hand*" in my field notes and begin to speak again (Field Note #5, 2021).

Me: “Ms. Leads, thank you. Since you would like to move on, I would like to ask you about what experiences or stories you have of professional development and your understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy” (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

Mrs. Leads: The professional learning component brings to light the whole concept of differences I was lacking from my pre-service education. For some people, it’s obvious of the diversity, even before they go there, but for many people, the professional development we have engaged in brings it to the forefront. At least now you’re conscious of it so you can start to act on it. The teachers in this building can’t say that they haven’t been given some recognizing features of how to be a culturally responsive teacher. (Leads: Interview #5, 2021)

Mrs. Leads addressed one concern she had about enacting culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom after reflecting on the Venn diagram. She stated:

Seeing that diagram made me see how everything comes together when thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy, but how do educators actually do all these things? In a lot of my classes, the vast majority of them are White students. So, like in a certain way, like when I think of culturally responsive pedagogy, I feel like I now understand you’re trying to reach a particular demographic group. Being in the same school for my entire teaching career, my understanding of my students was that they are a vast majority White. Almost all of our teachers are White, and I just taught the way I was taught, what I saw in my student teaching, and it suddenly made me realize what I had been doing for some many years....Professional development made me realize the importance that as our school’s demographics change, so must my perspective of teaching and how I can incorporate diverse viewpoints into their learning while taking into account some of my students of color in the room and their experiences (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

I was slightly distracted when she was speaking this time because I was noting, “*the paper in her hand...she just placed it folded under her right leg. She obviously felt comfortable about our interview that she could put away her notes and just speak freely*” (Field Note #5, 2021).

When reflecting on her interview later that week, I noted two things: “*She had spoken earlier of the 16 Cultural Groups, alluded to the fixed versus fixed growth mindset, came back to the 16 Cultural Groups, and also referenced the demographic numbers that had been shared...four references to the way in which professional development had enlightened her*

*understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Enlightenment is one word...but life changing could be another. She understood that these professional development sessions had changed her perspective of teaching and how she viewed her classroom. All teachers need to be able to have these transformative experiences” (Reflective Note #49, 2021).*

She continued with the interview, without any prompting from me.

Ms. Leads: Since we have started these professional developments, I have been able to reflect on my past experiences more. Ya know, I remember being really cautious and almost like hesitant to engage them (students of diversity) a lot. Every conversation would be like: “Oh, I got through that one.” And then eventually I got a lot more comfortable. I think it was the byproduct of that training. Through the given professional development, I always thought it’s going to do some kind of damage or reveal myself to be ignorant; but I was ignorant. I learned that by admitting, it makes things a little easier. One realization I had after the given professional development, I also realized that I can give examples of when I have used cultural referenced material, but I can’t say that I ever put much thought into what I was teaching or who I was teaching to. It was, like, part of the curriculum and I just did what I did. After this professional development, I realized how much further I could use culturally diverse voices (Leads: Interview #5, 2021).

Later in my reflection journal, I wrote, *“Through all the professional developments she has gone through, she truly has been a reflective educator, hearing what she was being taught, reflecting on what she had been doing wrong in her practice, and how she had begun to rethink her teaching practices to make her classroom more culturally responsive. This demonstrates one more reason why teachers need to have the opportunities to have these experiences to make them a better educator for the diversity in their class” (Reflective Note #50, 2021).*

### **Summary: Ms. Leads’s Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Mrs. Leads discussed in her interview that in her pre-service education classes, she had no preparation in culturally responsive pedagogical practices. She further talked about

how there was never a discussion about any diverse group of people and how she was taught to educate a student, not the diverse students she would come into contact with over her years of teaching and the demographic changes she was seeing within her own school. She specifically remembered what made this situation worse was when they were asked to write a one-page essay about diversity in the classroom after reading an article about diversity in the classroom in her methods class. She recalled that the article was only two pages long, and she could not even remember what the article was about. This is not what culturally responsive pedagogy is about. It cannot be covered in a two-page article because of the vastness of the ways in which the foundation can be applied within the classroom. She recalled the feeling of frustration while thinking about how in four years, diversity was mentioned once—not taught or read about—and then they were supposed to have all the answers about how to teach diverse students, by writing one essay. There was no discussion, no application, no seeing this topic through a different lens. Ms. Leads had missed all the pieces of the puzzle of being a culturally responsive educator in her pre-service education and her student teaching experiences. It was not until she had experienced discussion, reflection, and application of culturally responsive pedagogy that she recognized how little she knew in the best education for students of diversity.

### **Mr. Theodore**

Mr. Theodore was the last to bring his consent form to me. He brought in his form one day during lunch and playfully threw it on my desk, without a word. As he was walking out of the room, he turned back to me and, as I noted on the top of his consent form, laughed and said, “I’m old. I can retire. Can’t believe you want my opinion on this” (Field Note #6, 2021).

It was important that I reflect on this before setting up an interview time with Mr. Theodore. I wrote in my reflection journal later that day: *“White, Male, 30 years experience, social studies teacher, Diversity Committee Member: 3 years, Rural and Suburban Schools”* (Reflective Note #51, 2021). I hated writing White and Male for Mr. Theodore, because it already grouped him into two of the “majority” categories—two categories for which there is an assumption about the lack of diversity understanding, and as a teacher, a certain lens through which he might teach. I remember thinking about Mr. Dios’s story about only seeing White professors in his collegiate preparation and how I had reflected on the need for diversity to be seen in educators in the classroom.

I pulled my notes from our first diversity meeting, as mentioned several times throughout this chapter, to look at how he had presented himself. I had written the following: *“Mr. Theodore, here to grow. Here to understand. Passionate about seeing change in our school before he retires.”* I reflected on this information, as well as how he had delivered his consent form to me. Mr. Theodore had come to join the diversity committee for growth and to promote change in our school’s teaching and understanding of culture in the classroom. Although he saw himself as old and his stories not being as applicable as current educators, I was intrigued about how a veteran teacher would tell the stories of culturally responsive pedagogy through his years of service.

I set up the interview with him the next afternoon, making a star next to my reflection to bring this up to him in our interview. His story, no matter how long his time in education had been, was important to be heard, but I especially valued his longevity in the classroom, as he had seen the growth of the need for culturally diverse pedagogy in the classroom, even in his last years of service.

## **Explored Storying of His Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Mr. Theodore was late. We had agreed to meet in the afternoon after school, as his plan times were normally taken up by talking with struggling students and mentoring them. I knew to be patient because any chance he had to spend with students was always taken and was a priority for him. When he arrived five minutes later, I noted that he came in hurriedly, frazzled, pulled the chair out with force, and sat down hard in the seat.

Mr. Theodore: “I am so sorry I am late. Unfortunately, an issue came up towards the end of the day that needed to be addressed” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I didn’t press for any further response from him, but he continued to speak with urgency.

Mr. Theodore: “I don’t understand why it is so hard for people to just realize that students are not perfect. They need someone to believe in them, to see them for who they are, and to listen to them. It’s not hard to do” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I wrote in my field notes, “*Already demonstrating his knowledge of CRP, and we haven’t even started yet*” (Field Note #6, 2021). I came back to this when I was working on his transcript because it held a very important element in how he viewed culturally responsive pedagogy. I wrote in my reflection journal, “*Mr. Theodore gets it. He demonstrated how important it was for educators to recognize their students as not just an individual, but how their experience and stories filters into their success in the classroom*” (Field Note #6, 2021). I continued to reflect on how many times throughout my career I had thought the same thing. I did not understand why I heard so many stories of teachers struggling with how to connect to students, keep them interested in their learning, and find

success in their academics. I wondered if I had heard these stories over the past 20 years, if they had had pre-service education or professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy whether it would have changed their perspectives. It was apparent that Mr. Theodore felt the same.

Coming back to the interview, I paused after his last comment and noted that he took a deep breath, pulled his chair up to the table, and placed his hands on it. I took this as a sign that he was ready to move on.

Me: “Mr. Theodore, I am sorry you had a rough day. Are you ready to start our interview or do you need a few minutes?” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I noticed he opened his hands and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, “Well, I’m here, let’s get to it.” So, I continued. We went through the introduction questions, clarifying the things that I already knew about him and that I had already reflected on in my journal. However, when I got to the question, “How long have you been in education?,” I remembered that I wanted to come back to his comment about being close to retirement and that he was “old.” It was important for me to hear his story.

Me: “So, when you came in to drop off your consent form, you said, ‘I’m old. I can retire. Can’t believe you want my opinion on this.’ Do you remember saying this?” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I noted he laughed, not a chuckle, but a boisterous laughter that even made me smile.

Mr. Theodore: “I do. You remember everything” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I wrote the following in my field notes: “It’s about being a researcher, every little thing is something that leads to understanding what he is saying.”

Mr. Theodore continued:

I have been in education a long time. I grew up and went to school in a different time, got my college degree in a different time, and I will soon be leaving my career in a different time. You know that saying, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, well, I have grown more in the last few years on my understanding about students, culture, and teaching than I had in the previous 27 years. This old dog learned some new tricks. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

I noted this was important to his story by placing a star next to a few notes I had jotted down. I came back to this star to begin to reflect about bringing in pieces of his background information that he had shared with me. I wrote, "*Mr. Theodore had been in the classroom for three decades. I can't imagine the things that he has seen changed since then, not just in a classroom, but in society itself. He was raised as a small-town farm boy, taught in small towns, and settled into teaching here thirteen years ago when this town was considered a small rural town. He has watched the school grow, teachers and students come and go, and mentioned that in the past three years, the years that culturally responsive pedagogy professional development had been implemented in the school had given him the most growth*" (Reflective Note #52, 2021). This was important because it demonstrated that he did not feel as if he had understood the place of culture in the classroom completely until the last three years. It made me reflect back to Ms. Nells' interview when she talked about her lack of training in any type of culturally diverse training and how many opportunities she had missed in the classroom with students because she did not know how much their culture influenced the ways in which they learned and connected to their education.

Mr. Theodore: "Do you remember the 16 Cultural Groups we talked about in like our first or second PD?" (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I indeed knew what he was alluding to and reached over to my documents to pull it out. I placed it in front of him, and I noted that he slid it closer to him, wanting to ensure it

was within his reach to reference as we continued to talk. I made a notation, “*Ms. Qualls had also addressed this in her interview*” (Field Note #6, 2021). I noted he ever so slightly moved the paper back and forth on the table as he thought about how he would continue.

Mr. Theodore: So, this chart made me recognize myself as an educator, and the changes I have seen in this district since I started here. As you know, I teach social studies and it was like a light bulb went off for me, seeing this. I realized that I could apply each aspect of these characteristics in how and what I teach and how much more I could offer my students. Now, I won’t say that in my previous years I didn’t change my thought process about history and how it needed to change as history changed, but I never had made the connection that by recognizing culture in the classroom could benefit my students in the classroom. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

I wrote in my field notes, “*just like our students can be visual learners, Mr. Theodore needed something to visualize his thinking about culture and once he did, the connection was made*” (Field Note #6, 2021). Mr. Theodore continued:

For example, one of the first things that came to mind of what impacted me in understanding culturally responsive pedagogy, was when I talked about slavery, it was always from a White perspective, the majority perspective. When I thought about it, it was like, here are the causes of the Civil War. Here and here’s what Abe Lincoln did. I would talk about Frederick Douglass because he was always in the mix, but other than that, it wasn’t like we read any slave narratives or anything like that. I talked about the history of the winners, not of the oppressed. How did that look to my students of color sitting in my classroom? There was so much to be put into this topic that I just went past because I didn’t know it was important. It was the way in which I was taught in my younger years and in my college classes didn’t vary from that either. It’s kind of embarrassing. Those 16 cultural groups need to be present in every classroom, but it is so important for it to present in a social studies classroom. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

During transcription, I paused. Not being a history teacher, it was an interesting perspective to reflect on—how Mr. Theodore understood culturally responsive pedagogy. I wrote, “*As an English teacher, I have a freedom, it seems, to talk about culture in the classroom more and bring the literature or the conversations back to my students to allow them to feel connected. I had assumed that what was taught in history, and the truths of said*

history, were beginning to be talked about more in the classroom because the injustices of minorities are being addressed in so many other avenues. However, it would seem that through Mr. Theodore's story, he discussed how he had taught the way in which he had been taught growing up and how he was taught in his pre-education program. One of the most impactful things Mr. Theodore said was that he 'talked about the history of the winners not of the oppressed' and how teaching that side of history only might impact his students of diversity in his classroom. I remember reading Banks (2004) in one of my most recent classes and recalled how he argued that oppressed groups often distinguish between official and unofficial histories. In this, official history often serves as a tool to assimilate or dominate ethnic or cultural minorities. Mr. Theodore recognized that by telling the dominating history of one race over another, he was canceling out the history of his diverse students, disallowing them to make connections to their own lives and experiences" (Reflective Note #53, 2021). When I think about Mr. Theodore's story, it made me draw the following conclusions. His story raised questions about the preparation of culturally relevant teachers and what perspectives and voices they bring into their classroom. He specifically discussed how he had taught social studies in the same way he had been taught in his own schooling and his college classes. To recognize and appreciate the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom, future and current educators need to be educated to understand that students who can see themselves in the story of their shared past can develop a deeper appreciation of the subject and see themselves in what they are learning.

This sentiment was further expanded in Mr. Theodore's story when he stated:

And then I was like, this [culturally responsive pedagogy] totally changes things...Then I felt like that needed to be something that was used in class. Those kinds of things like primary sources of people need to be used in class. I began to find

primary sources from slaves, historical documents, etc., and I stopped using a textbook. The textbook only truly tells one side of the Civil War, and there is so much more to the story than just that. I mean how do you just touch on the story of Sojourner Truth? Alexander Augusta? Abraham Galloway, Susie King Taylor? Those are all Black voices that need to be heard by students. Not just because they are Black, but because they lay a foundation for our future students of color to be nurses, doctors, and politicians. It allows them to see that through a time of strife, these people who were tried to be kept down because of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, the color of their skin, or the educational levels...any of these things that are listed on this cultural groups chart, they stood up and helped make history. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

Mr. Theodore's story of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy came later in his life, but this understanding has made an impact the last three years in how he thinks about the voices he is making heard in his history classroom and how he can expand to meet the academic needs of diverse students in the classroom.

### **Explored Storying of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-Education Programs**

As Mr. Theodore talked about his personal experience, I had noted the *“excitement held in his voice...the impact of his understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy has impacted in which his students will learn and he will teach until he retires”* (Field Note #6, 2021). From his excitement, I was excited to see where his next story would take us.

Me: “Mr. Theodore, I appreciate how you spoke about your story of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy in your own classroom. Let's go back down memory lane and talk about your pre-service education preparation in culturally responsive pedagogy” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

Mr. Theodore: “Funny story...I don't really feel like my undergraduate education was very diverse. It was... pretty surface level material...” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I wrote in my field notes: *“Interesting he used the word surface level in his pre-service education, but his own response seemed surface level as well—possible discomfort?”* (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021). There was no depth to his response, and he seemed to laugh it off by stating “funny story” and wanting to move on to the next question without expanding upon it. He had been so enthusiastic before in his interview, but answering this question, he seemed to become serious in his response. When going back to his recording and working on the transcript, I paused my process. I needed to reflect on this moment for a second. I pulled my reflection journal out and wrote: *“Mr. Theodore had a moment of discomfort here. His words “funny story” and trying to have me move off the topic drew a spotlight that needed to be pushed further from him. There was a reason why he had so little to say”* (Reflective Note #54, 2021).

I decided to approach him with a follow-up question.

Me: “Mr. Theodore, could you please define what surface level means to you in how you experienced culturally responsive pedagogy in your pre-education program?” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

As soon as I asked the question, I noted in my field notes, *“needed to push this...important for me to understand his shortness of response and what surface level means to him”* (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021). I remember watching his body language to see how he would react to this push on the topic he obviously did not want to discuss. I noted that he sat straight up in his chair and looked away from me for a moment. When he brought his eyes back to me, he spoke with a quiet tone, one that made me lean in and slide my recorder closer to him (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021).

Mr. Theodore: Surface level to me is cursory in nature. It's like they needed to check the boxes...Curriculum theory—check...classroom management—check, lesson planning—check. But where was the understanding and application of anything past the readings, the lectures, the essays written? There was no depth, no ability to grow. Funny how after 30 years, education has taught me that application, project based, and real-world experience application is one of the best ways for students to learn. Yet, in a preparation teaching program there is no ability to apply what you have or have not learned till student teaching, and then do you even know what you are supposed to be applying or teaching outside of your subject matter? (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

As I reflected on his transcript, I was a little disappointed in his response, not just in his shortness, but also in the way he felt his pre-education program prepared him. I wrote, *“Mr. Theodore defined his pre-service education as surface level and lacking diversity in his classes. He felt that his pre-service program lacked any applicability to what he was learning in his classes and that the knowledge he was obtaining was just a simple checklist of items needed to exit the program. This has been heard through all of the participants that they have held a feeling of dissatisfaction with their pre-service education. Although my participants all shared the same story, I wonder how many other pre-service teachers feel the same way about their education being ‘cursory in nature.’ This isn’t how future teachers should be prepared. They need to see purpose, application, and worth to their learning and how it is applicable to their future career”* (Reflective Note #55, 2021).

Mr. Theodore's story said so much about how pre-service teachers might feel in their educational program. Pre-education programs need to ensure that our future teachers are receiving real-world experiences, observational opportunities in the classroom, and application. Mr. Theodore made a pertinent point when he spoke about colleges teaching their pre-educators about having applications in their own classrooms to help students learn; however, they do not require or expect the same things from their own students in the

collegiate world. There needs to be—from start to finish—discussion about diversity in pre-education programs. Talking to a classroom of future educators it is not enough; students need the ability to put what they are learning into practice, study it, read about it, and then have purposeful application of theory in a classroom setting. Further, it is crucial for them to recognize the foundational needs in theory and practice early in their education, thus allowing them to build on this knowledge and apply it to future learning. Curriculum, methods, and management can all be incorporated in the following years of learning, rather than a suggested piece to read, write, and reflect on to meet the check-marked box of teaching diversity.

### **Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs**

From the first question to the next, there had been such a change in Mr. Theodore's demeanor. He had gone from excited to serious, and I had a feeling that his passion lies in talking about how his perspective on culturally responsive pedagogy had changed, rather than going back to his stories and experience from 30 years ago. I had a feeling that Mr. Theodore would possibly have little to say as we moved forward to our next question, but I continued.

Me: “Mr. Theodore, I am sorry that you felt that your pre-service education experiences were lacking. However, you did mention that “in a preparation teaching program there is no ability to apply what you have or have not learned till student teaching.” Can you expand on how your real-world experiences were applicable to this statement?” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I noted, *“The seriousness on his face did not change. He cleared his throat”*

(Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021).

Mr. Theodore: Let me try to even explain the lack of real-world experience that I had in my pre-education program. It was a joke... a literal joke. I won't even talk about my observations. My professor never even checked to see if we did them; however, my student teaching, ya know, the time I am supposed to put everything together, learn from a mentor, and apply my knowledge? Yeah, well I got placed with a teacher who had been teaching for close to 25 years. I should have learned so much from him; yet, this is how it went. Even his teaching was a checklist:

- ✓ Students entered
- ✓ Any acknowledgement of said students? No
- ✓ Take Roll
- ✓ Lecture for majority of the hour
- ✓ Give homework from the textbook due next class
- ✓ Repeat the next day

Later that day, I listened to his interview again and stopped at 24:45. It brought me into some deep thought to begin writing: *“Secret Story Emerging: Mr. Theodore’s pre-service education and his student teaching both seemed like a checklist for him. He experienced the same thing in his pre-service classes that he experienced in his student teaching. What a hard thing to take into your first year of teaching. The only application he felt he had received in both was what he had also experienced in his own schooling experience in the day. This is so important to note because there was no checklist available for him to check off when it came to culturally responsive pedagogy. His real-life experience, that was supposed to be such an intricate part of his learning, was in itself “cursory” in nature. His mentor teacher did nothing to get to know the stories of his students, no diving deeper into the cultural iceberg or seeing them through the lens of the 16 Cultural Groups.*

*There was no fixed vs. growth mindset available for him. Culturally responsive pedagogy was absent in every part of his preparation. If you think about it, if you did the math...mentor teaching 25 years in the business, most likely teaching the same way for 25 years. Mr. Theodore taught for 30 years and just began to put the pieces of culturally responsive teaching and its importance together. That is 52 years of missing out on the needs of our diverse students and the importance of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Shocking when you put it into perspective like this” (Reflective Note #56, 2021).* The reflective note spoke for itself. Not only do colleges need to step up and start the conversation and application of culturally responsive pedagogy, but our future teachers need to be placed in applicable based student teaching experiences that allow them to recognize culture, the place and voice of others, within their curriculum and their classroom experiences. Mr. Theodore emphasized how his student teaching encouraged him to be a more culturally competent teacher.

### **Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development**

After feeling the heaviness in our interview for the past two questions, in contrast to the excitement he held at the beginning of our interview, I knew that my next questions would allow him to come back to his enthusiasm about his growth and learning.

Me: “Once again, I appreciate your honesty here, Mr. Theodore. Moving on to something you spoke of earlier, how can you expand on how you feel culturally responsive pedagogy has influenced you? Is there any other specific professional development that helped in this?” (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021).

I noted, “*he leaned forward and he gave me a crooked smile*” (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021).

Mr. Theodore: You’re back to what I like to talk about. I don’t like to dwell on the past. My grandfather used to tell me “Leave the past in the past, it’s a part of you that you have already reflected on and have moved on.” I like to recognize the growth I have made. The professional development over the last three years has allowed me to do that, and I am a better cultural educator because of that. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

I wrote a smiley face at this point in my field notes: “*This was his element... only the positive from here on out*” (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021). He continued:

Honestly, I don’t think there was one piece of professional development that wasn’t important to me. I can tell you there was nothing checklisty about what we were given. Since I was so focused on checklist before, let me give you my checklist of what was impactful to me and what helped me in my understanding of being a culturally responsive educator. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

- 16 Cultural Groups: The iceberg was impactful, but when it was broken down even further, I recognized that differences were made up of race, ethnicity, age, language, and even religion. However, I never thought of the other aspects like body/shape size, socio-economic status, family structure, gender identification, or ability/disability. Like, why did these not truly cross my mind as I was thinking about how I teach my students?
- Cultural Iceberg: I remember being asked, “what are we missing in our own students’ lives?” and it made me start to think about each student I have come in contact with over the last 30 years, and I realized how much opportunity I had lost by not knowing what we had just learned.
- Stats of Our Students’ Feelings about their School: Eye opener for me for sure. It made me think about how maybe I was part of the problem. My classroom needed to be about student-centered learning, understanding the student perspective, building relationships with my students and allowing their voices and experiences to be welcome and heard in my classroom and in what I teach.
- Theater for Change: This professional development allowed me to recognize that I can no longer be the “silent staff.” When I do not speak up about what I see or hear in the hallways or what other teachers say about students, I am just as guilty and am actually breaking down the relationships I have tried so hard to establish in my own classroom. Being able to stand up and demonstrate how I would handle these citations allowed me to be seen as an ally. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

As he made his checklist in his head, I noted *“as he speaks, he is check-marking the table after each moment that enlightened his understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Finally, he felt a checklist was worthy of his story or growth and change as a culturally responsive educator”* (Theodore: Field Note #6, 2021).

He made his final statement:

Mr. Theodore: Every time something new was introduced to us built on what we were being taught. After we had some foundation, then we were asked to apply it to situations in our school and classrooms, and then we were given time to reflect and change. I couldn't be more thankful for these moments. It has made an impact on me as I finish out my last years here. (Theodore: Interview #6, 2021)

As I listened to the last part of his interview, I felt a sense of happiness thinking about Mr. Theodore's growth in his teaching methods. He was indeed “an old dog” who had learned “new tricks.” I wrote, *“Through the professional development opportunities that Mr. Theodore was given he was finally able to complete a checklist of all the things that he experienced in his enlightenment of culturally responsive pedagogy. Through these moments, he realized that he was becoming an effective teacher by sharing his experiences that allowed him to know that now he was doing the right thing...the right thing for his students by embracing his newfound knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and how he now felt that he was educating his students fully and not just a one-sided view of history that his students might not see themselves in, could be offensive, and their voices were not heard”* (Reflective Note #57, 2021).

As all the participants discussed, the professional development given to them was enlightening; it allowed this researcher to discern that teachers need to have current applicable professional development that allows teachers to recognize and see the need for

change within their school and classrooms that is applicable to the constantly changing demographics they are seeing in their student body.

**Summary: Mr. Theodore's Explored Stories of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Through Mr. Theodore's explored stories, and one secret story, the findings of his experiences and perspectives were illuminated by the shortness and his dissatisfaction with his pre-education preparation, real-life experiences, and his lack of understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy entering his student teaching and his own classroom. He further emphasized the same stories as the other participants that the need for professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy is crucial to the success of students, but also to the teacher in understanding the cultural needs of each student in their classroom.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I presented significant discoveries from my study. I introduced and provided detailed examples of the following themes: (1) Explored Storying of Participants' Own Story of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; (2) Explored Storying of Dissatisfaction with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Pre-education Programs; (3) Explored Stories of the Lack of Real-World Experience in Pre-Education Programs; and (4) Explored Stories of the Enlightenment of the Understanding of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through Professional Development.

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings related to the research questions driving this qualitative study, and the implications and recommendations for change in pre-service programs, real life experiences, and professional development needs when it comes to the foundation and exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

When I began the process of this study, based on the knowledge of the setting, I assumed that the knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy would be fairly non-existent. This was based on seven years of working with the participants in the chosen setting and conversations that were held during our diversity committee meetings. As I began to acquire the participants in my study, I truly believed that the two Hispanic participants would bring the most understanding of CRP to our discussion; however, it was determined that no matter the years of teaching experience, college attended, or setting of their own educational experiences, the knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy was not apparent in their stories or their experiences.

These themes were developed, analyzed, and constructed through documents and semi-structured interviews stemming from one primary research question and two sub-questions.

In looking at sub-question a, it was interesting to see how the stories of the participants echoed and intertwined with each other to tell the stories of dissatisfaction and surface-level experiences in their pre-education programs. Whether the participants were part of a diverse community, educated in local Midwestern universities, or in other states, it was clear that each of the candidates lacked knowledge of what culturally responsive pedagogy is and how it is shown in the classroom. Their experiences and perspectives illuminated their dissatisfaction with their pre-education preparation and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, whether this be through the lack of diversity or lack of current teaching experience in a modern day diverse classroom in their professors, lack of diversity in their pre-education class work, or lack of experience in diverse settings during observation and student teaching.

Sub-question b addressed the perceptions of teachers regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and professional development. For all of the participants, it was the three years of professional development that established their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Document analysis further supported these findings as the participants discussed in multiple ways the growth they had experienced with the use of the diagrams of the 16 Cultural Groups, the Venn Diagram of the correlation between culture and education, the Cultural Iceberg, and Growth vs. Fixed Mindset. Further powerful pieces of professional development were images such as the Equality and Equity Baseball Game and the theatrical performance of Theater for Change that reflected current statistics of the 2016–2017 student

survey. These professional developments allowed the participants to recognize the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy and to recognize that all students do not learn the same. They understood the need to dive deeper into the stories, cultures, and experiences of students, as well as building relationships and content that is reflective of their students, allowing their voices to be heard. Further findings showed that the participants felt that by having the professional development, they were able to make connections to culturally responsive pedagogy and become better teachers and allies for their students.

Although I cannot generalize my research to all populations, I found significant discoveries that suggest implications and practical applications for pre-service education programs and the growth of professional development as it pertains to culturally responsive pedagogy. Through the interviews and document analysis, I complete my reflections as a teacher educator and offer recommendations and suggestions for pre-service teacher education and professional development as well as future research initiatives.

In the analysis, it was determined that while the under-represented population increases in schools in the United States, teaching without culturally responsive instruction in our pre-service education programs and professional development will continue to contribute to the marginalization of under-represented and lower socioeconomic populations (Kozol, 2005). As was discussed in this study, the teaching population is still predominantly middle-class, English-speaking, and Caucasian and remains ill-equipped to meet the needs of their students (Castro, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Sleeter, 2008). Further, it was apparent that many teachers lack experiences with students from ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds different than their own, yet they will instruct these students (Mysore et al., 2006; Ukpokodu, 2003).

The connection between the literature and research gathered on the pre-service education of future teachers, their real-life experiences, and professional development concerning culturally responsive teacher preparation programs needs to be addressed. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry research was to explore the stories and experiences of educators and their pre-service education, their real-life experiences, and professional development in connection to culturally responsive pedagogy.

Although research has been engaging with understanding pre-service teacher development, it is evident through this study that there is still a continuing, growing need for pre-service teachers and current educators to learn culturally responsive pedagogy (Castro, 2010). Previous studies have shown the importance of not only the content material of culturally responsive pedagogies, but also the teaching/learning methods that should be applied (Acquah & Commins, 2017; Brown, 2004) in order to develop pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills to teach in diverse settings.

### **Research Questions**

Villegas and Lucas (2002) have long argued that for teacher preparation programs to move beyond the fragmented and superficial treatment of diversity that prevail, teacher educators must articulate a vision of teaching and learning in a diverse society and use that vision to systematically guide the infusion of multicultural issues throughout the pre-service curriculum.

Further, researchers have determined several key reasons pre-service teachers do not feel they are receiving adequate knowledge to teach in a more culturally diverse classroom. To begin, Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011) argued that professors they encounter are unsure how to prepare teachers to educate culturally diverse learners in their classrooms. Next, diversity

is not incorporated in pre-service education programs in meaningful ways and most often is addressed in stand-alone courses (Trent et al., 2008). Third, in most instances, culturally responsive pedagogy is not addressed in other program requirements such as field placements and student teaching (Trent et al., 2008). Although pre-service teachers bring in their own experiences and stories, knowledge and skills pertaining to culturally responsive pedagogy do not occur automatically, and they must be taught across all phases of a teacher education program to ensure the connection and applicability is fully apparent in their preparation (Gay, 2010).

Similar to current research, these initial findings stipulate that as pre-service teachers, the participants felt under-prepared to teach in a diverse classroom. Melnick and Zeichner (1995) stated that the majority of teacher candidates who enter certification programs have little to no knowledge about diverse groups in the United States. Further, Sleeter (2001) argued that stand-alone courses do not provide a structural approach for teachers to develop culturally relevant knowledge, attitude, and beliefs, which was corroborated in the participants' stories. Thus, through the stories of teachers in this study, it is understood that teacher candidates and beginning teachers are lacking in the knowledge of histories and cultures of culturally diverse populations. Thus, in preparing teacher candidates to effectively teach students from culturally and diverse backgrounds, teacher education programs should transform pre-service teacher candidates' multicultural attitudes by increasing their culturally diverse knowledge base, not just through perfunctory work, but by allowing them to actively experience and practice the theoretical frameworks they are taught. This can be encouraged by colleges equipping pre-service educators with the skills needed to effectively teach culturally diverse students (Gay, 2010).

Darling-Hammond (2006) stated:

[I]t is impossible to teach people how to teach powerfully by asking them to imagine what they have never seen or to suggest they “do the opposite” of what they have observed in the classroom. No amount of coursework can, by itself, counteract the powerful experiential lessons that shape what teachers actually do. (p. 308)

With this in mind, teacher educators must develop field experiences that challenge pre-service teachers to begin to think more about the needs and nature of their students. As

Darling-Hammond (2006) stated:

Schools of education must design programs that help prospective teachers to deeply understand a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students. (p. 302)

### **Future Research**

This study focused specifically on the stories of teachers’ understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, their dissatisfaction with their pre-education programs, their lack of real-life experiences, and their enlightenment about culturally responsive pedagogy from their professional development experiences. There is a need to examine the stories and experiences of teachers who decide to further their education by enrolling in a master’s program. Future research could explore whether this influences their understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Further, more research should examine teacher development, whether through pre-service education programs or their real-life experiences to address the need for differentiated diversity in the classroom. This would allow future researchers to understand how to strengthen the confidence of teachers to bring culturally responsive pedagogy theory into daily practice.

Future research should continue to look for successful implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy through PD for teachers. Such PD should include: explicit activities

that allow for cultural awareness conversations, as was seen in the Theater for Change PD; awareness of culture in the classroom, as seen in the Cultural Iceberg, 16 Cultural Groups, and Equality and Equity visuals. It is important for educators to reflect on their own lives and how they correlate with the diversity in their classroom (Giroux, 2009). Researchers need to provide the conceptual understanding behind culturally responsive pedagogy and its components (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2004). Studies examining PD should continue to include constructivist learning opportunities with teacher reflections and peer collaboration as avenues of research exploration.

### **Conclusion**

By reflecting on their dissatisfaction with past educational experiences and their enlightenment through engaging in professional development, participants discovered the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in shaping learning experiences for diverse students. Professional development is one channel that has the greatest potential for transforming pedagogy as we intentionally integrate culturally responsive practices in our ever-increasing diversity in the classroom with the hope of change. There is still a substantial amount of work to be done though the preparation of all educators for teaching in a rapidly changing demographic of culturally diverse students. The future lies in restructuring teacher education programs to promote culturally responsive pedagogy through class content, student teaching opportunities, and professional development.

## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Exploring the Stories and Experiences of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy through the  
Teacher's Pre-Education Programs and Professional Development

Student Investigator: Julie Taylor

Primary Investigator: Nora Peterman

Study Title: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the Stories of Teachers

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nora Peterman and Julie D. Taylor

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nora Peterman: Work #: 816-235-4000: Email:  
petermanno@umkc.edu

Student Investigator: Julie Taylor: Cell: 816-721-6953: Email: [jdtxr5@umkc.edu](mailto:jdtxr5@umkc.edu)

### KEY INFORMATION

This study is a doctoral dissertation. Further, it is a qualitative study that is asking current teachers their stories about their preparation through pre-education classes and professional development in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy.

This consent is being sought for research and your participation is voluntary. Subjects will be required to commit to one semi-structured interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. After data is collected and coded, the subject will be asked to do an overview of transcripts and findings to clarify any questions, comments, or concerns. At this time, there are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or benefits to you as the prospective subject.

Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. As the researcher(s) discusses this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. Please talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this study is to determine teachers' perspectives and experiences in culturally relevant pedagogy through professional development and pre-service classes.

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a member of the Diversity Committee and show an innate interest in the best teaching practices for students of diversity.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Approximately 8-10 people will take part in this study in a private office setting.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?**

You will be asked to complete 1 initial open-structured interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. After data is transcribed and coded, you will be asked to meet for a post-interview interview to review transcripts and findings, as well as to answer any final questions, comments, or concerns.

**HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

This study will approximately last 6 months. There will be no further follow-up after its submission in May 2022.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is, however, the potential risk of loss of confidentiality. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential; however, this cannot be guaranteed.

Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

Further risks could be that confidentiality cannot be promised; however, all efforts to protect the names and setting of this research study through pseudonyms will be taken.

**ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

There are no personal benefits to taking part in this study. However, this survey will contribute to the education community to demonstrate how teachers' perspectives and experiences are seen in preparation for teaching students of diversity.

**WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction to Interview: Context (5-10 minutes)

1. Appreciation & Introduction: Thank you very much for making time to share your stories and experiences with me today concerning culturally responsive pedagogy. I am very grateful that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as a teacher and your personal life. Also, thank you for signing and returning the consent form. I just want to confirm once more—is it still okay with you for me to audio-record our interview? Just to confirm and out of respect for honoring your time I have planned approximately 60 minutes for this interview. Is that your understanding too? Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else at this time? [If yes, I will answer the question. If no, then I will say: “OK, great. Then, let’s get started—I want to make the most of your time.”]

2. Overview of Our Purpose and Goals: As a gentle reminder, I invited you to participate in this research study called \_\_\_\_\_. Today, we begin with the first interview that should last approximately 60 minutes, but feel free to stop at any time for any reason. I am doing this study to learn more about your perspectives and experience regarding how you, as a practicing teacher, view culturally responsive pedagogy in your own practice. For this study, culturally responsive pedagogy will be defined by Gay (2010) 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” (31). There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand your personal experiences and stories. Thank you so very much, in advance, for your help and time.

3. Confidentiality: In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things that you say, but I will never use your name unless I have your permission. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you prefer not to answer.

4. Questions Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know.

#### **Demographic Information**

How many years have you been teaching?

In what areas are you certified to teach?

What degree(s) do you hold?

How long have you been teaching at your current grade level?

### **Biographical Information/Educational Background**

Where did you do your undergraduate education?

Where did you get your graduate degree from? (If eligible)

### **Interview Protocol:**

1. How would you describe your academic preparation to teach culturally diverse students?

a. [Probe as needed] What classes, assignments, and/or experiences stand out in your memory?

2. Could you tell me about any professional development experiences that have influenced your understanding and/or approach to teaching culturally diverse students?

a. [Probe as needed] Could you tell me more about how this influences your current practice?

### Teacher Beliefs/Practices

3. Could you tell me about your students? How would you describe their families and cultural identities?

Could you tell me more about your relationships with your students? Parents? Community?

a. [Probe as needed] Could you share some examples?

4. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Specifically, can you tell me about any significant or memorable experiences (can be positive or negative) addressing issues of race and cultural diversity in your practice?

a. [Probe as needed] Does - or how does - cultural diversity matter in your classroom?

5. What do you think of when you hear the term “culturally responsive pedagogy”?

Why? What comes to mind?

a. [Probe as needed] Can you give me an example of this?

b. [Probe as needed] What questions, or puzzles of practice, or concerns do you have? [Can you tell me more about this?]

Teaching Context

6. How prepared do you feel to teach learners with different cultural identities and backgrounds than your own? Why?

a. [Probe as needed] To enact culturally responsive pedagogy in your classroom?

Why?

Wrapping Up

What questions do you have for me?

Is there anything I haven't asked that would be helpful as I consider your story and your experiences regarding culturally responsive pedagogy in your practice?

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## VITA

Julie Dawn Taylor is a gifted education professional born and raised in the Midwest. She graduated from Truman High School in 1998, then went on to attend Central Missouri State, where she earned a Bachelors of Science in Education degree in 1998. She furthered her education by receiving a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2005 and a Masters of Education in Educational Technology in 2018 from the University of Central Missouri. She also earned a certificate in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2017. She spent the first 15 years of her educational career working in the urban setting in the prison system and in alternative schools teaching high school English. Currently she teaches English in a local suburban high school. She also teaches at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in their Education Department, both pre-service education and master's classes.

Mrs. Taylor has been a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City since 2019 and began to work there as an adjunct instructor in 2020. She has one child, age 22, who is also a graduate of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Mrs. Taylor is active in her school, leading professional development in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy; she also serves the National Educators Association as their diversity consultant.

Upon completion of her degree requirements, Mrs. Taylor plans to continue her career becoming an instructional coach in an urban school district and continue as an adjunct instructor at The University of Missouri-Kansas City. Upon her retirement from public education, she plans to continue her career in a university setting. She is also interested in continuing curriculum research and advocating for the needs of diverse learners.