

A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE PREPARATION EXPERIENCES OF  
NOVICE TEACHERS IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2023

ABSTRACT

Literature has shown that qualified, effective, and confident teachers are the number one predictor of student success inside the classroom. Students in urban schools experience a greater number of inexperienced or qualified teachers than their peers, which has and currently is creating a social justice crisis in our nation. The reality of staff shortages and the amount of teacher attrition is extremely alarming, especially for students in urban school contexts. Teachers are leaving the profession because they are unprepared. Research suggests that teacher preparation must focus on preparing teachers through culturally and contextually responsive teaching and building critical competency for effective urban educators (Gay, 2010; Hollins, 2012; Howard & Milner, 2014).

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand novice teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban elementary school setting. The unit of analysis was the preparation of pre-service teachers' education experiences. This study examined the question: What stories do novice teachers tell about their preparedness to teach in an urban school? Data were collected from six novice teachers who were within the first three years of their teaching career. Data collection consisted of an initial survey and two face-to-face interviews.

The secret, sacred, and cover stories told by participants revealed five major narrative themes, including (a) Field Experiences, (b) Exposure to Culturally Relevant Practices, (c) Reflective Practices, (d) Life Experiences, and (e) Relationships with Faculty. The stories and implications described in this dissertation offer perspective for teacher preparation programs and leadership in urban school contexts.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled “A Narrative Case Study Exploring the Preparation Experiences of Novice Teachers in Urban Elementary Schools,” presented by Hailee A. Brewington, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We are experiencing a social justice crisis in the United States in urban education that must be addressed. Teachers are leaving the profession at astounding rates due to the lack of preparedness to teach in urban schools. Around the country, schools that are situated in urban areas have become the victim of inequitable education, opportunities, and experiences (Nieto, 2019). These inequalities are due to the negative effects of poverty, joblessness, poor access to health care, and the associated racism and hopelessness experienced by many people in urban areas (Nieto, 2006). Urban schools are likely to be found in areas of higher crime and violence, single-parent homes, parents working more than one job to make ends meet, and less access to resources such as childcare, medical resources, and adequate transportation (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Urban schools are more likely to have additional challenges such as inadequate facilities, outdated books and technology, fewer supplies, and overcrowded classrooms (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). They also experience the highest rates of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018). Because of the challenges in these environments, the students in urban schools need the best education possible, which requires the strongest, most experienced teachers (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The reality of what we are facing as a country is the complete opposite: urban schools experience higher turnover and less qualified candidates to teach in their schools (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). The effect of teacher attrition is felt powerfully in urban schools, where the highest quality of teachers is required to respond to the complexities and challenges presented in these settings (Dee & Goldhaber, Kreig, & Theobald, 2017; Guin, 2004).

During the 2017-2018 school year, there were 100,000 classrooms in the United States staffed by instructors who were not qualified for their jobs (Espinoza et al., 2018). In a national sample of 641 new teachers, 63% expressed a need for information on teaching diverse students (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, 2008). New and veteran teachers alike reported that one of the key challenges they face is the effective education of non-White students (Darling-Hammond, 2018; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, 2008; National Education Association, 2004). We must change the way in which we are preparing and retaining teachers in urban schools (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014).

All students, regardless of where they are situated in a city, deserve teachers who are prepared, confident, and dedicated to being the best educator they can be for their students. If teachers are not qualified or prepared to teach in the urban core, the educational inequities and teacher retention rates will continue to be a problem. If this issue is not addressed, the United States will lack hundreds of thousands of qualified teachers, and students will continue to suffer academically, socially, and emotionally. The promise of a free and quality education will not be equitable or fulfilled. Hence, I studied the preparedness of novice teachers who have entered urban settings and the complexities of teaching for diversity that they confront.

Milner (2012) described three conceptual frames for how researchers should talk about and define schools in urban educational environments. Urban Intensive is the first frame that describes school contexts which are concentrated in large cities and experience intense lack of necessary and adequate resources due to the large numbers of people who need them. Urban Emergent describes schools that are also located in large cities, but not as

large as the intensive category schools. These schools experience the same level of problems as the intensive schools, but on a much smaller scale. Urban Characteristic is a term used to describe schools that are not located in big or mid-sized cities but are beginning to experience some of the same challenges that are associated with the urban intensive and emergent categories.

Building upon the work of Milner (2012), for this study I used the urban emergent definition, given that I pulled data from a Midwestern school district that is situated within a large city and has resource scarcity problems. This would, in most cases, include the effects and challenges of poverty, which is a hindrance to student achievement (Boyd et al., 2011).

As an instructional coach at an urban elementary school, I have seen first-hand the impacts of teacher turnover in the urban core. The attitudes, preparedness, and beliefs of teachers who have not been trained with a social justice background are entirely different than those of teachers who have a social justice trained background. Some teachers, depending on the pre-service program they attended, have not had a full year of student teaching or other meaningful experiences that impact their level of confidence to teach in an urban school. I have seen teachers leave or stay no longer than a couple of years because of lack of preparation and confidence. I have heard families express this concern and students talk about how teachers always leave and there is always someone new filling their spots. What I have witnessed first-hand is that this lack of retention has broken trust within our families, and it has caused fear and instability for our students.

Year after year, I find myself training new teachers on our instructional models, adjusting curriculum pacing guides, embedding culturally responsive teaching practices, and training novice teachers on how to foster a culturally responsive classroom culture. I do this



every year, and teachers are leaving the following year. I have come to realize that the high turnover rate of teachers within the urban core is impacting how schools can move the needle with instructional practices and student achievement. I believe that all schools should be equipped with qualified, prepared, and committed teachers regardless of where the school is situated within a city. I am passionate about studying the problem of teacher retention within the urban core because our students and our families deserve qualified teachers who stay in their community and school.

An experienced, highly qualified teacher is one of the single most significant determinants of student success (Rice, 2003; Stronge, 2018). Research has shown that the skill and quality of the teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement (Rivkin et al., 2005; Wheeler Bass, 2018). The skill of being a great teacher aligns with curriculum understanding and rigor. Yet teacher education programs, whether traditional or nontraditional, struggle to prepare teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, practices, and worldviews (Gay, 2010) to develop curriculum rigor and other necessities for urban teaching. Within schools all across America, communities are seeing the alarming shortage of experienced and qualified teachers. In order to fulfill the promise of a free and quality education for all, qualified teachers are needed in every classroom.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), at least one district in every state began the 2018 school year with a shortage of teachers. These shortages have been magnified by the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic and unique challenges of 2020. Teacher shortages in 2021 are even more severe. The NEA administered a survey to 2,690 members; 32% of the respondents said the pandemic has led them to leave the profession earlier than they anticipated. This is an increase from the summer of 2020, when NEA found that 28% of

members said they had planned to leave or retire early. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) projects there will be a demand for approximately 300,000 new teachers nationwide and a supply of just over 100,000 by 2024 (García & Weiss, 2019).

In addition to the shortages, teachers are leaving the profession in high and alarming numbers. A survey by the RAND Corporation found one in four teachers reported they may leave their job by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, compared with one in six who were likely to leave prior to the pandemic. On a more local level, a survey conducted by the Missouri State Teachers Association showed 80% of the nearly 2,900 Missouri teachers surveyed have thought about leaving the profession after the 2021-2022 school year. This is extremely alarming given that data from the Missouri Department of Education (2020) showed that retention percentages within urban schools in the 2019-2020 school year were 68%. Urban schools cannot handle more turnover if they are to provide equitable learning experiences for our students. High turnover rates are detrimental for our students. A study from the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research showed that teacher attrition reduces student achievement; specifically, high turnover resulted in lower student scores in both ELA and math (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teacher turnover also harms the stability, collaboration, and relationships among staff, which ultimately results in a loss of vital institutional knowledge (Lin et al., 2018).

The rates of turnover are greater in urban schools. Title I schools, which are schools with large concentrations (at least 40%) of low-income students (National Center of Education Statistics, 2018), have turnover rates that are 50% higher. Schools with large concentrations of students of color experience a 70% higher turnover rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This shortage negatively impacts the quality of public education,

disproportionately affecting our highest needs schools (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017). Caring and trusting relationships are built over time. Research shows that students who have a sense of belonging and believe that they have good, sustained relationships with adults on campus perform better academically (Kokka, 2016). When students and families see new faces almost every year, there is no opportunity to build a caring and trusting relationship with the teachers in the building. Educational leaders who are dedicated to improving outcomes in academic achievement and the future of all students must keep highly qualified and skilled teachers.

Research shows that teachers leave the profession for a variety of reasons, such as salaries, working conditions, preparation, and mentoring support (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Lin et al., 2018; Redding & Henry, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2016). Data suggest that most teacher preparation programs have failed to adequately prepare future teachers to be successful in classrooms (Flower et al., 2017). An examination of 1,100 college-based teacher preparation programs by the National Council on Teacher Quality evaluated 4 out of 5 as mediocre at best (Greenberg et al., 2015). This would indicate that there is a direct correlation between retention of effective teachers in an urban school and the degree to which the teacher has been trained. The majority of high need schools are found in rural and urban areas (Sutchter et al., 2016). In order to access and retain quality teachers, proper teacher education and training is paramount. Studies of the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher turnover suggest educators with little to no pedagogical preparation are two to three times more likely to leave the profession than those with the most comprehensive preparation (Espinoza et al., 2018).

Through various research, it has become clear that critical pedagogy and pedagogy of culturally relevant teaching need to be present in teacher education programs to prepare our teachers to be successful in urban schools. A discussion of each of these areas follows in Chapter 2. Teachers must be equipped with the tools to teach in a manner that is conducive to the urban core if they are to be effective and successful. Providing teachers with the necessary tools will allow them to gain confidence, and educators who feel successful and confident are more likely to remain in the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that teachers are unprepared and are likely to leave urban schools at shocking rates. Studies have shown that teachers feel less confident and prepared due to the lack of understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and lack of involvement with a diverse student population (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Hones, 2002; Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2001). Teacher preparation must provide candidates with experiences that include these aspects in order to fully prepare teachers to teach in urban schools.

Annually, the Learning Policy Institute cites a nationwide annual teacher attrition rate of 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These teacher shortages are worse in urban schools that serve students of color and poor students. These schools experience even higher turnover rates and have up to four times the number of uncertified teachers that well-funded schools do (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Studies show that teachers who work in low-income urban areas are paid less and are not as adequately trained as their suburban counterparts (Barnes, 2006; Brogan, 2009; Milner, 2008). Some research suggests that even when teachers do feel prepared to teach in urban settings, they lack confidence in their ability to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse environments (Siwatu, 2007,

2011; Taylor & Sobel, 2001; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). To ensure the teachers' professional success, it is paramount to prepare them for the diversity of the students and experiences they will encounter (Quartz, 2012).

Celik and Amac (2012) interviewed five Midwestern pre-service teachers, four White females and one White male, regarding their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about teaching in urban settings and how they were prepared by faculty in education programs. In their research, Celik and Amac found that even though some progress has been made in the intricate understanding of urban schools, a wide gap still exists between what is being taught in preparation programs and the reality of teaching in an urban school setting. Wronowski (2017) studied the current recruitment practices for teachers in urban schools and saw a gap between the practices and reality of what it means to be an urban teacher. The recruitment practices focus on identifying people who have high academic achievement or cognitive abilities. Research on teachers working with diverse students shows that very few teacher education programs have successfully tackled the problem of training teachers for an urban setting (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Ingersoll, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Moore, 2008).

Many teachers lack understanding of inequality and cultural diversity (Haddix, 2017; Moore, 2008; Mule, 2010; Yuan, 2018; Zeichner & Payne, 2013) and therefore are not equipped to remain in an urban setting. Although teacher certification programs are making efforts to prepare teachers for urban classrooms, Ladson-Billings (1995a), as well as Marchitello and Trinidad (2019), argued that most programs do not do enough to foster culturally relevant pedagogy. Encompassing this pedagogy, teachers could begin to feel more

prepared and be more quality educators for urban students and schools, resulting in increased student achievement.

Milner (2008) stated that both pre-service teacher courses and experiences are crucial to the growth of knowledge, conceptual understanding, and practical understanding of classrooms in low-income urban schools. However, research reveals that in some cases there is a significant gap between theory learned in pre-service programs and practice in the classroom (Barnes, 2006). Teacher preparation programs have historically not directly focused on the challenges and possibilities of pre-service teacher education both for and in low-income urban schools (Milner & Howard, 2013). Traditionally, pre-service teacher education is focused on a suburban school-wide view. Additional research highlighted the programs that use a social justice lens (Quartz, 2012) had more of an impact, but ultimately a teacher's level of preparedness depended on the teacher's specific background experience. Darling-Hammond (2010) and others working in urban education programs have argued that pre-service teachers need specific preparation in social behavior and interactions in urban school settings, successful role models in handling cultural differences, appropriate teacher education courses that address differences, and general teaching methods for successfully teaching in urban schools.

The problem of high turnover rates in our inner cities directly impacts student achievement and teacher quality. The teacher shortage has long term effects on our families and communities in inner city schools. A lack of sufficient, qualified teachers threatens students' ability to learn (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Ladd & Sorensen, 2016). Unpredictability in a school's teacher workforce (i.e., high turnover and/or high attrition) negatively affects student achievement and diminishes teacher effectiveness and quality

(Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2018).

For over two decades, the literature has highlighted the need to better prepare teachers for teaching students in urban schools. An empirical study that took place in 2007 through the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda surveyed newly placed teachers regarding their feelings of preparedness to teach under the challenging circumstances of their high-need public schools. The teachers who were surveyed were prepared via four different routes of certification. The study consisted of a random sample of 577 traditionally trained, first year teachers, and 224 respondents from three alternative programs: Teach for America (TFA), New Teacher Project, and Troops for Teachers. The findings revealed that only half of the alternative-route teachers felt they were prepared for their first year of teaching, compared with 80% of the traditionally prepared teachers. Additionally, more than half of the alternative teachers said they had too little time working with an actual public-school teacher in a classroom environment as part of their teacher preparation. Conversely, only 20% of the traditionally prepared teachers who had enriching experiences in their pre-service programs reported having that problem.

The impact of teacher turnover on student achievement was echoed in an empirical study that took place in New York City. The study focused on 625,000 observations of 4th and 5th grade students in all of New York City between 2000 and 2002 and between 2004 and 2007, using a unique identification strategy that measured the turnover yearly by individual grades in individual schools. Their research showed that “teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA. Moreover,

teacher turnover is particularly harmful to students in schools with large populations of low-performing ... students” (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 29).

According to the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program’s (2010) report, the United States will continue to experience its greatest population growth in urban areas. This increase will result in a need for teachers “who are prepared and willing to meet the challenges and opportunities of working in urban school settings” (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2010, p. 42). This report reiterates the reality of growth that urban areas are experiencing and proves there is a high need for well-prepared teachers in urban schools. All students, regardless of where they live, deserve prepared and quality educators in order to effectively learn and achieve.

Quite a bit of existing quantitative research has been found regarding teachers who teach in the urban school environment (Bennett et al., 1990; Cicchelli & Cho, 2007; Cruz-Janzen & Taylor, 2004; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993; Tran et al., 1994). However, there is a lack of qualitative research studies on beginning teachers’ experiences and preparedness as they enter urban school environments, specifically within public schools in the inner city of Kansas City (Espinoza et al., 2018). This existing gap in literature needs to be addressed and examined due to the role teachers and schools play in the education of low-income urban students. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers attempt to capture human experiences by talking to participants and outlining their perspectives. The results of this study will fill that gap in the existing literature. Additionally, the results could be used to stimulate self-reflection and could be applied in professional development opportunities for teachers working within our inner city communities.



## Purpose

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand novice teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban elementary school setting. The unit of analysis was the preparation of pre-service teachers' education experiences. According to Patton (2015), the unit of analysis is "what you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (p. 263). I wanted to understand novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness through the knowledge, skills, and disposition they acquired during their pre-service education to be successful in teaching diverse populations of students.

Creswell (2018) stated that case study research "involves the study of a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (p. 96). Yin (2002) argued the case study design allows researchers to explore individuals or organizations through an examination of relationships, programs, interventions, or communities. The case study design approach explores an experience through multiple lenses by gathering data from a variety of sources. This process of crystallization allows the experience to not simply be revealed, but thoroughly understood.

Yin (2002) and Stake (1995) argued the case study design was best approached through the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist theory states the idea that truth is relative and one's perspective is essential in understanding that truth. Constructivism is also built upon the idea of social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Under this concept, people and groups interact within a social system and over a period of time develop an understanding of each other's actions. Within the context of a narrative case study design, collaboration between the participant and researcher allowed participants to tell their stories. The stories shared by participants enabled the researcher to understand their thoughts and

actions. The goal of this narrative case study was to utilize the participants' stories to better understand the experiences that fully prepare teachers to teach within an elementary urban school.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions are at the heart of the study and help to narrow the purpose statement into specific questions (Creswell, 2018). In order to fully understand the participants' experiences and perspectives, the following open-ended research questions guided this study:

1. What stories do novice teachers tell about their preparedness to teach in an urban school?
  - a. How do novice teachers describe their preparation for teaching in urban schools?
  - b. What professional practices and experiences do novice teachers perceive as being instrumental to the preparedness to teach in an urban school?
  - c. How are teacher preparation programs preparing teachers for the challenges of teaching in an urban school?

### **Theoretical Framework**

I have worked in two urban schools within the Kansas City area over the past ten years. I have taught fourth grade, been an academic interventionist, and currently am an instructional coach. Throughout my years of experience in urban schools, I have worked with numerous novice teachers from a wide range of educational backgrounds and preparation programs. I have witnessed firsthand the differences in novice teachers' sense of preparedness based upon the type of experiences and preparation they had to teach in the field. Education preparation programs vastly differ from university to university and city to

city. This results in different levels of preparation and experiences for novice teachers entering the field.

Seeing the differences firsthand has made me personally invested in exploring preparation factors that influence a teacher's sense of preparedness. As the researcher, I brought my own personal beliefs and assumptions to the study. I firmly believe that regardless of the zip code in which a student lives, every child deserves quality instruction from effective, prepared, and dedicated teachers. My assumptions are that teachers who do not have the cultural awareness or pedagogy training are not prepared to teach in highly diverse school settings. Another assumption I have is undergraduate training and experiences that have a residency focus, such as student teaching, tend to produce more prepared and qualified teachers to teach in the inner city schools. The purpose of this narrative case study was to fully understand novice teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban elementary school setting.

Maxwell (2013) defined the theoretical framework as “a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs” (p. 39) the study. Theoretical orientations are grounded in the literature and provide explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study through a specific lens to view the needs of participants and communities within a study (Creswell, 2018). Significant to the theoretical framework of qualitative research are the experiences and background of the researcher, prior and existing research, as well as pilot studies conducted related to the topic (Maxwell, 2013).

In order to be an effective and prepared teacher in urban schools, teachers need to have cultural awareness and possess the skills and dispositions that are effective in today's classrooms. In 2005, The AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education found that most

teachers come from different cultural backgrounds than the majority of the students they teach in urban schools. Public school enrollments are projected to be higher in 2028 for Blacks, Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and students of two or more races (Irwin et al., 2021). In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics found that the pool of teachers who work in urban schools is 83% White and 76% female. Therefore, equipping teachers with the adequate knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to feel prepared is crucial. According to Carter (2003), effective training contributes to a high level of preparation when content knowledge, pedagogy, and theory are integrated with hands-on experiences. Teachers need to comprehend a more comprehensive definition of diversity and need culturally responsive teaching strategies (Fehr & Agnello, 2012). Darling-Hammond (2018) suggested that teachers feel prepared when they have a vast understanding of the professional knowledge needed to teach. She suggested that professional knowledge requires a broad set of knowledge that is specialized in subject matter, pedagogy, and classroom management. Breunig (2005) reiterated that learning is enhanced through intentional experiences. Therefore, to be prepared as a teacher, teachers should be equipped with the content knowledge, pedagogy, and theory, and have opportunities to apply their understanding through enriching experiences.

Several theories and concepts have shaped my research in understanding the components of teacher preparation, specifically within the urban core. I wanted to utilize existing theories to add to the body of knowledge of literature that exists regarding teacher preparation. Therefore, the existing literature and the theories of social constructivism, sociocultural, and critical race theory shaped this study. Sociocultural theory contributed to the experiences of teaching for novice teachers because as Matthews (1992) stated,

knowledge is “personally and socially constructed” (p. 3). Social constructivism theory added to the experiences of teaching for novice teachers because it is valuable to draw on their experiences and what opportunities they have had to construct their knowledge to become prepared to teach in an urban school. Critical Race Theory was a major focus of this study and added to the literature of how we are preparing teachers to teach in an urban school. Sleeter (2017) spoke about the power that the Critical Race Theory lens holds to help universities push beyond superficial analysis of disconnects between teacher education and the diversity of students in the urban schools. One of the most significant gaps in the literature was how teacher preparation programs are equipping teachers through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Throughout the following sections “White” and “Black” are capitalized as proper nouns. The Center for the Study of Social Policy requires the capitalization of “Black” and “White” when referring to racial identity in writing. They state that by “establishing a rule, instead of leaving capitalization to the writer as a choice, emphasizes the critical importance and political permanence of these words as real, existing racial identities” (Nguyen & Pendleton, 2020, p. 8).

### **Social Constructivism Theory**

Constructivism is a term which has progressive meaning and substantial potential for the field of education. Hirtle (1996) reiterated this notion by stating, “Constructivists challenge traditional educational philosophy, which assumes there is a fixed body of knowledge which can be transmitted from educators to learners” (p. 92). Through the practice of constructivism, teaching for social justice can be achieved. Constructivists believe that thinking takes place through communication, and when various cultures are honored and validated, a dialogue will open up fixed boundaries. By doing so, Banks and Banks (1995)

stated, “students can freely examine different types of knowledge in a democratic classroom where they can freely examine the perspectives and moral commitments” (p. 6).

Constructivist theory in education has evolved from the fields of science education and math education (Davis et al., 1990; Novak, 1987; Von Glasersfeld, 1989). The work by these writers has helped to shape the constructivist position as it relates to student learning. The fundamental belief of constructivism is that “knowledge is actively constructed by the cognizing subject [learner], not passively received from the environment” (Matthews, 1992, p. 5). Constructivism is a perspective on learning which is introduced from the learner’s personal perspective rather than by the teacher. The ideology of constructivist theory is that the learner is not given material in a one-way approach. Beyhan and Köksal (2013) noted that “what is important in constructivist learning is how the individual makes meaning out of knowledge rather than adopting it” (p. 172).

In an international empirical case study, Tuncel and Bahityar (2015) analyzed pre-service programs that fostered a constructivist approach throughout various learning environments. The aim of the study was to find out the aspects of constructivist teaching and learning that had a lasting impact on teachers’ feelings of preparedness. The data sources of the study consisted of observations and semi-structured interviews with the pre-service teachers and the instructors. As a result of the study, it was found that a learning environment that includes “active learning,” “reflective learning,” “associated with life,” and “assessing simultaneously with teaching” were deemed to be the most important in teachers’ sense of constructing knowledge and feeling prepared. Thus, constructivist theory was a beneficial lens through which to analyze data to ensure that higher education programs are fostering a constructivist learning approach.

Constructivist theory is grounded in the idea that understanding is constructed by the learner rather than passed on to the learner. In this view, as stated previously, knowledge is “personally and socially constructed” (Matthews, 1992, p. 3). The learner constructs understanding based on experiences. All pre-service teachers come into teacher education programs with varying beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences. Therefore, their understanding of new knowledge and experiences will differ immensely. Given this, higher education preparation faculty must ensure that teachers are being prepared in a manner that interacts with their personal beliefs, experiences, and knowledge to ensure a complete conceptual understanding. Several authors have studied the possibility of applying this constructivist perspective to the education of teachers (Englehardt, 1988; Loewenberg-Ball, 1988; Tumposky, 1989).

Social constructivism is a branch of constructivist thought that believes knowledge is individually constructed through one’s experiences. Social constructivism was developed in the 1930s by Lev Vygotsky which stemmed from Piaget’s cognitive constructivism. Piaget’s theory stressed the student’s autonomy in the social environment (Lourenco, 2012), whereas Vygotsky’s work emphasized the impact of social and cultural influence on students, the ways their experiences and varied backgrounds shape students’ learning, and the ways students interpret and understand concepts. Vygotsky did not believe that learning took place within the individual; rather, that learning is collaborative and social and people create meaning through their interactions with one another. Given that participants bring their own world views to the learning context, their social interaction allows for varied perspectives on content and multiple representations of reality. Collaboration with diverse perspectives can be seen as a vehicle for developing appreciation of personal and cultural differences

(Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Vygotsky emphasized the learning context as a critical factor in shaping knowledge. He was a strong advocate for learning as experience and reiterated the importance of creating a learning environment that was driven by students to be the creators of their own knowledge.

Social constructivism is based on the social interactions a student in the classroom experiences along with a personal critical thinking process. Vygotsky's theories and research are collectively involved in social constructivism and development such as cognitive dialogue, the zone of proximal development, social interaction, culture, and inner speech (Vygotsky, 1986).

A primary goal of social constructivism is to provide a democratic and critical learning experience for students. Through the analytical lens of social constructivism theory, it was important to draw on the background experiences of novice teachers and value what they bring into the teaching profession in order to provide critical learning experiences for all students. Since the socialization of teachers is connected to their personal backgrounds and experiences, sociocultural theory is another theory that was paramount to my study.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory and pedagogy have emerged as a research-based foundation for diversity teacher preparation (Rogoff, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1984, 1985). Like social constructivist theory, sociocultural theory rests on the premise that learning is social, and that it is through social interaction with teachers and peers who are more knowledgeable that students receive assistance as needed in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to engage in culturally meaningful tasks. Although Vygotsky's original theory was intended to be applied to child development, it is reasonable



to suggest that pre-service teachers are enduring a similar development and learning process to become better and more knowledgeable professionals. One of the basic foundations of sociocultural theory is that as individuals we are, at all times, positioned in physical, social, and symbolic terms and that our particular positioning in the world, which is partly under our control and partly determined by others and circumstances, has important consequences for what we perceive, think, and do (Martin & Ford, 2006). Through sociocultural theory, individuals learn and develop as part of a community to construct new knowledge as they engage in and reflect on experiences within their community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). This process allows for the individual to develop through exposure to psychological and physical tools that are shared in a unique cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978), which holds implications for the novice teacher's preparation.

In a recent study, Kate French (2020) explored urban teachers' preparation to work in urban schools. She drew on experiences from 13 new teachers who all worked in urban schools, through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, with teachers reflecting on their pre-service and current school placements. French (2020) found that although her participants' stories were unique, many of them who experienced internships in schools that were different demographically and had different sociocultural elements experienced greater struggles and feelings of unpreparedness during their first year of teaching than the teachers who completed their internships in schools that were demographically similar. This study closely relates to my exploration of teacher preparation in that it supports the notion that teacher preparedness is linked to the experiences and preparation they have encountered. Through this analytical lens, the preparation of how teachers are socialized with culture can

be applied. A lens of Critical Race Theory was also significant in the investigation of preparedness for novice teachers.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory is an important theoretical framework that was utilized to analyze and ground my study. This theory is a vital component of how teachers should be prepared to teach in urban schools. Understanding and applying this theory in classrooms helps to promote a socially just curriculum and create equitable learning experiences for all students.

### ***Historical Context of Critical Race Theory***

Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew out of a movement known as the Critical Legal Studies which “sprang up in the late 1960s when a number of legal scholars and activists around the nation realized that the heady gains of the Civil Rights era had stalled and indeed were being rolled back” (Delgado, 2003, p. 125). After the Civil Rights Movement, civil rights cases rose as the country began to challenge housing, school integration, and other forms of discrimination. However, the outcomes of these cases did not result in any fundamental change in the structure of sociopolitical context. Instead, the law which was created to assist in the deconstruction of discrimination and racism, actually served to sustain and perpetuate it. “New approaches and theories were needed to deal with the colorblind, subtle, or institutional forms of racism that were developing and an American public that seemed increasingly tired of hearing about race” (p. 125). Critical Race Theory attempted to merge the two views, the laws as a co-conspirator and this new scholarship that challenged the color-blind ideology. “Critical Race Theory sought to stage a simultaneous encounter

with the exhausted vision of reformist civil rights scholarship on the one hand, and the emergent critique of the left legal scholarship on the other” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xix).

The foundation of CRT lies in reframing the outcome of civil rights litigation. “Critical Race Theorists have, for the first time, examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of the law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xi). The body of work by CRT Scholars Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberle Crenshaw addressed the liberal notion of colorblindness and argued that ignoring racial difference maintains and perpetuates the “status quo with all of its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities” and insisted that “dismissing the importance of race is a way to guarantee that institutionalized systemic racism continues and even prospers” (Olson & Fazio, 2003, p. 211).

CRT formulated a discourse that focused on issues of race and racism in the law in the same way that education scholars began to formulate a critique of race and racism in education (Crenshaw, 2002; Tate, 1997). During the early to mid-1980s, CRT critiqued the law, society, and race. CRT has now grown to be an expansive and credible movement that is both inter- and cross-disciplinary, particularly in regard to education. In 1994, CRT was first used as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Since then, scholars have used CRT as a framework to further analyze and critique educational research and practice (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

### ***Tenets of Critical Race Theory***

To fully comprehend the principles and dynamics of CRT, it is essential to understand the tenets on which the CRT framework is grounded. There are five major tenets of the CRT

framework: counter-storytelling; the permanence of racism; Whiteness as property; interest conversion; and the critique of liberalism (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

*Counter-storytelling.* Counter-storytelling is a framework that legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups (Decuir & Dixson; Gilborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Decuir and Dixson stated that counter-stories are a resource that both expose and critique the dominant (male, White, heterosexual) ideology, which perpetuates racial stereotypes. Counter-stories are personal, composite stories, or narratives of people of color (Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). School curricula continue to be structured around mainstream White, middle-class values, which contributes to the widening of the racial achievement gap (the separation of the achievement of students of color and the achievement of Anglo-Americans).

Hackman and Rauscher (2004) drew attention to the fact that under the guise of mainstream curriculum, certain enclaves of students become marginalized through curriculum and praxis that are insensitive and inequitable. Hackman and Rauscher (2004) stated the following:

often under-funded . . . mandates across the nation leave many educators wondering how best to serve their students, particularly those students who do not fit into the mainstream profile or curriculum. In today's schools, the needs of students with disabilities and members of other marginalized groups often go unmet, and as such, more inclusive educational approaches need to be adopted to ensure that all students have access to a solid education. (p. 114)

Counter-storytelling is a necessary tool, given the curricula inequity within our educational system. Challenging deficit thinking, single stories, and dominant narratives through counter-storytelling is critical race theory in praxis and anti-racist practice (Gilborn & Ladson-

Billings, 2009; Yamamoto, 1997). Setting up intentional experiences in preparation programs that allow teachers to experience counter-storytelling, enables pre-service teachers to directly apply CRT. If teachers are given opportunities to apply CRT in their practices, they will be better suited and prepared to teach a socially just curriculum for students in urban schools.

***Permanence of Racism.*** Permanence of racism suggests that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S. society. Bell (1995) referred to this as the “realist view” which requires realizing the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in American society. This can be a conscious or an unconscious act. Race is not an atypical social condition; instead, it is “the usual way society does business” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). This normalcy is deeply fixed in our legal systems, cultural values, and in our psychological mind-sets (Delgado & Stefancic) and becomes almost impossible for White people to see. Race has been constructed socially, much to the detriment of people of color. Permanence of racism can be used to analyze the disparities and impacts of White privilege. Various scholarship has been documented on this assertion (e.g., Armelagos et al., 1982; Akintunde, 1998; Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Chang, 1985; Delgado, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney López, 2006a, 2006b, 1994; Marks, 1995; Parker et al., 1998; Takaki, 1993; Valdes et al., 2002).

***Whiteness as Property.*** Within this tenet, the analysis of educational inequality, access to a rigorous curriculum, and who benefits from that curriculum, is examined. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) reiterated that White students are usually the ones who reap the benefits of education. Within public education, Whiteness as property has become a signifier of who earns the benefits of education through the value of property owned. Communities with more valuable property are able to fund schools at higher rates through their ability to

afford more resources, provide access to intellectual property in the form of high-quality curriculum, and wield power over public education which impacts policy and law (Buras, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Whiteness as property, both historically and currently, functions as a tool to confer social benefits on those who possess it and punish those who do not. In analyzing the differences between urban and suburban schools, it becomes apparent Whiteness of property is a direct function of our school system.

***Interest Convergence.*** Bell's (1980) theory of interest convergence is a critical component in the tenets of CRT. Through the analysis of who actually benefited from school desegregation and affirmative action policies, Bell (1987) argued that Whites advance interests of people of color only when they converge with and advance White interests. This tenet acknowledges White individuals as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006). This is the notion that Whites will allow and support racial justice and or progress to the extent that there is something positive in it for them, or a "convergence" between the interests of Whites and non-Whites. Milner et al. (2013) regarded interest convergence as "pivotal in under-scoring the past and present inequities in education and the larger maintenance of privilege" (p. 343), mainly because White people fear that systemic changes will menace them in personal ways, such as loss of status or control, and gains of people of color mean losses for Whites. Racial oppression continues because the White majority benefits from it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7), and racial marginalization will only be resolved when the White majority finds reason to dismantle it.

***Critique of Liberalism.*** Critique of liberalism stems from the ideas of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Critique of

liberalism allows Whites to feel consciously irresponsible for the hardships people of color face and encounter daily and also maintains Whites' power and strongholds within society (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critique of liberalism challenges the notion of colorblindness, which fails to consider the permanence of racism. Decuir and Dixson (2004) suggested that embracing colorblindness ignores "that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in the contemporary society" (p. 29).

### **Significance of CRT and this Study**

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) advanced Critical Race Theory as a theoretical project in education research in a *Teachers College Record* publication. They argued that although discussions and studies investigated race in the field of education, the field could further benefit from an explanatory theory to assist in empirical and conceptual arguments related to race. The CRT framework recognizes that racism is deep-seated in the system of American culture; the individual racist does not need to exist to realize that institutional racism is unavoidable in the dominant culture (Harris et al., 2012). Given the fact that most students in the inner city schools are students of color, while most teachers in the inner city are White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining power structures could be applied in the context of studying teacher preparation. CRT finds that power structures are based on White privilege and White supremacy, which propagate the marginalization of people of color. The CRT describes the concept of White privilege as referring to the many social advantages that come with being a member of the dominant race (Yosso, 2005).

Salazar (2018) utilized the CRT perspective to unveil Whiteness as the normative center of frameworks for teaching. The purpose of the research was to propose a culturally relevant alternative to teacher evaluation, the Framework for Equitable and Excellent Teaching (FEET). Phase one consisted of a three-year exploratory qualitative research project to define performance expectations for equitable and excellent teaching through the design of a framework for teaching. Phase two of the research consisted of the FEET evaluation model, which was field-tested in 2013 with 120 participants at the University of Denver, Teacher Education Program. A 15-item survey was distributed to 68 respondents, consisting of field supervisors, pre-service teachers, and mentor teachers to collect feedback regarding the FEET performance expectations, rubrics, and observation instruments. The purpose of this study was to test the measurement quality of the FEET with a group of novice teachers in the Denver school district. Overall, the study resulted in revising and revamping aspects of the FEET to better evaluate teachers in a culturally relevant perspective. CRT was the theory that grounded the research and helped challenge and change the structure of racial domination and oppression within educational programs and schools.

Through the lens of CRT and White privilege, the issue of low teacher retention and preparation in inner city schools can be addressed. Educators come to the field with an abundance of benefits they enjoy as members of the dominant race. These benefits come from a history of the privilege conferred onto individuals of the White race such as housing, education, the job market, the media, and law enforcement (Bennett et al., 2019). These are all areas where, historically, people of color have suffered discriminatory practices (Bell et al., 2016). When the dominant race views the struggles of people of color through the lens of White privilege, they may become less tolerant of what they perceive is a lack of motivation,



self-control, will, and ability of their students (Bernal, 2002). This can lead to teachers feeling disconnected to the communities they serve (Bernal, 2002). Thus, a CRT framework can explore if teacher preparation contributes to how teachers are trained and equipped to connect and teach the students they serve.

CRT attempts not only to understand our “social situation, but to change it. It sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson used “race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequality in education” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 30). Critical race theorists believe that “racial inequalities determine the educational experience of minority children and youth” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 16). Brayboy, Jones, Castagno, and Maughan (2007, as cited in Zamudio et al., 2011) argued that these “experiences translate into poorer schools, deficient teaching, lower achievement, and inadequate preparation for meaningful economic engagement” (p. 16).

CRT presents a strong lens to analyze qualitative findings (Catlin, 2008). By utilizing a CRT lens, in combination with a qualitative study, I emphasized not only the importance of preparation for working with different races, but also the validity of conducting research within a social justice framework.

I have explored Social Constructivism Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Critical Race Theory as theoretical frameworks for this study, which are further discussed in relation to the literature in Chapter 2. Literature review topics include: (a) culturally relevant teaching; (b) teacher preparation in an urban context; and (c) the role of instructional leadership to support novice teachers.

## Overview of Methodology

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a qualitative study allows a researcher to explore a complex phenomenon within context. The research design of a narrative case study is valuable in developing theory, interventions, and evaluating programs.

Stake (1995) defined an instrumental case study as an approach to use a particular case to gain a broader appreciation or understanding of an issue or phenomenon. The case that this research examined is the teacher's individual preparation experiences. This falls under the umbrella of an instrumental case study because I used what I have learned to inform the practice of teacher preparation. Each individual teacher served as a single case within a collective case study. The collective case study is done to provide a general understanding using a number of instrumental case studies that either occur on the same site or come from multiple sites. Yin (2003) explained that case studies are best used to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). By utilizing each individual case within a collective case study, I had the ability to look at cases that were located within a larger case (Yin, 2003). Each individual was an embedded case within the larger case of teacher preparation. I was able to make meaning of the collective experiences of my participants.

Narrative inquiry centers the stories of participants in order to understand their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The use of narrative inquiry allowed me to tell the participants' stories to better gain understanding of their lived and told experiences in regard to their preparation. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) categorized the types of stories teachers tell as sacred, secret, and cover stories. The place on the landscape outside of the

classroom is a place filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of changing children and teachers' classroom lives. Teachers express their knowledge of their out-of-classroom place as a place filled with other people's vision of what is right for children. This characterized theory-driven view of practice shared by practitioners, policy makers, and theoreticians is the quality of a sacred story (Crites, 1971). Within classrooms, teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explained that when teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom place on their knowledge landscape, they often tell cover stories, "stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school" (p. 25). For this study, it was important to recognize the different types of stories the participants told to better understand their lived experiences.

This critical narrative case study was informed by Critical Race Theory, Social Constructivism Theory, and Sociocultural Theory, to understand the experiences and preparation novice teachers have to teach in an urban school. The theories that drove this study are discussed further in Chapter 2. This narrative collective case study took place within an inner city school district in the Midwest. I chose this school district because it is within the urban core and has a large sample of novice teachers.

I utilized a criterion sampling technique by sending a wide net survey to 20 to 25 beginning teachers to see if they would participate in a study. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2015). The survey served as a criteria sampling technique because it was sent only to novice teachers with one to three years of experience.

To inform my research, I had three major data sources. My data sets consisted of a survey, open-ended questions, and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were an appropriate data set given that my purpose was to better understand the preparation of novice teachers. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the research interview is described as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (p. 3). In addition to the survey serving as my sampling technique, it also served as my first data set to sample a larger number of participants and consisted of quantitative items that were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Pinsonneault and Kraemer (1993) defined a survey as a “means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people” (p. 77).

Within my survey, I included six open-ended questions which counted toward my second data set. Singer and Couper (2017) spoke about the value open-ended questions can provide when embedded within a traditional survey.

Opening up the standardized survey in a manner that includes open-ended questions, can be of benefit both to respondents (giving them a greater sense of engagement in the interaction) and to researchers (giving us more richly textured data on the topics we are studying and providing methodological insights into the process itself). (p. 128)

At the end of my survey, I included a question to ask respondents if they wanted to go on to the next phase of the study and, if so, would they fill out their contact information to help me trace my participants and to identify their responses and survey data.

After I identified the six participants who were willing to advance to the next phase, I conducted two individual interviews. In the interviews I constructed with each participant, I gained insight and understanding to help tell their individual narratives. I utilized the data from the survey and responses from their interview to re-story their data. I interviewed my

participants the first time to get to know who they were in terms of background, experiences, and positionality. The other interview I conducted with each participant was centered on my research questions and unit of analysis.

Multiple data sources provided the opportunity to crystallize the data to develop a thorough description and understanding of each case. By following this data collection process, I utilized descriptive statistics to analyze the survey and coding of open-ended questions to identify themes. I identified the survey data and open-ended questions of the six participants to re-story their data in connection with the in-depth interviews. The aim of the case study approach of the study was to conduct within case and cross-case analysis to identify common themes in the cases.

Maxwell (2013) advised qualitative researchers to begin with data analysis immediately following the first interview. Creswell (2018) spoke about a data analysis protocol that I would carry out after my research was conducted. This consisted of a process of coding in which data was broken down into categories, assigning them words or phrases that described that segment of data. After studying and analyzing these categories, themes were identified within cases and across cases for this collective case study. I utilized the process of narrative analysis to re-story the data into coherent narratives.

Within-case and cross-case analyses are processes which are specific to case study research. The first process was to construct an analysis of each case, and the second process focused on identifying common themes and patterns across the cases. The cases were constructed using the three-dimensional process of narrative analysis as well. This step constituted the within-case analysis which related to how novice teachers spoke about their preparation experiences.

The development of a code book for each of the two sources of data helped me to develop themes. I specifically noted how each case has commonalities and differences, as Stake (2011) explained. I also searched for attributes, patterns, codes, and themes that would help me clearly understand each case. Utilizing this process when looking at the individual cases, I was then able to conduct cross-case analysis to allow me to gain a deeper understanding of the novice teachers' experiences. Utilizing cross-case analysis allowed me to "delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case" (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p. 1). An in-depth understanding of each single case allowed me to provide a detailed description of each case and the patterns and themes that surfaced from each one (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). A cross-case analysis was conducted to answer the research questions and provide readers a more holistic perspective and understanding.

### **Limitations, Reliability, and Validity**

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 39). In this study, I utilized the naturalistic paradigm as I was studying participants within the natural setting.

#### **Limitations**

Within qualitative research, biases are inevitable. Creswell (2018) stated, "All researchers bring values to a study" (p. 18), which often results in bias. The biases that the researcher holds can be seen as limitations to the study. Limitations are discussed to analyze the possible threats to the study's validity and to communicate existing flaws. Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated that a discussion of limitations reminds the reader that no study is

perfect; findings are tentative and conditional; and knowledge is elusive and approximate. It is important to recognize the biases the researcher brings to the study and proactively incorporate methods that address the limitations and ensure they do not hinder the trustworthiness or credibility of the study as a whole. The limitations of this study are listed below and are addressed in more depth in Chapter 3:

1. The accuracy of what my participants say
2. The interpretation of the data through my lens as an instructional coach who has worked predominantly in urban elementary schools
3. My experiences with urban school preparation

To address these limitations, I utilized journaling during the data collection process to document my own feelings, reactions, and questions as I conducted the interviews. I also utilized member checks of the compiled data and stories to address researcher bias. During these member checks, I asked my participants to check and correct any misperceptions or biased findings that may have existed.

### **Reliability**

Seltiz et al. (1976) referred to reliability as consistency, stability, and repeatability of the informant's accounts as well as the investigator's ability to collect and record information accurately. Creswell (2018) stated in qualitative research, reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets. Stenbacka (2001) argued that reliability has no relevance in qualitative research. To better understand this argument, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered alternative terms to validity and reliability that adhere more to a naturalistic research study. To establish the "trustworthiness" of a study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) used terms such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability and

confirmability as “the naturalist’s equivalents” for internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity” (p. 300). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also stated that there can be no validity without reliability; therefore, a demonstration of validity is necessary to establish the reliability. Patton (2015) also stated that reliability is a result of the validity present within a study. A test for validity is a test for reliability, and I identified ways in which I incorporated such tests of validity and reliability into my study.

### **Validity**

Validity in qualitative research indicates consistency and trustworthiness regarding activities and events associated with the phenomenon as signified by the study results explored in the research (Golafshani, 2003). Patton (2015) noted systematic data collection, rigorous training, multiple data sources, triangulation, and external reviews are techniques aimed at producing high-quality qualitative data. The high-quality data is then controlled to be credible, trustworthy, authentic, balanced, and fair to people studied (Patton). I established validity and reliability through the use of thick description, crystallization, and member-checking.

The first way I checked and established validity in this study was to describe in detail the participants, procedures, and context of the study thoroughly throughout the study. This check of validity and reliability is known as “thick description,” which allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). With such detailed description, the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred “because of shared characteristics” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32).



Another way in which I ensured validity was through crystallization. Crystallization offers a framework for conducting qualitative and mixed-method research that invites researchers to examine relational topics using multiple lenses and a variety of genres (Ellingson, 2009). I utilized crystallizations through the convergence of data sources, perspectives, and methods. Ellingson (2009) spoke to how research can be enhanced through crystallization. “Crystallized representations of participatory research highlight participants’ voices and reveal institutionalized injustices” (p. 447). It is through this process that I described novice elementary teachers’ experiences and preparation to effectively teach in an inner city school. The process of crystallization allows the case study findings to be more accurate and convincing based on multiple sources of data. I utilized the following when crystallizing data sources: (a) survey responses; (b) questionnaires; (c) comparing the varied perspectives of participants; and (d) comparing interview data with surveys and questionnaires.

Member checking is when the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Cho and Trent (2006) described this as “an interactive process between the researcher and participants” (p. 321). It is considered one of the most critical techniques to establish credibility. According to Stake (1995), participants should “play a major role directing as well as acting in case study” research. For this validation strategy, I asked my participants to review the summary of our interviews and reflect on the accuracy of the account. I was interested in my participants’ views of my written analysis as well as any information I may have missed.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because there is a direct correlation between student achievement and the retention of effective teachers. As a result, teacher retention is a function of the degree to which a teacher is prepared. Higher levels of preparation are associated with higher teacher retention levels. An effective teacher can produce a nine-percentile-point learning gain for students in one year, and students with an effective teacher for three years in a row show learning gains of nearly 50 percentile points (Haycock, 1998). There is broad consensus that one of the primary causes of poor student performance is the inability to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). When students are instructed by a less qualified teacher, student achievement decreases (Fletcher et al., 2005). Understanding the experiences that impact preparedness will help provide schools with the qualified teachers they deserve. The target audience for this study is undergraduate pre-service programs, teachers, and educational leaders in United States schools.

This study will add educators' voices at a more personal level, telling the participants' stories and exploring the idea of preparedness through their lived experiences. Results of this study will provide insights with respect to novice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, preparedness, and skill sets to inform the design of teacher education pre-service programs. The research also has the potential to contribute to the retention of quality and prepared teachers within inner city schools. Additionally, the results could be used to stimulate self-reflection and could be applied in professional development opportunities for teachers working within inner city communities.

## **Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Throughout this chapter, I have reiterated the social justice crisis the United States is facing in regard to the quality of educators in urban schools. Teacher retention is directly impacting the equitable learning experiences students in the urban core face. Teacher preparation is not adequately preparing teachers to feel successful in an urban school context, leading them to leave at alarming rates (Espinoza et al., 2018; Goings et al., 2021; Nieto, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2016). I studied the preparedness of novice teachers who have entered urban settings and the complexities of teaching for diversity that they confront. Chapter 2 presents a review of current research on the following topics: (a) culturally relevant teaching; (b) teacher preparation in an urban context; and (c) the role of instructional leadership to support novice teachers. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, research design, and procedures for this investigation. Chapter 4 provides the stories of the participants' lived experiences. Chapter 5 presents the within-case and cross-case analysis organized by themes, followed by a discussion of answers to the research questions. Chapter 6 is the conclusion of the study, which provides implications of the findings and recommendations for teacher preparation programs, leadership, and future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully understand the experiences of my participants, it is essential to have a solid understanding of the published research that exists around the topic. The aim of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers have obtained in their pre-service education experiences to feel prepared to teach in urban schools. In this chapter, I present an extensive review of the literature in areas related to novice teachers' stories of preparation to teach in an urban school. Pre-service teachers often report feeling unprepared or having low confidence in their ability to teach in urban schools (Alexander et al., 2020; Bates, 2020; Buchanan, 2017; Cohen et al., 2020; Hollins, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2012). This sense of being unprepared is supported by additional research that indicates teachers are not prepared to meet the demands of the increasingly diverse populations of urban schools (Barnard-Bark et al., 2017; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 2001; Voight et al., 2012). Throughout this chapter, I provide a discussion of empirical literature, concepts, and theories from multiple disciplines that guided this study.

I reviewed empirical studies, professional journal articles, books and other reliable documents to help develop a contextual understanding of the foundation literature of the study. Moreover, my aim was to discover studies and research similar to mine and to identify gaps so that my research can effectively contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic of teacher preparation. I conducted a search of several data bases, including EbscoHost, ERIC, JStor, and Goggle scholar to expand my understanding of teacher preparation and the subcategories included in this review. Teacher preparation is a frequently discussed topic among educators and communities. However, there were some challenges finding current

research that discussed the overall concepts in the study. For example, a general search of teacher preparation on the EbscoHost database yielded 217,704 results; refining that search to include “urban” and its derivatives narrowed the results to 8,684. While there are plenty of studies to review, many were not empirically validated or were outdated by many years. A revision of the search to studies from the past five years yielded 2,442 results. Urban teacher preparation is an expanding research area, with much to discover.

Searches for culturally relevant pedagogy showed gaps in the research for preparation on culturally relevant pedagogy for urban teachers. The broad term “culturally relevant pedagogy” yielded 6,714 results within the past five years. However, narrowing that search to include teacher preparation decreased that number to 367. Empirical studies focusing on novice teachers were few, so the literature that was studied was primarily centered on the broad category of teachers. This highlights the gap in research that focuses on the experiences specifically of novice teachers’ preparation experiences. While managing this gap was a challenge, it was promising that this study would contribute much to the current small existing body of literature that covers the understanding of how novice teachers specifically feel prepared to enact culturally relevant pedagogies in urban school contexts.

Searches for instructional leadership showed similar gaps in the research in regard to an urban school context. “Instructional leadership” yielded 167,669 results within the past five years. However, once that search was narrowed down to include urban, the number of results decreased to 68,613. Once the term “novice teacher” was added to the search, the results dwindled even more to 17,060. Empirical studies focusing on the influence of the instructional leader on novice teachers were limited, so the majority of the literature that was studied was centered upon best practices for leaders, rather than about how leaders impact

novice teachers. This study will fill the void and give an understanding of how instructional leaders can enact experiences and support to novice teachers to help them feel prepared and stay within the profession.

In this chapter, I begin with an introduction to the literature about culturally relevant pedagogy followed by an examination of teacher preparation with an emphasis on preparation for urban school contexts. Then I examine the literature about instructional leadership and how it promotes novice teacher success. I conclude this chapter with the literature reviewed and how it connects to the study.

## **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

### **Historical Development and Definitions**

Multicultural education was created to provide educators with a platform for working with diverse school populations and achieving justice within societies marked by inequalities based on language, gender, socioeconomic status, or religion (Banks, 2004). Within the United States, in the late 1960s and 1970s, multicultural studies became a focus of schools as the U.S. started to become more diverse. Schools across America continue to blossom with diversity, and various cultures have become more represented in schools. In the fall of 2018, 31% of all public school students attended schools where minority students comprised at least 75% of the student population; this represents an increase from the 27% of all public school students who attended such schools in fall 2009 (National Education Association, 2021). As diverse students populate today's classrooms, instruction must reflect the distinct cognitive and cultural distinctions. Educators must realize the differences among their students and integrate diversity into the entire curriculum to truly implement a multicultural approach to education. Gorski's (2006, 2009, 2013) research reiterated a need for more

regarding inclusion of multicultural content. He argued that rather than solely including content that celebrates diversity, we must ground all practices in equity and social justice (Gorski, 2006). “It is not enough to learn about the cultures of our students without considering the significance of their positions (and ours) in the wider sociopolitical landscape” (p. 165).

The idea of school curriculum and instruction to infuse culture is not a new idea. It goes back to the 1970s and 1980s as various scholars such as Banks, Gay, and Nieto called for multicultural education to become an integral part of school curriculum, instruction, and culture (Banks, 2004; 2016). Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) built upon multicultural education by talking through the cultural differences among children of color and pushed for educational practitioners to take notice of diverse ways of knowing, thinking, and communicating.

Au and Jordan (1981) were two of the first researchers to investigate this topic and coined the term “culturally appropriate.” As specifically related to multicultural education, they claimed: “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 illustrates the importance of the teacher as a bridge between home-community and school cultures.

Mohatt and Erickson (1981) used the term “culturally congruent” to describe the teaching practices of Native American teachers in their study of native Indians in Odawa, Canada. Through their study, they concluded that student and teacher behaviors must be taken in context, and research must focus on the understanding of teachers’ behaviors and their effects on students. In relation to multicultural education, Macias (1987) examined the

Papago Indian tribe's early learning environment and found that "when the home culture is radically different from that of the social mainstream, there is a way to introduce the mainstream that does not erode the child's appreciation of his or her own culture" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 68).

Cazden and Legget (1981) added to the body of knowledge of multicultural education when they noted a need for teachers to recognize differences in interactional style as well as in cognitive style. Through their research, they stressed that the teacher should be actively involved and aware of the learning styles of their students, which led to coining the term "culturally responsive" teaching. Each of these studies and researchers have worked together to build upon the need for a multicultural education and contribute to the evolution of culturally relevant pedagogy and what it stands for.

The scholar responsible for conceptualizing culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992), who explained it as an approach that "serves to empower students to the point where they will be able to examine critically educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society" (p. 110).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a) defined CRP as a "theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). Similarly, Banks and Banks (1995) introduced the framework of multicultural education, equity pedagogy, which also encouraged practitioners to rethink their teaching and instructional approaches. Equity pedagogy is defined as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial,



ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” (p. 3). When utilizing the pedagogical lens of equity and CRP, educators enable students to acquire the basic skills necessary to become effective agents for social change.

CRP is a way to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). CRP insists that students’ cultural competence is valued by their teachers and that students are aware of it. Furthermore, culturally relevant teaching invites students to challenge the status quo, encouraging them to question how knowledge is created and through whose interpretations it is shared.

When educators understand CRP, they can shift their instructional practices to better evaluate structures in schools that contribute to inequities experienced by children of varying cultures. Without the pedagogical approach of CRP, educators fall into a trap of deficit thinking. Valencia (1997) referred to deficit thinking as a contributing factor to school failure. Deficit thinking is the notion that students (particularly those of low income, racial/ethnic minority backgrounds) fail in school because such students and their families have internal defects (deficits) that thwart the learning process. Deficit thinking “blames the victim” for school failure rather than examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning.

CRP builds on the understanding of “how people are expected to go about learning may differ across cultures, and in order to maximize learning opportunities, teachers must gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms, then translate this knowledge into instructional practice” (Villegas, 1991, p. 13). Ladson-Billings (1995b) positioned CRP

as “pedagogy of opposition...committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment” (p. 160). Ladson-Billings’s focus on pedagogy primarily is intended to influence attitudes and culturally relevant education dispositions.

Valenzuela (1999) conducted a three-year study of academic achievement and schooling orientations among immigrant Mexican and Mexican American students at a Houston, Texas high school. Through the findings of this study, Valenzuela argued that schools subtract resources from youth in two major ways: first by dismissing their definition of education, and secondly, through assimilationist policies and practices that minimize their culture and language. A consequence of subtractive schooling is the diminishing of students’ social capital, alienation among student groups, and vulnerability to academic failure.

To meet the needs of the nation’s growing diversity within schools, there is a large amount of literature stating that CRP is a pedagogical solution that is grounded in equity and social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995b; 2014). Researchers have made a compelling case for the significance of developing a culturally relevant curriculum and instructional approach for all students in PK-12 classrooms (Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

CRP is not something we do and check off; rather, it is a way of thinking and a belief we must embody as educators. CRP is a way of being or thinking that then turns into ways of doing. For example, it is the belief we hold about the ideas of curriculum, instruction, and our role as teachers. It is the philosophical outlook we hold towards our approach to teaching. An example of this is giving students the skills, dispositions, and knowledge to change inequities that are present within our inequitable system. It is allowing students to critically engage in discussions about problems that affect them rather than teachers setting their own agendas in

the classroom. Ladson-Billings's definition of CRP was the primary pedagogical lens for this study.

### **Three Tenets of CRP**

Ladson-Billings (1995a; 1995b) identified CRP based on three tenets: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (1995b, p. 160).

#### *Academic Success*

In the first tenet of CRP, students must be engaged in learning experiences where they are succeeding and growing intellectually, and academic success is promoted among the students. This tenet focuses on the idea that all children have the potential to be academically successful. From this perspective, "educators emphasize academic excellence while simultaneously challenging deficit-based learning" (Gunby et al., 2010, p. 186). When Ladson-Billings first conceptualized the theory, she utilized the term academic achievement but then regretted using that term because educators immediately equated academic achievement with student test scores (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). What Ladson-Billings actually envisioned and meant was that culturally relevant pedagogy would facilitate and allow for student learning.

Ladson-Billings (2006a) explained that this tenet focuses on "holding high expectations for students through a challenging curriculum implemented by "skilled teachers that build on student strengths" (p. 34). Learning experiences are facilitated and students are learning as a result of interactions with their teachers. Ladson-Billings (2006a) expanded upon her envision for this tenet as, "what it is that students actually know and are able to do

as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 34). Teachers who focus on student learning understand that this is their primary function, as Ladson-Billings put it. She stated that teachers’ focus is not on making students feel good; “rather they are most interested in the cultivation of students’ minds and supporting their intellectual lives” (p. 34). Under this tenet, learning is facilitated in meaningful ways. Teachers who are culturally relevant think deeply about the curriculum and ensure that the purpose of learning is communicated and supported in authentic ways.

### ***Cultural Competence***

The second tenet of CRP is developing a sense of cultural competence within students, creating a “dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p. 467). Cultural competence is about student acquisition of cultural knowledge regarding their own cultural ways and systems of knowing society and thus expanding their knowledge to understand broader cultural ways and systems of knowing through access to the wider culture (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 36; Morrison et al., 2008). To successfully do this, teachers must first develop their own cultural competence by understanding their students’ communities and home lives.

Teachers use students’ previous experiences and funds of knowledge gained from their families and communities as assets in the classroom. Culturally relevant teachers provide ways for students’ cultures to be celebrated, honored, and valued. The more a student’s culture is connected to the learning process, the more connected the student feels to school. Students’ culture should be seen as “a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 161). This includes helping students to develop positive cultural identities in order to

achieve academically. Teachers promote cultural competence through enacting culturally responsive teaching frameworks.

### ***Sociopolitical Critical Consciousness***

Ladson-Billings' third tenet is that CRP requires students to develop sociopolitical and critical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities. In order to develop sociopolitical critical consciousness within students, teachers must first "educate themselves about both the local sociopolitical issues of their school community and the larger sociopolitical issues that impinge upon their students' lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 37). Then teachers can incorporate those issues into their teaching. Ladson-Billings (2006b) stressed that this tenet is not about teachers pushing their own political and social agendas in the classroom. Rather, she indicated that sociopolitical consciousness is about helping "students use the various skills they learn to better understand and critique their social position and context" (p. 37). This tenet is focused on students' lived experiences and educational interactions. Under this tenet, teachers acknowledge societal oppression and encourage their students to notice how those dynamics are evident in their everyday lives. Culturally relevant teachers facilitate meaningful and critical discussions for their students to challenge the status quo and engage the world and others through a critical lens.

Setting up real-world learning assignments in which students are encouraged to think about their country or community and then take those issues and put them into action is a good example of building students' sociopolitical and critical consciousness. Another example this in the classroom is inviting students to have opportunities to effect change within the school building. When students feel that they have opportunities to impact change

within their school community, they will also begin to have feelings of agency to impact changes in other communities. A final example of this is incorporating current events into the content and facilitating critical discussions in which students apply critical thinking skills to examine current situations and develop a deeper understanding about their reality, then giving them the opportunity to implement and evaluate solutions to current event problems and problems of those around them.

While CRP rests on the three tenets listed above, the operationalization of CRP often encompasses the works of additional scholars, including culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining teaching, and the application of critical race theory.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Related to CRP with a primary focus on instructional decisions is what Geneva Gay (2010) called “culturally responsive teaching.” Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching “as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching rests on six dimensions:

- Culturally responsive teachers are socially and academically empowering by setting high expectations for students with a commitment to every student’s success;
- Culturally responsive teachers are multidimensional because they engage cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives;
- Culturally responsive teachers validate every student’s culture, bridging gaps between school and home through diversified instructional strategies and multicultural curricula;
- Culturally responsive teachers are socially, emotionally, and politically comprehensive as they seek to educate the whole child;
- Culturally responsive teachers are transformative of schools and societies by using students’ existing strengths to drive instruction, assessment, and curriculum design

- Culturally responsive teachers are emancipatory and liberating from oppressive educational practices and ideologies as they lift “the veil of presumed absolute authority” from conceptions of scholarly truth typically taught in schools. (Gay, 2010, p. 38)

Teaching, from Gay’s perspective, not only should relate to the various cultures of its students, but it also should respond to their daily lived experiences. It is a pedagogy that actively “teaches to and through the strengths of students” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Through Gay’s perspective, she utilized students’ prior experiences, knowledge of culture, frame of reference, and styles of performance to make learning relevant and meaningful. Teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies that encompass the learning styles of students. Teachers utilize their students’ cultural identities and heritages within the formal curriculum.

Gay’s focus on teaching primarily seeks to influence competency and methods, describing what a teacher should be doing in the classroom to be culturally responsive. It is a student-centered approach to teaching that includes cultural references and recognizes students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences throughout all aspects of learning. Through her work, she identified practices which encompass culturally responsive teaching. For example, culturally responsive teaching is the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the curriculum and having high expectations for all students through the delivery of instruction. Another example of this is the integration of students’ cultural knowledge, experiences, practices, and perspectives into the instructional content. Gay’s focus on teaching primarily seeks to influence methods and competency, describing what a teacher should do to be culturally responsive.

Culturally responsive teaching is the implementation of CRP, particularly the tenet of cultural competence. Teachers learn about and understand the cultural identities of their

students and then differentiate their lessons to meet the individual and cultural needs of their students. This requires teachers to provide multiple opportunities for students to display understanding. When it comes to curriculum, the teacher provides various perspectives and ideas and encourages students to think critically, ask questions, and challenge information that is being taught. Culturally responsive teaching impacts competence and practice of theory, whereas pedagogy affects the attitude and disposition (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Within Gay's (2010) framework of culturally responsive teaching there are four dynamic components that are interwoven: caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction.

### *Caring*

The ideological grounding of culturally responsive teaching is culturally responsive caring. This refers to how teachers relate and build relationships with their students. In classrooms it is student centered, meaning students are at the center of the learning process with their personal interests and strengths as opportunities for academic success. Ladson-Billings (1994) defined student-teacher relationships as ones that are "fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. [Culturally relevant teachers] demonstrate a connectedness with all their students and encourage that same connectedness between the students" (p. 25). Teachers should not only recognize students' individual value and importance; they should also consciously recognize what their students have in common. Together, students and teachers need to build classroom communities, making it a safe place in which to nurture everyone's cultural identity.

Creating a safe learning environment entails "understanding culture, recognizing cultural archetypes, and recognizing the sociopolitical context of students" (Hammond, 2014,



p. 33). As teachers increase their knowledge of how culture impacts aspects of student learning, they are able to create a learning community in which students' learning will flourish. Caring is demonstrated through patience and persistence with learners. These teachers facilitate learning, validate learners' knowledge construction, and empower learners' individual and collective learning capacity. A trademark of culturally relevant teachers is the ability to provide caring interpersonal relationships with students (Gay, 2000).

### ***Communication***

The component of communication under the culturally responsive teaching framework is an essential tool for quality instruction within the classroom. Educators who utilize culturally responsive teaching in the classroom incorporate elements of different cultural communication styles into their practices. This stems from building relationships and caring about their students. Culturally responsive teachers analyze their own discourse modes and compare them with those of their students to better understand how their students will negotiate and navigate their learning experiences. According to Gay (2000), "communication is strongly culturally influenced, experientially situated, and functionally strategic. It is a dynamic set of skills and performing arts whose rich nuances and delivery styles are open to many interpretations and instructional possibilities" (p. 109). Irvine (1990, 2001) reiterated this idea, explaining that culturally relevant teachers' knowledge and translation of different cultural communications styles can avert misinterpretations of behaviors, disrespect, and conflicts in schools. Using this information, culturally competent teachers seek ways to better communicate with their culturally and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2010).

Awareness, appreciation, and acceptance of different discourse patterns help to bridge the gap between students' home life and school life. Teachers who see the value and worth in

their students' home experiences and cultural background, and further validate it by integrating into their teaching, successfully embrace culturally relevant pedagogy in their teaching (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

### ***Curriculum***

Curriculum that is culturally diverse and accessible to students is critical for student success in classrooms today. Curriculum serves as the resource for culturally responsive teaching (Bonner et al., 2018), and it should be multicultural, relatable, and accessible. Banks and Banks (1995) argued for curriculum to integrate non-mainstream content into traditional, Eurocentric curriculum. In their argument, they stated that learning in school must be connected to all students' identities in order to make it relevant. Apple (1996) and Ndura (2004a) found that textbooks have cultural and gender biases. Similarly, Kim and Chung (2005) examined numerous multicultural materials and found that textbooks and curriculum did not represent a diverse population and were predominately Eurocentric.

Culturally competent teachers ensure that the curriculum is meaningful and relevant to students' lives and that they are included in curriculum decision-making (Gay, 2010). Students should be able to see themselves in the curriculum and feel that their culture is honored and valued. Various studies (Cahnmann & Remillard, 2002; Guha, 2006; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) have highlighted teachers who created or brought in materials to teach subjects that were not included in the Eurocentric curriculum. Throughout these studies, teachers brought in visuals, games, traditions, and materials that were specific to particular cultural groups in order to enhance their curriculum. Modifying prescribed curriculum is essential in building cultural competence, and an important way that culturally

competent teachers can modify curriculum is through building upon students' funds of knowledge (Gonzales et al., 2006).

The concept that learning must be connected to children's prior knowledge and experiences is monumental throughout the literature of culturally relevant pedagogy. The term "funds of knowledge" covers a broad range of elements in a child's life including identity, family experiences, language, values, and ways of being. In order to connect curriculum that is truly built upon students' funds of knowledge, teachers must first learn about these elements of students' cultures through authentic relationship building.

Curriculum can then be modified to connect to the prior knowledge students have on certain concepts.

### ***Instruction***

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of infusing aspects of cultural systems of diverse groups into instruction. Instruction in culturally relevant teaching addresses engagement and interaction of students and teachers throughout the learning processes. Teachers should honor their students' various learning styles and deliver their instruction in ways that meet their varying needs. Culturally competent teachers ensure that instructional processes are consistent with the learning styles, cultural orientations, and experiences of their marginalized students and create learning spaces for this to occur (Gay, 2010). Modeling, scaffolding, and clarifying challenging curriculum are practices which promote culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms.

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Similar to Gay, Dr. Django Paris (2012) also expanded on CRP in proposing culturally sustaining pedagogy, a theoretical stance that "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to

sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). This approach considers the many ways learners’ identity and culture evolve. Paris and Alim (2014) suggested that culturally sustaining educators not only draw on but also sustain students’ culture—both heritage ways and home language, as well as their evolving culture—meaning that culturally sustaining educators helps students develop a positive cultural identity within their teaching methods. Paris (2012) argued that cultural relevance in the curriculum “cannot, alone, ensure students will be prepared to live in an increasingly diverse, global world” (p. 88).

CRP and earlier pedagogies invite students’ cultural ways into the classroom more as a bridge to “better” mainstream practices. Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks not only for students to maintain their own practices, but also to grow more critically engaged with them. Culturally sustaining pedagogy encourages students to see themselves as worthier rather than as a bridge to current educational practices. It is an outcome-oriented approach or stance to teaching and learning in which educators intentionally think about pluralism not just on the way into educational settings (Paris & Alim, 2017). While utilizing culturally sustaining pedagogy, educators do not just honor or be responsive to the language, literacies, and cultural ways that students bring into classrooms; they actually make classrooms places that perpetuate and foster those, and they deepen and extend the practices and ways of knowing that students bring to classrooms (Paris, 2012). Paris and Alim (2014) supported that culturally sustaining practice, “has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers.” In more recent work, Ladson-Billings (2014) “remixed” her original theory which builds upon Paris’s (2012) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2014) asserted pedagogy should

be ever evolving to meet the needs of students and rather than focusing on only racial or ethnic groups, culturally sustaining framework pushes researchers to also consider global identities, including development in arts, literature, music, athletics and film. Each of these pedagogies is also informed by critical race theory (CRT).

### **Critical Race Theory Operationalized**

Critical race theory began with legal scholars as a political and scholarly movement to challenge the dominant culture that keeps all other cultures suppressed (Crenshaw, 1995). Critical race theory was initiated for social justice and is the theoretical framework that has been used in the research of CRP. Critical race theorists describe how race influences all areas of society and how racism is interwoven in America's history and school systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2017). When children of color live in racially segregated communities and attend schools that have high levels of low-income enrollment in comparison to their White peers, and are delivered a white-washed curriculum (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017) it is fair to conclude that we are still experiencing racism within America. "We live in a world with a long history of oppression that manifests in virtually every aspect of society, including our schools" (Esposito & Swain, 2009, p. 46). The use of CRT addresses the uneven distribution of power within our society. Teachers must be self-aware and have pedagogical content knowledge to dismantle the uneven distribution of power within our school systems. Howard and Milner (2014) called on teachers to "attend to their own deep-rooted beliefs, ideologies, and values," while cultivating a "deep understanding of the sociopolitical context of urban communities" (p. 107).

The culture of power as it relates to education is “the power of the teachers over the students, power of the publishers of textbooks and of the developers of the curriculum to determine the view of the world presented” (Delpit, 2002, p. 283). The dominant culture determines what students learn, how they will be taught, and what they will be taught (Ndura, 2004b; Rodriguez-Mangual, 2004; Rollock, 2012). Ladson-Billings (1998) identified the application of CRT in education, linking the dominant race to curriculum, school budgeting, instruction, student evaluation, and school populations. Educators must challenge the culture of power and become change agents for students’ equal opportunities within education. Social justice is essential to promote equity within education. A way to achieve equity is through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Critical race theory operationalized, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy all comprise the tenet of cultural competence. Culturally relevant educators encompass each tenet to enhance their cultural competence and better utilize the pedagogy of culturally relevant approaches.

Collectively, Ladson-Billings (1995b, 2014), Gay (2000), and Paris and Alim (2014) have made major influences on the way we think about multicultural education through culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy. Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy have been influential in the work surrounding education. All pedagogies work together to support students of diverse cultural backgrounds in regard to their learning and academic success. The three frameworks are focused on culture, race, equity, and the success of students who are traditionally marginalized in the educational system. Although the focuses of each framework may differ, they each have visions for a commitment to social justice education and utilizing the classroom as a site for social change. As educators

utilizing these pedagogies, we defy the deficit model and ensure students see themselves and their communities reflected and valued in the content taught in school. Multicultural education is a must, given the diversity within our nation. By implementing a multicultural curriculum that honors these pedagogical approaches, we will be one step closer to making lasting change in our school systems.

I chose CRP as the pedagogical framework for this study because the United States student population is growing in diversity (Irwin, 2021), and our teachers must be prepared to effectively instruct our students through the intersection of school and home community cultures (Au & Jordan, 1981; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1994; 1995b; Nieto, 1999; 2004). I chose this pedagogical lens because CRP represents a pedagogy of opposition that is committed to empowerment and social justice. The understanding of CRP allows the American educational system to ensure equitable learning experiences for all students.

### **Empirical Studies on the Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Sleeter (2017) asserted that research on the impact of CRP was limited in scope. However, there is still a sufficient body of research that provides insight on its effectiveness. Some researchers have connected teachers' use of CRP to increased engagement and interest in school, suggesting an increase in student learning (Hill, 2009; Lawrence-Pine, 2015; Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Although the studies do exist, they are small-scale and are not plentiful. It was difficult to find studies that showed a direct correlation between CRP and academic achievement. However, through the limited studies reviewed below, one can make the connections to how CRP impacts student achievement. Although the studies are limited in a direct correlation between CRP and achievement, there is research on other impacts CRP has on classroom success.

Compelling research highlights the benefits of CRP (Choi, 2013; Fulton, 2009; Martell, 2013). Studies in brain science and education find that drawing on learners' background knowledge shapes comprehension, and all learners process new information best when it is linked to what they already know (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Tatum (2011) conducted research that illustrates that when instructional materials, assignments, and texts reflect students' backgrounds and experiences, there is a deeper level of engagement and meaningful learning. In a smaller but promising group of studies evaluating the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching interventions, there is a direct link between the approach and a wide range of positive outcomes such as academic achievement and persistence, improved attendance, and greater interest in school (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Byrd, 2016; Morrison et al., 2008). A significant part of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is a connection to students' lives and an obligation to foster the empowerment of students. Each tenet of CRP is highlighted through the studies that have been done and correlate to having a positive impact on achievement, motivation, and student confidence.

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) sought to use hip-hop music and culture as a means to facilitate critical discourse in students' lives while promoting academic literacy and critical consciousness. In a traditional senior English class that covered poetry from the Romantic period, the researchers situated hip hop as a genre of poetry to make the assignment relatable to students.

For example, students were able to make connections between canonical poems and rap music, such as Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 and Affirmative Action by Nas. In this study, hip hop pedagogy was one example of how we might close cultural gaps and see the power and potential of pedagogy grounded in Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy. (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 189)



Students' engagement skyrocketed, and they were able to engage in critical dialogue and make connections to larger social and political issues.

Christianakis (2011) sought to understand how urban fifth-grade students created language hybrids using rap and poetry to participate in their literacy block in the classroom. Using ethnographic methods and participant observation, Christianakis observed a teacher, Mr. Mitchell, during his writing block for a total of 118 observations. The class was a diverse group of students consisting of 27 students from various demographic backgrounds and all from lower-income families. Throughout the study, the researcher collected field notes, audiotapes, interviews, and work samples. It was found that through the alternative forms of poetry writing, students were able to "express their intellectual creativity" (Christianakis, 2011, p. 1157), which resulted in a higher level of motivation. Student engagement and motivation rose throughout the study.

Ensign (2003) analyzed second, third, and fifth-grade mathematics classrooms in two Northeastern urban schools. In these classrooms, teachers created math problems that were connected to students' lives. Students used journal writing to connect mathematical situations to their own lived experiences. Pre- and posttest comparisons revealed an increased interest in math as reported by students. Ensign concluded, "Interest in mathematics (as reported by the students in individual interviews and also as noted in classroom observations of time on task and involvement in mathematics lessons) also increased noticeably when students' out-of-school problems were included in classroom lessons" (p. 419).

Similar to using strategies of personal experiences, Civil and Khan (2001) collaborated with a classroom teacher to bring together students' and families' knowledge

and experiences in a classroom project focused on gardening in an elementary school. Throughout the project, interviews and observations were conducted with the students to probe their understanding and learning. The researchers found that students were able to engage in mathematical dialogue and make connections that were deemed “personal and meaningful” (p. 401). Both studies done by Ensign (2003) and Civil and Khan (2001) showed that through the use of students’ culture and everyday lives, an interest in math could occur, which in turn improved academic achievement and engagement.

Gutstein (2003) conducted a study to more explicitly draw the connection between CRP and mathematical achievement in a study that was conducted over two years in an urban classroom. Gutstein was both the teacher and the researcher in seventh and eighth grade classrooms, where he collected data through participant observation and surveys. Throughout his research, Gutstein created lessons centered on controversial issues which affected students. His classes began to examine inequalities and discrimination not only in the content of math, but in other areas of life. For example, students analyzed traffic-stop data to acknowledge the reality of racial profiling. In this study, Gutstein (2003) moved beyond cultural competence to sociopolitical consciousness when “students overwhelmingly showed evidence of connecting mathematical analysis to deeper critiques of previous assumptions” (p. 53). The results of his study showed that 27 of 28 students demonstrated what Gutstein referred to as “mathematical power” as shown by the increased scores on tests, quizzes, projects, and class work. This study indicates a direct correlation to the power culturally relevant pedagogy holds on student achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

A study done by Langlie (2008) also looked at the impact of CRP and student achievement. The focus of the study was to see if Black and Latinx students taught by teachers who practiced CRP would achieve higher scores on standardized tests. Data were compiled from the National Educational Longitudinal Study using questionnaires obtained from students compared with performance on standardized tests. The results from Langlie's study found that Black and Latinx students whose teachers emphasized awareness about the importance of instruction in their everyday lives and encouraged students, had higher scores on standardized tests.

Similarly, Hubert (2014) conducted a case studying examining African American students' perspectives on the effects of culturally relevant math instruction on their achievement, attitudes, and interests in math. The study was conducted in an alternative high school situated in the southern states, with participants being students who were labeled at-risk. Math lessons were centered on themes that related to the students' lives, and data were collected through observations, interviews, and pre- and post-assessments. On average, Hubert found that students who participated in the culturally relevant math lesson increased their grade by at least one letter and reported feeling more confident while taking their statewide assessment.

Ortega (2003) studied narrative stories that emerged from students and their teacher who implemented culturally relevant practices in an American Literature class composed largely of Hispanic students. The study took place in New Mexico, where 49% of state public school students are Hispanic. Data were collected over a two-year period in the form of interviews and classroom observations. The teacher studied acknowledged her students' backgrounds and used their cultures as a vehicle of learning. She built her entire curriculum

around their backgrounds and interests. In the conclusion of the study, students told stories about the teacher's commitment to care about them as a huge part of their success in the classroom.

In comparison, Zoellner and colleagues (Zoellner et al., 2012) conducted a mixed-methods study in a Midwestern, predominantly African American high school where they analyzed the culturally relevant practices of two highly effective teachers. They utilized a quantitative survey instrument and qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to conclude that the two teachers were successfully able to increase their students' engagement and motivation through culturally relevant practices. In one highlighted example throughout the study, students had to select a character from the book, *The Outsiders*, with whom they could identify and compare the character's internal and external conflicts to their own conflicts they might be facing. This connected the literature to the students' personal lives and with alignment of culturally responsive teaching, students were able to feel that they had a voice and were "empowered to dissect many of the struggles they faced in their lives to better understand the material" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 191).

In the empirical studies reviewed, it is clear that culturally relevant pedagogy holds great power on student engagement, motivation, and success in classrooms for all learners. Gorski and Swalwell (2015) recommended all educators implement these high leverage pedagogies through growing abilities and capabilities before asking their students to do the same. This could be achieved by taking preparation experiences one step further in pre-service education. Teachers should be given opportunities to learn ways in which they can respond to the educational inequalities by changing their own personal practices first (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Alishmail and McGuire (2016) reiterated this idea, stating the need for

pre-service teachers to be systematically immersed in quality programs of multicultural education that honor the teaching and application of culturally relevant pedagogies. “Future teachers must be afforded opportunities to become aware of and question their personal perspectives regarding social, philosophical, and cultural “norms” in order to develop the skills and mindset to work with and teach students from diverse socioeconomic, racial, gender, language, and cultural backgrounds” (p. 140). When considering the needs for first year teachers, it is important to understand the literature about teacher preparation for urban schools.

### **Teacher Preparation**

The development and preservation of a highly qualified teaching force are fundamental for meaningful public education in the United States (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Wheeler Bass, 2018). The relationship between teacher education and teacher effectiveness has been debated for years in both research and policy circles (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Goldhaber et al., 2019; Czajka & McConnell, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Advocates of stronger preparation for teachers in schools serving low-income students of color have argued that in order to be considered successful and effective, teachers must possess an understanding of how children learn and how to make learning materials accessible to a wide range of students (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). In contrast, opponents of teacher education and certification have argued that teacher effectiveness is a function of either general academic ability or a strong understanding of subject matter knowledge.

Overwhelming evidence supports that quality teachers are the single biggest influence in schools on students’ academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Milner, 2010).

Howard and Milner (2014) argued that teachers need to be prepared in a manner that allows them to acquire the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are uniquely situated for work in urban schools. To ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students, it is vital to understand preparation approaches as they could potentially either improve or reduce the quality of the teacher workforce. In urban schools, student achievement is lower than in suburban and rural area schools (Hung et al., 2020; Schmid, 2018). Recent data have continued to reveal that the achievement gap between urban and suburban students in both reading and math has remained relatively constant over the past years, with little sign of improvement (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2017; Ouellette et al., 2018). In the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress report of its Trial Urban District Assessment in reading of grades 4 and 8, data revealed that performance in urban public schools was well below the national average.

Composite attrition rates in the teaching profession in the United States are relatively high; approximately 33% of teachers leave the field in the first three years, and 50% of them leave in the first five (Sutcher et al., 2016; Wynn & Brown, 2008). The rates of teacher turnover are even greater in high need, urban schools. Title I schools, which are schools with large concentrations (at least 40%) of low-income students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), experience turnover rates which are 50% higher than the national average attrition rate in the teaching profession. Schools with large concentrations of students of color experience the highest level of teacher departures, with a turnover rate that is 70% higher than the national average attrition rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The resulting shortage in teachers negatively impacts the quality of public education,

disproportionately affecting our highest needs schools (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017).

The high rates of teacher turnover affect low-income students as “some studies have found that teacher attrition seems related to the demographic characteristics of schools’ student populations . . . [or] due to the difficulties posed by the kinds of working conditions that often pertain in high-minority, low-income schools” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 11). Four factors have been found to influence the decision of teachers who are considering vacating their current teaching position or abandoning the field entirely: (1) working conditions, (2) salaries, (3) levels of preparedness, and (4) support and mentoring during the early years in the field (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Clearly, in order to mitigate the adverse impact on low-income students, it is critical that we work to reduce the teacher attrition rates experienced by urban area schools by addressing the factors that influence teachers’ decisions to vacate their positions in the high need schools.

In addition to high attrition rates in the teaching profession, school enrollment is increasing, which makes it even more complicated to hire and retain quality educators. To address this issue, policymakers have approached the problem in a variety of ways. Some states are tightening the regulation of teacher preparation and certification by extending course requirements and imposing more entry exams. Many other states have tried to attract a different group of people to teaching by reducing entry requirements and introducing “alternative certification” programs (Boyd et al., 2007; Papay et al., 2017).

While there is agreement about the importance of preparing effective teachers, the profession has not determined the best way to complete this task, as there are a variety of

approaches to teacher preparation. Throughout this section I explain the types of teacher preparation avenues that teachers follow to enter the profession. Program approaches and the key characteristics of effective practices for teacher preparation are highlighted and discussed, specifically through the lens of preparing teachers for educational equity and social justice. I conclude by offering recommendations for critical components related to preparation of teachers working in urban schools.

### **Teacher Preparation Routes**

Across the county, teachers enter the workforce through a variety of large and small, public and private colleges and universities, as well as through alternative programs offered by districts and states (Wilson et al., 2002). Program designs, teacher preparation, and experiences vastly differ given the route one takes for certification. When speaking about teacher preparation, it is essential to first understand the types of preparation avenues that exist in the United States.

#### ***Traditional University-based***

One route through which a teacher can gain certification is through a college or university-based teacher preparation program (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Goldhaber, Quince & Theobald, 2017). These programs are often referred to as the “traditional” route to becoming a teacher, and about three-quarters of new teachers are prepared in colleges and universities (National Research Council, 2010). University-based programs view teaching as specialized work that requires “specialized preparation in which candidates learn to teach by developing knowledge about teaching and learn to teach with experienced classroom teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 49; National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher



Education [NCATE], 2010). Typically, university-based teacher preparation programs consist of varying combinations of academic coursework and field experiences.

University-based, traditional teacher preparation programs are the primary source of the teacher supply in most states in the United States (Boyd et al., 2008; Cochran-Smith et al., 2020). States approve teacher education programs, enabling them to offer degrees. These programs are shaped by state regulations, choices made by individual programs and institutions, as well as by criteria established by accreditation groups. These programs traditionally involve a four-year curriculum of structured course work, culminating in a bachelor's degree in the field, or they can offer a graduate degree if a bachelor's degree is already attained. Once teachers successfully complete the approved programs, they are assumed to have met the preparation component of certification. In the certification, course content and field experience are required.

The required course content falls into three broad areas: foundational courses, pedagogical courses, and content or subject-matter knowledge courses (Koedel et al., 2012). Foundational courses are deemed to be the learning and development focused courses. These courses may include the history of education, multicultural education, and the philosophy of education. Pedagogical courses represent the most significant allocation of time and resources in traditional preparation programs and are focused on methods of teaching, classroom management, instructional methods, learning theories, and the skills that enable teachers to structure, deliver, and communicate material to students. Traditional preparatory programs also require candidates to complete some field experiences where they link and apply their education to actual teaching experiences. According to data collected from *Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards Based Education* (Edwards, 2006), the

requirements for the amount of coursework and time spent on actual teaching experiences varies from state to state.

Traditional university-based programs have often been critiqued for being too academically and theoretically focused and having few opportunities for clinical experience (Chen et al., 2020; Gatlin, 2009; Guha, 2006). Along with being critiqued for being too theoretical and not based in practice, traditional university-based programs have been viewed as being too lengthy for candidates who already hold a degree. These two critiques are what led to alternative teacher preparation programs (Klagholz, 2000; Paige et al., 2002).

### *Alternative*

Another route to gain teaching certification in the United States is through a fast-track university-based or third-party program, typically referred to as an alternative program (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2004). According to a report by Feistritzer (2005), alternative certification programs are field-based programs “designed to recruit, prepare, and license talented individuals who already had at least a bachelor’s degree—and often other careers in fields other than education” (p. 3). These programs have several common characteristics: “rigorous screening processes, coursework or equivalent experiences in professional education studies before and while teaching, work with mentor teachers and/or other support personnel and high-performance standards for completion of the programs” (Feistritzer, 2005, p. 3). The alternative pathways to teacher certification permit a broader interpretation of traditional certification laws and present an innovative response to the need for teachers (Noll, 2008, p. 387). These nontraditional teacher certification programs generally target mid-career bachelor’s-s-prepared recruits (Boyd et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Alternative routes to certification typically allow teachers to enter the classroom by postponing or bypassing many of the criteria required by traditional teacher preparation programs. This type of bypass results in more “on-the-job” training and less theory. Boyd et al. (2007) collected state-by-state data from the years 2005 and 2006 to compare the different components of alternative routes to certification, attributes of the programs such as pre-service training and subject knowledge. In their findings, forty-six states and the District of Columbia reported having at least one alternative route to certification. A more recent report conducted by Putman and Walsh (2020) found that alternative routes into the classroom have grown so much that now one in five teachers enter the profession through an alternative certification route (Parra et al., 2020). All require teachers to hold a bachelor’s degree; 80% require teachers to demonstrate subject matter knowledge by completing coursework or passing an exam, or both.

Some researchers are opposed to alternative certification programs. Feistritzer (2005) stated that pedagogy cannot be taught in a compressed amount of time, which is a key component of an alternative program. Within these programs, individuals have opportunities to “jump right in” and bypass much of the theoretical learning and approach that university-based certification programs typically offer (Dill, 1996; Natriello & Zumwalk, 1992; Redding & Smith, 2016). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (1988, 1990, 1999) suggested that the alternative approach decreases the number of highly qualified teachers who enter the profession. She argued that due to the lack of theoretical learning and pedagogical understanding, teachers through these avenues lack quality and preparedness. “There is a significant amount of empirical evidence that suggests that “on-the-job” pre-service training leaves teachers seriously underprepared” (p. 333). She also argued that alternative

certification programs decrease the prestige of the education profession. In a more recent study, Matsumoto-Royo et al. (2021) presented a synthesis of the practices, teaching, and assessment that was incorporated within traditional and alternative programs through 2013-2017. Throughout their review, they found that teachers coming from a traditional program had more exposure to learning theories and effective core practices than teachers from alternative programs. They also found that teachers in traditional programs had more exposure and practice opportunities in the field than teachers from the alternative programs. Additionally, Sorensen and Ladd (2018) analyzed the high turnover rate in urban contexts in the 2015 school year and found that teachers from alternative programs made up more than half of the retention pool in North Carolina. Similarly, an analysis of the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) 2015-2016 data found that on average, teachers who enter teaching from alternative programs feel less prepared to do their jobs in the classroom (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Comparing the levels of preparation and qualifications of educators entering the teaching profession through the traditional versus the alternative certification programs is challenging since there is a general absence of comparative research on the subject. Consequently, there is no definitive guidance regarding whether one certification program is superior to the other with respect to the high-quality preparation of teachers (Goldhaber, 2019). The most compelling report to support this conclusion is the report on teacher preparation from the National Research Council (2010), which noted the unlikelihood that there is one best pathway to high-quality preparation for teachers. It concluded, “There is currently little definitive evidence that particular approaches to teacher preparation yield teachers whose students are more successful than others” (p. 60). Theoretical research

published by the Teacher Education and Learning to Teach Program, and reinforced by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, indicated there is no single effective way to organize teacher education programs, as a variety of successful programs employ several effective methods (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 391). In 2002, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, stated that there "was little evidence that education school course work leads to improved student achievement" (Levine, 2006, p. 39). Paige stated that educators should be selected based only on verbal ability and subject matter knowledge. He stated that enrollment in a school of education should be voluntary, and he encouraged states to eliminate teaching requirements and "other burdensome bureaucratic hurdles" (Levine, 2006, p. 39). As a result of thoughts such as these, coupled with the public's criticism of teacher preparation programs, many states have deregulated teacher licensure guidelines and have created an environment in which nontraditional and traditional certification paths are encouraged (Levine, 2006; Mungal, 2015; Singh, 2021).

### ***Residencies***

Residency programs were created as a response to the criticisms of alternative routes. While some undergraduate programs follow a format similar to those of residency programs (Waddell & Vartuli, 2015), residencies most commonly refer to post-baccalaureate programs. The residency concept is best associated with the medical school approach to training and preparing doctors. As part of their residency programs, doctors complete a guided clinical experience which is highly supervised, where they work with patients under the shadow of a veteran to apply what they have learned in practice. Teacher residencies follow the same structure: candidates who are learning to teach have authentic learning experiences with expert mentorship in the context in which they will eventually be teaching. Due to the

critiques of the traditional university-based and alternative pathways to the education profession, teacher residencies have had growing attention in the last 15 years (Klein et al., 2013; Krieg et al., 2020; Sass, 2015). Some researchers would say that the residency model is full immersion and does not provide enough theory foundation throughout the program (Berry et al., 2008); a well-defined balance between practical approaches and theoretical foundations must be present within an effective residency program.

The residency design emerged in the 1960s and 1970s through the start of the Master of Arts in Teaching programs. Elite colleges and universities such as Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, started a year-long post-graduate program which placed candidates in schools for a full year of student teaching internships with veteran teachers. The candidates would participate in their student teaching while completing coursework from the university. This design was the foundation for the residency model, which created a closer connection to the hiring districts, financial incentives, and mentoring support for the candidate (Guha et al., 2016, p. 3). Despite the idea that each residency program is unique, several common characteristics are shared among high quality residency programs.

**District/University Partnerships.** Each residency program is operated by a partnership that consists of at least one institution of higher education and one high-need school district. A high-need school district is defined by the Silva et al. (2014) as:

One that serves a substantial number or percentage of children from low-income families, and that has at least one of the follow characteristics: (1) it employs a high percentage of teachers who do not teach the subject or in the grade-level in which they are trained; (2) it has a high rate of teacher turnover; or (3) it hires a high percentage of teachers with emergency, provisional, or temporary certification or licensure. (p. 3)

Because of this partnership, candidates are placed within these districts or schools that address the hiring needs of the partnered district or school. This is one advantage of residency programs to help address the problem of teacher shortages within a school or district. “High-quality residency programs are co-designed between the district (or charter management organization) and the university to ensure residents get to know the students and families in the communities” (Guha et al., 2016, p. 6). This allows for rigorous exposure and preparation for candidates to teach within the communities and school contexts in which they will serve.

**Participants/Candidate Selection.** The residency program is a path for teaching for individuals who are seeking a bachelor’s degree or who have a bachelor’s degree but have not previously been certified to teach. Applicants are either candidates who are college undergraduates, graduates, or mid-career professionals “from outside the field of education possessing strong content knowledge or a record of professional accomplishment” (Silva et al., 2014, p. 5). Residency programs aim to recruit candidates who are top-notch through their rigorous selection criteria. Within a study of 20 teacher residency programs funded through the federal Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant, it was noted that the screening process for admission favors applicants that have strong content knowledge or a record of accomplishment in the chosen field, have strong oral and written communication skills, and “other attributes that’s [sic] linked to effective teaching” (Silva et al., 2014, p. 5). Coffman and Patterson (2014) reiterated the idea that sets residency applicants apart is that partners work with the programs to ultimately decide what additional qualities are necessary to deem candidates as profession-ready in their context at the end of the preparation program. Because of these specific criteria, candidates who enter through residency programs may

have different skills than those who enter through different programs (Krieg et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2014).

**Financial Support and Incentives.** Residency programs are organized and funded to offer candidates financial incentives or support such as a living stipend, student loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, or a salary during their residency (Guha et al., 2016). In exchange for this support, candidates must agree to teach within a high-need school in a partnered high-need district for at least three years (Silva et al., 2014, p. 6). Financial support, incentives, and stipulations vary among residency programs. One cross-site study cited that residents' contributions for their training and master's degrees were anywhere from \$0 to \$36,000 in the programs that were reviewed (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

**Coursework/Clinical Experiences.** Candidates within residency programs take "rigorous" graduate level coursework which leads to both state certification and a master's degree from the partner university. "Rigorous" is not specified in detail in the TQP grant. However, the coursework is an integration of pedagogy and classroom practice which is concurrent with the year-long clinical residency (Silva et al., 2014; Solomon, 2009). One study, which examined 30 teacher residency programs, found that candidates took an average of 450 hours of coursework, equaling about 10 college courses (Silva et al., 2014). Coursework was coherent and consistent with their clinical experiences. Research suggests that coherence between academic coursework and school-based experiences provides candidates with opportunities to make connections and has "a greater impact on the initial conceptions and practices of prospective teachers than [programs] that remain a collection of relatively disconnected courses" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).



The clinical experience in a residency program consists of at least one full academic year during which the candidate spends 4-5 days a week in a classroom under the watch of an experienced and trained mentor teacher. As the year progresses, so does the candidate's responsibilities (Guha et al., 2016). This is a characteristic that differs from other preparation programs in the sense that most residents receive at least 900 hours of pre-service clinical preparation, where the norm for most programs is in the range of 400-600 hours (Silva et al., 2014). The heightened clinical experience allows candidates to feel more prepared and supported in their role as a classroom teacher. Levine (2006) surveyed teachers and reported that teachers say pre-service school-based experiences were helpful in preparing them for the realities of the classroom.

**Early Career Mentoring & Support.** Once candidates complete the residency program, there is a high level of early career mentoring and support for one to three years after completion. Once candidates are hired as teachers, the program supports them through “professional development, networking opportunities and an induction program” (Silva et al., 2014, p. 6). The induction program is focused on not only supporting teachers but also on providing them with professional opportunities to improve their performance and retain them in the profession. Some components of these induction programs that contribute to these goals are high-quality mentoring and collaboration opportunities with other teachers and mentors. Studies have shown that “having planned time to collaborate with a mentor in the same subject area is a key element of successful induction that supports beginning teacher retention” (Solomon, 2009, p. 10).

## **Empirical Studies Regarding Teacher Preparation Routes**

Despite the differences between the routes of teacher preparation programs, there are key commonalities among the varying approaches. Traditional and alternative routes both focus on the following three components: pedagogy coursework, methodology coursework, and field experiences (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Goldhaber, Kreig & Theobald, 2017; Silva et al., 2014). Pedagogy coursework can be defined as the coursework that is grounded in learning theory and educational psychology and considers the aims and values of education from a philosophical perspective (Ericsson & Karlsson, 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015). Methodology coursework builds upon what students have learned in their pedagogy coursework and tends to focus more closely on processes, practices, and procedures for teaching specific disciplines or content (Collins et al., 2023). Methodological courses focus on the teaching practices that support understanding everyday classroom teaching (DeGraaf et al., 2013). Field experiences are referred to as the student teaching experiences candidates encounter throughout their preparation experiences (Cowan et al., 2016).

The primary differences between the program approaches relate to the quantity and quality spent on and within each of these critical components (Coffman & Patterson, 2014). Empirical research studies highlight the differences of teachers' sense of preparedness and the associated impact on student achievement when comparing the components of teacher certification routes.

Kee (2012) analyzed federal School and Staffing Survey data which examined 1,690 first-year teachers who had pursued either a traditional or an alternative route to teaching. She specifically examined the extent to which program features related to new teachers' feelings of preparedness. The study revealed that first-year teachers who had fewer types of

education coursework and shorter field experience feel less prepared than teachers whose pedagogical preparation was more complete. Kee reported that teachers whose alternative certification programs allowed them to begin full-time teaching without having had coursework or field experiences felt the least well prepared in their first year.

Another empirical study, which took place in 2007 through the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, surveyed newly placed teachers regarding their feelings of preparedness to teach under the challenging circumstances of their high-need public schools. The teachers who were surveyed were prepared via four different routes of certification. The study consisted of a random sample of 577 traditionally trained first year teachers and 224 respondents from three alternative programs: Teach for America (TFA), New Teacher Project, and Troops for Teachers. The findings revealed that only half of the alternative-route teachers felt they were prepared for their first year of teaching, compared with 80% of the traditionally prepared teachers. Additionally, more than half of the alternative teachers said they had too little time working with an actual public school teacher in a classroom environment as part of their teacher preparation. Conversely, only 20% of the traditionally prepared teachers reported having that problem.

Easton and Davis (2009) conducted a large national study of 4,400 early elementary children from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. In the study, they examined achievement gaps and teacher qualifications using value-added methods. The report concluded that students who had a certified teacher for most of their early school experience scored significantly higher in reading than students with uncertified or alternatively certified teachers. Students with fully certified teachers for at least two of the three grade-levels

studied averaged 1.5 units greater growth per year. Teacher certification accounted for 8% of the growth in reading achievement and was particularly influential in predicting growth for African American students. This study supported the idea that having fully certified teachers narrowed the academic gap between African American students and White American students across the early elementary grades.

A 2011 study in four Texas school districts compared the achievement of students of TFA and traditionally prepared teachers of mathematics and English language arts/reading. Both students at the elementary (grades 3-8) and secondary (grades 9-11) level were included in the study. In their concluding remarks, Ware et al. (2011) voiced concern regarding the fact that lower gains in ELA/reading were evident for elementary and high school Hispanic students of TFA teachers. Researchers encouraged TFA staff to “review their teacher training and support systems to ensure an additional focus on teaching strategies to support Hispanic students.” A 2005 study by Darling-Hammond et al. also found that the negative effects on student achievement of uncertified TFA teachers were most pronounced for limited-English-proficient students who took the district tests in Spanish.

Based on the foregoing, empirical research studies support the theory that teachers who are prepared through experiences and coursework have a direct and positive impact on student achievement. However, a review of the literature was inconclusive regarding the right balance of course content, which makes it even more challenging to identify the best approach for teacher preparation. Pedagogical and methodological coursework, as well as field experiences, are the three components literature states as being vital to teacher preparation. Nevertheless, in teacher preparation for an urban context, literature states that we need more characteristics interwoven throughout the three components.

As stated previously, urban area schools are adversely and disproportionately impacted by the absence of qualified and effective teachers (Bates, 2020; Birkeland & Peske, 2004; Cullen et al., 2021; Ingersoll, 1999; Lankford et al., 2002). The demographic characteristics of the student body of urban schools must be considered in teacher preparation certification routes. The above research demonstrates that teachers from alternative preparation programs are generally less able to successfully educate students in urban schools. Because of this, the critical characteristics that are embedded in teacher preparation programs must be analyzed through the lens of educational equity and social justice. By doing so, qualified and effective teachers are produced by participation in either a traditional or alternative program. Research has highlighted key factors that are a part of effective practices for our teachers throughout their preparation courses. To create confident and prepared teachers, these characteristics must be integrated into preparation programs. Teachers must be trained and prepared to promote educational equity and social justice in order to be successful in urban schools.

### **Key Characteristics of Urban Teacher Preparation Programs**

Significant evidence indicates that many new teachers feel under-prepared for the complexities of urban schools (Buchanan, 2017; Cohen et al., 2020; Hollins, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2012). Teacher preparation is a key factor in ensuring that teachers are effective and stay in urban schools. Milner (2012) strongly asserted, “There is no issue more important to improving urban education—particularly the instructional practices of teachers in urban classrooms—than the preparation of teachers” (p. 700). Prepared teachers contribute to the academic achievement of students and could be the solution to the problem of low student achievement and a shortage of qualified teachers (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Howard, 2013;

Kirp, 2013). The fact that 12% of public school teachers are in their first two years of experience supports the idea that preparation programs should be creating teachers who are ready to be successful starting on their first day in the classroom.

The literature field of teacher preparation for urban education is still developing (Howard & Milner, 2014); however, there is a growing body of research that indicates the key characteristics of quality teacher preparation programs. Scholars have emphasized the need for preparation, courses, and curriculum that immerses candidates in urban communities, provides an intellectual framework, has critical engagement with equity and justice, and equips teachers to meet the needs of all learners (Matsko et al., 2022; Walcott, 2019). Furthermore, preparation programs should include coherence and integration of coursework with clinical practice and field experience (Solomon & Sekayi, 2007; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006).

### ***Content of Courses***

Multicultural curriculum should be at the heart of the content in all courses in teacher preparation programs. Cochran-Smith (2004) stated that given the diversity of American schools, “diversity issues should be central not peripheral to the rest of the curriculum, mandatory rather than optional for all prospective teachers, and infused throughout all courses and fieldwork experiences rather than contained in a single course” (p. 31). Diversity must be infused into teacher preparation programs, so candidates understand their own biases, values, and backgrounds, know the cultures of urban schools and communities, and have opportunities to work with urban students to practice culturally responsive pedagogy (Cochran-Smith, 2003b; Gay, 2004; Haberman, 1996). Aside from the infusion of diversity, specific teaching method courses must be presented to ensure candidates are prepared.

Nationally, urban students lag in achievement in the areas of math, science, and literacy (Barnard-Bark & Ritter, 2017; Voight et al., 2012). Therefore, method courses in these content areas must be presented in preparation programs to help increase the sense of preparation for pre-service teachers. Based on data from a nationally representative survey of teachers, researchers found that teachers who completed more methods-related coursework felt better prepared and were more likely to stay in teaching (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). A study of New York City teachers found that coursework which is grounded in the work of the classroom and engages participants in the actual practices involved in teaching, such as planning guided reading lessons, produces teachers who are more effective during their first year of teaching (Boyd et al., 2009).

Recommendations from researchers state that all assignments and coursework should be organized around core teaching practices (Grossman et al., 2009; Loewenberg & Forzani, 2009). In addition, coursework should be aligned with the Council of Chief State School Officers Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards. Examples of these types of assignments could include collection of instructional data about student learning, identification of instructional challenges, and how they were addressed, and reflection on practice. Throughout these courses, candidates should be immersed in urban communities, have critical engagement with equity and justice, as well as learn pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of all their learners. Each component is further described in the following sections.

### ***Immersion in Urban Communities***

Unique ways in which setting or place affect human society has been an essential lens of sociology research (Park et al., 1925). Research in which setting has been considered

includes economics, politics, and public health policy (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Hiskey & Bowler, 2005; McLafferty, 2003; Shin, 2001; Zenk et al., 2005). The literature points to the importance of acknowledging setting when learning to teach and the need to determine what that means during the teacher preparation process (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). Teacher candidates need to be engaged with and culturally immersed in urban communities (Ladson-Billings, 2000a, 2001; Noel, 2013; Sleeter, 2001).

By immersing candidates in urban communities, candidates can move beyond the “artificial” domains of the university and a single field-based practicum (Solomon & Sekayi, 2007) to confront the negative stereotypes which often result from limited contact with urban communities (Solomon & Sekayi, 2007; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006). Preparation programs have been successful in addressing these challenges by involving teacher candidates in community-based projects, service learning, and personal interaction with urban communities (Walcott, 2019). Courses that focus on this type of immersion and content experiences provide candidates with a deeper and more realistic perspective of urban communities (Massey & Szente, 2007; Solomon et al., 2007), which have been linked to positive changes in attitudes toward issues of multiculturalism and difference (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006). Matsko and Hammerness (2014) reiterated that in order to equip teachers to work effectively in schools that serve students of color, “candidates need to develop the capacity to analyze the particular setting of any school in which they will eventually teach with an in-depth and nuanced understanding” (p. 129).

David Gruenewald (2003, 2004) offered a rich argument for the importance of “place conscious” education, noting that places are “pedagogical” in that they play an important role in how we learn about and experience the world. For candidates who are going to work in



urban schools, “place-conscious preparation may help them develop tools for looking beyond the “danger of a single story” (TED, 2009) narrative that uses the term urban as code for “the conditions of cultural conflict grounded in racism and economic oppression” (Chou & Tozer, 2008, p. 1; Williamson et al., 2016, p. 1174). Research on these programs, which have community immersion experiences, report that not only do their graduates report being highly motivated and committed to the particular settings for which they were prepared and immersed in, but also, they do in fact remain in teaching longer than their peers. Further, teachers who were not as well prepared for their contexts are more likely to leave (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1984; Tamir, 2009, 2013; Tamir & Lesik, 2013). In relation to quality community immersion experiences, candidates need courses which present an intellectual framework through which they can best understand their students’ experiences and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### ***Intellectual Framework***

Teacher candidates need a framework that pushes them to understand their students and to confront prevailing deficit perspectives (Sirrakos, Jr., 2017; Stairs et al., 2012). Candidates must understand the complex and multiple characteristics that students bring into the classroom and how those characteristics impact students’ experiences, behavior, and learning (Banks, 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Culturally relevant pedagogy is a set of pedagogical strategies that encourages teachers to understand local students, cultures, and geographies (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995b). Culturally relevant pedagogy is the foundation of an intellectual framework for teacher candidates. Many teachers lack understanding of inequality and cultural diversity (Ford & Moore, 2013) and therefore are not equipped to succeed and remain in an urban setting. Although teacher certification programs are making

efforts to prepare teachers for urban classrooms, Ladson-Billings (1995b) argued that most programs do not do enough to foster culturally relevant pedagogy. Embracing this pedagogy, teachers could begin to feel better prepared and be more qualified educators for urban students and schools, resulting in increased student achievement. This idea is articulated directly by Howard and Milner (2014): “In its simplest conception, research has suggested that teachers need to build knowledge about and be aware of the racial and cultural background of students in order to address the range of needs students bring to school” (p. 206).

Successful urban education programs have a framework which helps candidates recognize the impact of race, culture, and social class in urban communities (Milner, 2006). Moll and Arnot-Hopffer (2005); Nieto (2006), Emdin and Lee (2012), and other multiculturalists have addressed the need for a more vigorous and meaningful approach in encouraging pre-service teachers to examine themselves in relation to the urban populations they will serve in their teaching careers. Nieto (2004) proposed that for teachers to be prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds, universities must begin to reform their teacher education programs and develop approaches that address pre-service teachers’ “attitudes, sensibilities, and values” (p. 457) toward students “who have been marginalized by their school experiences” (p. 457). Moll and Arnot-Hopffer (2005) stated that teacher education programs must concentrate not only on subject content and technical capabilities but also on developing pre-service teachers’ sociocultural competence in working with diverse student populations.

Pollack (2013) highlighted ways in which the use of targeted critical listening through observation, reflection, and journaling as effective components within courses help teacher

candidates uncover and challenge deficit narratives. Coursework that is grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy and structured field experiences, along with field- and inquiry-based approaches and school partnerships, are crucial in helping teacher candidates develop the necessary framework for understanding their students' realities (Tidwell & Thompson, 2009).

### ***Engagement with Equity and Justice***

Students in low-income communities are more likely to receive fewer resources and a qualitatively substandard education compared to their middle-class counterparts (Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Rothstein, 2004). Students of color are often denied adequate educational resources, are overrepresented within special education contexts, and are subject to harsher forms of punishment than their White peers (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Mukherjee, 2007; Oakes et al., 1997). These are not new trends, as U.S. schools have historically failed to adequately serve students outside the White, English-speaking, middle-class, nondisabled, mainstream culture (Santamaria et al., 2020; Zollers et al., 2000). To combat such inequalities, engagement with equity and justice is emphasized as a vital part in many teacher education programs and curricula.

We look at our classroom teachers to help transform the inequities in society and within our school system. Our teachers are understood as “the most essential element [as] they have the ultimate responsibility to navigate the curriculum and instruction with their students” (Lalas, 2007, p. 19). It is essential that we train and prepare our teachers with a justice-oriented teacher education in their pre-service experiences. Throughout pre-service experiences, it is recommended that teachers must be provided with opportunities to self-

study and self-reflect in order to fully commit to enact a social justice teacher education (Matias et al., 2017; Ticknor et al., 2020).

It is recommended that teachers who teach in furtherance of social justice enact curricula that embeds multiple perspectives, questions the dominant Western narratives, and are inclusive of the racial and linguistic diversity in North America (Banks & Banks, 1995). Teachers who teach through social justice support students to develop a critical consciousness of the injustices within our society, and they create opportunities by facilitating experiences for students to be active participants in a democracy.

Offering opportunities to have critical engagement with issues of equity and justice is a key characteristic of effective teacher preparation programs (Walcott, 2014). Teacher candidates must be prepared to engage in the struggle to transform both the school and society (Giroux, 2009; Kincheloe et al., 2004; Matias et al., 2017; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Preparation that is grounded in social justice shifts the focus from issues of social justice, making social change and activism at the center of teaching and learning (Adams & Bell, 2016). “Social justice programs explicitly attend to societal structures that perpetuate injustice, and they attempt to prepare teachers to take both individual and collective action toward mitigating oppression” (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 597). Teacher candidates should have coursework that pushes them to understand the ways in which schools support the dominant ideology and therefore reproduce social inequalities. Candidates must understand that the pursuit of justice in education includes a fight for justice in society (Ewing, 2018; Love, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Darder (2012) argued that teacher education must help candidates “develop a critical understanding of their purpose as educators” (p. 104). Rodriguez (1983) reiterated this,

stating that colleges and universities must play a central role in facilitating their candidates to “understand their own and their students’ culture, combined with the development of teaching skills consistent with the accepted purposes of education for a multicultural society” (p. 18). Preparation programs must empower teachers in creating culturally democratic classrooms where “students’ lived experiences are validated and utilized to foster critical consciousness and social transformation” (Cabrera et al., 2012, p. 169). Preparation programs must equip candidates to challenge their internal biases and understand the way in which schools work to reproduce inequality (Cabrera et al., 2012; Matias et al., 2017).

### ***Meeting the Needs of All Learners***

Candidates must be prepared to meet the needs of all their students. More teachers now in schools and in teacher education programs are likely to have more and more students from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural groups in their classrooms (Gay, 2010). Howard (2003a) noted that because of the diverse student population, teachers must “be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities” (p. 195). Candidates must be equipped to build on and value students’ experiences in order to implement asset-based pedagogies grounded in the belief that students can find success in school (Michie, 2019; Stairs et al., 2012). As stated previously, preparation must include an emphasis on culturally responsive, relevant and sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Paris & Alim, 2016), and multicultural education (Grant, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

In addition to coursework that is centered on community immersion, an intellectual framework, critical engagement with equity and justice, and meeting the needs of all learners, coursework should also be coherent with clinical practice and field experiences. Programs

that incorporate coherent visions of teaching that are integrated across courses and field experiences, have a greater impact than those that consist of a largely disconnected set of courses (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021; Walcott, 2019). In their study of seven exemplary teacher education programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) found that high quality teacher preparation programs had strong connections between coursework and clinical field experiences and a consistent vision of good teaching practice. All field experiences must be accompanied by courses that give candidates the opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021; Milner, 2006). The key characteristics of field experiences are explained in the following section.

### ***Field Experiences***

Meaningful university-school partnerships are linked to effective field experiences and must be a key component for effective teacher preparation programs. Darling-Hammond (2006) affirmed the need for teacher education programs to develop proactive relationships in places “where practice-based and practice-sensitive research can be carried out collaboratively by teachers, teacher educators, and researchers” (p. 309) and in schools that include diverse learners. Stairs and Friedman (2013) referred to a perspective on learning based on the situational context—stressing the need to situate learning within the context of the object of study—to describe and discuss the positive influence of urban school-university partnerships on pre-service teacher preparation. Noel (2013) also advanced the value of building on community strengths in the work of urban-focused teacher preparation and urged “teacher educators to move all or part of their programs directly into urban schools and communities” (p. 217). These partnerships are crucial in providing teacher candidates opportunities to learn about and practice culturally responsive pedagogy “in schools and

classrooms that value students' diverse cultures in connection with university programs that hold a strong commitment to educating students in historically underserved urban schools" (Olson & Rao, 2016, p. 139). One goal of these partnerships should be grounded in the idea of exposing teacher candidates to urban schools and classrooms as early as possible in their preparation programs. Placing teacher candidates in actual classrooms at the beginning and throughout the program "allows the candidate multiple opportunities to observe, reflect, and decide over the course of their collegiate career, if an urban school setting is a good fit, and if it is, to prepare to teach in that setting" (Lee et al., 2010, p. 105).

Positive urban field experiences correlate positively with teacher retention and preparation (Chapman & Green, 1986; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). Gallego et al. (2001) argued that "teacher educators must provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to interact with the communities and children representative of those they are likely to teach" (p. 312). Arthur Levine's (2006) national study of university-based teacher education programs found that effective teacher preparation programs are ones that achieve "curricular balance," integrating "the theory and practice of teaching" by "balancing study in university classrooms and work in schools with successful practitioners" (p. 21). Field experiences have been considered a crucial, if not most important, component of pre-service teacher preparation (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Research has proven the positive effect of early field experiences and longer internship placements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021). Field experiences are a part of nearly every accredited teacher preparation program (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). As stated previously, field experiences are most powerful when they are coupled with coursework (Clarke et al., 2014; Gareis & Grant,

2014). In field experiences, pre-service teachers observe, interact, and have teaching opportunities in K-12 schools, working directly with students, teachers, and the community surrounding the schools.

Darling-Hammond (2006) explained the importance of field experiences: they allow pre-service candidates to view teaching and learning through a lens different from that of a student, which is the one they have used the majority of their life. Candidates come into their education programs with beliefs and values about teaching and learning that are unlikely to change unless they are offered experiences that “challenge their validity” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1987, p. 9). Recognizing that pre-service teachers bring with them a host of assumptions and conceptions, Gallego et al. (2001) asserted that “without opportunities to deliberately expand and challenge personal and professional habitudes, [prospective] teachers may routinely underestimate students’ abilities and misunderstand diversity” (p. 313). This view highlights the important need for many urban teachers to have exposure to culture, schools, and communities that hold relevance for learning.

### ***Exposure to Communities***

Research suggests that cross-cultural, community-based field experiences can enhance teacher preparation programs because they give teachers insight into students’ lives outside of school (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017; Yuan, 2018). Sleeter (2008) also suggested that teachers need to be in the context in which they will be teaching. Teachers must be involved in the community in order to gain perspective, exposure, and understanding of the families and community partners situated around individual schools. Evidence from traditional teacher education paradigms suggests that separating learner from environment and knowing from doing can lead to detrimental effects on the beginning teachers’ relative



development (Lee et al., 2010). Additionally, Lee et al. (2010) stated that many traditional approaches instruct in various degrees of abstract form that are not applicable to the meaning of clinical situations, making learning a difficult process that is unrelated to the demands of an urban reality. In an environment where learning occurs outside of real-world settings, knowledge is gained without the ability to reflect and relate within context, making it difficult to see the relevance of practice in meaningful situations. Candidates benefit greatly from the identity and sense-making work they do conjointly with the community, the children, and cooperating teachers when situated in multicultural or non-mainstream settings (Murrell, 2000, 2006; Quartz et al., 2008).

Oakes and Rogers (2007) supported this claim through the work they did with Centre X, the urban teacher program at UCLA. Through their work they realized that “experts need to be broadly constructed to include community members and students themselves working alongside one another” (p. 229). They suggest that teachers need space to understand “local urban cultures, the urban political economy, the bureaucratic structure of urban schools and the community and social service support networks serving urban centres” (p. 229).

Similarly, Noel (2013) mentioned the concept of “community strengths,” which urged teachers to go into the community to learn about the community’s strengths that “could then be utilized in a more culturally relevant education” (p. 137). This form of advocacy of valuing and utilizing community strengths to facilitate student learning relates closely to the concept of “funds of knowledge” by Moll and his colleagues (1992). Ladson-Billings (2006b) asserted that when teachers are able to have strategic field experiences that encourage them to value community knowledge, they are able to more effectively draw on that community knowledge to create a culturally relevant classroom that assists multicultural

students to achieve academic success and achievement. In addition to field experiences providing opportunities to become exposed and learn about the community, they also offer a sense of preparation for teaching and learning through the exposure to classroom contexts.

### ***Exposure to Classroom Settings***

Field experiences such as student teaching are seen as a critical component of teacher preparation (Cuenca, 2011). Student teaching is seen as beneficial because as Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) noted, “modern learning theory makes clear that expertise is developed within specific domains and learning is situated within specific contexts where it needs to be developed” (p. 403). Knowledge of teaching emerges directly from the activity of teaching; student teaching provides prospective teachers with an opportunity to construct their own understandings of teaching, based on the dilemmas they encounter within the field (Cuenca, 2010).

Berry et al. (2008) argued the belief that new teachers in urban schools should have substantial guided field experience in an urban classroom prior to becoming a teacher. Some studies indicate that longer periods of student teaching are beneficial, whereas others do not find positive effects of extended practice (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). Ronfeldt and Reininger (2012) drew on data from over 1,000 prospective teachers in a large urban district by analyzing pre-and post-student teaching survey data to find whether longer student teaching improved teachers’ perceptions of instructional preparedness. The findings of this study showed that the length had little effect on teacher outcomes; however, the quality of student teaching had more significant and positive effects. A key factor to quality student teaching experiences is the cooperating teacher who supports and mentors the prospective teacher. Anderson and Stillman (2010) found that teacher candidates reported a higher level

of efficacy and preparedness when their cooperating teachers mirrored the beliefs and dispositions similar to those of their preparation programs. The research indicates that effective mentor teachers must have an in-depth understanding of pedagogical content, be able to recognize the characteristics of adult learners, promote stages of teacher development, and be able to practice classroom observation techniques and coaching strategies (Andrews, 1950; Boatright et al., 1986; Clarke et al., 2014; Gareis & Grant, 2014). It is essential that cooperating mentor teachers possess these characteristics in order to create a quality student teaching experience in which candidates can truly understand and apply their learning. A quality cooperating teacher impacts the quality of the student teaching field experience (Coombs, 2003; Goldhaber, Krieg & Theobald, 2017; Moore-Russo & Wilsey, 2014).

Additionally, qualitative studies of student teaching reveal how quality in student teaching field experiences varies. For example, case studies of nine student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors found numerous instances of lost opportunities for student teachers to learn to teach in their experience, including limited feedback on teaching subject matter and hardly any connections made between the content from method courses and their experiences (Valencia et al., 2009). Evidence also suggested that specific features within field experiences matter. Programs that provided more oversight of student teaching, and more opportunities to engage in the specific practices involved in teaching, resulted in more effective and prepared novice teachers for New York City schools (Boyd et al., 2009). Where teacher candidates do their student teaching may also influence the effectiveness of the field experience. A study of six Washington State teacher preparation programs indicated that teachers are more effective when the student demographics of their

current school are similar to the student demographics of the school in which they did their student teaching (Goldhaber, Krieg & Theobald, 2017).

In contrast, Williamson et al. (2016) pointed out that preparing teachers to be successful in challenging schools by purposefully training them in those settings “can be fraught with pitfalls as well as promises” (p. 1173). As Sykes et al. (2010) warned, the conditions of practice that teachers experience play a significant role in how their competency develops. The complexity of urban schools is certainly part of the reason they are frequently seen as unstable, and “it is difficult to develop professional competency in unstable settings” (Williamson et al., 2016, p. 1173). Milner (2012) argued that teachers must understand the many “opportunity gaps” that work to shape urban schools, and too often teachers develop “context-neutral mindsets” that sometimes blind them to seeing the “deep-rooted and ingrained realities embedded in a particular place, such as a school in a particular community” (p. 707). Carefully thought-out placements and integration of coursework alongside field experience must be adequate to ensure candidates are able to understand the realities and complexities that encompass quality teaching and learning in urban contexts. Preparation programs must equip their candidates to “swim upstream,” as Hollins (2012) stated, so that they can engage students in relationships and enact practices that enhance student learning. Otherwise, Hollins (2012) warned that teachers who learn to “swim with the tide” in low performing urban schools will adopt low expectations, stale practices, and dysfunctional ideologies of those communities. This is one drawback that highlights the reality that preparation programs that locate their candidates within the most challenging settings can run the risk of “having new teachers learn dispositions and practices that will allow them to accept rather than disrupt the norms that reproduce inequity” (Williamson et

al., 2016, p. 1174). Because of this, it is essential for a partnership between universities and schools to be established to ensure candidates are placed in schools that foster the same ideologies, dispositions, and beliefs as the ones they are learning in their program.

Field experiences are a crucial component of teacher preparation in the sense that they give candidates exposure to schools and communities within the urban context. The quality of these field experiences is determined by the careful placement with a quality cooperating mentor teacher and the oversight of experiences. The content of courses, immersion with urban communities, an intellectual framework, engagement with equity, an understanding of meeting the needs of all learners, coupled with field experiences, are the key characteristics of an effective teacher preparation program. In the following section, I conclude with recommendations from the literature regarding teacher preparation for an urban context.

### **Recommendations from the Literature**

Research has shown that teachers are not being efficiently prepared to serve in urban schools with diverse students (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Holland et al., 2014; Howard & Milner, 2021). In an effort to address the problem of under-prepared teachers, Darling-Hammond (2012) created a model for preparation programs that includes the common features of programs which have been proven to produce effective teachers. These common features are: (a) a vision for effective teaching that is understood by all students and underscored in all of their coursework and field experiences; (b) professional standards created out of the program's vision, which guide and evaluate the students' coursework and field experiences; (c) a curriculum that authentically parallels the students' field experiences and considers in the context of the various developmental stages of

children; (d) extended, authentic clinical experiences that span at least 30 weeks; (e) consistent utilization of learning methods that urge students to apply the curriculum to their practice and evaluate their practice using the curriculum; (f) the implementation of intentional strategies that assist teachers in confronting and challenging their biases; and (g) genuine relationships fostered between the university and its partner schools, in which they work collaboratively toward a common vision (Darling-Hammond, 2006, 2012). These seven features have been seen as a necessity to address the need for the curricula and field experiences being offered in teacher preparation programs to prepare candidates to serve in schools of various contexts.

Darling-Hammond (2014) expanded later upon her model, adding that teacher preparation programs could become even more useful if they included: (a) explicit coherence and integration between students' coursework and their field experiences; (b) partnerships between preparation programs and schools, which work collaboratively on improving the preparation of teachers; and (c) an intentional application of the theories the students are learning in their field experiences. With these improved features to be incorporated into teacher preparation programs, Darling-Hammond emphasized the necessity of bridging the gap between compelling theories and effective practices. Concurrently, Darling-Hammond's framework advocated for preparation programs that would better equip teachers to educate diverse students in diverse educational settings. The conceptual framework proposed by Darling-Hammond (2006, 2012, 2014) is just one of the many frameworks that have been established to address the need for preparing teachers to be ready to meet the diverse needs of K-12 students.

Allen et al. (2017) created a framework that systematically integrates culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) into teacher preparation programs. The authors argued that the foundation of CRP is necessary because not only does it foster the academic achievement of students, but it also establishes their cultural competence and critical consciousness, both of which are crucial when working with diverse learners. Allen et al.'s (2017) framework presented that the integration of CRP occurs throughout teacher preparation programs by incorporating the following: (a) cultural competence via the critical reflection of teacher educators and candidates; (b) critical consciousness through social justice action in policies and programs; and (c) academic achievement by posing critical questions in the program's curriculum and instruction. This framework argued that through the integration of CRP into teacher preparation programs, programs have the potential to equip educators with the necessary tools to be successful educators to diverse learners.

Through a broader approach, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) developed research-driven teaching standards to assess and support teachers' instruction to diverse learners. These progressions have been created to be used by stakeholders with the intention of supporting the ongoing development of teachers as they work to lead their students toward high academic achievement. These progressions can be used as a way for preparation programs to guide the sequence of their coursework and frame their field experiences. It is also recommended that school leaders utilize these progressions to evaluate their teachers and teachers can assess themselves to ensure instruction is effective for their students (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

In relation to the efforts put forth for improving teacher preparation programs, Boyd et al. (2009) conducted a study to explore how different features of teacher preparation

influenced teachers' effectiveness as measured by their students' test scores. In the study, the authors analyzed documents, conducted interviews, and surveyed administrative staff, instructors, and graduates of 31 teacher preparation programs in New York City. The results showed varied factors in the effectiveness of teachers coming from various programs; however, the one consistent and defining characteristic of effective teacher preparation programs was their ability to recruit promising teacher candidates. It is recommended that the first crucial step in teacher preparation programs is to recruit the proper candidates in order to properly prepare them to teach in diverse urban schools.

Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2000b) argued that "a more systemic, comprehensive approach is needed" (p. 209) to appropriately prepare teachers to serve diverse classrooms. She named the following as essential components of effective teacher preparation programs: personal/cultural autobiographies, restructured field experiences, situated pedagogies, and returning to the classroom of experts. In regard to the personal/cultural autobiographies, Ladson-Billings (2000b) described the effectiveness of teachers who reflect on their life experiences, citing her prior article that suggested teachers "consciously re-experience their own subjectivity when they recognize similar or different outlooks and experiences" (King & Ladson-Billings, 1990, p. 26). When the component of autobiographies is infused into teacher preparation programs, educators will be better prepared to empathize with and authentically teach to diverse experiences of their learners.

Further, Ladson-Billings (2000b) suggested that the field experiences of pre-service teachers need to more accurately match the realities of teaching in urban schools. She argued that schools should prepare their teachers by providing more authentic field experiences in actual urban schools and provide them with immersion opportunities in diverse communities



to promote an awareness of the communities that house their students. Next, Ladson-Billings outlined that pre-service teachers should receive training that includes culturally specific pedagogies. By doing so, Ladson-Billings argued, teacher educators are asked “to think more carefully about the relationship of teacher preparation to the communities in which they are located and the school populations that their graduates are likely to serve” (p. 210).

A final strategy Ladson-Billings (2000b) offered as a recommendation to improve the education of teachers was to return to the classroom of experts. This component encompasses the three propositions of CRP: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical critique (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Academic achievement is fostered when diverse students are both engaged in and challenged by the instructional content. Cultural competence is achieved when teachers acknowledge, celebrate, and legitimize students’ culture. Lastly, sociopolitical critique is promoted when students are consistently challenged to examine inequities and how they are perpetuated by social structures (Ladson-Billings, 2000b).

Typically, teacher preparation programs progress their candidates by (a) aiding them in the mastery of their content matter, (b) guiding them in their adoption of a pedagogical approach, (c) providing them with a student teaching experience, and (d) preparing them to teach diverse students (Allen et al., 2017; Boyd et al., 2009; Hayes et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2002). Yet, it has been found that the component of preparation for diverse students is not always heavily emphasized. One reason for this may be that governing bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation do not explicitly require student understanding of diverse learning needs (Allen et al., 2017; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.). While realizing the critical necessity of these four teacher

education components, it is necessary to acknowledge that they do not include the thorough and authentic understanding of “the daily lives of the children in context” (Ladson-Billings, 2000a, p. 209). Research has shown that this is an integral missing link because, according to Darling-Hammond (2006), “teaching is in the service of students, which creates the expectation that teachers will be able to come to understand how students learn and what various students need if they are to learn more effectively—and that they will incorporate this into their teaching and curriculum construction” (p. 303). Future educators must be given the type of preparation that builds this understanding, along with authentic exposure to the populations they aim to serve. By doing so, prospective educators would have the necessary tools to shape the development and delivery of their instruction, which would in turn, “foster higher academic achievement among their students who have been marginalized and disenfranchised” (Lee, 2019, p. 6). In order to fully support the needs of diverse learners in urban contexts, it is critical that great intentionality needs to be put into ensuring that preparation programs are adequately preparing teachers to utilize true cultural relevance in their diverse classrooms. The recommendations in the literature described above highlight the necessity of stronger urban teacher preparation programs.

Within the last decade multiple scholars have developed approaches that propose a balance between these components (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Hollins, 2011). Within each route of teacher preparation, there is a program approach that exists and contributes to the preparation experiences for pre-service teachers. Offering practice-based programs is a common approach for teacher preparation (Krichevsky, 2021) that is further explored in the following sections. An understanding of this type of teacher preparation program helps to decipher the critical characteristics that

contribute to the justification of the impact of the teacher shortage, effectiveness, and quality in urban area schools.

### **Practice-based Teacher Education**

The term practice based refers to teacher education that “is less concerned with where teachers’ training takes place and more with what teachers are helped to learn and how they learn it” (Forzani, 2014, p. 358). Hollins (2011) explained that a holistic practice-based approach “integrates academic knowledge of theory, pedagogy, and curriculum across experiences in authentic contexts that are embedded in focused inquiry, directed observation, and guided practice” (p. 359).

In 1997, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future released a report that was centered on qualities in programs whose graduates were considered successful in teaching diverse students. Through this report, Darling-Hammond (1997) named qualities of various programs that were believed “exemplary,” which included programs that had experiences with “strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs among school- and university-based faculty”; and were grounded in pedagogical content knowledge “taught in the context of practice” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 30). This report called for teacher education to implement a reform that valued practice-based approaches. Similarly, in 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) released a Blue Ribbon Panel report calling for teacher education to be transformed through clinical practice. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE, 2010) also released a report urging teacher education programs to supply opportunities for candidates to “practice and reflect on teaching while enrolled in their preparation programs” (AACTE, 2010, p. 6).

Throughout the past two decades there has been a laser focus on teacher education reform aimed to increase equitable learning outcomes for students throughout PK-12 schools (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Forzani, 2014; Hollins, 2011; Zeichner, 2010). Hollins (2011) believed that a practice-based approach for learning to teach is a direct image of the practice of quality teaching in PK-12 schools. Similarly, Pam Grossman (2016) argued that the turn toward a practice-based approach in teacher education has been built upon a sophisticated research basis and the experiences of highly accomplished teacher educators (e.g., Ball et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011, 2016; Forzani, 2014; Zeichner, 2019). Conventional pre-service teacher preparation programs have been criticized for lacking pedagogy and connections between courses and field experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Zeichner, 2010). A practice-based approach can address these criticisms as it serves as a balance between theory and practice.

Hollins (2011) stated that there must be a process for learning to teach and a standard for quality teaching that is addressed through a practice-based approach. Hollins (2011) supported the need for clinical practice by proposing a model for practice-based teaching that is focused on learning to teach in a breakdown of two distinct parts: the practices for teaching and the qualities that support learning to teach. She argued that the first part of learning to teach is focused on the practices for teaching, which are referred to as the essential knowledge, skills, and understanding which encompass knowledge of learners, learning, subject matter, pedagogy, accountability and assessment, and the practices in a professional learning community. The second part of learning to teach includes the epistemic practices and qualities that support learning to teach, which are focused inquiry, directed observation,

and guided practice. The program qualities that support learning to teach include coherence, collaboration, continuity, consistency, integrity, and trustworthiness.

### ***Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Understanding of Practice-based Programs***

Grossman and McDonald (2008) argued that teacher education should move away from a curriculum focused on what teachers need to know, to a curriculum based on core practices in which knowledge, skill, and professional identity are developed throughout the process of learning to practice. Hollins' (2011) proposed practice-based approach outlined the essential knowledge, skills, and understanding that should inform the practices for teaching. Each essential component is described in greater detail in the following section.

**Knowledge of Learners.** One of the most important aspects of teaching and learning is based on how well the teacher knows the learner. Teachers must develop relationships with their students culturally, academically, and socially in order to facilitate meaningful learning. Human cognitive development knowledge allows teachers to make sense of what their children can do and know, as well as enables them to enact developmentally appropriate learning experiences to build upon and extend what children already know and can do (Kitchener, 1986; Kohlberg, 1968; Parke & Gauvain, 2009; Piaget, 1953; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1985). In order to provide deep and authentic learning experiences for students, there has to be a deep knowledge base of their prior learning experiences, their values and interests, and what they already know and how they make sense of what they know (Bornstein, 1995; Jordan, 2010; Stinson, 2006).

**Knowledge of Learning.** In order to effectively support learners in developing academic skills and a deep base of content knowledge, there must be a deep knowledge of the theoretical perspectives on learning (Gess-Newsome et al., 2019; Hollins, 2011). The

constructivist theoretical perspective of learning and teaching is at the core of practice-based programs. Learning is social and constructed through intentional experiences in various disciplines. Programs that are truly practice-based adhere to a theoretical perspective and offer coherence, consistency, and continuity in the application of pedagogy and content. There is a balance between theoretical approaches and how those are utilized to practice. Hollins (2011) explained that students learn the practices in a discipline “concerning how theories, models, and arguments are constructed and the social processes for participating in a disciplinary-based discourse community” (p. 399). In practice-based programs, candidates take part in learning experiences that are facilitated to share knowledge, varied perspectives, and co-construct knowledge (Caudle et al., 2021).

**Knowledge of Subject Matter.** For the past two decades, there have been many changes in what is deemed important as subject matter knowledge that teachers are required to teach their students. Factors such as social justice, emphasis on culture, school reform efforts, and technology have influenced what subject matter knowledge is learned by PK-12 students (Bhatnagar et al., 2016; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021). Duschl (2008) stated that learning should be influenced by experiences that are sequenced and mediated and have an emphasis on domain-specific reasoning and practices. Hollins (2011) explained that the subject matter should shift within practice-based programs. She explained that this means:

Moving from conceptual learning towards a balanced focus that is conceptual, epistemic, and social where students learn conceptual structures within a discipline, cognitive processes for reasoning, frameworks for developing and evaluating knowledge, social processes and context for communicating knowledge, and the formats for doing so. (p. 399)

**Knowledge of Pedagogy.** Pedagogy in this context refers to the designed learning experiences that fit within a theoretical and philosophical perspective that is grounded in the

purpose of education for student outcomes. “In practice, a philosophical stance is the conscious thought process through which a deliberately constructed system of beliefs is operationalized” (Hollins, 2011, p. 400). In practice-based programs, teacher candidates develop a deep sense of personal meaning and commitment to developing their teaching practices that will contribute to an improvement in the quality of life in society. Classroom practices are integrated with a theoretical perspective and a philosophical stance that supports academic and social learning outcomes. With a deep sense of pedagogy, the curriculum is promoted to understand social problems and impact candidates’ willingness to construct instructional approaches. Teacher candidates’ beliefs about the process of learning to teach are proposed through a practice-based teacher preparation program. The practice-based program approach is grounded in the constructivist perspective and is structured in a manner that allows candidates to reflect upon and develop their own philosophical stance about their work as teachers (Linton & Gordon, 2015). It allows teachers to develop “a holistic perspective on the meaning, purpose, process, and content of their practice as teachers” (Hollins, 2011, p. 401).

**Knowledge of Accountability and Assessment.** Teachers must have an in-depth understanding of instructional practices that are most authentic, grounded in a theoretical perspective and will appropriately assess student learning. Hollins (2011) referred to the knowledge of accountability and assessment as being grounded in integrity and trustworthiness. “Quality teaching is maintained through accountability for the integrity and trustworthiness of pedagogical practices based on evidence from assessments of students’ progress in relationship to expected learning outcomes” (p. 401). In practice-based programs, candidates are provided with opportunities to identify and develop appropriate approaches to

assessments that provide the evidence necessary to determine their everyday classroom practices which will result in learning outcomes.

**Ability to Participate in a Professional Community.** Learning is a social process, and professional communities of practice provide candidates with the socialization needed for entering the profession and increasing their overall teacher development. In practice-based programs, socialization occurs through the facilitation of experiences and dialogue and discourse among teachers, candidates, and colleagues. Throughout this process, students can develop a professional identity and dispositions, and they can collaborate with other candidates on common understandings and teaching experiences (Hollins, 2011). As candidates participate in a structured professional learning community, they recognize characteristics and behaviors that are essential for enhancing student learning outcomes. Hollins (2006) reported that when teachers worked collaboratively as a community, they were able to transform their deficit ideology to construct knowledge of the relationship between learner characteristics, pedagogical practices, and learning outcomes. Because of this, teachers were better able to facilitate learning for their students and to support learning for novice teachers. The ability to participate in a professional community puts candidates at an advantage as they develop their professional practices.

**Program Practices and Qualities in Practice-based Programs.** Grossman (2011) supported the recommendations for clinical preparation and recognized challenges that impact high-quality clinical experiences, such as the curricular divide between foundations and methods courses, as well as the separation between the university and school. Grossman and McDonald (2008) argued that teacher education must move away from a curriculum focused on what teachers need to know and more into a curriculum organized around core



practices in which knowledge, skill, and professional identity are developed in the process of learning to practice. Given this, Grossman (2011) suggested that clinical practice should be designed carefully and take the form of experiences in schools, stimulations, laboratory settings, and/or virtual settings.

Grossman et al. (2009) identified three key concepts for understanding the pedagogy of practice in professional education candidates: representations, decomposition, and approximations of practice. The different ways that practice is represented in professional education and how those representations are made visible is comprised of representations of practice. These representations can be taught through videos, observations of teaching, and even through modeling lessons. Representations of practice are present through both coursework and clinical experiences and should show the aspects of effective practices for candidates to learn from. “Decomposition of practice involves breaking down practice into its constituent parts for the purposes of teaching and learning” (p. 2058). In the concept of decomposition of practice, candidates can identify the essential components of practice such as understanding the elements of quality and effective lesson plans. Approximations of practice “refer to opportunities for novices to engage in practices that are more or less proximal to the practices of a profession” (p. 2058). Approximations of practice are carefully designed settings which give candidates opportunities to engage with approximations of practice through simulations or role-plays, while receiving feedback to better their craft. “Simulating certain kinds of practice within the professional education classroom can allow students to try piloting the waters under easier conditions” (p. 2076). These key concepts for understanding the pedagogy of practice allows candidates to build their confidence and overall understanding in the teaching profession (Grossman, 2011).

Practice-based teacher preparation programs are positioned from a constructivist-sociocultural perspective. Hollins (2011) identified three practices that are at the heart of learning to teach: focused inquiry, directed observation, and guided practice. In focused inquiry, candidates address questions about what has happened or is happening and the impact or outcome in relationship to teaching and learning. Focused inquiry can take place in university classrooms, the local community, a public-school classroom, or through the context of videotaped recordings.

Directed observation follows focused inquiry and provides candidates the opportunity to investigate aspects of a phenomenon while “making deep connections and understanding of teaching and learning in classroom contexts” (Hollins, 2011, p. 403). Direct observations allow candidates to see different perspectives such as shifting their thinking from a student to teacher view. Through this process, candidates begin to develop standards for “engaging in meaningful professional discourse” (p. 403). Candidates are also able to develop their own philosophical stance that will impact and give purpose to their own teaching practices.

Guided practice is when candidates are able to experiment “with planning and enacting a short sequence of learning experiences for a small group of students under the careful supervision of university faculty or an experienced classroom teacher” (Hollins, 2011, p. 404). In the process of guided practice, candidates experience the complexities of teaching when they are involved in the “process of planning, enacting, interpreting, translating, planning and (re)enacting” learning experiences that are essential for learning to teach (Hollins, 2011, p. 404).

Alongside the practices deemed necessary for practice-based programs, Hollins (2011) identified four qualities that are also key to an effective practice-based program.

These qualities include collaboration, coherence, continuity and consistency, integrity, and trustworthiness. In a practice-based teacher preparation program, candidates view teaching practices from two perspectives—that of the student and the teacher. Through these facilitated experiences, collaboration is key, and these structures allow candidates to participate in dialogue with peers and faculty that supports learning the discursive practice of the teaching profession (Hollins, 2011).

Throughout practice-based teacher programs, the connections of the learning experiences and sequences over time provide coherence, which both foster the development of deep knowledge of the ideas for teaching and learning (Arias & Davis, 2017; Waddell & Vartuli, 2015). Throughout the program, all discourse is centered on theories, appropriate approaches to learning experiences, and specific student populations and evidence of student learning. This connectivity allows a deeper understanding of teaching. From here, continuity happens through the relation between practices of the teacher educators and candidates. Hollins (2011) mentioned that a key factor to continuity is the consistency “which faculty represent the organizing ideas for teaching and model in their own teaching the practices and habits of mind candidates are expected to learn” (p. 405).

An effective practice-based program has both integrity and trustworthiness at its core. Hollins (2011) summed up how each practice connects with the qualities to promote effective teacher preparation programs. “The level of coherence, strength in the representation of the organizing ideas for teaching, the quality of the epistemic practices that frame learning experiences, and the consistency in application determine the integrity of the program” (p. 405). Trustworthiness stems from the integrity by which it produces candidates that are prepared and able to engage in quality teaching.

A holistic practice-based program entails each practice and quality mentioned above. “The practices and qualities work together to create a research-based approach to quality teaching” (Hollins, 2011, p. 406). Through the reviewed literature, it is apparent that there is a gap in identifying the best approach for urban teacher preparation. It is recommended that there should be a well-defined balance of theory and practice through the design of reflective work and the integration of high-quality clinical work (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021).

Research supports practice-based teacher preparation programs and the need for a more vigorous and meaningful approach in encouraging pre-service teachers to examine themselves in relation to the urban populations they will serve in their teaching careers (Lee, 2012; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2006; Nieto, 2006). Nieto (2006) proposed that for teachers to be prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds, universities must begin to reform their teacher education programs and develop approaches that address pre-service teachers’ “attitudes, sensibilities and values” (p. 457) toward students “who have been marginalized by their school experiences” (p. 457). Moll and Arnot-Hopffer (2006) stated that teacher education programs must concentrate not only on subject content and technical capabilities but also on developing pre-service teachers’ sociocultural competence in working with diverse student populations. Lee (2012) discussed the need to transform teacher education programs by providing pre-service teachers with school-based residency opportunities (community involvement in urban settings outside of school) earlier in the program and for a longer duration to ensure they have adequate experience working with students in a school setting. Reforming teacher education in these ways is a critical first step toward teacher retention.

As cited in Chapter 1, teacher retention is strongly influenced by school leadership and the culture of a school. Urban elementary school principals play an ultimate role in teacher retention. Significant relationships with school administrators have been found to be a necessary resource for new teachers in general (Huisman et al., 2010). Even though the type of school and its specific context may differ, there are two primary implications for teachers. Teachers need proper preparation for their task, and there needs to be a strong system of support in place to assist beginning teachers with the challenges of the job (Siwatu, 2011). Principals who are responsive and supportive of the varying needs of teachers are principals who are effective at retaining quality teachers. A report by Brown and Wynn (2007) investigated principal leadership styles in schools with low attrition rates. The study involved interviewing twelve different principals and focus group interviews with four to six new teachers. The results indicated that principals who were successful at maintaining high rates of retention of their new teachers were principals who had an awareness of issues affecting new teachers and had a proactive versus reactive approach in supporting their new teachers. The results also indicated that the principals who had high rates of retention had a commitment to professional growth and excellence for themselves, their students, and their teachers. Moreover, each principal that was interviewed expressed the importance of careful hiring; that considering how new teachers will “fit” in the school environment was important to the overall functioning of their respective schools (Brown & Wynn, 2007).

## **Instructional Leadership**

### **Historical Context and Definition**

Over the years, the role of a principal has continued to evolve as demands for greater accountability have required the principal to be instruction oriented. High stakes

accountability demands of federal and state mandates have created a sense of urgency in evaluating and developing effective educational leaders that positively impact student achievement (Pepper, 2010). In *Learning from Leadership*, Louis et al. (2010) delved into the correlation between leadership effects and student achievement. The report concluded that next to classroom instruction, leadership is the most important school-related influence on student learning. Studies of effective leadership indicate that without deliberate commitment from the principal, it is nearly impossible to achieve lasting change (Cross & Rice, 2000). The idea of the principal as an instructional leader has evolved to take academic charge within school systems and make change possible and lasting.

The goal of instructional leadership is to facilitate the improvement of teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Glickman et al., 2017; Hoy & Hoy, 2003). The focus on students learning at high levels can only happen if teaching and learning become the central focus of the school and the central focus of the principal (Blankstein et al., 2010; Bulach et al., 2008). Understanding the role of the principal as an instructional leader requires analyzing the definitions of leadership. Yukl (2006) asserted that leadership has multiple definitions and that a major dispute is whether leadership is a “specialized role” or “a shared influence process” (p. 3). Donaldson (2001) leaned towards leadership as influence in his definition of school leadership functions: “to mobilize people to change how they themselves work so that they collectively better serve the emerging needs of children and the demands of society” (p. 6). Leithwood et al. (1999) explained the idea through a lens of transformational leadership. Once transformation leadership is applied to the educational context as a focus, the leader becomes more facilitative in the use of power and building strong cultures where leadership is shared by others.

The developing definition of instructional leadership has evolved from these ideals of leadership and has emerged in literature and is still being explored and defined (Donaldson, 2001; Knapp et al., 2006). Elmore (2000) and Schmoker (2006) described the principal as an instructional leader who makes instruction the main priority in the school and creates a student-centered environment. Elmore (2000) described instructional leadership as behaviors and practices that emerge as principals' function as the instructional leaders. Elmore noted the following specific practices that instructional leaders engage in: (a) they guide school improvement by frequently monitoring information about student performance; (b) they focus on supporting teachers in the classroom; and (c) they prioritize academics. These practices require principals to observe teaching and learning in the classrooms, use data from multiple sources, and create time for the staff to learn professionally. Elmore's focus on classroom instruction aligns with yet another description of the principal as an instructional leader with a sharpened sense of direction and information about what goes on below the surface regarding teaching and learning in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Schmoker, 2006; Wagner, 2001).

Smith and Andrews (1989) took a different approach and described an instructional leader as person who has four different roles: (a) the resource provider who manages the budget and facilities in order to meet the physical requirements of instruction, the manager of space and materials; (b) the resource for instruction, programs, and teacher professional development; (c) the communicator who provides clarity to the mission and goals of the school; and (d) the visible presence to the staff who is strongly focused on classroom observations. Blasé and Blasé (1998) added characteristics to this definition that were more closely aligned with teaching and learning: collaboration, coaching, use of data to inform

practice, and a strong focus on building a learning community within their building. Researchers have identified similar distinctions in the characteristics of instructional leadership (Copland, 2003; Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Lambert, 2006; Marzano et al., 2005). DiPaola and Hoy (2008) created a model of instructional leadership based on previous models. Their model identified three functions that are basic to instructional leadership: “Defining and communicating shared goals, monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and promoting schoolwide professional development” (p. 5). For this study, instructional leadership was defined as “the shared work and commitments that provide direction for instructional improvement, and that engage the efforts and energy of teachers and others in pursuit of powerful, equitable interactions among teachers, learners, and content, in response to environmental demands” (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 30). Culturally relevant pedagogy was the pedagogical lens of this study, which makes culturally relevant leadership essential in understanding leadership in urban schools.

### **Culturally Relevant Leadership**

Educational reformers have claimed that school leadership is a crucial component of any reform of education, but only secondary to the very act of teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). This same research suggested that good teachers will leave schools where there are ineffective leaders; data show this is especially true in urban educational environments (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004). Therefore, developing instructional leaders is a vital piece of the process for recruiting and retaining teachers and creating equitable learning opportunities for children who have been marginalized. To best serve marginalized students, effective instructional leaders must be capable of promoting and sustaining an environment that is grounded in culturally relevant frameworks. Additionally, the



instructional leader will hold a more robust understanding of the need to recruit and sustain culturally relevant educators who are better prepared to work with children of diverse cultures (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Papa et al., 2002). In order to create equitable learning experiences for all children, urban schools must have instructional leaders who are culturally relevant.

As population demographics continue to shift, so too must the leadership practices and school contexts that accompany these shifts. Just as teachers are expected to be culturally relevant, the same must be expected of instructional leaders. It is the job of the instructional leader to develop and improve teachers' craft in a way that results in improved student outcomes, but it has to be done with cultural responsiveness.

Culturally relevant leadership is grounded in the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy, which was the critical pedagogical lens for this study. Culturally relevant leadership improves school culture by providing processes and supports throughout an educational system to challenge social structures (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; McCray & Beachum, 2011, 2014; Osborne, 1996). To do this, culturally relevant leaders support teachers in their professional learning and encourage teachers to utilize pedagogies that are culturally relevant to their students' lives. By doing so, teachers allow students to develop a critical social consciousness to understand, recognize, and challenge the inequitable social norms and practices (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

McCray and Beachum's (2014) framework examined culturally relevant leadership and the ways school leaders are culturally relevant by "awakening students, teachers and extended communities to hegemonies—and providing them with the skills and confidence to

engage the ‘other’ (Said, 1978) while also being reflective of their own actions” (Ezzani & Brooks, 2019, p. 785). Culturally relevant leadership is a vital conceptual framework for instructional leaders because of its three specific tenets: (a) liberatory consciousness; (b) pluralistic insight; and (c) reflexive practice. When each tenet is conceptualized, leaders are taking steps toward change in knowledge, change in feelings, and change in actions, which results in educational equity for all students.

### ***Liberatory Consciousness***

In McCray and Beachum’s (2014) framework, liberatory consciousness begins with the leader and involves self- exploration, questioning one’s beliefs, and coming to terms with the reality of schools and society. Liberatory consciousness stems from the philosophy of Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972; 1973). The philosophy also emphasizes that consciousness is raised to the extent that one can actively struggle against social oppressions and its corresponding beliefs and customs (Freire, 1973; 1998; Nwankwo, 1989; Woodson, 1933). In this vein, education is inherently political, and a critical education offers opportunities for leaders, teachers, and students to engage in authentic dialogical approaches that recognize and seek to uphold hegemonic social structures (Gorski, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012). Through the process of authentic dialogue, educators and students learn together, upending traditional power hierarchies and offering alternatives in understanding complex meaning and contexts (Bowers et al., 2005). Hence, analyzing and contesting oppressive societal conditions prepares students to live as critical citizens in the world, linking knowledge to mutual interaction for social change (Bowers et al., 2005; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Culturally relevant leaders have the role of

integrating curriculum that fosters these critical dialogical approaches and critical pedagogies that as a result could place students on a path toward inclusiveness and pluralism.

### ***Pluralistic Insight***

The second tenet in McCray and Beachum's (2014) framework is pluralistic insight, which deals with educators' attitudes towards students. With pluralistic insight, dominant cultural norms are challenged, and deficit thinking is negated (Beachum & McCray, 2011). Eck (2006) presented four points to deepen pluralistic insight: (a) engage and interact with diversity; (b) seek understanding with those who are different; (c) be trustworthy and reliable; and (d) be open. School leaders with pluralistic insight place high priority on developing relationships with those of different cultures, whether they are within or external to their school community (Shweder, 2000). In the same context, McCray and Beachum (2014) argued that culturally relevant leaders with pluralistic insight actively support both educators and students to develop respect and appreciation for all. Culturally relevant leaders should assist people in the organization to understand themselves and their students and advocate for an educational attitude that affirms student and colleague diversity. By doing so, culturally relevant leaders "incorporate and enhance true ideals of social justice and democracy" (McCray & Beachum, 2011, p. 32).

### ***Reflexive Practice***

The third tenet in McCray and Beachum's (2014) framework is reflexive practice. "Reflexive practice is a form of educational praxis that is oriented toward change agency" (McCray & Beachum, 2011, p. 32). This practice is centered on the act of thinking about one's actions and engaging in a process of continuous learning and self-improvement (Cunliffe, 2009; Giroux, 1988; Schön, 1983). Matthews and Jessel (1998) spoke about

reflective practice moving beyond reflection, which focuses on thinking about various verbal and nonverbal feelings and thoughts to consider the reality of an individual's experiences in the world and his or her position to those experiences. With reflexivity, individuals are attentive to and conscious of their social and intellectual standing in situations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This consciousness then allows individuals to extend their understanding and work toward self-improvement considering awareness (Matthews & Jessel, 1998). McCray and Beachum (2014) defined the tenet of reflexive practices as leaders "engag[ing] in both practice and reflection upon what is morally right and equitable in their schools" (p. 407). Culturally relevant leaders encourage individuals to learn to be cognizant of their values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and actions prior to enacting practices and policies (Schein, 1983; Senge, 1999; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Reflexive practice overtly opposes the stigmatization and stereotyping of students and communities to promote a bias toward action. Milner (2006) described a similar idea as relational reflection. In relational reflection, teachers "think inherently about their own perspectives, beliefs, and life worlds in conjunction with, comparison with and contrast to those of their students and their students' communities and worlds" (p. 84). In addition, Milner (2006) provided three guiding questions for educators to prompt relational reflection:

- (1) Why do I believe what I believe?
  - (2) How do my thoughts and beliefs influence my curriculum and teaching [managing and disciplining] students of color? and
  - (3) What do I need to change in order to better meet the needs of all my students?
- (p. 84)

Taken together, liberatory consciousness, pluralistic insight, and reflexive practice encompass the components of culturally relevant leadership. As a framework and process, it starts with liberatory consciousness, which encourages philosophical/ideological changes,

leads to pluralistic insight, which is attitudinal in nature, and finally results in reflexive practice, which is a change in the way things are done in the school. To be a culturally relevant leader, one must encompass each tenet in order to reach a transformation toward equitable educational outcomes. Expansion on how the culturally relevant leader can serve as an instructional leader is provided in the following section.

### **Principal as Instructional Leader**

As stated previously, the higher expectations for student achievement by both state and federal accountability systems increased the pressure for principals and their role to evolve. Because of the evolving role, educational researchers and theorists have extended their views of principals to carry the role of an instructional leader. An instructional leader is one who builds communities of learners through collaboration and sharing leadership throughout the building. As principals shift to instructional leaders, it is hoped that the school focus and principal role will be centered explicitly on student learning and quality instruction. This increased sense of public accountability has revamped research efforts about leadership that can improve and empower student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) as well as create a new definition for instructional leadership (Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni, 1992).

The idea of building learning communities is a major condition in which the principal can serve as an instructional leader within their school. The term learning community is explained by McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) as a group that collaborates around a united vision and learns together in order to take responsibility for student learning. This community is described as one that “develops shared language about their practice and commits to high-quality intellectual work for their students” (p. 7). The shift in the learning community goes

from the principal and the teachers focusing on the teaching to what the students are learning (Wellman & Lipton, 2004). This adds value to student achievement and the principal, as the instructional leader is charged with guiding this change (Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Schmoker, 2006).

Behind this shift have been advocates to move “from leadership of a professional community with a focus on teaching to leadership of a professional community with a focus on learning” (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008, p. 2). In this instance, the role of the principal is redefined as the primary learner in a community of learners who work together and collaborate to improve the learning for all. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (Warger et al., 2001) endorsed making student and adult learning the priority by creating a culture of continuous learning for adults which is focused on improvement in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Levine, 2005; Schmoker, 2006).

When building a culture for collaboration, Wagner and DiPaola (2011) noted that instructional leaders are “creating and sustaining the conditions for continuous adult learning for both teachers and members of the community” (p. 380). The authors purposely stressed that all leadership practice should be analyzed through the lens of how to promote focused, collaborative learning. This type of emphasis is focused on improving student learning by building the capacity of the adults in the schools through structured learning communities.

Leaders serve as strong instructional leaders when there is a focus on learner-centered leadership, which has grown from the charge for building communities of learning. Learner-centered leadership considers the influence of teaching on student learning (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). It is divided into two categories: behavioral and organizational. Behaviors that characterize learner-centered leaders are modeling, monitoring, and dialogue. Teachers say

they value and expect these types of behaviors from an effective leader. Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005) explained the organizational aspects as the structures and systems that the leaders design and deploy to ensure that the focus stays on student learning and that it is sustainable. Learner-centered leadership is directly aligned to Lambert's (2003) characteristics of leadership capacity, which are further discussed in the next section.

The principal's role of leading teachers to achieve results with higher standards requires a new mindset for thinking about leadership practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This learner-centered collaboration leads to new ways of working together and new thinking about student learning that employs instructional leaders to think about how they work with teachers. By creating this type of collaboration, classroom instruction and school culture and climate can be powerfully influenced (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Copland, 2003; Donaldson, 2001; Hoy et al., 2006).

A final condition of instructional leadership is leveraging capacity or shared leadership. Researchers have declared that instructional leadership is more effective if the leadership is shared or distributed (Elmore, 2000; King, 2002; Spillane et al., 2004). Sharing leadership, creating cultures of inquiry, and building an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning are the sole responsibilities of the instructional leader and are key to implementing successful initiatives.

Spillane et al. (2003) explained that understanding the role in which different forms of capital play in the construction of shared leadership will assist principals to identify the mechanics favorable to supporting professional learning communities that will bring change to schools. Spillane and a team of researchers examined the construction of leadership through a process in which followers defined others as leaders, based on capital. For

example, human capital includes skills, knowledge, and expertise; cultural capital defines ways of being; social capital focuses on networks and relations of trust; and economic capital describes material resources. In their study of 84 teachers in eight schools, Spillane et al. (2003) determined that leadership was owned by a variety of people in the schools. They noted that the most important capital for all leaders, especially principals, was cultural capital. Understanding capital and the distribution of leadership provides the principal with the knowledge to create cultures of inquiry in which data are at the center of decision making.

Lambert (2003) identified three developmental phases that a principal goes through to build leadership capacity: (a) The instructive phase, which pertains to the principal's behavior as a teacher, sponsor, and director; (b) the transitional phase, which is associated with the principal acting as a guide or coach; and (c) the high leadership capacity phase, which is understood as the principal walking in the role of colleague, critical friend, and mentor. Lambert's study has reflective implications for schools that should be taken into consideration when discussing instructional leadership and building capacity. Within this context, leadership capacity means broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership (Lambert, 1998; 2003) and a way of understanding sustainable school improvement.

Schools that are dependent on a single leader, the principal, are vulnerable when that individual leaves. If a principal focuses on building leadership capacity, when and if the principal leaves, the organization continues to learn (Copland, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002a; Senge, 1999). The capacity of shared leadership or distributed leadership increases the sustainability of the learning communities. Building leadership capacity in the school



encourages the development of sustainable structures to make instructional decisions independent of a role-based leadership (Copland, 2003; Donaldson, 2001; Marzano et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Leithwood et al. (1999) extended the concept by linking instructional leadership to transformational leadership because it “aspires more generally to increase members’ efforts on behalf of the organization, as well as develop more skilled practice” (p. 20).

The components and conditions of instructional leadership described above require the principal to take a much more active role and increase ownership of instructional practices and leadership in innovative ways. To serve as an instructional leader, the role of the principal honors and maintains the following qualities: collaboration, problem solving, decision making, professional learning, conversations, vision/purpose and coherence, information and inquiry, relationships, and student performance (Fullan, 1993; Glickman, 1993; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002b; Lambert 1998, 2003; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Schmoker, 1996). Instructional leadership provides clarity, opportunities to develop, improve, establish goals, and align vision with practices. Schools need instructional leaders for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, schools need instructional leaders for the learning and growth of students. When the principal serves as an instructional leader, they have direct impacts on the culture, student achievement, and support for teachers within a school.

### **Instructional Leadership and School Culture**

As the front-line leaders within schools, principals, in their role as an instructional leader, play an important part in developing and maintaining the culture of a school. Student success in learning and staff success in teaching can be directly impacted by the culture that

is developed by the instructional leader (Bulach, 2008; Leonard, 1999; Taylor & Gordon, 2015). School culture is used to describe the unique working conditions inside organizations. Organizational culture represents the traditions, rituals, shared norms, and assumptions within the school (Schein, 2004). Each of these beliefs is adopted over time and provides a distinct character to the overall school.

In effective school cultures, teachers and principals share norms of collegiality and achievement, a clear sense of the school's goals, and high expectations for all students. The power of school culture recognizes that the beliefs and actions of its members move the school either toward greater effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; Stolp & Smith, 1995). Since leadership and culture are intimately linked, it is believed that leaders can develop, influence, and manage school cultures through their practices (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Furthermore, leaders' actions are central to the development of a school culture that is conducive to high levels of achievement and learning (Deal & Peterson, 1993). Principals who shape school cultures that support educational excellence for all students are often described as "visionary" or "transformational" leaders (Kirby & Paradise, 1992; Sashkin & Sashkin, 1990; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993). Instructional leaders should strive to make decisions that create a positive and collaborative culture in efforts to be transformational with their practices.

A collaborative culture is the foundation upon which a professional learning community rests. Such a culture is a vital ingredient for long-term, continuous school improvement (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Collaborative school cultures have been presented as the best setting for learning for both teachers and students (Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). Schools that have high levels of collaboration among staff tend to promote higher behavioral

and academic standards (Bettini et al., 2016). As mentioned above, instructional leaders have a direct role in creating structures that aid collaboration and continuous learning through professional learning communities (PLCs). Within these PLCs, instructional leaders are supportive, and shared leadership is distributed. Principals are democratically sharing the power, authority, and decision making with their teachers. There are shared visions and values at the heart of the work and a collective application of learning. The collaboration makes staff feel supported and valued, which contributes to the culture within a school. A study by Moller and Pankake (2013) found that schools' readiness to develop PLCs had a high level of trust and communication between the teachers and the principals. This reiterates the idea that instructional leaders can foster trust, communication, and collaboration to impact the culture within their school.

School culture can also be a predictor of school effectiveness. As Heck and Marcoulides (1996) found, school performance can be determined from knowledge of the school's culture. This study further suggests that principals who foster a school culture of innovation and risk taking, encourage teacher participation in decision-making, and provide significant time for collaboration have higher levels of student achievement. This is exactly what PLCs stand for within school contexts if the instructional leader sets them up intentionally.

Another way in which instructional leaders impact school culture is through their vision, beliefs, and actions. All stakeholders within a school need to understand their leader's vision for the school, in order to understand and fully believe in that vision. A culture of transparency and openness helps parents, students, and staff to support their school leaders. Leaders can create this transparency by communicating their goals and beliefs (Peterson &

Deal, 1998). A culture that is transparent and involves the community fosters relationships that prove to be beneficial (Schwartz, 2014). One of the best ways that instructional leaders can promote transparency is by being a visible member of the school population. Simply being visible in common areas of the school, attending extra-curricular events, and visiting students and teachers in the classroom creates a culture of trust that inspires students and staff to view principals as more than just enforcers of rules (Westerberg, 2016). Visibility increases credibility and trust between staff members and the instructional leader. Being visible, engaging with the school community, and providing a clear vision creates a level of transparency that builds a positive school culture.

### **Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement**

The school principal is one of the consistent symbols of school leadership and is accountable for all school results (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). Much literature has been written to expand upon the claims that the leadership practices of principals directly correlate to positive student achievement (Nason, 2011; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leithwood et al. (2004) used a meta-analysis as a means of reviewing the predominant literature surrounding relationships among principal leadership and learning. In the findings, Leithwood et al. claimed that principal leadership is second only to classroom instruction in terms of impacting positive student achievement.

Relative to this claim, there must be consideration of the aspects of leadership practices that correlate to positive student achievement. Traditionally, principals have been seen as the budget balancers, disciplinarians, cafeteria managers, and transportation facilitators (Usdan et al., 2000). Today, principals are expected to manage all these operations as well as setting a vision, assessing academic programs, and evaluating and

leading teachers, all while monitoring student results (Leithwood et al., 2006). Cross and Rice (2000) affirmed these aspects by stating “where schools are successful, one will find a principal who places academics first and who knows how to motivate staff and teachers” (p. 62).

Arguments have been made that for principals to truly impact student achievement, a vision of academic success with a high level of commitment from school leaders is a necessity (Cross & Rice, 2000). Alongside this claim are the aspects of high expectations of student progress, trust, effective communication, and the ability to engage in collaborative relationships with faculty and families, which must be an active practice for positive effects to take place (Cross & Rice, 2000). Usdan et al. (2000) proposed that today’s principals must have a firm grasp on instruction and content, collaborate with teachers and the community, utilize data as a means of furthering student interventions, and provide the shared vision for continued student achievement. They reported that all practices “must be in service of student learning” in order to have any impact on student achievement (Usdan et al., 2000, p. 4).

Good instruction is the foundation of any successful school. With quality instruction, student achievement rises. Effective instructional leaders boost teaching through avenues such as conducting instructional conferences, providing staff development, and monitoring instruction in the classroom. University of Washington researchers who observed urban schools that have made some progress in improving student learning noticed that leaders within those schools sought “to give substantive feedback to teachers and retain a connection with what was happening in classrooms,” with practices that included “informal classroom observations, targeted learning walkthroughs, and leading and participating in professional

development during grade-level and content-area meetings, whole staff meetings, or in classrooms with teachers” (Portin et al., 2009, p. 67).

Blasé and Blasé (2004) talked about instructional conferences in which principals observe teachers teaching and capitalize on the opportunity to provide feedback. During these conferences, instructional suggestions are made, feedback is given, and leaders model behaviors and solicit advice. These types of conferences not only foster the relationship between teachers and the principal, but also allow the principal to be seen with an active role in the instruction that takes place in the building. These conferences help principals gain confidence and “help them provide support for teachers working toward instructional improvement” (p. 22). Pajak (2000) described classroom observation and conferencing as two important approaches to improving classroom instruction. Facilitating an open-ended conference structure, leaders can incorporate reflective thinking structures that promote ownership for teachers to implement instructional goals and strategies.

Instructional leaders can impact student achievement using intentional and targeted professional development for teachers. Professional development that is purposeful and aligned with the building’s visions, goals, and instructional practices will increase teachers’ growth, which ultimately impacts students’ learning (Elmore, 2000). In a meta-analysis of 27 research studies aimed to understand the importance of leadership dimensions in relation to student outcomes, Robinson (2007) found that the leadership dimensions of “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” was the most predictive of positive student outcomes (p. 667). Hallinger (2005) argued that “instructional leaders have the strongest influence on student achievement through shaping the school’s learning-focused mission and aligning the school’s structures and climate to serve that mission” (p. 229). In

another empirical study, May and Supovitz (2011) studied leadership by examining the perceptions of 721 teachers and student achievement data from 11,397 students across 38 elementary and middle schools. In their study, they found that principals affected achievement through faculty-wide efforts such as professional development and individualized efforts such as conferring with teachers on high leverage instructional strategies as an important link to improving instruction.

Fullan (2006) claimed that in order to positively affect student achievement, principals must be the catalyst for developing and sustaining other systematic components over time. It is not enough to simply include instructional practices within the role. Instead, a development of the school culture, including positive relationships with teachers and the right perception of their responsibility as leaders, is required (Fullan, 2006). Principals need to be cognizant of their role in developing the capacity of others through instructional leadership:

What this means is quite specific: the main mark of a school principal at the end of his or her tenure is not just the impact on the bottom line of student achievement, but also, equally, how many good leaders they leave behind who can go even further. (Fullan, 2006, p. 6)

The Minnesota-Toronto study examined multiple schools and found that “compared with lower-achieving schools, higher-achieving schools provided all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions.” One explanation, according to researchers, is that principals willing to share leadership benefit from the “collective knowledge and wisdom” in their school communities (p. 35). When leadership is built into other staff members, staff buy-in increases and academic initiatives are better rolled out.

## **Instructional Leadership and Teacher Support**

Novice teachers find the early years of teaching filled with challenges that tend to lead to higher teacher turnover (Redding & Henry, 2018). High stakes testing highlights the demands policymakers and school leaders place on teachers (Reeves et al., 2017) which is an added challenge novice teachers experience in their first year. Learmond's (2017) qualitative research study showed that novice teachers are willing to meet the educational demands but crave the instructional support in their initial career stages in order to be effective educators. Instructional leaders play a critical role in the support provided for their teachers.

A report by the Public Education Network (2003) highlighted the importance of the principal's role in making a teacher's first year successful. In the report, new teachers described their experiences and listed several attributes and behaviors of principals that made a difference to their teaching practices. Teachers described that when principals were accessible and fostered an environment to ask questions and discuss problems, they felt more supported through the guidance, assistance, and solutions offered. "Principals should be accessible, not just someone in the building. ... They should be more of a sounding board for teachers" (DePaul, 2000, p. 16). McKerrow (1998) affirmed this claim in a survey of new teachers. The results were similar to the report by the Public Education Network (2003); teachers wanted to be listened to and made to feel successful as they worked to refine their teaching practices and manage their classrooms.

Researchers at the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers have also studied factors influencing new teachers' sense of support and morale. Through their findings, they identified consistent areas which could be addressed by principals in order to better support novice teachers. Schedules that promote collaboration, team planning, and frequent



observations were a few consistent findings that relate to other recommendations from the literature (Johnson & Uline, 2001). Instructional leaders need to provide structures that honor these findings in order to support and retain their teachers. When the principal serves as an instructional leader and shares the capacity of leadership, collaboration is at the center of the work (Lambert, 2003). Aside from collaborative structures, research has proven that instructional leaders can best support novice teachers by providing meaningful professional development (Johnson & Uline, 2005; McInnis, 2009).

Experiencing supportive professional development that helps teachers to overcome barriers to meet the diverse needs of their students is vital to the success of novice teachers (Kraft et al., 2018). Many new teachers express concern that they are not well prepared to provide effective instruction to all students in their diverse classrooms (Johnson & Uline, 2005). To address this issue, on-the-job training related to working with students from a variety of cultures could increase effectiveness and feeling of support and increase their satisfaction with teaching. When professional development is centered on individual teacher needs, growth happens much more rapidly, and teachers feel that they are supported in ways to become better. Davis and Bloom (1998) expanded upon principal support that is focused on helping the new teacher focus his/her professional growth activities. “Inservice is best when it is relevant to day-to-day practices” (p. 78). Similarly, Goodwin and Babo (2014) highlighted struggles that new teachers feel. A major area of concern in their findings was an unsupportive work environment. New teachers felt as though administrators ignored them and their needs and did not provide the support, guidance, or training necessary to be effective. Research by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) supported this claim: “most new teachers are given little professional support, feedback or demonstration of what it

takes to help their students succeed” (p. 2). Throughout the literature, it is recommended instructional leaders can address these issues by being intentional about the type of professional development they offer for their teachers.

Teacher support is a key factor in the success of a school, and it is the responsibility of the instructional leader to foster supportive structures for their teachers. Instructional leaders can intentionally build leadership capacity, create collaborative work structures, and provide meaningful professional learning that can contribute to the overall success and sense of support novice teachers obtain.

Instructional improvement is a vital aspect of basic school improvement initiatives. It is a goal worth seeking and when achieved, results in both students and teachers making a more enriching learning environment. In order to achieve this goal, the role of the principal needs to be redefined. Principals should take on the role of instructional leaders where they shift their focus from managerial and bureaucratic tasks to more focused efforts toward improved teaching and learning. As school principals take on the role of instructional leaders, schools will flourish in steps toward academic excellence and lasting change.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature review focused on three main areas of effective teachers and teacher retention. Teacher preparation needs practice-based teacher preparation with an emphasis on understanding the role of culture and principals who serve as instructional leaders. There is a gap in the literature to holistically understand how these components work together. Although the literature indicated that teacher preparation and instructional leadership contribute to teacher retention, the literature lacks specific details about how these

components contribute to the experiences to novice teachers and thus their decision to stay in the profession.

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand novice teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban elementary school setting. The unit of analysis was the preparation of pre-service teachers' education experiences. This study sought to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives, by answering the following research questions:

1. What stories do novice teachers tell about their preparedness to teach in an urban school?
  - a. How do novice teachers describe their preparation for teaching in urban schools?
  - b. What professional practices and experiences do novice teachers perceive as being instrumental to the preparedness to teach within an urban school?
  - c. How are teacher preparation programs preparing teachers for the challenges of teaching in an urban school?

Chapter 2 identifies the “how” of the study: the methodology and describes in detail the research design and the procedures of the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

New teachers are leaving the profession at a high rate (Fontaine et al., 2012; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Karsenti & Collin, 2013). It is estimated that 41% of teachers in the United States leave their jobs within five years (United Federation of Teachers Research Department, 2012). Urban schools that have more demanding and difficult conditions are likely to have a shortage of qualified teachers (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2004; See et al., 2020). According to Gallant and Riley (2014), “early career exit from teaching has reached epidemic proportions” (p. 263). These high rates of attrition are not only costly to the school system, but more importantly, they have negative effects on student achievement and overall morale (Durden et al., 2014; Hollins, 2015; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012; Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

Several studies have shown that novice teachers feel less confident and prepared due to the lack of understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and the lack of involvement with a diverse student population (Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Lankford et al., 2002; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). New teachers are underprepared for the pressure their profession places on them (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Kearney, 2014). The beliefs that pre-service teachers have about teaching are shaped by their preparation programs, which affects their transition into the profession (Beltman et al., 2015; Charteris & Dargusch, 2018; Tarman, 2012; Zhao & Zhang, 2017). Milner (2008) stated that teacher preparation programs have historically not focused on the challenges and possibilities of pre-service teacher education for urban schools. Traditionally, pre-service teacher education is taught with the assumption that students live within a suburban context. Darling-Hammond

(2010) argued that pre-service teachers need specific preparation and experiences in social behavior and interactions within urban school settings, specifically through culturally relevant pedagogy beliefs and practices.

The shortage of prepared and quality educators contributes to high turnover and has long term effects on our families, communities, and overall student achievement within the urban core. This study is significant because it can offer results that will allow pre-service preparation programs to refine the way in which we are preparing our teachers to teach in urban schools. This study will help reveal the preparation experiences that novice teachers have had to teach in urban schools.

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand novice teachers' preparation for teaching in an urban elementary school setting. I wanted to understand novice elementary teachers' perceptions of preparedness, the units of analysis, through the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they have acquired during their pre-service education to be successful to teach diverse populations of students. I chose to study elementary teachers' perceptions because of my work as an elementary instructional coach as well as because there is variability in teacher preparation programs for elementary teachers.

In order to fully understand the participants' experiences and perspectives, one open-ended research question guided this study, with three sub-questions.

1. What stories do novice teachers tell about their preparedness to teach in an urban school?
  - a. How do novice teachers describe their preparation for teaching in urban schools?

- b. What professional practices and experiences do novice teachers perceive as being instrumental to the preparedness to teach within an urban school?
- c. How are teacher preparation programs preparing teachers for the challenges of teaching in an urban school?

This chapter contains a thorough description of the methods I used in my research. I begin with a rationale for the selection of qualitative research and the theoretical traditions or design elements of case study and narrative, followed by the role of the researcher. The design of the study includes sample selection, participants, data sources, and data analysis process. Then I discuss the limitations of the study, validity and reliability, as well as ethical considerations. To fully understand and appreciate the methods utilized in my study, I turn to the rationale for qualitative research which allowed me to seek better understanding of the experiences of novice teachers to successfully teach within urban schools.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). The rationale for using a qualitative approach in this research was to explore and describe the experiences and preparation novice teachers have had to work in urban schools. Creswell (2018) stated, “Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (p. 15). This study was grounded in the understanding I wanted to obtain from novice teachers’ preparation experiences to teach in urban schools in the Midwest.

The existing literature and research is grounded in quantitative research that regards teachers who teach within the inner city school environments (Brown & Wynn, 2007). There

is a lack of qualitative research studies that examines novice teachers' experiences and level of preparedness as they enter inner city school environments (Claeys, 2011; Espinoza et al., 2018; Gomes, 2017). This gap in literature needs to be addressed and examined due to the role teachers and schools play in the education of low-income urban students. Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research captures human experiences by talking to participants and outlining their perspectives. This type of insight can serve as a starting point for new research that could further support and expand the findings. The results of this study will fill the existing gap in literature and could be used to stimulate self-reflection for administrators of pre-service programs, teachers within the field, and even building leaders or principals to understand how to best support their staff. The research design of a narrative case study is valuable in developing theory, interventions, and evaluating programs.

### **Case Study**

The major technique for this study was case study methodology, which is one of the first types of research to be used in the field of qualitative research. The case-study method was first introduced into social science by Frederic Le Play in 1829 in his studies of family budgets (Singh, 2015). Yin (2014) asserted, "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). Stake (1995) defined an instrumental case study as an approach to use a particular case to gain a broader appreciation or understanding of an issue or phenomenon. An instrumental case study occurs when understanding the case is needed in order to understand the bigger research question at hand (Stake 2005). Stake (2005) also explained that a collective case study is the selection of multiple cases in an instrumental case study.

Therefore, in alignment with Stakes' point of view, this study utilized a collective case study design. Collective case study "involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases that can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or sub-cases embedded within" (Merriam, 2009, p. 49). Each individual novice teacher I interviewed served as a single case within a collective case study. By utilizing each individual case within a collective case study, I had the ability to look at cases that were located within a larger case (Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions, which is in alignment with my research questions. I asked how and why questions which allowed my participants to freely express their experiences drawing on their personal lived experiences. This study was appropriate for a case study design because the aim was to uncover personal experiences that were relevant to the phenomenon of preparation experiences for novice teachers.

In addition, Yin (2014) suggested that there are six sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. This study included questionnaires through a survey and semi-structured interviews to restory the experiences of novice teachers' preparation. Each individual was an embedded case within the larger case of teacher preparation. I was able to utilize these data sources to make meaning of the collective experiences of my participants.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is based on the premise that humans come to understand their own lives and the world around them through story (Andrews et al., 2008). Narrative inquiry involves the gathering of these stories and focuses on the meanings people assign to their



experiences (Josselson, 2007). Polkinghorne (1988) viewed narratives as the way we render meaning to our existence and suggested that stories are not gathered to determine if events really happened, rather for the meaning people assign to these events. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggested that in narrative inquiry it is the researcher's desire to "understand rather than control and predict" (p. 30). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claimed to be the first to use the term "narrative inquiry." They had an interest in the lived experiences of teachers and realized the importance of narrative inquiry as a research methodology for educators. Because teaching and educational studies are a form of experience, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding these experiences.

Narrative inquiry centers the stories of participants in order to understand their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explained the skills and knowledge of education professionals as "teachers' personal practical knowledge" (p. 25). In my research, teachers' stories provided perspective on their personal practical knowledge. Webster and Mertova (2007) suggested also that narratives give us a better way of understanding teaching and learning. Moen (2006) noted that narratives make it possible to study teachers in their environment and within their cultural and institutional settings. The use of narrative inquiry allowed me to tell novice teachers' stories to better gain understanding of their lived experiences in regard to their preparation experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) categorize the types of stories teachers tell into three types: sacred, cover and secret stories. The "sacred stories" are the official stated perspectives and beliefs about the positions of the school policies, curricular resources, and even the way in which communication is delivered. This characterized theory-driven view of practice shared by practitioners, policy makers, and

theoreticians is the quality of a sacred story (Crites, 1971). Then there is a more personal but realistic type of a story, “cover stories.” These stories are told by teachers to other professionals, parents, administrators, or even researchers. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explained that these stories are told when teachers move outside of their classroom walls and into the out-of-classroom knowledge landscape. These stories are protected and are grounded in what it is they want to represent. Finally, there are “secret stories,” which are the most personal and guarded types of stories teachers will tell. These types of stories are the real experiences of the teacher and students inside the classroom. Told only to trusted individuals and within safe contexts, often known as the “teacher lounge talk,” these stories do not always tend to be politically correct. Clandinin (2012) wrote that narrative researchers embrace the assumption that story is fundamental to explaining human experiences. For this research, it was fundamental to understanding the different types of stories which teachers told and how that contributed to their preparation experiences to teach in inner city schools.

### **Role of Researcher**

I have spent many years teaching and serving as an instructional coach in urban schools. My experiences in this context inspired me to conduct this research in order to gain better understanding and contribute to the solution of creating more prepared educators to teach and stay teaching in urban schools. Teachers do not stay in urban schools when they are unprepared to teach diverse students, and I have seen first-hand how detrimental it is for our students, families, and school community when teachers leave year after year. Because of how personal this research is to me, I knew that I had to acknowledge my biases, values, and experiences that I brought into this research. I had to stay aware of these biases and name them up front throughout the process of this study (Creswell, 2018).

As the researcher, I understand the importance of my role. Patton (2015) explained the role of the researcher, which is “to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusion offered” (p. 51). As I conducted this research, I developed a sense of trustworthiness for the research taking place. I utilized multiple data sources to ensure this type of credibility and data dependability (Yin, 2014). I built rapport and trust with the novice teachers I interviewed to build that trustworthiness as well. I was transparent by explaining the study and the overall purpose of the study. I also established rapport with my interviewees by explaining how the interview would be conducted. During my interviews, I asked open-ended questions that did not lead the participants to any answers. This was an additional step that helped to eliminate research bias.

## **Design of Study**

### **Setting**

This narrative collective case study took place within the boundaries of an urban school district in the Midwest. I assigned the school district a pseudonym, Cherry Hill District. This school district aligns with Milner’s (2012) definition of urban emergent, since it is situated within a large city and has a scarcity of resources and faces many challenges of larger city school districts. I chose this school district because it is within the urban core and has a large sample of novice teachers. However, the stress of COVID-19 led Cherry Hill School District to deny access to their teachers, as they wanted to respect their teachers’ time and did not want to involve them in a research study. After being denied access to teachers in the Cherry Hill School District, I reached out to multiple public, open-enrollment charter

schools within the Cherry Hill School District boundaries, as this would provide access to teachers in schools with similar student populations as those within the Cherry Hill School District. Thus, the study was conducted within the same urban school system as originally intended, but with participants from two urban charter schools rather than district schools. Each charter school was assigned a pseudonym, Brentwood and Stonecrest. I originally anticipated that face-to-face interviews would be conducted in school buildings; however, due to the preferences of the participants, I did not conduct any interviews in school environments. Information about the interviews and locations is further detailed in the following sections.

### **Sampling Procedures and Participants**

Participants of qualitative research are chosen purposefully. Participants are chosen based upon the researchers' purpose of the study (Lodico et al., 2010), which is referred to as purposeful sampling. Criteria-based selection allows the researcher to choose participants with experience in the subject being studied who can offer the most information. Further, criteria-based sampling allows the researcher to pick a sample that will provide pertinent information to the study (Merriam, 2009). To begin selecting participants, criteria must be established. The criteria for the participants for this study were that they had to be novice elementary teachers, meaning one to three years of experience and must be working in a public urban school located within the boundaries of the Cherry Hill School District.

I began by obtaining consent to conduct the study by reaching out to the principals of the charter schools within the Cherry School district boundaries (see Appendix A). Once permission was granted, I worked with the schools' principals to identify participants for the study through purposeful sampling. I asked the principals of the schools to send an email to

all novice teachers inviting them to participate in the study (see email scripts in Appendix B). In this email there was a link to the survey (see survey in Appendix C). At the end of the survey there was a question asking if the respondents were willing to advance to the next phase of the study. Based upon the survey results, I then identified six participants who were willing to advance to the next phase, with whom I then conducted individual interviews. The final six participants were selected for a sample that was most representative of the demographics of the larger sample (all novice teachers). This sample size allowed me to establish a close interaction and relationship with my participants.

### **Data Sources**

Narrative researchers may utilize multiple different approaches of data collection. I collected qualitative data from four different sources: surveys, interviews, field notes, and public websites. The following paragraphs describe the strategies for collecting each type of information and the purpose each served in the final narrative analysis.

#### **Survey**

Survey research is defined as “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 160). This type of research allows for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilize various methods of instrumentation. Survey research can use quantitative research strategies (e.g., using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research strategies (e.g., using open-ended questions), or both strategies (i.e., mixed methods). Because they are often used to describe and explore human behavior, surveys are frequently used in social and psychological research (Singleton & Straits, 2009).

I used the survey to sample the full population of all novice teachers within the boundaries of an urban school system in the Midwest. The survey was developed using Qualtrics, and all data were stored in the UMKC password-protected Qualtrics account. Only the researcher and the research advisor had access to the Qualtrics survey and reports. More details about storing survey reports are given in subsequent sections. Since the survey data were collected anonymously and not face-to-face, “the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document, and the **principal risk** would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality” (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2021), signed informed consent was not obtained from survey participants. Instead, the survey began with an introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and the process for providing consent to participate via assent. A copy of this introduction can be found with the survey in Appendix C. In the survey, I included nine multiple choice questions and six open-ended questions which aimed to reveal opinions, experiences, narratives, or accounts about how the novice teachers have been prepared to teach in an inner city school. I asked the principals of the schools to send an email to all novice teachers, with a link to the Qualtrics survey. The email included the purpose of the study, potential risks, and an explanation of how data would be used. A copy of the email script can be found in Appendix B. At the end of the survey, I included a question asking if they wanted to go on to the next phase of the study. If they answered yes, they filled out their contact information, which helped me trace my respondents and to identify the responses and survey data for those who were willing to be participants. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

## **Interviews**

Interviews are a valuable asset in qualitative research. According to deMarrais (2004), an interview is a process in which a researcher and participants engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study. The purpose of interviewing is to gain insight on others' perspectives and see the world through what participants tell the researcher. "We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, 2015, p. 341). Merriam (1998) also described interviews as being conversations with the purpose of obtaining information from participants about their experiences.

Interview data were important for me to gain insight and understanding of teachers' perspectives in regard to their preparation. Creswell and Poth (2018) note this impact as they describe qualitative interviews as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. 164).

Narrative researchers expand upon the interview process by understanding that interviews can transform their participants into narrators who make meaning of their experiences in a unique and empowering manner. As Chase (2008) explained, we as researchers must think about interviewees as narrators with their own stories to tell rather than solely thinking of them as answering the researcher's questions. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described the way in which teachers respond to the interview questions could reveal a way in which they express their "cover stories" to reveal their personal practical knowledge. Teachers may also adjust their stories as they feel comfortable and could reveal perspectives on their "secret stories." Narratives were gathered from the novice teachers through the use of semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately 30 to 90 minutes in length.

The location of the interview was determined by where the participant felt most comfortable. As the researcher, I offered a few locations such as my office, their classroom, or a public meeting place. This allowed them to have ownership of the choice to select a location that was most comfortable and safe for them. Before conducting the interview, it was essential to build rapport with each participant. I did this by asking each participant to sign the consent form (see Appendix D). I also built rapport by asking each participant to select a pseudonym for use in all data collection. The list of pseudonyms was kept in an Excel document and stored in a secured UMKC Box file where only the primary researcher had access to the document. Additionally, to further protect the confidentiality of all participants, all interview files were saved under the respective pseudonym.

According to deMarrais (2004) and Patton (2015), an interview guide should be developed and aligned with the research questions. This interview guide serves to help guide the direction of the interviews. My interview guide (see Appendix E) enabled me to follow a semi-structured format that allowed for a more conversational feel. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) explained how the semi-structured interview allows more flexibility in the format. “The 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” (p. 124).

The questions were all open-ended and solely related to my research questions and focused on the participants’ pre-service preparation experiences. In order to catch the essence of the participants’ experiences and really see the types of stories they told in regard to their preparation, I asked a variety of questions ranging from hypothetical, ideal position, and



interpretive questions (Merriam, 1998). I utilized probing questions to elicit greater detail or elaboration from the participants. The interview questions, also contained in Appendix E, are as follows:

1. Describe your pre-service experiences in regard to teacher preparation?
2. What was the most impactful piece of your preparation experience?
3. How did your pre-service experiences prepare you to teach in urban settings?
4. What were some of the most powerful practices you learned in your pre-service experience?
  - a. What skills and knowledge did you learn that were most impactful when educating urban students?
5. How would you describe your preparation experiences with the communities surrounding urban schools?
6. What do you think the ideal pre-service program would be like?
7. What would you change about your pre-service program?
  - a. What experiences, knowledge and skills do you wish you had when it comes to educating urban youth?
8. How would you describe the educational needs of urban students?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your pre-service preparation?

The interview process allowed each participant to tell their personal story without imposing my beliefs or interpretation. I utilized the data from the survey, open-ended questions, and responses from their interview to restory, by compelling all of their data to one new story. I interviewed the participants twice. The first interview was an opportunity to

get to know who they are in terms of background, experiences, and positionality; these questions can be found in Appendix E. The second interview questions was based on my research questions and unit of analysis, as noted above and contained in Appendix E. There were also questions to clarify or gather additional details based on their background experiences and positionality. The second interview occurred no sooner than four weeks and no later and 12 weeks after the first interview.

### **Field Notes**

Collecting field notes through participant interviews in a shared practical setting is one of the primary tools of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Numerous narrative studies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; 1989; Hoffman, 1988; Kroma, 1983) have utilized field notes showing the power they can hold on telling the whole story of participants. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) expressed the importance of field notes to help the researcher make meaning of the story, as they are seen as an active reconstruction of the researcher's personal reactions and interpretations of data. Field notes were used during the interviews as a way for me to capture my initial reactions to the stories participants were telling. I also utilized field notes and journaling after the interviews were done, to process through the thoughts, biases, and ideas I have after analyzing the interview transcriptions. These field notes allowed me to make deeper connections with the stories participants told and to capture my personal interpretations and reactions to the stories.

### **Documents**

Moustakas (1994) asserted the value documents hold on enhancing interview data by helping to create “additional meaning and depth, and supplement depictions of the experience obtained from observations and interviews” (p. 49). Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

further explained the utilization of documents as being supplemental to the research and enhancing the interpretations of the overall concepts, ideas, and theories uncovered during the interviews.

I utilized official documents, which consist of documents that are designed for consumption by a specific audience or organization (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These types of official documents include handbooks, guides, or memos and are accessible and available to the general public (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I utilized official documents in the form of preparation program websites in order to learn more about the structure and philosophy and gain general background knowledge on participants' preparation program prior to their interview. The use of documents as a data source was important in structuring the methodology of this narrative case study. Incorporating documents assisted in illuminating the lived experiences of teachers and their preparation experiences and allowed me to address my research questions in a more comprehensive way.

### **Data Organization and Management**

It is crucial to consider the management and organization of the data for several reasons. First, management and organization of the data is an ethical issue. If data are mismanaged, there is a likelihood for breach of confidentiality of participants. Additionally, mismanaged data can lead to an issue of accuracy in interpretation and analysis of the overall study. In order to prevent any issues that could potentially result in mismanaged data, I employed specific strategies to ensure data were kept secure.

### ***Surveys***

The survey data were stored in the UMKC password-protected Qualtrics account. Only the researcher and the research advisor had access to the Qualtrics survey and reports.

The survey reports were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet, which was stored in a password-protected folder in UMKC Box. Only the researcher and research advisor had access to the Box folder. The data were also backed up onto an external hard drive in order to prevent any issues with data being lost. The external hard drive was kept in a file cabinet in the research advisor's office on the UMKC Volker campus, and the researcher and research advisor were the only ones with keys to access the cabinet.

### ***Interviews and Field Notes***

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. As indicated previously, all interview files (audio files and transcripts) were saved under the respective pseudonym and date. The interviews were recorded using a device specifically created for audio recording. When not in use, this device was kept in a locked cabinet. A third-party transcribing service was used, and the data were coded and maintained by the researcher. All files were stored in a password-protected folder in UMKC Box. Only the researcher and the research advisor had access to the Box folder. All of the interview data were backed up onto an external hard drive as well, which was also kept in a locked file cabinet. Field notes and journal entries were hand recorded and then typed into a document on a password-protected cloud drive. This helped to ensure the security of all data sources.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was informed by the theoretical traditions which were the foundation of this study. I primarily utilized the within-case and cross-case analysis to provide me with a process for engaging with the data as it became available. I also utilized the elements of narrative data analysis to ensure that I fully understood how the lives and experiences of my participants were woven into their responses to my interview questions.

Thematic coding was utilized to make meaning of the data and to assist me in restorying the data. Additional details about the data analysis are in the following sections.

### **Narrative Analysis**

Stories that are told by participants are the main focus of narrative analysis. Sociocultural and socio-linguistic represent the two descriptions of narrative analysis. The sociolinguistic aspect refers to the connection between language and society. The sociocultural analysis goes beyond the linguistic approach by also incorporating culture, socialization, and political elements of knowledge in the narrator's stories. This type of analysis can also be considered a "sociocultural approach" (Grbich, 2013, p. 221), wherein the researcher goes beyond the linguistic structure of the narrative to explore its political and social context and examine contrasting stories from multiple perspectives.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) viewed narrative inquiry through a three-dimensional lens that encompasses looking for interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation or place (physical and cultural context). The personal and social interaction occurs when the researcher analyzes the personal experiences of the person telling the story. Continuity refers to the researcher looking at the past and present actions of the storyteller when analyzing the story. And finally, in regard to the situation or place, the researcher looks for locations in the storyteller's setting that can provide more meaning to the overall narrative. Utilizing this approach allowed me to put the story together with a deeper level of meaning.

Given the fact that urban schools are diverse in nature, serving different types of cultural groups, and located in low-income communities, I found it important to combine the sociocultural approach (Grbich, 2013) with the three-dimensional approach described by

Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Utilizing an approach that analyzed the cultural, political, and socialization aspects of the stories were fundamental to this study's conceptual frameworks, given that the research is grounded in the critical race, social constructivism, and sociocultural theories.

I used thick, concrete descriptions to understand the preparation experience novice teachers have had and draw interpretations about meaning and the significance of surfaced themes (Patton, 2015). This data analysis process allowed me to ground the research in my personal experiences and feelings about the topic of the study.

To analyze the surveys and interviews, I utilized a process of enumerative content analysis (Miles et al., 2014). I started with the enumerative analysis by assigning descriptive codes throughout the transcribed interview and survey data. These codes were generated using my knowledge regarding what it means to be prepared to teach in an urban school setting. The descriptive codes were then clustered together to create interpretive codes. Finally, the interpretive codes were categorized to form broader themes (Grbich, 2013). As the themes blossom from the coding and supportive data, I was able to make connections between the themes in each data source as they related to my research questions. I was able to restore the data from the survey and open-ended questions with the in-depth interviews. The aim of the case study approach of the study was to conduct within case and cross-case analysis to identify common themes within the cases.

### **Within-case and Cross-case Analysis**

Within-case and cross-case analyses are processes which are specific to case study research. The first process was to construct an analysis of each case, and the second process focused on identifying common themes and patterns across the cases. The cases were

constructed using the three-dimensional process of narrative analysis as well. This step constituted the within-case analysis, which was related to how novice teachers spoke about their preparation experiences.

### ***Surveys***

I organized the survey data into a table by each participant's response, where I was able to easily see each response. Each participant's table was viewed as an individual case. An in-depth understanding of each single case allowed me to provide a detailed description of each case and the patterns and themes that surfaced from each one (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Next, I reviewed each individual case data and developed a code book based on the responses to help me develop broader themes within the data. I created a table for each research question and sifted through the data to group the findings which corresponded with each research question. Finally, I was able to conduct cross-case analyses between the individual cases to gain a deeper understanding of the novice teachers' experiences.

### ***Interviews***

Each interview was audio-taped and then transcribed verbatim. I coded each transcript line by line to develop broader themes. This allowed for fragments of the interview to be organized into a meaningful and cohesive continuum. The information was categorized and put into an Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. Next, I took each verbatim transcription and placed the information into a format that could be applied to answer the research questions, and then placed the answers to the questions in the context of the theoretical framework for this study. This was done in the form of multiple tables, one for each research question with its connections to the theoretical framework. Direct quotations from each interview were placed in the table and labeled according to the themes developed

in the previous step, which were directly related to the research questions. I specifically noted how each case had commonalities and differences as Stake (2013) directed. I also searched for attributes, patterns, codes, and themes that would help me clearly understand each case. From here I was able to look at each individual case and conduct a cross-case analysis between the interviews to find common themes. I then restoried the data from the surveys and interviews to identify common themes within cases. This allowed me to answer my research questions and provide readers a more holistic perspective and understanding. Once the analysis was complete, I represented the data by “telling the stories” of my participants through a narrative lens. The following section describes the limitations and ethical considerations of this study.

### **Limitations, Validity and Reliability, and Ethical Considerations**

#### **Limitations**

Creswell (2015) defined limitations as “potential weaknesses of the study” (p. 110). As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are several limitations to this qualitative study. The first and foremost limitation would be researcher bias. As a White middle class instructional coach interviewing novice teachers on their preparation experiences, there were issues of reflexivity, power, and privilege that must address be addressed. To do so, I utilized journaling during the data collection process to document my own feelings, reactions, and questions as I conducted the interviews. I also utilized member checks of the compiled data and stories to address researcher bias. During these member checks, respondents who participated in all phases of the study and data collection were asked to check and correct any misperceptions or biased findings that may exist. I did this by sending each individual



participant the data results via email and asked them to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

A second limitation of this study is that I had had previous relationships with four out of the six participants in different contexts. Given these past relationships with four of the participants, I made careful attempts to control my own potential biases by journaling during each phase of the study and utilizing member checking. I also consulted with my chair in attempts to maintain neutrality.

Another limitation of this study could be the accuracy of my participants' narratives. Participants had a variety of ideas, perceptions, and experiences when discussing their preparation experiences. This prior knowledge could impact the way they view and respond to my questions. To address this limitation, I reiterated the purpose at the beginning of the interview session. By doing so, it hopefully reinforced to the participants the low threat there was in being truthful and accurate when discussing their experiences. A final limitation could be the length of time that had passed since their teacher preparation experiences. To address this limitation, I specifically included a question to determine how long ago they completed their preparation experience.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of validity is sufficient to establish the reliability. Patton (2015) also stated that reliability is a consequence of the validity in a qualitative study. Validity and reliability can only be judged by the readers when the researcher presents a thorough and thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the participants' experiences as well as the design and methods decisions that occur throughout the research process.

The first way I checked and established validity in this study, was by describing in detail the participants, procedures, and context of the study during the duration of the study. This is known as “thick description” and allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

Member checking, mentioned above, was a way in which I solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. This was an interactive process between the participants and me, which is considered to be a critical technique to establish credibility (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 321).

The final way in which I ensured validity was through crystallization. Ellingson (2009) referred to crystallization as a way in which one can examine relational topics using multiple lenses and a variety of genres. Crystallization refers to the practice of “validating” results by using several methods of data collection and analysis (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2009). The process of crystallization allows the case study findings to be more accurate and convincing when based on multiple sources of data. I utilized the following when crystallizing data sources: (a) survey responses (b) comparing the varied perspectives of participants; and (c) comparing interview data with surveys. By combining multiple data sources, my intention was to protect against threats to validity. I also used crystallization of data sources and methods to decrease any significant influence of my own biases.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) was established to help protect human subjects involved in research. In this report, three basic ethical principles were established 1) respect for persons 2) beneficence, and 3) justice. The first principle is the recognition that people

are autonomous and should be protected. It covers the idea that people enter into the research voluntarily and are provided with adequate information. In the second ethical principle, beneficence, people are treated in an ethical manner not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm. The Belmont Report identifies two rules regarding beneficence: 1) do not harm, and 2) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. Beneficence refers to the researcher's responsibility to consider all risks associated with participation. The last of the Belmont Report's three basic ethical principles, justice, raises questions about who ought to receive the benefits of research and who ought to bear its burdens. This principle is centered around the way in which the researcher should determine participants based on a set of fair procedures.

Along with the Belmont Report, I was also guided by the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is mandated by the National Research Act. The sole responsibility of the review board is to ensure that all ethical issues have been fully addressed in regard to the protection of human subjects who volunteer for this study. The IRB reviews all protocols for research using human subjects, guided by three prevailing principles: 1) inform subjects about the nature of the study and ensure their participation is voluntary; 2) ensure the benefits of the research outweigh the risks; 3) ensure the risks and benefits of research are evenly distributed among the possible subject populations.

In addition to receiving the guidance of the Kansas City Institutional Review Board (IRB), I also have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program). This program is dedicated to promoting the public's trust in the research enterprise by providing high quality, peer-reviewed, web based educational courses in research, ethics, regulatory oversight, and responsible conduct of research. The materials within the program

are designed and updated to enhance the knowledge and professionalism of investigators conducting research. By participating in this program and taking the exam, my research was ethical and ensured.

Safeguards of participant confidentiality as well as the school division and individual schools were assured by the researcher. I will had each interview participant sign an informed consent to participate in the study and select a pseudonym for use throughout the study to protect his or her confidentiality. Next, I obtained permission from the participants before audio-recording the interview and guaranteed the privacy and protection of each participant by ensuring that no individual identifiable information was reported in the research findings. Finally, participants were informed that they could select not to comment on or answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable, and they could also choose to withdraw from the study at any time free of judgment. The ethical consideration of participants sought to ensure privacy and confidentiality and resulted in the development of positive relationships that allowed me as the researcher to foster trust and confidence throughout my study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand novice teachers' preparation experiences for teaching in urban Midwestern elementary schools. In this study, I aimed to uncover the secret, sacred, and cover stories of my participants. I explored their perceptions of preparedness, through the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they acquired during their pre-service education to be successful to teach diverse populations of students. This allowed me to increase my understanding of their experiences and broaden my knowledge of what teachers deem to be meaningful in regard to teacher preparation.

I chose to study elementary teachers' perceptions during COVID-19 because of my work as an elementary instructional coach working with teachers from various preparation programs. While the context of COVID-19 influenced my study, my hope was that participants would tell rich stories in regard to their preparation experiences, allowing me to understand their teaching practices on a deeper level.

#### **The Significance of COVID-19 and Preparation Experiences**

In March of 2020, the world experienced a very different way of living than ever before. The COVID-19 virus was spreading rapidly, and the fear of catching the virus rose in people throughout the world. Schools, businesses, and offices were closing, and people were encouraged to stay home. Local officials emphasized that we would be “safer at home” and that people should remain home in order to “flatten the curve.” Something we had never experienced prior as a society shifted the way in which we conducted our day-to-day life very quickly. Questions of how to conduct schooling while at home swirled, virtual learning

emerged, and scrambling to educate students through a digital platform became our nation's reality.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on PK12 schooling continued into the 2020-2021 school year; some districts began to offer a choice for students to return to school in a blended format or fully virtual, while other districts remained fully virtual. This created another layer of chaos in teachers' minds about how to best educate students in a smaller amount of time, with social distancing, mask requirements, and little accountability to be present during the school day, whether virtually or in person. Teachers worked tirelessly to familiarize themselves with how to teach through an online platform and prepared to adjust to the "new normal" of being a teacher during a pandemic.

It is essential when to understand the context of academic years 2019- 2020 and 2020-2021 in which the study participants graduated or completed their final year of their teacher preparation experience. The impact of COVID-19 emerged as an interpretative code in the findings, as the impact of the pandemic severely changed the format of some of the participants' preparation experiences. The pandemic left some of the participants with less exposure to practicum experiences, fewer projects or immersions within their coursework, as well as fewer opportunities for collaboration. Because of this, it is vital to understand that the pandemic had impacted the stories most of the participants told regarding their perception of preparedness to teach in an urban school.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the significance of qualitative research and discussed the methodology used in the study. In this chapter, I begin by providing contextual information, including a review of the methodology and issues related to reliability and validity. Next, I present the restoried narratives for each of my participants with the use of

multiple interviews and survey data. I was careful to incorporate sociocultural analysis to give attention to sociocultural and historical processes that influenced their preparation. Sociocultural analysis allowed me to integrate the elements of cultural precepts, ideology, and socialization with their storied lives (Grbich, 2013).

### **Study Components and Contextual Factors**

This study sought to illuminate the lived experiences of novice teachers and their perceptions of preparedness to teach in an urban school context. The experience I have both with working with novice teachers in the field and preparing teachers before entering the field, steered me toward a collective case study as a theoretical tradition through which to tell the stories of my participants. According to Stake (2005), a collective case study occurs when we seek to understand the case in order to understand the bigger research questions at hand. Within this collective case study, each individual novice teacher I interviewed served as a single case within a collective case study to understand the lived experiences of preparation for novice teachers.

Additionally, the selection of narrative inquiry was essential to this study, as it was critical to provide data in the form of storytelling that acknowledges the humanity of the participants. In order to fully gain access into the truth of the experience, I attempted to uncover the cover stories told by teachers, which are those that teachers tell each other in order to hide any areas of incompetence or insecurities, and encouraged the sharing of secret stories, which are the truth that happens behind closed doors (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Olson & Craig, 2005). This was achieved by efforts in establishing trust and ensuring confidentiality by positioning me as their colleague and ensuring that my participants

understood my non-judgmental stance. I sought only to learn about their stories of preparation.

### **Secret, Sacred, and Cover Stories**

This study was focused on the stories of teachers and how their preparation experiences prepared them to work with students in urban school contexts. This is a sensitive topic, and it is not always easy to be critical and vulnerable when talking about how prepared one feels in the field of teaching. In order to provide a more rich, thick narrative, I aimed to uncover the secret stories of the teachers—how did they really feel their preparation experiences prepared them?

Secret stories are those that teachers only feel safe to share with a select few people and are typically only shared within the walls of their own classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Sacred stories are those that are so ingrained into the school as a system that they are considered to be second nature (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). These are the stories that drive leadership decision making, that are shared with stakeholders, and that promote the positive perception of the school among stakeholders (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Sacred stories are stories that happen outside of the classroom and are filled with “other people’s visions for what is right for children” (Clandinin, & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). Individual teacher stories connect to these sacred stories because they set the context for the work environments of teachers. Cover stories are those that teachers tell others or themselves to appear competent and capable (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

The sacred stories participants told were based on the theoretical perspectives their preparation experiences wove into their course work. Many of the participants’ secret stories were about their feelings of specific professors or negative experiences they had during their



preparation experiences. Their cover stories were positive, upbeat, and optimistic, while their secret stories ranged from disappointment with their lack of learning, lack of focus on culturally relevant pedagogy, or lack of practice with students during their preparation experiences. While many of the participants were willing to share their secret stories, I wondered if some of them were telling cover stories in terms of their sense of confidence and preparedness. As much as I worked to develop trust and rapport, it is understandable that they would be guarded in sharing how they really felt about their levels of confidence and preparedness. In some of my participants' stories, I note where I reflected on whether they may be sharing a cover story with me, and maybe with themselves.

### **Review of Methodology**

In Chapter 3, I discussed in detail the methodology that was used in the study. In an attempt to answer the research questions, as well as to uncover the secret, sacred, and cover stories of participants as they pertained to their lived experiences, I utilized multiple descriptive data sources which included an initial survey containing open-ended questions, two in-depth semi-structured interviews, field notes, and data from the web sites of participants' respective teacher preparation programs. The survey was used in two ways: (1) as a recruitment tool, with questions pertaining to the demographics and background information of participants; and (2) as a questionnaire that gathered their general perceptions and experiences related to their preparation experiences. The survey questions are provided in Appendix C.

The first interview primarily focused on building rapport and getting to know my participants better on a more personal level. The questions encouraged them to expand on the context of who they are, explaining why they chose urban education, and elaborating on

some of the content similar to the survey questions. The questions for the first interview were primarily structured to help me get to know my participants in an authentic manner and in a more conversational way as recommended in narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The survey responses also helped inform the semi-structured interview questions based on the responses, or lack of responses, found in the results. There were several survey items that I wished to expand upon, and I did so by including them in my first interview questions. In the second interview, the content was similar to that of the survey, but asked participants to elaborate on their responses and to provide a comprehensive background including their preparation experiences, the skills, content, and dispositions they acquired within their preparation experiences, and what they perceived to be the most beneficial parts of preparation experiences when working with urban students. The questions for the second interview were tied specifically to my research questions. In addition, the second interviews were used as a way to probe participants to delve deeper into previous responses, to provide clarity or elaboration, and to discuss questions that came up during their first interview. An interview protocol for the initial interview and second interview can be found in Appendix D. Through the use of questionnaires through a survey and semi-structured interviews, I was able to restore the experiences of novice teachers' preparation experiences. I was able to utilize these data sources to make meaning of the collective experiences of my participants.

Another vital part of the study methodology was related to my role as a narrative researcher. As a narrative researcher, it was necessary for me to employ field notes and journaling as I worked to acknowledge my own reactions, experiences and perceptions without allowing them to influence my analysis of the participants' stories (Moustakas,

1994). I incorporated reflective journaling during all phases of the study and included relevant journal entries in the stories of the participants.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative inquiry presents a unique challenge when assessing for validity since Maxwell (1992) asserted that instead of seeking validity in qualitative research, the focus instead should be on quality, rigor, and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further argued that researchers should substitute the term “authenticity” for validity in qualitative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that rather than focusing on validity and reliability, a qualitative study should rely more on transparency, verisimilitude, and transferability. With this in mind, I sought to incorporate these elements into my study in order to increase the overall credibility. I utilized crystallization of multiple data sources by including various methods of data collection in order to solidify my claims (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ellingson, 2009; Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2009). In combining multiple data sources, my intention was to protect against threats to validity as well as to decrease any significant influence of my own biases.

In addition, I utilized Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) transactional validity strategies of building trust, protecting against misinformation, and persistent in-depth analysis of the research, providing ample time and attention to ensure that it was done completely. All phases of the research, including identification of participants, data collection and analysis, member checking, telling their stories, and writing the final report comprised 10 months. Over time I was able to develop a trusting relationship with participants to increase the authenticity of their accounts. To do this, I provided transcripts and used member checking after each interview. Survey results were discussed in both interviews to reflect and ensure

responses were accurate. I also engaged in brief conversations after the interviews were completed, in order to clarify or increase my understanding of a statement or expressed thought. I was clear and transparent about the focus of the study, and I worked to maintain a trusting relationship by following through with meeting times, providing informed consent, and maintaining confidentiality.

### **Participants**

My initial goal was to find participants whom I did not know and with whom I had no prior interactions. I was confident that I could find teachers who fit this criterion in order to better avoid bias and increase the comfort of teachers who might not want to share such personal details of their preparation experiences with someone with whom they work. However, that changed, given the number of responses I had received to my initial survey. Given the implications of COVID-19 and the start of summer, I realized that teachers were less likely to want to participate in a study. As previously stated in Chapter 3, Cherry Hill School District denied access to their teachers, and did not want to involve them in a research study. After being denied access to teachers in the Cherry Hill School District, I reached out to multiple public charter schools within the boundaries of the Cherry Hill School District. In May 2022, I sent an email with my sampling survey to principals of eight urban elementary schools within the Kansas City area. After doing this, I only had 12 responses with six teachers willing to advance to the next stage of the interviews. To increase participation and acquire a larger sample, I resent the request two months later, with a larger incentive to participate. I still only had 16 total responses, with eight participants willing to be interviewed. I reached out to each of the eight survey participants who indicated they wanted to advance to the next phase of the study, but I heard back from only six of them; thus, my

final sample consisted of six participants. Out of these six participants, I had existing relationships with four of them.

With a lot of consideration and discussion with my committee chair and methodologist, we decided to move forward. We believed that given the past relationships I had established with these participants, they may be more comfortable and share more with me, given that the trust and rapport had already been established. Once participants were notified of next steps in the study, they each chose their own pseudonym. Additionally, any identifying details have been redacted or changed by me in an effort to protect their confidentiality, while maintaining the message within the study.

Each participant appeared motivated and eager to share their stories; there was some variation with rapport and comfort level, which was to be expected, but all participants willingly took part in each stage of the interview process. Table 1 depicts the demographic information of each teacher. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 46 years. Five of the six participants identified as female, one identified as male, and three racial identities were represented: African American, Latino, and White. Out of the six participants, a total of five different teacher preparation programs were represented. Five of the participants obtained their certification from a university-based undergraduate program; for two of these participants their university-based program specialized in working with students in urban settings, whereas the other three had general preparation. Finally, one of my participants obtained their certification from a non-university-based alternative program.

As noted in the survey, I obtained information about field placements from all participants, as the literature pointed to the importance of field experiences in teacher preparation. Field placements are defined as the number of field experiences (e.g., practicum

courses, internships) pre-service teachers had prior to their student teaching experience throughout their preparation. This number of experiences ranged from zero to four, with the average of two experiences.

In the survey, participants also rated their sense of preparedness after completing their preparation program; this rating was a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10 with a ranking of 1 representing not feeling prepared and a ranking of 10 representing feeling extremely prepared. The ratings of preparedness ranged from two to none, with the average rating of six.

### **Relationships with Participants**

Within the past three years, I have worked with Jane as her instructional coach, observing, mentoring, and coaching her in many different personal and professional settings. I have done the same with Katheryn over the last two years. Johnny and Sheridan are two participants for whom I previously served as the instructor of one of their courses during their teacher preparation experiences. Given the past relationships with each of these participants, I made careful attempts to control my own potential biases. In order to control for these biases, I journaled during each phase of the study and utilized member checking. I also consulted with my chair in attempts to maintain neutrality. However, I believe because of the established relationship I had with each of these participants, their sense of comfort was increased, rapport was readily established, and, as a result, they were better able to expose their secret stories regarding preparation. Cover stories that they were expected to tell were not as apparent in this group. Sacred stories were told because they were comfortable and open, compared to the other participants whom I did not know prior to the study.

**Table 1**

***Overview of Participants***

Name	Ethnicity	Type of Preparation	University	Years in Education/Grade-level	# Field Placements	Rate of Preparedness
Jane	White	University based Undergraduate General Preparation	Cookie	3 years in second grade	2	2
Johnny	Latino	University based Undergraduate Urban Preparation	Manilla	3 years in first grade	4	9
Sheridan	White	University based Undergraduate Urban Preparation	Manilla	1 year in kindergarten starting in third this year	2	6
Monae	African American	University based Undergraduate General Preparation	Blue	2 years in fifth grade	4	9
Katheryn	White	University based Undergraduate General Preparation	Wheat	3 years in third grade	4	7
Lindsey	White	Non-university Alternative based	Crumble	2 years in fourth grade	0	4

In the previous section of this chapter, I presented a review of the major study components including the rationale for the selection of narrative case study, a review of the methodology, and basic information about the participants. In the next section, I introduce each participant first by expanding on their demographic information, sharing their survey data, and providing an overview of what I learned after researching the website of their teacher preparation programs. Next, I share the stories of each participant by blending all of the data from each source to create a restoried narrative illustrating the lived preparation experiences of each participant. Each story was constructed as a synthesis of all data sources to create a narrative that includes the secret, sacred, and cover stories of each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The stories are presented as a holistic story utilizing the sociocultural narrative lens. In Chapter 5, I provide a cross-case analysis of the themes and sub-themes across the cases.

## **Reported Findings**

### **Introducing Jane**

Jane<sup>1</sup> identifies as a White middle-class female. She is a second grade teacher at Stonecrest Elementary, a school within the Cherry Hill School District that is situated in an area of the city where many immigrant families reside. The student population of over 700 students at Stonecrest Elementary comprises the following races and ethnicities: 1.7% White, 96.2% Latinx, 1.7% African American, and .1% Asian. Her classroom is reflective of these ethnicities. Jane is in her third year of the teaching profession, all of which has been in a second grade classroom at Stonecrest Elementary with the same building leadership. I have

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<sup>1</sup> All person and place names are pseudonyms.



known Jane for three years as a colleague. Within the past three years, I have been Jane's instructional coach working closely with her in many different personal and professional settings.

Jane obtained her degree from a university-based undergraduate program called Cookie University from which she graduated in spring 2020. Cookie University is a small private Catholic university in rural Kansas. From what I have learned about the university, it is rather small and predominately White. The graduating class of 2020 (the year she graduated) consisted of 486 graduates, of which 92% were White students. As I researched the number of students that graduated with a teaching degree, I found that out of the 486 graduates, 7% were from the Elementary Education & Teaching program. Thus, Jane's graduating class consisted of 35 students.

I reviewed the university's website to learn more about the Elementary Education & Teaching program and I discovered the degree objectives. It appears they are centered upon building learning communities, modeling decision making, and involving the community as a partner in the educational process. They boast about establishing a learning community that is within classrooms and schools, as well as in communities surrounding schools. As I looked through their course sequence, it appears that the majority of classes in the program are methods courses in the core content areas of social studies, science, math, and reading. One diversity class was listed, one field experience course, and then half a semester of student teaching.

In the initial survey Jane reported that she had two classes that prepared her to teach diverse student populations. She rated herself at a two out of ten in regard to feeling prepared to teach students in urban schools after her preparation experiences; she reporting having two

field placement experiences during her preparation experiences. The area she noted as feeling the most prepared to teach was math. Jane's story in regard to her perception of her preparation experiences is told in following sections.

### **Introducing Johnny**

Johnny identifies as a Hispanic working-class male. He spent the first 15 years of his life in Mexico and has been in America for ten years. He is a first grade teacher at Stonecrest Elementary, a school that is situated in an area of the city where many immigrant families reside. The student population of over 700 students at Stonecrest Elementary comprises the following race and ethnicities: 1.7% White, 96.2% Latinx, 1.7% African American, and .1% Asian. His classroom is reflective of these ethnicities. Johnny is in his third year of the teaching profession, all of which has been in a first grade classroom at Stonecrest Elementary with the same building leadership. I have known Johnny for the past four years. He was a student I instructed during his preparation experience and has also been a colleague the past three years in the same school in which I work.

Johnny obtained his degree from a university-based undergraduate program called Manilla University and graduated in spring 2020. Manilla University is a public university serving more than 15,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and is located directly in an urban area of Missouri. As I learned more about Manilla University's Elementary Education program, it appears that the program is designed for students who want to be certified to teach in grades 1-6. It is a field-based program, meaning students are prepared by working in the classroom with master teachers and elementary school students. Their website mentions that the program features include classes which are taught on-campus and in real-life partner schools and that graduates will graduate with a year's worth of

teaching experience. It appears that the focus of coursework connects theory with real-world experiences. As I reviewed the four-year plan of study, I noticed that as an elementary education major, the first two years of the experience include required coursework that is focused on the introduction to teaching, children's literature, child development, and educational psychology courses. There are several methods courses within this progression as well. After a student completes the required coursework, they enter the Teacher Education Professional Program. In this program the coursework appears to be focused on methods courses, three total practicums prior to a student teaching semester, two courses rooted in culturally responsive strategies, and a course centered on working with families and communities.

On the initial survey, Johnny rated himself at a nine in regard to feeling prepared to teach students in urban schools after his preparation experiences. The areas in which he felt he was the most prepared were utilization of new methods of teaching, using data from assessments to drive instruction, and addressing the needs of students with limited English proficiency or from diverse cultural backgrounds. His survey results showed that most of his courses were centered on teaching diverse student populations and that he had four or more field placements prior to his student teaching year. Johnny's in-depth story in regard to his perception of his preparation experiences is expanded upon in following sections.

### **Introducing Sheridan**

Sheridan identifies as a White middle-class female. She is in her second year of teaching. Her first year she was a Kindergarten teacher, and this year she is a third grade teacher. For both years, she has been at Brentwood Elementary, a school that has had the same building leadership since she started. The student population of over 600 students

consists of the following races and ethnicities: 59.5% African American, 20.4% Hispanic/Latino, 5.2% White, 6.5% Multi-racial, 7.5% Asian, and .9% Pacific Islander. Sheridan states that this population breakdown is reflected in her own classroom. I have known Sheridan for two years outside of this study, as I was an instructor for one of the courses she took during her preparation experiences.

Like Johnny, Sheridan also obtained her degree from Manilla University. She graduated from Manilla University in spring 2021. According to her survey results, she rated herself at a six in regard to how prepared she felt to teach students in urban schools after her preparation experiences. The areas that she noted as feeling the most prepared were math and reading. She also indicated that she had two field placements prior to her student teaching year. Although she and Johnny attended the same university, their survey results showed differing results, which are explored more in Sheridan's individual story in the following sections.

### **Introducing Monae**

Monae identifies as a Black working-class female. She is a fifth-grade teacher at Brentwood Elementary, a school that has had the same building leadership since she started. She is in her second year of teaching fifth grade at Brentwood Elementary. The student population of over 600 students consists of the following race and ethnicities: 59.5% African American, 20.4% Hispanic/Latino, 5.2% White, 6.5% Multi-racial, 7.5% Asian, and 0.9% Pacific Islander. Monae explained that most of the students in her classroom are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. I did not know Monae prior to this study; she was one of the few participants I solicited to take part in the study whom I had not already known.

Monae obtained her degree from a university-based undergraduate program called Blue University, and she graduated in spring 2020. The graduating class totaled 627 students receiving bachelor's degrees, but I was unable to find how many of those graduates were Elementary Education graduates. However, according to their website, it appears Elementary Education is the second largest major by enrollment at Blue University. According to their website, the Elementary Education program is divided into three phases, which are all unique with opportunities for profession-based learning. It appears that the program itself is centered on collaborative learning communities in which students can form the basis for reflection and professional growth. The overview of the program mentioned being "hands on and rich with ample field experiences" (University, n.d.). As I reviewed the four-year plan of study it appeared that the first two years of the program are focused solely on the method courses of geography, literacy, math, and social studies along with professional learning community hours. By year three it appears to have a shift to more theoretical framework classes, a multiculturalism course, two practicum experiences, and another two hours of professional learning community. The final year consists of a semester of residency paired with one hour of professional learning community and a semester of student teaching paired with the final hour of professional learning community. The four-year plan of study appears to match the advertised descriptions within the website.

According to the survey results, Monae rated herself a nine in regard to how prepared she felt to teach urban students after her preparation experiences. The area in which she felt the most prepared was behavior management. She also indicated that she had four or more field placements prior to her student teaching year. Monae's story in regard to her perception of her preparation experiences is expanded in following sections.

## **Introducing Katheryn**

Katheryn identifies as a White middle-class female. After graduating college, she taught third grade abroad in Honduras for a year. She has now been teaching third grade for two years at Stonecrest Elementary. In her two years of teaching in the United States the leadership within the building has remained the same. As stated previously, Stonecrest Elementary is situated in an area of the city where many immigrant families reside. The student population of over 700 students at Stonecrest Elementary comprises the following races and ethnicities: 1.7% White, 96.2% Latinx, 1.7% African American, and .1% Asian. Katheryn's classroom is not exactly reflective of this, as she serves as the "sheltered" classroom in third grade. Sheltered classroom entails a smaller class size consisting of students who are predominantly Spanish speaking and have the lowest WIDA scores. According to Fritzen (2011), sheltered instruction (SI) is a method of teaching English Language Learners that fits the recommended model of culturally responsive education. The goal of SI is to help ELLs develop content knowledge, language proficiency, and academic skills at the same time. I have known Katheryn for the past two years in the capacity of her instructional coach. I have worked with her in various professional settings.

Katheryn obtained her degree from a university-based undergraduate program called Wheat University and graduated in spring of 2019. Wheat University is a small private Christian university in rural Arkansas. According to their website, 4.68% of graduates were Elementary Education graduates, meaning 23 degrees were awarded. The program website advertises that it is heavily focused on building confidence in teachers through providing ample opportunities to observe seasoned teachers and practice teaching in classrooms surrounding the university. As I researched the university and became familiar with the

sample four-year study plan, I noticed it was a bit different than other universities which my other participants attended. It appears that the first two years of the program are focused heavily on method courses for the core content areas, with two practicum experiences. The third year of the program includes a cultural competency course, a differentiated learning course, and two practicum experiences. Where it differed quite a bit was in the last year of the program. Based on the course progression, the fall semester of the last year in the program is a full semester of student teaching and an additional seminar course. Then, in the spring semester, seminar and practicum experiences are gone and it appears to be a semester full of a capstone and an Essentials of Christian Formation course. This was a flipped approach based on what I had learned about other universities.

In the initial survey, Katheryn rated herself a seven in regard to feeling prepared to teach urban students after her preparation experiences. The areas that she noted as feeling the most prepared were behavior management and ELA. She also reported that she had four or more field placements prior to her student teaching year. Katheryn's story of her perception of her preparation experiences is told in following sections.

### **Introducing Lindsey**

Lindsey identifies as a White middle-class female. She is in her second year of teaching fourth grade at Stonecrest Elementary. Lindsey is a second career teacher, meaning she has worked in numerous fields prior to choosing education. She worked in the film industry for six years, in the communications field for five years, worked as a behavior interventionist for a few years before getting her certification, then worked as an associate teacher before becoming a grade-level teacher at Stonecrest Elementary. I did not know Lindsey prior to this study. She works in my building; however, I do not work directly with

her and have had no previous interactions with her outside of this study, other than in passing and saying good morning or hello.

Lindsey received her teaching certification in 2018 through a non-university-based, alternative program through the state of Missouri, named Crumble. Crumble is a nonprofit organization that is a state-approved alternative teacher certification program. All candidates in the Crumble program must possess an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university prior to being admitted to the Crumble program. I found on their website that they market their program as being a “self-paced study program in which subject mastery and pedagogy is taught and tested” (Organization Website, n.d.). The program is outlined to take 12 months, but according to Crumble’s website, “the average student completes the program in 7-10 months, but some students have actually completed the coursework in as few as two months.” It appears that the coursework is set up in learning modules that consist of videos coupled with opportunities to apply the learning through “practice sheets.” Based on the information within Crumble’s website, it appears that 60% of the online modules are based on the core subject areas of math, reading, science, and social studies. The remaining 40% of online modules are centered on professional teaching knowledge. I could not find exactly what Crumble deems as professional teaching knowledge and could not find a sample of the modules or online coursework. Once a candidate completes all the coursework through the learning modules, they are ready to take the exams. One is a content mastery exam and the other is a Professional Teaching Knowledge (PTK) exam. Students have three chances to pass the exam. Once students pass the two exams, they receive their certification.

According to the survey results, Lindsey rated herself a four regarding feeling prepared to teach urban students after her preparation experiences. The areas that she noted



as feeling the most prepared were classroom management and ELA. Lindsey also indicated that she had zero field placement experiences. Lindsey's story of her perception of her preparation experiences is told in the following sections.

In the following sections, I provide a narrative representation of the teachers' thoughts, feelings, and comments in order to illuminate their overall lived experiences in the form of a story. Each story was constructed as a synthesis of all data sources to create a narrative that includes the secret, sacred, and cover stories of each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Each story is organized by the overall themes that emerged as answers to the research questions. These themes are preparation for working with diverse cultures and cultural awareness. Interpretive codes are embedded within each theme as well. Analysis of the stories by theme is further discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Participants' Stories**

### **Jane's Story**

I think overall, my preparation experiences just comes down to lack of actual practice. Like for me to actually teach and apply. I also think it comes down to just lack of exposure to different educational settings, especially those from your own. Everything was just so broad, which kind of relates to lack of exposure. But yeah, mostly just no depth in any of the learning or experiences.

—Jane (Interview, September 2022)

Throughout our interviews, as Jane elaborated on her preparation experiences, she talked about having little to no exposure to other cultures growing up, making it hard for her to draw deeper connections sometimes with her students. "I just never experienced the same type of things that these students have, and it was shocking to me, to see that some families and cultures do things so differently than what I ever was used to. I was just never aware really" (Interview, September 2022). My initial assumption of her low survey score was

affirmed when she elaborated more on this idea. It became clear that she had a lack of cultural awareness and felt that was a barrier that had impacted her confidence and preparation to teach diverse student populations.

As Jane continued to talk about her low exposure to teaching diverse student populations, I started to notice some deficit thinking shine through some of Jane's perceptions when talking about the students in her urban classroom. When asked about what she wishes she had when it came to preparation for working with urban students she stated, "I wish I would have known more about the disparities that these students and families have" (Interview, September 2022). Immediately after Jane said this, I quickly wrote in my field notes "*DISPARITIES?!*" (Field note, September 2022) Jane also referred to students in urban school contexts as "these/those kids," which was also coded for its negative connotation.

In the secret story Jane told about struggling with family relationships, she expanded upon it, saying she could not relate to these families and felt badly because of it. She made some assumptions about her Latino students' families that also showed her lack of cultural awareness.

You know education isn't as valued or prioritized as much I've noticed with our Latino families. And, like a lot of our parents aren't well educated or care much about education. So, I think that makes a difference in how they interact with teachers and value what we do. (Interview, September 2022)

I jotted down "*Assumption! Wrong!*" (Field note, September 2022) and highlighted it in my field notes. I did not feel great about hearing her say this, and I knew I had to control my biases. So, I turned to my journal that night and reflected.

Jane is so wrong about saying our families don't value education. This is such a backwards way of thought. Surely, she doesn't really think that. Or actually she probably does! She said herself that she never had any experiences learning about different cultures or checking her own stereotypical biases. I feel like the lack of

having those types of learning experiences has caused quite a bit of harm to her thinking of working with diverse students. There must be a space to learn, reflect and challenge your own thoughts about culture! (Journal entry, September 2022)

Throughout the interview with Jane, her sense of awareness and lack of cultural awareness came through in multiple instances. She was upfront about having the gap from the beginning of our first interview, and she reiterated time and time again about wanting more experiences in communities of diverse students, working with families, and understanding their cultural norms.

This first showed in her responses from the initial survey score. She rated herself a two in regard to her perception of feeling prepared to teach urban students. The story of her perception of preparedness came to light more when she began to talk about her personal experiences outside of her preparation experience.

In our first interview, I began by asking her to tell me more about herself, stating “Tell me about yourself.” In response to this, Jane jumped right in by mentioning that she never had many encounters with people of different social classes or different cultural groups growing up. She seemed to reiterate numerous times how sheltered she was with her limited exposure to social or racial classes different than her own. I found it interesting that she homed in on this when I asked her the broad question to tell me about herself. After asking if there was anything else she wanted to share with me in regard to any context of who she was, she repeated her lack of exposure to diversity in the following response:

I was pretty much only around wealthy White people growing up and throughout my school. And yeah, and even when like playing sports and playing against other schools, I was still only traveling to and like interacting with other students from White rich suburban schools. So, there wasn't very much interaction with others, or like different races or socioeconomic classes either. Especially in Oklahoma. It's like suburban schools or like country schools. So yeah, very little diversity that I was exposed to growing up and even in college really. (Interview, August 2022)

This made me think about how Jane reflects on her experiences growing up and how those have impacted her as she sees herself now within the context of a diverse setting, around diverse cultures. This connects more soundly in the following sections when I talk about her perceptions of preparation. Her awareness of the lack of diversity really stood out to me and I noted this in my journal entry after our interview:

I am very curious about Jane's emphasis on telling me about the lack of exposure she had to different races and social classes as she grew up. I am wondering if she made a point to repeat this many times because she thinks it is something I may want to hear, or if she really is reflecting on that being a big factor to how she is now as a teacher. I can't tell if this was something she was just keenly aware of, or if this was something she was boasting about? It just seemed odd to me. I feel like her response really showed her privilege more than anything. This is something I will have to dig deeper into in our next interview. (Journal entry, August 2022)

When telling me about herself, Jane mentioned many times how supportive and involved her family has been throughout her education, career, and extracurricular hobbies. She talked about growing up in Oklahoma and being close with her brother and parents. She mentioned spending a lot of time together as a family traveling and playing games together often. It was clear to me that she is someone who truly values her relationship with her family and that they are a big part of her identity and her story.

After getting to know more about Jane and the context of who she is, I began to ask her questions more geared around my research questions. I wanted to dig into why she chose teaching and specifically, why she chose urban education. Jane's response about why she chose education was quite funny and showed the reality of thought most people deal with when making the decision to go into teaching.

As a kid I always said I wanted to be a butterfly or a teacher, and clearly the whole butterfly thing didn't work out, ha ha, so teaching it was. But when I was in high school and I found out how little teachers made so, I decided I wanted to do sports

medicine. But again, that changed when my academic advisor had me take a type of survey to gauge career options and it screamed education. So regardless of the low amount of money, it was obvious what was right for me and what I wanted to do. So, I went to college, enrolled as an education major, and here I am! (Interview, August 2022)

My follow-up question was to see why Jane chose urban education specifically. It appeared to me that this question made her seem a little uneasy. I noticed she started to stumble over her words a little bit and did not have a direct answer, at first. She quickly responded with, “Um, I don’t really know.” (Interview, August 2022). With a little bit of wait time, she expanded her response by telling me that she did not really have any urban experience in practicum but the one experience that she did have, she enjoyed. She went on to express that she did not choose urban intentionally; rather it just happened.

I liked the idea of moving into a city. Um, and it just happened. I went to a career fair and met Susie (pseudonym) and Maggie (pseudonym) and like this seemed to be a good fit. So kind of, kind of by choice, kind of by coincidence I ended up in urban. (Interview, August 2022)

As Jane shared this response, I noticed she started to begin tapping her foot quite fiercely, as if I had made her a little uncomfortable. I took note of this, and she filled the silence with, “I hope that doesn’t throw anything off that I didn’t really choose an urban school intentionally. I have never really thought of it like that before.” As she said this she then looked down and a little disappointed. I wrote in my field notes “*A problem? Does she feel ashamed? What does this mean?*” (Field note, August 2022). I quickly looked up and reassured her by saying “Absolutely not! This is your story and however you want to tell it is up to you. There is no right or wrong answer.” At this point it was evident that not intentionally choosing an urban school was a secret story of Jane’s.

Hearing Jane say she didn't intentionally choose urban stood out to me and made me stop to think about my biases toward her and presumptions. In order to control these, I reflected in my journal my initial reaction to this response.

It is very surprising to me that Jane didn't intentionally choose urban education. I can't help but think that her experience now in urban contexts is what has made her so aware of her cultural gaps growing up. Because of what I know about her and the type of teacher she is, I had always assumed she intentionally chose this path over other types of schools. (Journal entry, August 2022)

When I asked Jane about where she went to school for her preparation experience and why she went there, she explained to me she did not really choose the school, it chose her. She talked about being a high achieving student athlete throughout her high school years, in which she was offered a scholarship to play softball in college. She took the scholarship and attended Cookie University.

I asked Jane to tell me about her preparation experiences at Cookie University, and she began by telling me all about the core content method courses she had taken and how she felt that they were not meaningful or helpful. In my field notes I wrote down "*Methods courses, not as helpful*" (Field note, September 2022). As she was elaborating, she said "There were kind of a lot of article readings, and just not much learning about instruction, but maybe like the vague approach and like the mindset of thinking about instruction, but not even really that. It was so vague" (Interview, September 2022). This was the first of many times Jane mentioned her preparation experiences as being vague and referring to lack of depth and connection. She spoke about how surface level her courses and coursework felt in her preparation experiences.

Immediately after Jane mentioned the vagueness of her courses and readings, she looked at me and said, "Do you want me to add what I wish I had or what I wish it would

have been more like?” (Interview, September 2022). As she said this, I wrote in my field notes “*Quick to talk about improvements—does this mean she is dissatisfied with experience?*” (Field note, September 2022). We both giggled after that comment, and I told her not yet, I wanted her to tell me more. This was also a moment in which she showed that she was a reflective person, always jumping to how to improve things, like what I know about her as a teacher and in our working relationship.

She started to expand upon her idea that the learning was vague by providing an example that showed how she felt unprepared in regard to understanding curriculum and instructional approaches.

Like we would quickly look at standards, but not in a way to understand them, just to try and find a way to connect what we would plan to them. We didn’t go deep to really use those to plan, it was like the opposite. Which this isn’t even best practice. But then we would create a lesson plan then were instructed to pick a standard that would fit it best. Nothing like backwards design, I didn’t even know about that until our PD’s here. Then we would just pick an instructional strategy that felt like it best fit with what the plan was. No one ever talked about what instructional strategies would be best for different types of learners. It was just all vague and we were expected to know the best strategies based on articles or other assigned readings. Not actually taught about them really. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Jane express this, I wrote comments in my field notes about her body language. I wrote down “*Aggravated tone of voice, eye rolls, lots of looks of annoyance*” (Field note, September 2022). It was clear that Jane was frustrated with the experience she had in preparation when it came to understanding standards and instructional approaches. While her understanding of standards and teaching practices have advanced since being in the field, it was clear she felt that was due to professional development given on the job rather than preparation she had prior to entering the field.

Jane continued to elaborate on her preparation experiences by sharing more examples that made her feel like her experiences in educational contexts were vague or disjointed. Specifically, she spoke a lot about her practicum experiences in this regard. In her junior year she had to have 20 hours of observation during her fall semester, which she found to be beneficial because she was able to see various grade levels of teaching at various types of schools. However, Jane talked quite a bit about the observations never having a focus or feeling that they were unintentional.

It was always like go in and observe, see what you can and reflect on what you saw. But then we never talked about what we saw, I don't think. And it was only 20 hours, like that is nothing, that is maybe 3 or 4 days. And we could decide when we would go based on what would work for our schedule, so it wasn't like it was set up or consistent. (Interview, September 2022)

Later that night after interviewing Jane, I read through the transcripts and highlighted this specific quote in the transcript and reflected about it in my journal.

How could a teacher who is trying to learn how to best teach, learn anything from observations without a specific look for or a space to reflect on what they saw? I can't imagine how confusing that must have felt for Jane. (Journal entry, September 2022)

When I asked Jane to explain why she rated herself a two on the initial survey, she giggled and said, "Remind me was that out of 10 or 5?" I reminded her it was out of 10 and she giggled again, seeming a bit nervous. I noticed she shifted in her seat and sat straight up with a look of confidence and then jumped right to responding.

Okay. Yeah, so within my practicum before student teaching, we only had to teach one lesson for the whole semester, like one observed lesson. And I don't feel like...And maybe this was my own fault, like I didn't take enough action when I was in the classroom, but I felt like I just didn't get any opportunity to practice things or like trial and error and take things into my own hands. Like, you know, I just didn't get to do anything other than sit there and listen, which is helpful, but like, I learn by doing. You know?



And then my student teaching semester was March, or I mean it was spring of 2022. And at that point, in my student teaching I had taken over two or three content areas, but still I'd never taught a full day of school from start to finish before coming here and teaching. So, it was like, I didn't feel like I was all that prepared at all. I did not feel confident because I never had even taught a full day of school! I didn't ever get any real practice. Like at all. (Interview, September 2022)

Listening to this part of Jane's story I could hear the crack in her voice of frustration and annoyance. As she talked about this, in my field notes as I jotted down "*COVID!!!!*" (Field note, September 2022) as I knew at this time that this was a major factor as to why she felt the low confidence in regard to feeling prepared to teach. I also realized at this moment, this was yet another burden of COVID-19. The pandemic had impacted her not only personally, but professionally. It took away more of the already little opportunity she had to practice and apply her teaching. She was striving for more opportunities to practice her learning and could not get them. She was aware of what type of learner she was and was able to reflect that she learns by doing, so it was obvious she was upset that she did not get the chance to apply what she had learned.

I affirmed her response, nodded, and said, "Wow, I bet that was so hard! I was going to ask how your preparation was impacted by COVID-19." I needed her to know that I heard her frustration. Jane continued to explain that not only did she have to leave her student teaching experience, but she also had to move back home, because her university had closed. She explained the hardship of moving in spring 2020, coupled with her disappointment in ending her senior year the way she did. Jane also talked about how weird it was in her student teaching experience:

It was like a quick kind of abrupt end. We held one Zoom class for our kids, but mostly it was like okay, have a nice summer, and that was it. And since I had to move, I couldn't even help drive around with my cooperating teacher and deliver student packets. I don't even think I was included in that. The school shut down and I

never even really heard anything else from my cooperating teacher. (Interview, September 2022)

As Jane told me this, she kind of slipped back down into her chair, looking down at her feet. I could not help but feel sorrow for Jane as she told this part of her story. I knew I had to reflect on my feelings and I turned to my journal that evening to do so.

I could not imagine how disconnected Jane's experience had to have felt for her. Although she hadn't elaborated too much on her own feelings during this, it was apparent it upset her by her body language. It seemed like she didn't have the best partnership with her cooperating teacher, or she would have reached out I assume. Thinking of her lack of practice coupled with the ending of her student teaching makes it so clear why she didn't feel confident. I remember how hard it was in my own personal student teaching experience, I can't imagine it happening during a pandemic. (Journal entry, September 2022)

After hearing about the impacts of COVID-19 and the reason for her survey rating, we shifted our focus to the things she found to be the most beneficial during her experiences. Jane mentioned that being in different schools around her university and seeing various grade levels was helpful, although they were not always focused or were sparse. She also mentioned her special education classes as being extremely beneficial because they did talk more in depth about meeting the needs of all students. She elaborated more, saying "Really, any of the times I was able to teach or be in practicum, like doing things and applying the learning was the most beneficial. But that was just so minimal" (Interview, September 2022). As I listened to Jane, I wrote in my field notes, "*Lacking enough time to practice and wanting more*" (Field note, September 2022). Jane was clearly expressing that she found time in classrooms and applying her learning as being the most beneficial, and saying the time was minimal, it was apparent she wished for more of this in her experiences.

Jane continued to elaborate on what she thought was important in her preparation: "I mean, I really feel like the teachers that I did observe, or like my cooperating teacher

specifically, really did show me more so what kind of teacher I didn't want to be honestly" (Interview, September 2022). I asked Jane to tell me more about this, and she continued to home in on the practices and beliefs she did not see.

My cooperating teacher was really, really tough on kids. Like, she didn't even get to know her kids really and she didn't show that she ever really cared about them. Like being tough on them is something I bring into my practices now. Like I have high expectations for them but also, I am going to be tough on you during math like you are going to sit down and do this because I know you can. But then I am going to go play tag with them at recess and ask them about their weekend and get to know them personally. I am going to make sure that relationship is there.

Where I felt like... I don't know. I didn't see a lot of relationship building while I was in classrooms, especially in my student teaching and that is something that is very important to me. I have a hard time teaching a kid if I don't have a relationship with them, and I know they have a hard time learning from me if we don't have that relationship as well. (Interview, September 2022)

This secret story Jane shared with me showed me just how much she values relationships and building them with her students. Hearing this from Jane also showed a glimpse into what kind of educator she is, specifically showing the tenet of caring under Gay's (2010) culturally responsive framework. Jane continued to express that she saw a lack between connecting students' lives beyond the classroom and how this made the learning seem shallow in classrooms she saw. When talking about preparation in regard to urban school contexts or diverse student populations, Jane stated she had no experiences in schools that were situated within urban communities during her preparation experiences. She said most schools she had been in were either suburban or rural with predominantly White students.

I asked Jane to tell me about the specific skills or knowledge she gained that were essential for teaching urban students. She referred to any preparation she had received for teaching diverse student populations was shallow. "Again, things were conveyed like what

we should do to connect with all students, but nothing specific or grounded in culturally relevant practices. If anything, I had one professor talk about culturally relevant pedagogy, but it was like an afterthought or footnote” (Interview, September 2022).

When asked about what experience she had in communities, Jane talked about one experience that took place at the Boys and Girls club. As she was talking about this experience, her entire demeanor changed; she appeared to be lighter and more joyful in her speech.

We spent a lot of time on a community project there, we actually had to get 50 hours, and I ended up volunteering and did more. But that was one of my favorite things I did in my preparation! That was more hours we had to even spend teaching. (Laughs) But that was really a cool experience. Like we would just spend time there tutoring or reading with the students, getting to know them personally and building real authentic relationships with them. It was awesome. But I guess within that experience, there were some students of differing cultures, so I was able to work with them on a personal level. But not in a school setting. (Interview, September 2022)

As Jane talked more in depth about this experience, she mentioned how she felt that she was making a difference in the kids’ lives that she worked with. She expanded upon being a constant, safe, and trusting adult for them and grew attached to them. As Jane was talking, in my field notes I wrote “*Working directly with kids—experience she wanted!*” (Field note, September 2022). She mentioned that she built that relationship because she knew it was important, not because she had an emphasis on that in any of her classes. She talked about the idea of building authentic relationships with students as something she wishes she would have had more experience and learning on during her preparation experiences. Jane also brought up an interesting perspective as she shared this part of her story: she mentioned the impact she saw on kids when different college students would cycle through.

I could see their confidence dwindle, and they kind of put up a guard with some of us. Like one kid told me, you are just going to leave after this assignment for you is over. And I think about that now, especially with turnover here in our school. Kids are aware and it's like so detrimental for them. Like, they lose trust in adults where there isn't a constant and there is so much turn around. (Interview, September 2022)

Jane's elaboration on this experience showed her reflection and understanding of the impact teachers or adults have on students. Jane was able to reflect and make connections between the experience she had firsthand with the kids at the Boys and Girls Club and relate that to what she sees in her own professional experience now. She even talked about how she thinks the lack of preparation around getting to know your students as a whole child could be a reason why teachers do not stay in urban settings.

As Jane reflected on what she wished she had in her preparation experiences, she could not say enough about wanting more time to be in the field working directly with students. She talked a lot about wanting time to actually teach lessons to students and be put in a position where she would have to adapt and differentiate lessons based on student needs. Jane also talked about wanting more experiences in her preparation working in urban schools. She said by doing so, she could have become more comfortable working with diverse student populations and understanding more of their community.

As Jane continued to reflect about what her ideal program would have entailed, she began to tell me a secret story.

I would have loved more learning and experiences surrounding how to best communicate and build relationships with parents and families. Especially those who have different cultural norms than your own. I struggled so much with behaviors and parent communication last year. It was so hard for me to connect with my families, and I felt so alone and honestly too embarrassed to ask for help. If I could make an ideal program, I would start with it being centered around building that bridge between home and school, because that is something that makes the biggest impact in students' education. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Jane tell this story, I could not help but home in on her words, “alone” and “embarrassed.” I wrote these words in my field notes and put an exclamation mark next to them. As I reflected later that evening and reread the transcriptions, I started to make the connections in my journal as to what I thought these words could mean.

Jane feeling alone and embarrassed breaks my heart. Did she not feel supported? Why would she feel alone? Could it be that her lack of preparation in this area made her feel embarrassed that she struggled. I am thinking she expected to be better at building relationships with families since she talked about how important relationship building with her students was to her. I am also wondering if this is a secret story about the culture within the building. (Journal entry, September 2022)

Overall, through Jane’s story, it was apparent she believed her preparation experiences were lacking. She felt that she was not prepared due to the surface level of learning she received, the lack of practice she had in classrooms applying her learning with students, and the lack of diverse coursework or exposure to varying cultures, diversity, or real-life issues pertaining to urban students.

### **Johnny’s Story**

It was so impactful getting all the experience that I got. Like living it, watching it and getting it all from a first-hand perspective. I was able to see it all in action and be fully immersed in the profession.

—Johnny (Interview, September 2022)

Johnny started out our interview process with a true bang! The first thing he said to me as he walked into my office prior to the interviewing starting was, “I am so happy to be here! I think it will be really cool to talk with you about preparation at Manilla University!” (Interview, August 2022). The smile on his face was infectious, and I felt myself feeding off his positive energy. Johnny is someone who can quite possibly change the energy in the room simply with his presence, which is exactly what I felt in this moment. Prior to asking him any

of my interview questions I jotted down “*Eager, happy, smiling, excited!*” (Field note, August 2022).

This energy carried with him as he dove into talking about his preparation experiences. He could not rave enough about how wonderful he thought his program was. This is apparent throughout the interview transcriptions; within the 50-minute interview in some variation, he said, “Manilla did so good with that” a total of 18 times.

Johnny felt that he had such enriching experiences mainly because he had a positive cohort to learn alongside, reflective and collaborative dialogue around diversity and culture, along with the immersion within different urban schools throughout his experience. When Johnny talked about his preparation experiences, one of the first things he mentioned was his cohort.

So, like we were grouped together for the whole time. Some of us knew each other before but a lot of us didn't. We all had different backgrounds and there were some varieties of different races, but we all trusted each other. It was a safe space, and it was so helpful to have each other throughout the whole experience. To like, you know, encourage one another, reflect on things together and make meaning of everything together. Like we are all even still friends, we have like a group text chain still and it has been three years. We got very close together. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Johnny tell this sacred story about his experiences being in a cohort, I jotted down the words that came to my mind or stood out to me most as he talked: “*Trust, safe, relationships, collaboration, reflection*” (Field note, September 2022). In this sacred story of Johnny's cohort experience, he beamed as he talked about how important the reflective learning opportunities were within his cohort. Through this part of Johnny's story, it was evident that the power of collaboration with peers and having a space to digest and reflect on things was paramount to his preparation. He elaborated on this idea:

We weren't just together for a semester; we were together for years. So, we had built a relationship really, we had been through it all together. We all had a space to bring in what we saw and make meaning of it. We could talk with each other about the experiences we saw and like make connections together and problem solve. Like leaving practicum after a bad day and knowing I needed to change something it felt good to go talk with them and hear others have similar experiences or be able to give advice or a tip to try. I feel that was very helpful for me and made me more confident as a student and a teacher. (Interview, September 2022)

The elaboration about the power of a cohort was relatable to my own experience. I reflected upon this immediately in my journal after our interview.

It was so enlightening to hear Johnny talk about his cohort experience. I went through the same experience and felt the exact same way as he did. But I have never heard someone else talk about it in that way or in depth of detail. Reflecting on my cohort experience, I guess I never really thought about how instrumental that really was in my own learning. (Journal entry, September 2022)

When describing his preparation experiences, Johnny talked a lot about the experiences he had in classrooms within urban contexts. He mentioned being exposed to classrooms early in his preparation through a variety of ways that were purposeful.

Early on we had to do some observations that were like guided by certain things to look for based on like what we were learning in class, then we did some tutoring where we would work with small groups of kids, like plan lessons for their reading needs, then we were placed in our student teaching our final year. (Interview, September 2022)

As Johnny spoke about his experience in classrooms, he named at least three different schools he was in during this progression of his field experiences. Johnny reiterated how beneficial it was for him to see a variety of schools all within an urban context. Because of this exposure to urban schools, he talked about being able to make connections between the content and readings he was doing in class and directly apply that understanding while being immersed in the environment of an urban school.



Johnny shared a secret story with me about one realization he had during a field experience that made him more aware of the cultural differences in teaching and learning contexts. He told a story in which he was comparing two different urban schools he was in; one was a predominantly African American student population, and one was a predominantly Hispanic student population.

I was shocked to see that some of the kids who were the same age and in the same grade were learning such different things. Like, some of them were writing in math and were able to multiply, divide, and the resources they were using were hands-on and there were two teachers in the room. Then the kids in the other school were struggling so hard to even know their numbers or basic facts. The content was like not even to that level, there were not other ways to learn other than like really slow step-by-step whole group instruction. And I really think it is like because of the language or maybe like less resources or support? I am not sure, but it was just like shocking to see.

Like, it was just so weird, and I think shocking to see firsthand how far off the two groups of students really were. And at the time I was like. I wonder what we can do to get these kids to like to remember these things and do better at math? Like how are we as a school system, what do we do to like, be on the same level and make sure we are giving all students that same level of learning things? If anything, seeing that like, made me kind of mad. And made me more excited to jump in and do that myself, for these students. (Interview, September 2022)

As Johnny told this part of his story, I could hear the emotion change in his voice. The inflection in his voice and tone showed his passion, and I noted this in my field notes. Johnny talked about how he was able to make connections and see the inequities between different schools and spoke about how this ignited his motivation.

When thinking about how he was prepared specifically to teach urban students, aside from talking about the immersion in urban contexts, Johnny also talked in great depth about the discussions that took place within his program. As stated previously, having his peers from his cohort to reflect with was instrumental to his learning, but Johnny also said, “the

discussion topics and seminar reflections we would have, were key to get me to think more deeply” (Interview, September 2022).

Johnny said that in his program, they strategically would have some “really deep conversations, especially about race” (Interview, September 2022). Johnny specifically shared a phrase that has stuck with him since: “You can’t say you don’t see race. You have to see race and you have to do something about it!”

Johnny told the story about this phrase being an opening phrase to elicit a deeper conversation within his cohort during one class period. He said this was just one example; there were many times these types of conversation starters would be posed. Johnny reflected as he was talking to me about how useful these conversation starters were, mostly because they challenged him to think deeply about his own beliefs and allowed him and his peers to share their varied cultural perspectives. Johnny said within his cohort he had a good sample of diversity, so it was nice to hear a perspective from people of different cultural backgrounds. Johnny spoke a lot about the diverse topics that were embedded in all his coursework. He said every course talked about diverse learning styles, knowing your students, and how to bring their cultures and backgrounds into the learning environment.

Johnny specifically talked about one course he had called Families and Communities that was centered on getting to know your students as a whole. He explained that it was geared around understanding their culture, their family values and dynamics, as well as the community in which they are situated. Johnny said that at the time of taking this course, he was in his student teaching placement, which made it even more beneficial.

We had to drive around the neighborhood surrounding the school and take note of certain things. Then we discussed what that meant. So, like my professor would be, like were there any business? Did you see a lot of homeless? Did you notice the

condition of homes or stores? And like when I did it, I could personally see like 20 houses that were empty. So, then we would have discussions about what that really means and like conversations about how the community surrounding our students' school and lives plays such a part in their learning. Doing this was so good because it was helping me to see that it's more than just teaching. It is more than just teaching the standards, we have to be aware of the community, the family make-up and all the things that make students who they are. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Johnny tell this part of his story, I wrote "*Relationships! Knowing your students!*" in my field notes. Later that evening I wrote in my journal about this part of his story in order to capture my thoughts and check my own assumptions.

Johnny talks about teaching being more than the academia side like standards and content. He mentions multiple experiences which include analyzing communities and having discussions about various cultures, seeing inequities in schools of different cultures.... I am wondering, would he have made these connections on his own had the intentionality not been there? I wonder how his own personal experiences come into play with this. (Journal entry, September 2022)

Through each response Johnny gave, he emphasized the importance of knowing his students culturally. He talked about how significant it is to understand students' cultural backgrounds. As Johnny elaborated on practices he had learned in preparation for working with urban students, he shared other examples of learning about making connections to students' background knowledge. He mentioned a class that taught a lot about an assets-based approach to working with diverse students.

Johnny continued to talk about his experiences and how helpful they were. When he talked about his student teaching experience, he mentioned how appreciative he was of the school community he was placed in, as well as how amazing his cooperating mentor teacher was. Johnny student taught at Stonecrest Elementary, where he currently works. He spoke about the community feel of the school and how that drew him in. He also mentioned how

supportive and collaborative everyone is within the school, which made him feel more comfortable.

He explained his student teaching experience as being “So good! It was like I chose the perfect place to be” (Interview, September 2022). He started at Stonecrest Elementary three days a week in the fall. Mostly he was observing, building relationships with the kids, and pulling some small group reteaches. In October he said he started taking on one subject at a time, meaning fully teaching that subject on his own as his cooperating mentor teacher gave him coaching and feedback. Then when he got back from Christmas break in January, he continued taking on more subjects. Unfortunately, this was 2020, so his experience got cut short due the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the way Johnny spoke about this, it did not seem to have as big an impact as I had assumed it would. When he first mentioned COVID cutting his year short and taking away most of his spring semester, I wrote, “*Dangit COVID!*” in my field notes. However, as Johnny continued to talk about this part of his preparation experience, I realized I was too quick to write down my reaction.

Yeah, so my final semester of student teaching, we were here five full days a week and I was just starting to take over the whole day of teaching. The goal was to be the full-on teacher starting after we came back from spring break. Well, we never came back from spring break. So I never got that consistent practice of taking everything over. I had just started the week before spring break, so had only been like a week of doing it.

To be honest at first I was kind of scared and worried. But not really, I was still confident in myself as a teacher. Then we started doing Zoom classes in like... I think April? My CT she let me take that full on and of course she helped me, but it was like then even though it wasn't the same, like at all. Like it was so different. I learned how to connect with my students in like a different way that I never thought of before. We learned so many things like Google classroom or like technology apps that I never would have known of before then either. And like those things, I do in my classroom now. Like I wouldn't have known that, and those things help with engagement and participation even when we aren't on Zoom.

I mean, so yeah. It sucked being virtual, but I don't feel like I really missed a bunch because we had so much before. But we did miss the home visits because of COVID, and that is something I do wish we had. But still we had so much stuff sort of like it before. And I also think having to experience the shift to Zoom with my CT, made me realize how flexible you have to be as a teacher. (Interview, September 2022)

As Johnny spoke about this experience, I noticed how reflective and calm he was in his response. I went back to my field notes and drew a flower next to my initial "*Dangit COVID!*" note. By the flower I wrote "*Perspective on growth!*" (Field note, September 2022) and highlighted this. As I reflected that evening in my journal, I made sure to go back to that field note. I read it and reread Johnny's interview transcription before I put my pen to paper to capture my thoughts.

Whenever I ask ANYONE, especially teachers who were in their final year of college during spring 2020, they talk so much about how hard virtual teaching was, how ineffective it was, how terrible the experience was. But not Johnny! He literally pointed out the good that came out of it. He doesn't see it as a negative. Johnny may be one of the most reflective thinkers I know. Or could this be a cover story? I cannot tell. (Journal entry, September 2022)

Johnny talked highly about his level of confidence and how prepared he felt through his program experiences. He felt that shifting to virtual was not as big a deal for him because he had so much prior experience. This may have been a cover story he was telling me and himself; I could not fully tell. From other parts of Johnny's overall story, it was clear that reflective thinking was a strong part of his preparation experiences, and he was showing me that reflective perspective when he talked about the non-impact of the pandemic on his preparation experiences. Overall, the strong focus on diverse coursework, reflective practices, immersion in urban contexts, and collaborative experiences made Johnny perceive his preparation experiences as very helpful. His cultural awareness also influenced how prepared he was to teach urban students.

Johnny began our first interview right away with his personal story of his family coming to America from Mexico when he was 15. His father applied for his green card when Johnny was born but did not get the actual green card until Johnny was 15. His father wanted his family to move from America because as Johnny says, “He wanted us to get a better education, and thought we would have more opportunities and he really wanted us to learn the language” (Initial Interview, August 2022). At the time Johnny and his sister did not want to leave Mexico, and he recalls being very nervous and anxious about the transition. He shared a secret story with me, one which he said he has never told anyone.

We had always known eventually whenever we would get like the green light, we were going to go. And I remember, one night my father he came home from work and sat us all down. He told us, like the next week we were going to Texas to go through all of the vaccinations and paperwork, then go see family in California and we were going to move to America for good.

I remember the next day I told my group of friends I was actually leaving. They all gave me a hard time. They said I was going to become stuck up and I was never going to come back or if I did I would be like an American snob, or something like that. I remember thinking this would actually be true and I cried all night the night before we left. But I didn’t tell anyone, especially my father. And I couldn’t tell my sister, even though we were really close because I had to be brave for her. I just faked that I was okay with it because I knew that’s what my father would have expected from me. But yeah, I was actually really scared. (Initial Interview, August 2022)

As Johnny told this part of his story, I could see this shift in his body language. He moved back and forth in his chair, crossed his arms, and looked down at the table when he spoke, occasionally looking up at me. This was not the normal way Johnny communicated, and I made note of that in my field notes. “*Seems apprehensive to share this personal story with me, long pauses between words and looking away from me when he talks*” (Field note, August 2022). As he continued to recount his story and moved out of talking about his personal feelings, his body language shifted back to a more relaxed and comfortable stance.

He held eye contact with me and spoke in a more upbeat tone of voice. I felt that I was assuming that he had been uncomfortable, and to control my assumptions and reactions, I turned to my journal that evening.

I could feel the anxiousness Johnny spoke about when he shared his feelings with me about moving. He seemed as if he was uncomfortable talking about his own feelings and seemed nervous saying them out loud. It felt like he was almost ashamed to admit he was nervous. I am wondering if the pressure he gets from his father's expectations has something to do with this. He mentioned thinking it would be true that he would turn into an American snob. Could it be that Johnny struggled with the idea of losing his identity? I need to explore this more in our next interview. (Journal entry, August 2022)

Through this secret story he shared, it was apparent that he is deeply influenced by his family's expectations. This showed even more as he continued to share about his transition to America. Johnny talked about how they ended up in Kansas because it is where his father's family lived. He mentioned they had never been close with this side of the family because they had moved to America when Johnny was younger. "My father always said that family sticks together, and it was always our end goal to end up together in America, so we would have better opportunities and be together to experience the better opportunities" (Interview, August 2022). He went on to share that in his culture, you do not disagree with your elders, regardless of the situation. He talked about how rough high school was when he first got here and how bullying happened, mostly because they did not speak the language. He recalled a group of students telling him and his sister one day on the bus to go back to Mexico because they were not welcome in America. Within the first couple of months of attending school he said kids would laugh at him or try to mimic his accent, telling him he sounded stupid.

I remember one day when we got to school, this group of girls tapped my sister on the shoulder and pointed to the SPED [Special Education] classroom and told her that's where she belonged. We didn't know immediately what that really meant, but we figured it out. It was just mean little things like that here and there, but it got better.

Whenever we would tell my dad about this, he would just kind of like brush it off and just tell us these experiences would make us stronger. (Initial Interview, August 2022)

Johnny talked about how his experience slowly got better the longer he was in school. He recalled his coursework being strongly focused on learning the language. “I had like 7 classes my first year, 4 were ELL, one was math, one was PE and the other art” (Interview, August 2022). As he started to acclimate more to the American school system, he said he found himself being interested and motivated to learn more about American culture, especially the language.

If anything, the bullying or mean comments, they were like ... Well, it was like a motivator for me and my sister to study harder so we could fit in. We practiced all the time, trying to use English as much as we could. Practiced so much we started using more and more English at home. And I remember my parents not knowing English very well so they would just kind of like encourage us but didn't really know how to help. So my sister and I had to also communicate for them like out in the grocery stores and in passing with our neighbors. But we progressed really fast. (Interview, August 2022)

When Johnny talked about learning the language as a motivator for him to fit in, I jotted in my field notes, “*Fit in? Why!*” (Field note, August 2022). My initial reaction to hearing this was a mix of disappointment and anger. I knew I needed to confront this reaction, so I turned to my journal after the interview.

I can't imagine being in Johnny's situation whatsoever. But I hate that he felt like he had to learn the language so he could FIT IN! Why couldn't it be that his peers should learn HIS language so they could be INCLUSIVE? It seems like this process of learning English even overtook his language he spoke at home with his family. How could his teachers have celebrated his language more and make it seem as if it were an asset? (Journal entry, August 2022)

Johnny excelled quickly in learning the language—so quickly that his teacher had him become a tutor for other students who were entering the courses. Johnny talked about an



experience helping a student who had just moved to Kansas from Ecuador. He would work with him for hours in and out of school. This experience ignited his passion for teaching.

Working with him was so cool. I knew what it was like to be in his shoes. I could like relate to the experiences he was going through coming to America and we became friends. But what was even cooler, was teaching him language, English. Like I was teaching him you know, colors, hands, feet, simple things, but once he got it he was so excited! And seeing him be excited, made me excited. It was awesome. Like that feeling of seeing someone get it. That is when I realized I wanted to really be a teacher. I enjoyed doing that a lot. And if I could help him fit in faster and help him in ways I wish someone could have helped me, that's what I wanted. I think my connection to him and my experiences helped him. (Interview, August 2022)

Johnny spoke about using his cultural identity to connect with another person, making it more meaningful. He talked about the connections his teachers would make with him. He shared a story about one of his teachers having a father-in-law from the same place he grew up. This teacher would go out of her way to tell Johnny about things her father-in-law told her. Johnny mentioned that this type of relationship motivated him. "I wanted to do good for her because I liked her. And she knew me. She tried to connect with me in ways my other teachers didn't, and that helped me" (Interview, August 2022). Johnny said having a teacher try to connect with his culture was powerful. He mentioned that the relationship he built with this teacher inspired him to feel seen and do better academically. Johnny also talked about his relationship with one of his ELL teachers, who was also Hispanic.

She could relate everything to me and knew exactly how to. She told me about how she came to this country when she was 17 and would always tell me about her experiences. I found myself much more connected to her. I did better in her class, and I cared more. This makes me think about how like we need more representation in our teaching. Like you look around and these students are 95% Latino or Hispanic, and there is like three Hispanic teachers. These students need more people who look like them and share cultural backgrounds as them. I think it would make them do better really. But, I think it will get better, it has too. It's important! (Interview, August 2022)

Through this sacred story Johnny shared with me, he related being deeply influenced by a teacher who looked like him. He explained that she would confirm his thinking in ways that other teachers could not. Johnny felt more comfortable with teachers who were like him, which made him do better. He believed he excelled in his ELL courses because this teacher had shared the same cultural identity.

As Johnny continued to excel in his ELL courses, he recalls taking a test that allowed him to test out of certain classes, so he was not considered an ELL anymore. “I felt so proud like I wasn’t an ELL anymore even though that was like felt kind of sad too. It was a weird struggle for me. I was happy but it also felt kind of weird for me” (Interview, August 2022). When I asked Johnny to tell me more about this feeling of struggle, he explained it as an identity struggle. He shared that he felt that he lost a little bit of his Hispanic culture as he became more immersed in American culture. Johnny explained that he felt some guilt that he was doing so well in learning English, even though that is what he knew his father wanted. He talked about liking his experience and time in America more than he thought he would, which made him feel torn.

I actually was starting to really enjoy it here and it felt off at first that I felt that way. Sometimes, I was sad thinking about not being in Mexico, around the Hispanic culture as much, and when I started making new friends here, I thought about what my friends in Mexico said, about me like becoming arrogant and not being the same.

But I didn’t and when I would go back to visit Mexico, my friends still were there and they thought I was still cool (laughs) so I didn’t lose my identity really. But like, so much of my identity did change. And I don’t want to say it was weird, but it was like an experience that made me really change my cultural outlook. (Interview, August 2022)

Johnny talked about all the ways in which his cultural identity and outlook changed, admitting to have a bit of a cultural struggle. He talked about times when he would ask

himself, “Is this part of American culture worth losing part of our Hispanic culture?” (Interview, August 2022), specifically when it came to speaking English over Spanish at home. He shared examples of how he struggled with his cultural identity and where he fit in. He talked about how the traditions of holidays such as Halloween and Fourth of July are so overlaid in America, and they do not always relate to the Hispanic cultural celebrations, which was a form of cultural struggle he experienced. Johnny said just this last year they started to participate in making a full Thanksgiving dinner. “We never have done that before, because that isn’t our culture. But we just started because it’s like, well, yeah, it is a part of our culture here” (Interview, August 2022).

In our second interview, Johnny expanded on this cultural identity struggle as he talked about deciding to become a teacher. He told a story about his decision to become a teacher and his family’s initial reaction:

So like when I decided that is what I was going to go to school for, my father was very disappointed. You know like we have no teachers in our family, and, well first of all, they don’t see it like a real manly job. Like in my culture, we mostly do like construction or landscaping or something like very physical labor, you know. And like when I said teaching they were first like **what**, why? Then they immediately thought like okay, high school teacher? And when I told them no, elementary, they were even more like **what**. They were so confused.

I remember my father telling me that it was a woman’s profession. And like as a Hispanic male I should be doing something like he does, like construction or landscaping or using my hands. I mean, eventually he got over it, but he still tells me like oh, you don’t work that hard, or oh, that is just easy money. They just don’t get it. And I am not sure if they ever really will. Like now they see I do work hard. But I just don’t think my job as a teacher is as like respected to them. Like you know that saying, those who can’t do, teach or something like that. Like that is what they think. It just isn’t looked at as highly in the Hispanic community. (Interview, September 2022)

Johnny talked about how his decision to join the teaching profession was a point in his life where he struggled with his cultural identity again. He started to wonder if he was

maybe becoming “too American” and felt torn between his family’s cultural influence and what he really wanted to do with his life. However, he said that his family’s reaction was the sole reason that continued to motivate him to pursue education. Johnny talked about how the idea that teaching as a male is not culturally accepted in the Hispanic community made him want to change that narrative. Johnny explained how he could use his own personal struggle with cultural identity to relate and connect with students of diverse cultures.

Johnny talked a lot about his personal experiences as a way in which he became more aware of his own cultural understanding and identity. He also shared experiences in his preparation program that made him become more aware of diverse cultures. Johnny recalled reading articles and having discussions within his cohort that focused on the way in which diverse cultures learn.

It was shocking to read that like Hispanics learn some things at a slower rate, and African Americans learn this way and seeing that stuff on paper really made me aware of the differences in cultural learning types. Then I would be thinking about my personal life and thinking about the reading, and like making connections thinking like **oh** is this why I struggled? It was just shocking to see on paper, you know? (Interview, September 2022)

When continuing to expand on how his preparation experiences encouraged his cultural awareness, he also mentioned an experience that he went through in class. He recalled an exercise they did as a cohort, in which each student in the cohort had to take a test that made them answer questions if they applied to them. “It was like, okay so if you are a person of color this question applies to you ... If you are not, it doesn’t apply to you” (Interview, September 2022). Johnny explained that at the end of this, everyone shared their responses, and this was an eye-opening moment for him.

I remember I was like lower than some people with a different culture. And then some other cultures were like even lower than me. And we had this discussion, of like

privilege and benefits and things that students bring into the classroom. Like their way of knowing. And it was just crazy to see that like some kids have better opportunities or chances than other kids. And it made us all think like wow, we have to know that and know that cultures have different ways of knowing and we have to honor that for our students and within our teaching. It was like a really good exercise to do. (Interview, September 2022)

Through the intentional structure of diverse coursework throughout his preparation experiences, Johnny gained more awareness and perspectives to expand upon his cultural outlook. Under the theme of preparation for working with diverse cultures, it is apparent that these types of experiences contributed to Johnny's cultural awareness. Johnny's cultural background and his personal experiences of attending high school in America is a major part of his story. Understanding how these experiences work together contributes to understanding his overall sense of preparedness to teach diverse student populations.

### **Sheridan's Story**

I've always heard that teaching is a "learn as you go" kind of job, and I definitely have felt that. If I were only counting on college experiences, then I would be at a huge disadvantage of even being a good teacher. All in all, I did not feel prepared whatsoever.

—Sheridan (Interview, September 2022)

Sheridan was disappointed with her preparation experiences, and she was vocal about that from the beginning. When I first asked her to tell me about her preparation experiences at Manilla University, her first response was, "I always joked that I was working on my exposé (laughs) and that I was gonna publish my exposé the next day after I graduated" (Interview, September 2022). As I heard this, I wrote in my field notes, "*Exposé?!?!?*" I was instantly drawn in to understand why she felt like she was writing her exposé! Sheridan explained right away that Manilla University was lacking a sense of community, and even referred to it as, "it was a bit of a joke to be honest, how good they make themselves seem,

when in reality it is quite the opposite” (Interview, September 2022). It was clear to me at this moment how dissatisfied she was with her program, and I needed to know more. I asked Sheridan to tell me more and explain to me why she had these thoughts and feelings.

In the actual preparation program, um, it felt like some people just competed with each other, and wanted to make themselves look better rather than actually helping us, the students. And then professors weren’t always accessible, or even knowledgeable really. They were a few in particular that it kind of like, if you approach them with questions that were vulnerable or something then it was almost like you were talked down on for having those questions and needing clarification. It’s like okay, well, I’m not coming back to you for it.

I feel like, especially when going into the student teaching year, and needing any type of help or direction, I definitely relied more on my cooperating teacher for everything, way more so than I did for any of like the Manilla professors.

I would say just like the broad picture of things, it more felt like I was a check for their program every semester, rather than like an actual member of society that you know, they were trying to shape into being a good teacher. (Interview, September 2022)

As Sheridan expanded upon her experiences, it was clear that her professors influenced ways in which she perceived her preparation experiences. She told how professors would talk down to her, making her feel inadequate when asking for support or clarification. Sheridan explained that this made her draw away even more from her professors and instantly caused disengagement with the content and coursework. “I didn’t even feel respected as a human, so it made me hate my experience even more. They didn’t care about us, so why should I care about their courses? Ya know?” (Interview, September 2022). Not only did Sheridan feel disrespected and unvalued, but she also explained how fearful she is of some of the faculty in Manilla University. She shared a secret story with me about how these memories are still with her.

And like my supervisor, they was supposed to you know support me and offer feedback and check in and help. But every time she came in it was like she only

pointed out what I did wrong and never gave me any advice that was impactful. (Interview, September 2022)

Sheridan elaborated on how the support from her professors was lacking in many ways. The feedback she received was often, “condescending and rude. Nothing that could actually help me grow as a teacher or [make] me feel like I was doing anything right!” (Interview, September 2022). I was a little taken back by Sheridan’s experience and hearing her story about the feedback she received while in her program at Manilla University. I knew that my reaction and feelings could influence my interpretations, so I made sure to journal about my initial feelings that evening.

It is very clear that Sheridan did not enjoy her professors at Manilla University... I wonder if Sheridan was given constructive feedback which wasn’t well received because of the lack of trust and respect she had for some professors? It is very interesting that the first thing that sticks out to her when talking about her preparation program is the culture of Manilla University, specifically within the faculty. (Journal entry, September 2022)

The lack of support Sheridan received made her feel discouraged, and as she says, “unmotivated and unconfident” (Interview, September 2022) as she navigated through the role of being a student to being seen as a teacher. Sheridan explained turning more to her cooperating teacher for guidance and support. She also elaborated on how she felt so relieved she had the cooperating teacher that she had.

Honestly, it was like a blessing that I got placed with the cooperating teacher that I did. She was amazing, I learned so much from her. And, she helped me more than what Manilla could at all. Like she didn’t sugar coat things, she was relevant and like in the trenches, so I respected her more. It was much more authentic. (Interview, September 2022)

As Sheridan raved about her relationship with her cooperating mentor teacher, she could not say enough how effective that partnership was in her development. She talked in great detail about the impact her cooperating teacher had on her overall learning and development in

becoming a teacher. Sheridan mentioned that this relationship with her cooperating teacher felt more authentic and purposeful because of the reality of learning alongside her. She mentioned this as being different from her professors because her professors seemed to be, “Out of touch and unaware of the realities in day to day school. I mean they taught like 15 or more years ago and a lot has changed” (Interview, September 2022). Sheridan admitted to having a hard time learning from teachers who had been out of touch and out of the classroom for a while. She expanded upon this, stating that her cooperating mentor teacher was a bigger help simply because she also was immersed in the student academic and social needs as well as knowing their students’ cultural backgrounds.

Along with the idea of having an effective cooperating teacher, Sheridan mentioned how beneficial it was that she got experience and opportunities so early in her preparation experiences.

Like I know people from other universities that they really didn’t get a ton of like experience in the same classroom over and over again until their student teaching. And we did. Like we were in rooms a lot before we student taught.

So, I think just knowing that, like, okay, you’re gonna get to know these kids and practice forming a relationship and like a meaningful bond with them and you have to work at it. I think I just like getting the opportunity to practice that, often and early. And practice how to work with colleagues and like to be a professional in a school setting, early on. That was probably the most impactful I would say. (Interview, September 2022)

As Sheridan elaborated on her most beneficial experiences, she spoke about how many different opportunities she gained either observing, tutoring, or modeling within actual classrooms with groups of students prior to her student teaching year. Sheridan continued to talk about how helpful this was because she was able to do this in a variety of urban schools. “It was so helpful because we saw like three different urban schools, and we were working



directly in them. Like our practicums were in that setting, which made us even more aware of the realities of teaching in an urban setting” (Interview, September 2022).

When talking about how her preparation experiences prepared her to teach specifically within an urban context, Sheridan mentioned that was the sole focus of her experience at Manilla University. She said all her experiences were focused on the urban school setting. Every experience she had, she mentioned as being “very intentional to be centered around urban communities and diverse students” (Interview, September 2022).

When she expanded on her practicum experiences, she mentioned the advantage she felt she had by being in all urban schools.

All in all, I think what most prepared me for urban schools was like the true immersion of the entire program. Like being in that setting, learning alongside teachers, working on community service projects, you know like being in it and seeing it all firsthand. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Sheridan explain her preparation experiences in greater detail, she mentioned how big a difference it made for her to be immersed in that environment from the beginning to help her be better prepared. Aside from the immersion aspect of her preparation experiences, Sheridan talked a lot about reading literature, articles, or watching clips of how effective teachers teach diverse student populations. She mentioned that these experiences were set up in an intentional way in which collaborative and effective dialogue was held with her peers. “It helped to be able to process what we were learning with our peers, it also helped us to see other perspectives or take on topics that could, you know, potentially be out of our comfort zone” (Interview, September 2022). In my field notes as Sheridan explained this I wrote, “*Process! Out of comfort zone*” (Field note, September 2022) and underlined it. As she was speaking, the tone of her voice became more upbeat than it had been previously.

She appeared to be more relaxed, and her body language was more welcoming as she talked through her experiences. I wrote, “*Seems to feel more excited to talk about urban preparation specifically*” (Field note, August 2022). This type of immersion Sheridan spoke about instilled a passion in her for urban education. She talked about this passion from her preparation experiences in our first interview.

That is one thing I would say Manilla University really did well. They ignited a passion for urban education that was not there before I started my higher education, and it has only grown the more time I spend in urban schools. I mostly chose urban because of the people. Like, mainly because the students are absolutely amazing. I mean their resilience knows no bounds.

I work with students who are immigrants and refugees and typically speak very little English when they come to our school. The way that they push ahead and show up every day is absolutely inspiring. They inspire me to show up every day and fight for them to get the education they deserve in and outside of the classroom. Never knew I could be as passionate about something until I was immersed in it, really. (Interview, August 2022)

It became clear the more she talked about her preparation experiences in our second interview that the idea of being immersed in urban school contexts was a big factor in her passion for urban education.

Sheridan explained how her experiences also helped prepare her for community engagement and parental connections. She mentioned having a class that was specifically geared toward preparing teachers to work with families and communities. She recalls having to do service community projects for a set number of hours, which she said was “very helpful to learn about the resources and things that are within their community so we can be more aware” (Interview, September 2022). As Sheridan spoke about this course, she talked about how powerful it was being able to hear from multiple stakeholders in urban communities. She recalled a memory she had within that class where community outreach programs,

principals, parents, and some teachers from local urban schools were invited to come and speak to the class. She remembered this as being insightful and helpful to be able to ask questions and get varied perspectives on topics.

When talking about her community and family course, Sheridan mentioned the requirement of home visits, which she did not get to do because of COVID-19. “In that class normally, we would have done a home visit too, but it was no longer allowed because of COVID” (Interview, September 2022). This is where the interpretative code *COVID Impact* blossomed. Being that Sheridan graduated in 2021, it was obvious that COVID would have impacted her preparation in some way or another. I asked her to tell me about those impacts, and it appeared she was triggered by the question itself. Her immediate response, “What do you mean how did it impact? I feel like it robbed us of everything!” (Interview, September 2022). Sheridan sat up straighter in her chair and started to tap her foot fiercely, her entire demeanor changing as she started to talk about the COVID impacts in her preparation experiences.

So COVID hit when I was in my junior year. So, at the time I was in practicum one day a week, the one where we actually did small group guided reading, so that really sucked. I only got to do like two weeks of practicing and teaching guided reading before COVID hit, so that practicum experience was cut short. Then to start student teaching in a virtual/blended format. Like wow. It was just so different and not the true experience I had expected.

But what was really annoying was all of our classes shifted to online and everything just felt meaningless at that point. Like our professors didn’t even check or grade our work, we had busy work assignments and so I just started doing the bare minimum because you know, why try? No one even cared. Zoom just isn’t productive and it felt like we got the short end of the stick. Still had to pay the same amount for a very different type of education. (Interview, September 2022)

As Sheridan talked through this experience, she told how she almost lost all motivation after the pandemic hit. Again, she talked about the professor’s outlook during this time and how

that impacted her immensely in regard to what type of student she was. She said that she found herself more unmotivated and less excited about her courses than she was prior. Sheridan mentioned the biggest impact of COVID was that “It cut our time out of what could have been purposeful classes, discussions, and coursework. Nothing felt good or worthy at all on Zoom” (Interview, September 2022). Sheridan did not elaborate too much about the impact of getting her practicum hours cut because as she stated earlier, she got so much of that experience prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As I listened to Sheridan tell her story, I asked her why she rated herself at a six in regard to how prepared she felt. She reflected on how the practicum experiences and intentional placement within urban school contexts prepared her a great deal, specifically with teaching diverse student populations. Sheridan said the real thing that held her back from feeling more prepared was the lack of community and connection she felt while at Manilla University.

Manilla as a whole just felt very disconnected. It was like they preach relationships and inclusion, but yet don't have professors or experiences that actually make us as students feel valued or included. It felt like I was, you know, just a check to them and they didn't really care about how well I did as a teacher. I feel like if I had stronger relationships with my professors or if they had been more involved, I think I would have been a better teacher and more prepared. (Interview, September 2022)

Aside from the impact in which faculty members at Manilla University had on Sheridan, she also talked about how her own cultural awareness and understanding also played a vital role in the way she perceived her sense of preparedness to teach diverse student populations. During our first interview, Sheridan talked about being born and raised in a suburb outside of downtown Kansas City. She mentioned being homeschooled until she went to sixth grade, when she attended Catholic schools. She said she does not typically tell people she was

homeschooled and does not really like to talk about that part of her life. After telling me this, Sheridan jumped right into reflecting on her experience in Catholic schools. As I listened to her talk about her experience, the idea of *Self Awareness* emerged.

The schools I attended were incredibly whitewashed and very privileged. You know typical privileged private school views on everything. Which I never knew at the time and being in it, but looking back and what all I know, I can absolutely say that now. (Interview, August 2022)

Sheridan expressed that she had become aware of how privileged she was growing up and how unaware she was of her privilege until she got older and was out on her own. “My family had some very close-minded cultural thoughts and perspectives, and I never realized that until I became old enough to learn things and really develop my own views” (Interview, August 2022). I asked Sheridan to tell me more about this, and she quickly shut it down by saying, “Oh that is for another time and a whole different conversation!” (Interview, August 2022). It was apparent that she did not want to talk about this, and I knew it was not something I should push on; however, it showed me a lot about her awareness and self-reflection. In my field notes I jotted down, “*Differing views from family—more close minded*” (Field note, August 2022). From the beginning of our first interview, I had learned a secret story about Sheridan and her upbringing. She felt that her family dynamic was an important part of her story and felt that it needed to be included. I reflected on our first interview immediately afterwards in my journal:

Sheridan made sure I knew that she was aware of the privilege she had as a White woman. I wonder if she was implying that her parents think differently about privilege or if they aren’t as racial aware. When she told me that her family’s views were very different, I am assuming that is what she is referring to? I can’t tell. But for her to be so open about this at the beginning makes me think Sheridan is a very culturally aware and reflective person. I wonder what experiences made her get to that point. I will need to ask in our follow up. (Journal entry, August 2022)

In our second interview, Sheridan talked about how powerful it was to be immersed in urban school contexts. As she talked about this experience, aside from how helpful it was to work directly with students, she also mentioned how it helped her to become aware of what urban students' lives were like.

It was so helpful to be in the setting and learn from them and their families to be more aware of their way of living. You know it is just so different from what I experienced growing up and I never knew anything about other cultures or socioeconomic statuses that were different from mine, so to be in those environments alongside them was helpful and important. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Sheridan share this, it was clear that again, the immersion piece did not just help her to be prepared to work with diverse student populations, but also helped her to become culturally aware. Sheridan talked about how she had classes that were grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy, which also contributed to building that awareness. She mentioned that a lot of her experiences in her preparation program were grounded in the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, but she said she felt that the action piece was missing.

Everything was like you know, “Oh be culturally responsive” but we had no preparation on how to have difficult conversations with students. Like I have students who very clearly do not trust the police, and rightfully so. But we were never taught how to ACT and bring up these difficult conversations and topics with students to make a change.

It was like yes, we are culturally aware of the injustices—but now what? Like what can we do about it? And that was a missing piece I feel like. (Interview, September 2022)

Sheridan told a story about one of her students bringing up the death of George Floyd and wanted to talk about it during their morning meeting. She expressed how nervous she felt to have that conversation with her students and how she did not feel prepared to necessarily talk about the injustices with seven- and eight-year-olds in an appropriate way. She shared:

I was like tiptoeing around how to navigate that conversation. I just kept telling them, you know like, our country has not been fair to people of color, and things need to change. But how do you have that conversation with students in the right way? I was so nervous, and I wish I would have had more of that training alongside the focus of being a social justice teacher. (Interview, September 2022)

As Sheridan talked through this story, her voice and body language shifted. Her passion shined through her words as she spoke about missing the training on how to actually enact social justice curriculum. She felt that she was culturally aware and had experiences that brought about that awareness, however she thought she did not have enough opportunities or learning to really practice how to enact being a social justice teacher—specifically, when it came to discussing current events. Sheridan mentioned wanting to build cultural competency in her students but feeling unsure how to do so. She mentioned that she values this so much that she has sought out professional development opportunities in order to learn more. She referred to the opportunities she has sought out as being “extremely beneficial and rich!” and mentioned that this was the type of learning that should be included in all preparation experiences.

When reflecting on her preparedness to teach diverse student populations, Sheridan mentioned becoming much more culturally aware through the purposeful experiences she did have in preparation experiences. However, she felt that the cultures of which she really became more aware were only African American, Hispanic, and Latino cultures, and she wishes she had learned more about other cultures. When telling me this, Sheridan talked about the school in which she currently teaches. She explained that the school is made up of a large population of immigrants and refugees who speak little English. She admitted that she did not feel prepared to work with the student population of Afghanistan refugees and

Ismailian families. Sheridan talked a lot about wishing she had been exposed to more cultures so she could have widened her awareness and perspectives.

I have some like refugee families that I've tried to get, like donations for and stuff and it's been hard. I have tried to tell families like, "here are things for your kids!" and they wouldn't accept it, because they don't want to feel like they are a charity. Because we have a lot of Afghanistan refugees, and they have a very difficult time, like culturally accepting help for anything. Like they won't.

Our translators and parent liaisons have told us that it is their culture that they struggle with that, and they have been trying to work on it since moving to the United States because they don't want people to think that they're rude or unappreciative. But just like culturally, they don't accept help.

So I wish I had practice with other cultures, and learned about other cultural norms that weren't my own, or Black or Latino. Because if I had more of that understanding, I would feel more prepared and confident in how to best help, interact or even communicate with my students and their families. (Interview, September 2022)

Sheridan talked about how essential it is to know her students' backgrounds so she can be a more effective educator. She mentioned that knowing students' cultural norms and ways of thinking allows her to tailor her instruction to deliver content in an effective manner. In this part of the interview, it became apparent that Sheridan values her students culturally. She talked about how educators not only need to be aware of students' differences in culture, but also need to know the implications of their cultural ways of knowing on their instruction. As she spoke about her students, she often reiterated the strengths they bring into the classroom. She used the terms assets and celebrations when she talked about how powerful her students' cultural backgrounds were. As Sheridan spoke about her students, her face lit up, and I could feel her passion in her voice. She very much values her students, and the love she has for them was apparent as she spoke.

The immersion experiences in Sheridan's preparation experiences helped deepen her cultural awareness of some cultures. Through her story, the immersion of being in her current



school, and learning more about different cultures also helped to deepen her understanding. However, in Sheridan’s perspective, being culturally aware is not enough. She believes there has to be an active part of cultural awareness in order to be an effective teacher. Her story shows this as she spoke about craving more training to learn how to enact practices effectively and as she spoke about using her students’ cultures as vehicles for learning.

### **Monae’s Story**

I couldn’t imagine being a first-year teacher and going into an urban school and not having any type of prior experience, or skills or any exposure. Like when we think of our college, we think of the full experience, like you want to be proficient in your area that you’re going to work in. And with me, I can’t think of anything specific or really even say that my school gave me anything specific to go work in an urban school with.

—Monae (Interview, August 2022)

Monae was eager to participate in this study and this showed within a minute of our first interaction. As I greeted Monae at a coffee shop that she had selected, she was smiling ear to ear and stood up to greet me with a warm handshake and welcome. “Hi! I am so excited to meet you and talk about this!” (Interview, July, 2022). This type of greeting made me feel not only welcomed but affirmed that I had a great participant who was also just as eager as I was to dive into the discussion of urban preparation. As I sat down and got my materials out, I quickly jotted down “*Enthusiastic & welcoming*” (Field note, July, 2022) so I would not forget the type of energy she displayed from the beginning.

As Monae reflected on her preparation experiences, she started by talking about the type of classes in her program. She referred to some math and reading method courses, an introduction to SPED course, a multiculturalism course, and a professional writing course. She reflected on her course load as having, “a good variety of classes that were like two-part, ya know, one part was about teaching us all the stuff in the classroom, but then the other part

were classes that taught us about the professional working side of teaching” (Interview, August 2022). I asked Monae to expand on what she meant in regard to the professional working side of teaching. She talked about the class being dedicated to applying for jobs; she explained that in this particular course, students learned how to create their resumes, write cover letters, draft professional emails, and how to reach and communicate with principals and district officials. Monae said this course was extremely helpful because it helped her be aware of how professional communication should look. I found this really interesting and wrote about it in my journal that evening.

I think it is really cool that Monae had a class dedicated to professionalism. I know personally these types of things weren't in my preparation courses. I remember googling best resume and cover letter templates. The idea of professionalism was an indicator we all talked about in our program, but a class dedicated to how that looks and how you communicate would have been very helpful. This also makes me think about a lot of the new teachers I coach. They often ask me how to best communicate with our principals or other staff members in a professional email, or to check their emails if they sound okay. I am thinking about how helpful it would be if this type of requirement would be provided for all aspiring educators. Shoot, not even educators, just all college students! (Journal entry, August 2022)

Monae then shifted to talk more about her introduction to SPED class specifically as being helpful, because it gave exposure to the student population with disabilities and taught her how to better understand individualized educational plans, something she had not been aware of prior to that class. As she expanded on this thought, she talked about not having any students in her first year with an IEP but referred back to the learning in that class often to think about how to differentiate her instruction in meaningful ways for her students. Monae said her method courses helped her to learn what to teach and how to teach the content appropriately. She mentioned a lot of work on writing lesson plans and understanding elementary school content. She referred to her program as being “pretty rigorous and intense

at times, mostly because of how much we had to write on those lesson plans” (Interview, August 2022). Monae mentioned that she felt sometimes the lesson plans carried too much emphasis, rather than the actual teaching.

You know, you can look real good on paper. Like I could make an awesome lesson plan that looks 100%, but that doesn’t mean I actually taught it well. I wish sometimes I would have gotten more feedback on my teaching, rather than just my writing. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae elaborated on this idea—that her preparation courses were focused on the type of lesson plans she would create. She felt sometimes it was not helpful to only receive feedback about whether she wrote them correctly rather than how she taught the content. Because of this, she felt some of her assignments were busy work and not helpful to making her a better teacher.

I understand you have to lesson plan, but I think it is more important how you deliver the lesson rather than how you plan it. Like in the real world, like day to day in my classroom, I don’t write out 10 page lesson plans for everything. I just don’t. So having us do that so much felt kind of like a waste for real. I would have rather had some more intentional learning on like the HOW you deliver the plans. You know what I mean? (Interview, August 2022)

As I listened to Monae share this part of her preparation story, I wrote in my field notes, “*Feedback wanted on implementation vs. planning*” (Field note, August 2022) and put a star next to it with the time stamp so I could come back when analyzing. As she continued to talk about her experiences, she mentioned the vast opportunities she had in practicums, but felt that the practicum experiences sometimes lacked connection to the learning that took place in her courses. She elaborated that in her practicum experiences she would deliver some lessons, but again did not get the feedback on how she taught the lesson, only how she wrote it. She also talked about the disconnection between coursework and classroom observations. Monae mentioned that she was able to make the connections between what she

was seeing in the classroom but had to do so herself and sometimes wondered if she was connecting observations correctly to the learned content. She stated:

I remember having to do a time on task on three students in a practicum. But never learning like what the results of that time on task meant really. I kind of connected the dots and realized like okay, this kid was only on task this amount of time when the teacher was doing this, so the teacher could of or should have done this instead. But there wasn't like a real space set up for us to talk about that. Like I just was kind of assuming and hoping the connections I was making were correct. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae shared that as she spent more time in practicum and continued to make more connections on her own, she learned to speak up and ask more questions of her professors and sometimes even the teachers she was working alongside in practicum. "I wanted to learn as much as I could, so I asked a lot of questions. But for real I wish I didn't have to be the one to always ask the questions, but that's alright" (Interview, August 2022). This showed me a lot about who Monae was as a learner. She talked about how she would even start to do her own research based on things she was seeing in the classroom. She laughed as she talked more about this and told me, "I never really told anyone, but I would spend a stupid amount of time researching on Google Scholar all kinds of things. (Laughs) Like different types of instructional strategies, content delivery methods, and like best engagement strategies for elementary students" (Interview, August 2022). I reflected upon this part of her secret story in my journal later that evening.

Monae appears to be very self-driven and reflective in her learning experiences. She was motivated to learn to be the best type of educator she could be, so she learned she needed to advocate for herself and ask questions when she wasn't sure. This is something that shows her care for learning and her thirst for knowledge. (Journal entry, August 2022)

Monae made sure to clarify that she was appreciative of all her practicum experiences regardless. She shared with me that the amount of field experiences and intentionality behind

being in classrooms was the most important part of her preparation. She told me that Blue University's school of education had a school on site, which meant she was in classrooms starting from day one in her program. She explained that the first two years of her program they would be in classrooms observing and sometimes teaching a lesson here and there. But by her third year, they had a practicum in the fall and a different practicum in the spring.

So practicum for me, was like a mini student teaching experience before my full student teaching experience. I was in a kindergarten class and I pretty much like just worked with a small group every day for about an hour. I had to assess what they knew, analyze what gaps they had, then I had to make intentional plans to teach them and assess if they got it or not. So, it was like this continuous cycle for small group instruction really. That one was in whatever my partner teacher wanted me to work on, so that one in the fall was math.

Then I had to do the same thing in the spring but had to be there two hours a day instead of one. And that time, I was in a third grade classroom. So, I did a reading group for one hour, then just kind of assisted students when they were independently working. Like that partner teacher had me kind of like in the moment reteach and explain things after she delivered the whole group lesson. (Interview, August 2022)

These experiences were extremely powerful for Monae. She mentioned that it helped to build her confidence and made her feel less shy when it came to delivering lessons and working with students. She also talked about how it gave her the ability to apply the learning and practice teaching. She stated:

It was so good to have those practicums. Like I actually got to practice teaching before doing it on my own! And especially in kindergarten. It taught me to like hurry up and get to the point because you know, kindergarteners' attention span! But for real it taught me how to pace lessons and how to really just get to the meat of it. Ha, and it also taught me that I for sure didn't want to teach little, little kids. (Interview, August 2022)

Since Monae graduated in 2020, I had assumed that COVID-19 would have had a big impact on her preparation experiences; however, in her perception it did not. I asked her to tell me about the impacts COVID had on her learning, and she shrugged her shoulders and

responded, “Ah, I mean if anything, it just made it seem more like a wash in all our classes, that’s really it” (Interview, August 2022). That Monae appeared to be so nonchalant when she said this really took me by surprise. However, as she expanded upon her response, I realized why. Monae received clearance to do her student teaching in the fall semester of 2019, versus when she was supposed to do it in the spring of 2020 due to some personal reasons. Because of this, she had already completed her student teaching experience and was taking classes in the spring. When reflecting on this experience, she shared;

So really COVID only really impacted some of my classes by having to go online. Like I had a reading one, that was supposed to be in person in a classroom and so I missed being able to do more reading groups with kids. Which kinda sucked, but it was okay because we had experience before in classrooms, like I already did my student teaching! So it wasn’t like I got a ton of experience with kids cut from my experience, ya know what I mean?

But yeah, COVID was hard doing Zoom college classes or preparing online things for students, I mean my motivation kind of faded for real. I didn’t care as much about that last semester only because things were so check box type of feeling. There wasn’t any real learning that took place that semester really, and no professors even cared really. And as long as I could still graduate, that is all I cared about!

Now if I was student teaching during that spring I would probably feel way different. But by the grace of God I dodged that bullet (laughs). (Interview, August 2022)

As Monae shared this with me, a couple of the words she used stuck out, and I wrote them in my field notes, “checkbox type of feeling. Professors didn’t care” (Field note, August 2022).

Even though Monae felt that COVID-19 didn’t impact her education a great deal, the way she shared it with me made me think a little differently. I wondered if COVID had actually shifted her stride and motivation more than she was aware of. I processed this and reflected upon this idea in an entry I made in my journal.

Monae shared so much about how much she strived to learn more, but when talking about the COVID implications and shifting her classes to online, she didn’t care and seemed okay to accept that no learning took place. I wonder if this is a cover story,

she is telling herself or if she really feels like it wasn't a big deal to her. I wonder if the personal stuff she referred to that she had going on in the spring impacted her way of thinking. Or if her motivation dwindled like everyone else's when the pandemic arrived. Not sure, but something to think about... (Journal entry, August 2022)

When I asked Monae to tell me about how her preparation experiences prepared her to teach in an urban context, her entire manner shifted. Previously in our interview she appeared to be energetic and excited to share about all the great things she learned and experienced, but when getting specific about urban students, it felt like that excitement turned into annoyance. Her follow-up to my question was, "Ha! I wasn't prepared at all to teach in an urban school based on Blue University" (Interview, August 2022). She told me that she thought a big reason for this was the location of the university itself. She explained that Blue University was centered in a rural location, which meant that a lot of her experiences in classrooms were with White students who were "either very privileged or from middle-class family environments" (Interview, August 2022). Monae mentioned that she felt that it was assumed a lot in her preparation program that teachers would not teach in underserved communities. She admitted that she assumed this only because of the lack of focus on culturally diverse students or social justice topics.

Everything we learned was from this very like, I don't want to sound rude or insensitive, but like this real White male perspective. Like this almost whitewashed, unrealistic way of living. It was like assumed on their end that we were all going to teach in a predominantly White rich school where no hardships or problems would ever be faced. It was almost like a jaded sense of reality for real. I swear to God, we even had a professor tell us "Don't get into current events with students, it gets dicey and you don't want to bring any issues up like that in your classroom." And I remember I was over here thinking like, **what**. It was bizarre. But yeah, very White way or the highway up there. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae mentioned having one class that was somewhat geared toward teaching diverse students, and that was her multiculturalism class. She recalled this being her favorite class

because the professor was Black, which felt relevant and relatable to her. She reflected on him bringing up some tough conversations and pushing his students to think deeply and differently than any other professor had done previously. When talking about this, she said, “He made us get uncomfortable, which was good! We needed that.” (Interview, August 2022). She mentioned how powerful it was to have a class that talked about topics of social justice and had a space to learn from each other’s experiences. As Monae talked about this course, she reiterated many times how she wished she had had more courses that were focused on these types of topics and ways of learning. Out of all her classes, she was able to talk about only one course that was grounded in culture, diversity, trauma, or any real issues pertaining to urban students.

Aside from the meaningful discussion that would get brought up in this class, the majority of the focus was on a service project in the community where they were able to choose where they wanted to complete community service hours. Monae decided to choose the women and children’s shelter, which she said was eye-opening. She reflected on this experience:

I just didn’t know what a lot of kids went through in those shelters. Like it made me realize that kids go through so many different things that I would have never imagined. And I had no idea how that all impacted kids, until I was there with them, cleaning out their spaces and helping them acclimate to this new environment with them. Like we got to interact with those kids, hang out, get to know them and just really see like firsthand how the trauma impacted them. Made me think of like, you never know what your students are going to be going through. Just made me more aware. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae mentioned taking this perspective with her currently into her own practices as she works with students who face a lot of traumas. She said the awareness she got from her



multiculturalism class is one she wishes would have been expanded upon in other classes throughout her program.

Monae's perspective that Blue University did not prepare her to teach in an urban context made me curious to learn why she rated herself a nine for sense of preparedness on the initial survey. She explained to me that a lot of her confidence and feeling of preparedness came from her own personal background experiences, not from her preparation experiences. She shared with me her experience working at the Boys and Girls Club over the summer. She said she taught a summer school curriculum, and that helped her with teaching students of different cultures, but most importantly, she got the experience to build relationships with not only the students but the families as well. Monae talked about how the relationship she built with the family helped her be a better teacher for the student, because she got a different insight into the student from the family's perspective. She said this was a frequent practice of Boys and Girls Club, but not one she learned from Blue University. Monae also talked about what it was like to have nine nieces and nephews that she would often babysit. She said while babysitting she was able to see how kids react, play, and communicate with one another, which are things she said she brings with her into knowing the students in her own classroom.

Monae made sure I knew that the experiences and structures the university had in place were great, she just wishes they had placed more emphasis on culturally diverse students and ways of knowing. The biggest thing that Monae said prepared her to teach in an urban school was her own lived experiences.

I mean the biggest thing I got to prepare me for urban schools was my own background and lived experiences. Like, I grew up in the hood, so I get it (laughs) and I am Black. Like I know how to reach these kids because I was one. And no

offense, but if I were a White girl just riding on Blue University to prepare me to teach Black and Brown children, I would have been screwed! (Interview, August 2022)

When reflecting on her preparation experiences, it was interesting to hear Monae talk about how her own life experiences gave her more of a sense of preparation than her preparation experiences. She talked about her life experiences in great detail and made connections to things she had experienced growing up and how that gave her confidence in the role of a teacher for diverse student populations.

In our first interview Monae talked about growing up in Iowa with her five brothers, mother, and father. Being a middle child, she was tasked with babysitting for her younger siblings. As her older siblings had children, she also became a steady babysitter for her nieces and nephews. She said these experiences were ones that helped her early on realize she wanted to be a teacher since she loved babysitting and working with children so much. When talking about her family, she mentioned that her parents were never married, and her dad was not always around.

My dad was sorta in and out of the picture, um, but that's alright. Him and my mom would break up and get back together, and it was like a continuous cycle. But he was always a good dad! He wasn't like the stereotypical Black man type of father. (Interview, July, 2022)

I made note of "*Stereotypical Black man*" in my field notes as she shared this part of her story with me. When Monae shared this, it was obvious that she was aware of the stereotypes that surrounded her racial identity. She elaborated on this:

You know, it's like the norm if you're Black and your dad isn't around. Like everyone always assumes if your dad isn't around that he is probably a deadbeat with like 10 other kids. Ha, and that was not the case, like at all. He loved us and always supported us, just wasn't always there. (Interview, July, 2022)

Monae was very much aware of how society views Black fathers and was adamant to make sure I knew her father did not fit that stereotype. I reflected on my reactions and feelings to this in my journal.

I HATE SOCIETAL VIEWS! It was really upsetting to hear that Monae say, “it’s the norm if you’re Black and your dad isn’t around.” It’s really disheartening to hear this be said out loud and it appeared as if she accepted it, she didn’t seem bothered by that. But it really bothered me. This really makes me think about the privilege I hold being White and from a divorced family. I don’t feel like I ever had to justify my father being a good father, however she felt she had to. What will it take for these racial stereotypes to be diminished? (Journal entry, July, 2022)

Monae continued to talk about how her skin color caused people to not only think of her family in certain ways, but also herself. She reflected on the first time she really felt different than others and realized she was judged because of her skin color. She shared the following personal story with me.

There were like no girls in my neighborhood, really. All a bunch of boys. Most of us were Black but there were a couple White families. But I remember this new family moved into the apartment complex next to ours. They was all outside like moving things out of their car and I saw the little girl bouncing a ball. I was so hyped because it was another girl in the neighborhood, so I ran up to her and said hi and was asking her if she wanted to draw and use my chalk with me, and her mom yelled at her to come back to her. I heard her mom say. “Lucy, you need to be careful. There are a lot of people around here like that and we need you to be safe.” And Lucy just waved at me and walked away. She like was never outside after that really.

But I remember telling my mom about it and I could tell she was hot! (laughs) but my mom was never one to show us when she was mad. I remember her telling me like, “Yeah, Monae, that is what people think of us, they think we are dangerous, and they don’t know us. We just prove them wrong and know in our heart they are wrong.” And we never really talked about it after that. But I was like nine, I think. And I remember that. Like I remember young knowing I was gonna be looked at differently because I was Black. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae mentioned feeling judged in her elementary school and recalled a time in which one teacher made a comment assuming she could not read. She remembers feeling like it was a racial comment, because she only said it to her and in the context of not having family

around to read with her at home. Monae expressed feeling that there often were assumptions made about her and other Black students in her classes. Monae's early cultural and bias awareness was another piece that inspired her to be a teacher. She shared with me how she thought having representation in her own teachers would have made a big difference in her educational journey.

I also really think urban students need teachers and staff that look like them. Like don't get me wrong, good teachers are important. But that representation matters. Like for me, I didn't have a teacher that looked like me until I was maybe in the 10th grade in high school.

I had some really great teachers, but to see someone who looked like me, in a field that I wanted to pursue, and see someone that looks like me in a professional stance, I think it would have made me feel more excited about school and more supported. Like I was supported growing up but would have felt more support if I had more teachers of color, I think. Like to have somebody who understands me and what it means to look like me. I think it would have helped a lot to have somebody that could relate to me about certain things. (Interview, August 2022)

As Monae talked about her own experiences as a Black girl with predominantly White teachers, she made connections between this feeling and where she currently teaches.

For example, even me and where I teach now. I have Hispanic students, Somali students, Iranian students, and Black students all within my classroom. Like students of all cultures need to see teachers and staff that look like them. It is important. (Interview, August 2022)

Monae talked about the need for representation in the teaching field in the context of her personal experiences and what she experiences now as a teacher. She said her school does have a somewhat diverse staff but believes more diversity in the teaching staff would make a difference with the students.

Throughout our interviews, Monae reiterated numerous times how much she wishes she had had more learning about teaching students who were culturally different than herself. She specifically spoke about wanting to learn more about how to best communicate and

interact with students who have such different cultures than her own and feels that was a major missing piece to her preparation experiences. Monae also mentioned the need for all staff to go through some type of learning experience where they would intentionally learn about all the cultures that make up their student population. She mentioned how vital knowing your students is to being an effective teacher and wishes experiences like this would take place.

Monae's cultural awareness stems directly from her own life experiences rather than her preparation experiences. Because of being a woman of color and understanding her own experiences, she is keenly aware of the biases that exist and believes representation in the teaching force is essential.

### **Katheryn's Story**

We had lots of different placements. It wasn't like one school we partnered with. We went to schools all around, which was nice because there were some different populations in different areas and different socioeconomic pockets that we kind of taught with in different schools. Some are really big, some are really small, some were really well funded, and some were super underfunded.

—Katheryn (Interview, September 2022)

From the beginning of our first interview together, Katheryn showed a great deal of eagerness to discuss her preparation experiences. In our second interview she came prepared with her college transcripts so she could refer to the exact classes and experiences she had throughout her college experience. Katheryn jumped right in talking about the overall structure of her program at Wheat University. She explained to me that she was an elementary education major but minored in Spanish, so she was also getting her TSOL endorsement. Katheryn talked about her math, science, reading, and writing courses as being

embedded within her four years that also paired with practicum experiences. She explained that starting day one in her program, she had practicum experiences in classrooms:

They had added in class observation hours for every class we took. So, freshman year, like, first semester, for my first education class, I had hours within classrooms right away, which was nice because I know some programs don't have you in schools like that quickly. (Interview, September 2022)

As Katheryn talked about this, she recalled having at least two practicum experiences per semester. Within the first two years of her program, she remembers practicum experiences being guided mostly around observations. She explained that professors intentionally gave them specific look-for while in classrooms that they had to note and reflect upon, which were mostly tied to the learning that was taking place in her college courses. Katheryn reflected upon this:

It was helpful to learn about lesson delivery methods, then go in and actually observe a teacher's way of delivering content. Like I remember we specifically learned about the SIOP model, and then I was placed in a classroom and observed a teacher using the SIOP model. Like I actually understood, okay, so this is how you would present language objectives, and this is a great interactive activity for students to use during math. Like I made more sense out of what I was learning because I could actually see it. (Interview, September 2022)

As she talked about the rich experiences she had in so many different classrooms prior to student teaching, it was apparent that this was an experience she valued throughout her preparation experiences. Katheryn explained that as she got further along into her program, by her junior year her practicum hours increased, and she was responsible for not observing but teaching lessons and running small groups.

After having these purposeful practicum experiences, Katheryn completed her student teaching experience in the fall of her senior year. Her student teaching was 16 weeks, in two different placements. She had eight weeks in one classroom and eight weeks in a different

grade-level and classroom. She mentioned how powerful it was to be with her cooperating mentor teacher at the beginning of the school year. She reflected on the experience:

It was really cool to be with my teacher from the beginning. Like to see her set up a classroom, that was helpful because I didn't realize what all goes into creating a classroom environment. Then it was nice to be a part of the onboarding PD. I could see how schools really train their teachers for the start of a school year. It made me feel more included with everyone being there with them when they all started back, too. I enjoyed it. Then I left after quarter one and went to another classroom. So that felt a little weird, like I wish I would have stayed in one for the whole 16 weeks. But again, it was nice to have a variety in grade-levels and classrooms. (Interview, September 2022)

I had never heard of a student teaching placement intentionally being structured for the fall semester. I related to some of Katheryn's thoughts and reflected upon this idea in my journal that evening.

I know my student teaching was all year long, so I was a part of the onboarding Professional Development in my practicum, and that was so helpful! But, I have never heard of a program being in the fall, if it wasn't a yearlong student teaching placement. The idea of seeing a room get set up and being able to talk through that with a cooperating teacher is so important. I know so many first year teachers struggle with this in our building, seeing that prior to your first year could be so helpful. (Journal entry, September 2022)

Katheryn referred to this type of progression in her practicum experiences as being beneficial because it made her feel more prepared by the time she had to do her student-teaching experience. After her 16 weeks of student teaching, her spring semester was a capstone class and a data reflection course. Katheryn said these courses were set up in a manner in which she could unpack all of the learning she had during her student teaching.

It was nice because we could talk together as a group about data we had collected in the fall and we all talked through things like what we saw, what we learned. It was just like a nice wrap up and then that semester we also had a class dedicated to differentiated instruction. So that was really helpful, because we could use the data we had collected and talk through how we would differentiate our teaching based on that. (Interview, September 2022)

Katheryn talked about all her practicum experiences as being the most influential piece of her preparation experiences. Her practicum experiences were in different schools and in different grade-levels. She talked about how this allowed her to see which grade-levels she enjoyed teaching the most, as well as learn about the different academic needs of students of varying age groups. Katheryn also talked about how helpful it was to get exposure in different types of schools around her university.

Some of our practicum experiences were in very rural schools that weren't the best funded. They were lacking resources, lacking adequate numbers of support staff, and had a lot of families living in poverty. Then we had some experiences in very funded suburban schools where the resources were plentiful, and it almost seemed like there were more than enough supports in place. It was good to see the different perspectives and really become aware of the inequities between both. Seeing that really solidified for me that I wanted to teach within an urban or rural school. I felt like I was making more of a difference there, and that those students deserved dedicated teachers. (Interview, September 2022)

The immersion Katheryn had in different types of schools not only built her awareness of the educational inequities, but it also helped her see where she ultimately wanted to teach. She said that without that type of exposure, she does not know if she would have intentionally sought out an urban school. Katheryn felt that exposure was meaningful and mentioned how she wishes the schools she had been in had had a little bit more diversity so she could become more prepared to work with diverse student populations.

It was good to see the difference of socioeconomic status within students and how, you know, poverty impacts student learning and well-being. But I wish I would have had more diversity within my experiences. Student diversity was sparse and wasn't really a focus of any of my courses either. So that was a little bit of a shock when I went to Honduras. I felt sort of prepared, only because of my TSOL certification and a little of those classes. Like I knew the best instructional methods for teaching English, I just didn't have a lot of exposure or practice working with high numbers of ELs.



Luckily my time in Honduras made me get that practice and exposure, so I felt more prepared coming here. But that feeling of preparation didn't come from my college experience. (Interview, September 2022)

Katheryn discussed the intentionality of being placed in various types of schools, but really lacked the diversity piece of exposure or learning. As she talked through this, she mentioned that it could have been due to where the university itself was placed, and that could have been why she did not see much student diversity. However, she reflected that although they were not in schools with diverse populations, she still did not recall a focus on diversity in any of her courses. When asked about how she was prepared to teach students in urban schools, it was clear that there was not a focus on teaching diverse students or underserved communities. She elaborated on this:

I think that too, is maybe a piece that was lacking a bit in my school. They did talk about diversity when we were mostly in my ESL classes. They would talk about more diverse cultures or socio economically students, more like urban or lower class students or families. Then they would kind of, like give examples or like try to help you come up with strategies of how to reach those students when you are like a teacher who is maybe not from those backgrounds. They vaguely talked about how we need to build an understanding of perspectives of different people.

And a couple of my classes I think the mainstream ed classes didn't really touch a ton on urban settings, but they did more in my ESL classes. Just like with some of the books we were reading, and stuff were from different perspectives and different backgrounds of people. But not a lot.

I mean it was predominantly a White school that I went to and like my professors were mostly White. So, I didn't learn from professors or anybody who was necessarily from an urban or diverse environment. We did partner with some urban programs in Memphis, like a teaching residency in Memphis. And I remember, some people from there came and talked to us a couple of times. But really surface level. Urban education or diverse student populations wasn't a huge factor of my education really. (Interview, September 2022)

When Katheryn reflected on this part of her preparation experience, it was apparent that she was disappointed with the lack of diverse coursework she had received. She mentioned

having no intentional learning experiences in culture, diversity, trauma, or real issues pertaining to urban students. It was disheartening to hear Katheryn's lack of learning in regard to diversity and varied perspectives in general. I reflected upon this in my journal after our interview.

This is another participant I have interviewed who doesn't recall any intentional learning experiences that were centered upon teaching students from diverse backgrounds. I don't understand how programs can feel confident releasing graduates to teach within our diverse society without any intentional learning on the topic of culture or diversity. The idea of placement where university is located is a recurring theme to the perception these participants have as to why diversity wasn't a focus. I don't understand that. Despite where a school is located, the topics are relevant everywhere. How do these programs not see this? It is also a shame to hear yet again that when there was a sprinkle of the topic, it was surface level. Isn't it our job as educators to equip students to be prepared to function in a diverse society? Should understanding and awareness of varied perspectives be a part of that preparation? (Journal entry, September 2022)

Throughout the interview, Katheryn also elaborated on how she had hardly any preparation on what it was like working within communities that surrounded the schools. She recalled being part of a game night that a school hosted, where families would come in and play games with their students. The school librarian was present so parents could sign their kids up for a library card, and a local restaurant catered the event. She mentioned this event was held as a way of building a relationship with families outside of academics. This is the only experience she recalls when family or community involvement was talked about in her preparation experience.

When reflecting on her preparation regarding working with families or communities, Katheryn talked a lot about her time in Honduras versus her preparation experiences in college. While in Honduras, she learned that knowing her students culturally was essential. Katheryn explained that while she was abroad, other teachers taught her how to build

community with families and how to get involved in her students' communities outside of school. She talked about how she learned so much more about how to be a better teacher for her students when she was involved in their life outside of school. Katheryn mentioned that when she intentionally built a relationship with her students' families, she understood their cultural norms better, which allowed her to tweak her instructional practices. She explained that this is something she really values and wishes she had had more of this kind of experience in her preparation.

When I asked Katheryn if there was anything else she wanted to share with me in regard to her preparation experience, she mentioned the need for learning how to better scaffold grade-level content for low learners. Katheryn shared that in her two years in an urban school and as a sheltered classroom teacher, she has realized how wide the achievement gap is in her students and that she does not feel as prepared to work with it.

I mean I have like half of my students that are on a first-grade or lower level. And we are third graders. I just don't know how to best keep them on pace with our instructional mapping, but also give them what they need. Like I wish I would have learned how to take a third-grade-level content standard and scaffold it in a manner that doesn't lose the rigor but allows them to access it and show their learning. I mean I am getting better at that, through professional development and PLCs we have here. But I should have learned that before I became a teacher. Like that is our reality, especially now with COVID slides. We have a great number of students who are so far behind, but getting passed from one grade to another, and that gap is just widening. I wish I would have learned more of how to fill in the gap, while also teaching grade-level content. You know? (Interview, September 2022)

As Katheryn began talking about this, I noticed her body language shifted. I wrote in my field notes "*Voice cracked, appears more tense*" (Field note, September 2022). As she spoke, her voice became bolder and more assertive, and she started to talk faster. It was apparent that this was something she was passionate about, and she appeared to be aggravated when talking about how hard it is to fill gaps for her lower learners. Her passion for her students

shined through as she said, “I get so upset because I feel like sometimes, I am not helping them as much as they need, and they deserve to have a curriculum and learning opportunities that are designed to meet their needs and represent them” (Interview, September 2022).

Katheryn talked about how stressed and frustrated she sees her students get when they cannot regularly do things that are expected of them and how much of that she feels like she could help if she had a better understanding of how to best scaffold resources and learning experiences. Katheryn expressed an understanding of the opportunity gap in varying urban students and a need for training to better address the opportunity gap. She mentioned her lack of learning in understanding how to best differentiate instruction and resources to best fit her students’ needs. Katheryn said that even though she had a class that was geared toward understanding student data and talked about differentiation, she feels that it did not get deep enough or really equip her with the knowledge of how to differentiate and scaffold for students with varying needs.

When asked why Katheryn ranked herself a seven in regard to feeling prepared to teach in an urban school, she talked mostly about that high rank score coming from the fact that she had so many practicum experiences. She believed she would have felt more prepared had she had more intentional experiences and coursework centered on diverse student populations, and more depth in learning about how to best scaffold instruction to meet the varying needs of students.

Throughout our interviews, Katheryn showed a great deal of self-reflection and cultural awareness as she shared her story with me. In our first interview she shared that she grew up in a tiny town in Iowa, with a population less than 1,000. She described the town as “really small, very White, and very rural” (Interview, August 2022). As she said this, I jotted

down “*Pointed out very White. Is this a part of something bigger?*” (Field note, August 2022). Katheryn shared that she is an only child and was homeschooled up until she was in fourth grade, then attended public school in fifth grade, then moved her junior year of high school to a suburb outside of St. Louis, Missouri, which was a much bigger town. She referred to her life growing up as being “sheltered.” When I asked her to expand upon this, she elaborated:

Like I said, I was in a tiny, tiny town and was an only child. I didn’t have a lot of friends, or really interaction with a lot of people other than family before I went to school in fifth grade. My mother was sick when I was little, so we really didn’t do much. My father is a pastor and has been my whole life. So, a lot of times he thought some of the outside world was a little too sinful to be exposed to, that is just his religious thoughts and perspective, that is a whole other thing. So, I was just sheltered, which was fine. I didn’t know any difference at the time. (Interview, August 2022)

Katheryn elaborated on how she was only around her family, who were White and middle-class, showing her lack of exposure to varying cultures or ways of living. She reflected on her town consisting of all White people and does not remember even encountering a person of color until at least middle school. I reflected on this in my journal later that evening.

It is insane to think that Katheryn had never come in contact with a person of color until middle school. I can’t even imagine that. I feel like saying she is sheltered is an understatement. I also am very curious to what she meant about the world being too sinful for her to be exposed to. She seemed hesitant to share that with me, so I didn’t want to push her to elaborate. Hopefully she will get into this later in our second interview. I am wondering how and if her dad’s religious views may have impacted her worldviews. (Journal entry, August 2022)

Katheryn told me about her limited exposure to diverse cultures and thought it was solely because of where she lived. She explained that when she lived in the small town in Iowa, she only had a handful of interactions with people of a diverse culture. This changed her junior year of high school when her father got a job at a new church, and they moved to a

suburb outside of St. Louis. Katheryn said this suburb was much bigger than where she grew up and that is when she became more aware of how sheltered she had been previously.

You know, in Sully, my mom was sick, and I think that made my dad really fearful. He was fearful for us to be out and around people and was just a little more intense. But when we moved to Wennis and my mom wasn't sick anymore, I noticed he relaxed a lot. I was also older and was becoming aware just how radical his way of thinking really was. But he loosened up a lot. And that alone showed me really how protective he was prior. Like seeing him not be that way, made me realize how extreme it really was.

And I mean there were just a ton more people in Wennis. Like, people of all kinds of different cultures, there were so many more restaurants, shopping districts, movie theaters, places to go for fun. It was just like a totally different experience than what I had been used to in my tiny town in Iowa.

I joined the youth group at my dad's church, and I met a ton of new people, made some new friends. And I was 16 at the time, and just to see their way of living versus what I had experienced, was so different. Then I realized like wow, Sully was so tiny and just didn't offer those same experiences or exposure. (Interview, August 2022)

Katheryn reflected on what this experience was like for her, saying that it was very "eye-opening and refreshing" (Interview, August 2022). Katheryn talked about being more close-minded when she lived in Iowa simply because of the limited knowledge she had about perspectives that were different from her family's. She mentioned that when she moved to Missouri, she learned so much about different ways of living, that she became more curious and open-minded to ideas, because she was exposed to other perspectives rather than those of her family. She talked about how her family was not intentional about being inclusive with their language or exposure prior to moving to Missouri, and this is something she said was important to her. She reflected on this:

It is not like my family sheltered me intentionally from different types of people or perspectives or cultures you know or like different norms of living. They just didn't even expose me to that at all, until I had asked. They weren't inclusive of anything other than our family and our norms. I think that is something that is very important to do as a parent and a teacher. Like we have to be inclusive and expose our children

or our students to different ways of living and different perspectives. (Interview, August 2022)

This showed me a lot about Katheryn's sense of cultural awareness. She knew she had not been exposed to differing cultures, and she was able to reflect on how that lack of exposure hindered her way of thinking. As I listened to her, I jotted down "*You don't know what you don't know—so how could she have been culturally aware?*" (Field note, August 2022). She referred to the need for exposure to different cultures and views in order to become aware and broaden her own worldview.

Katheryn also elaborated on how the exposure she gained when moving to Missouri also impacted her way of thinking about equitable education. She talked about the differences she saw in her own school experiences of going from a small rural school in Iowa to a well-funded suburban school in Missouri. When she transferred schools her junior year of high school, she loved school more because of the classes she was offered and the extra opportunities that were available. Katheryn mentioned in her old school in Iowa she did not have options in classes; you just took what was available, and there was not a lot of choice. When she got to Missouri and was enrolled in a bigger suburban school, she had a variety of choices about the classes she could take which made her enjoy school much more. Katheryn then related this to the inequities between urban schools and opportunities that urban students are missing.

I did notice when I moved, I enjoyed school more. I liked the classes a lot more because they were more challenging and had like, extra you know, options like what kinds of classes you can take in regard to electives and stuff. Sully didn't have any of that type of variety. It was pretty much just like you did what they had because that's what they had and there wasn't really any other option or choice.

It kind of made me think again back to lack, the limited exposure and not knowing what I didn't know. And I think of that now with urban students. Do they get the

same types of opportunities well-funded suburban schools get? No, they don't. Like do they even know of the vast differences between those types of things? I think it really goes back to like, we need equitable opportunities and education no matter what type of school you attend. (Interview, September 2022)

Through Katheryn's exposure to a more culturally diverse demographic, she became more aware of socioeconomic differences that are associated with a larger and more culturally diverse population base. The lack of exposure and inequities she experienced first-hand encouraged her to get into teaching.

I wish I had that experience earlier than my junior year of high school. I wish some of my teachers would have brought in different perspectives and exposed to me a life outside of the small town I was in. I wanted to be a teacher that would do that for kids, so I decided in high school I was going to go into education. I wanted to be a teacher that helped build a wider view of society for students. (Interview, September 2022)

Katheryn felt that her cultural awareness broadened because of her own personal experiences. She expressed that she wished she had had more intentional experiences to help deepen her awareness in college. Katheryn talked about being so intrigued to learn more about different cultures and their way of living that she decided to teach abroad in Honduras for her first year. When reflecting specifically on her experience in Honduras, she talked a great deal about how she had learning that was centered on understanding the meaning of culture.

In Honduras, because of the mentors and learning experiences like training and things. I learned that culture is so much more than just your heritage or skin color. Like I learned about warm cultures versus cold cultures, how religion, family dynamics, traditions and economic status all make up someone's culture. And I learned how even in Honduras, although all my students were the same skin color, they all had such different cultures. And I never really learned that prior. So that was like a major shift in my thinking and understanding. That learning has been a game changer for me as a teacher! Like how to actually understand and really know my students. It has helped me build relationships with them and just be a better teacher really.



And that is something, you know, that piece of knowledge is so understated. Like so many people think culture is just skin color. No shame, I used to think the same! But like, we have to build the awareness within people, especially teachers, that culture is so much more. (Interview, September 2022)

This reflection Katheryn displayed shows that she is culturally aware and seeks more opportunities to deepen her awareness. She understands the importance of being culturally aware, specifically when it comes to teaching.

### **Lindsey's Story**

Crumble just lacked a big focus on learning from students or even thinking about students at all. It was assumed that all kids needed the same thing. And that every strategy would work for every kid. I mean, that's the best way I can say it. It was really broad. Very much like a White broad approach. Like the entire program was very homogeneous, just you know, color blinded, surface level dips of learning.  
—Lindsey (Interview, September 2022)

Lindsey was the only participant who attended a non-university-based alternative program for her preparation experience. She was excited to share about her experiences because as she said, "Crumble is actually really good and pretty rigorous, so I am excited to talk about it more with you" (Interview, August 2022). Throughout our first interview, Lindsey reiterated that although her program was an alternative one, she felt that it was extremely beneficial in preparing her to be a teacher. She also spoke a lot about how people in society tend to view alternative programs not as highly as traditional university programs. By the third time she said this, I jotted down in my field notes, "*feels the need to justify an alternative based program*" (Field note, August 2022). It was apparent to me that this bothered her. Her tone became sterner as she talked about people's perceptions. This gave me a glimpse into Lindsey's sacred story about how much she valued her preparation at Crumble. She wanted to be sure I knew how exceptional she thought her preparation

experiences were. When I went back through the interview later that evening I reflected in my journal.

Lindsey said multiple times that people think alternative programs aren't good. She almost seemed defensive when telling me where she attended her preparation. It felt like she was really overkill how much she loved her experience at Crumble. I am wondering why she felt the need to justify how great Crumble was if she felt so prepared? I am also confused because on the initial survey, she rated herself a four in regard to feeling prepared to teach in an urban school. I wonder if in my second interview I will unravel the discrepancy between how great her preparation at Crumble versus what she originally rated her preparedness as? (Journal entry, August 2022)

As Lindsey shifted into talking more specifically about her time at Crumble, she shared with me that it was all online and took her 18 months to complete. Lindsey explained that the program was divided into two sections consisting of professional teaching knowledge and core content knowledge.

It was online modules that you could do at your own pace and at the end of each module there was a quiz to make sure you were keeping up with the understanding of content that was in the modules. The professional teaching knowledge was all about direct instruction, how to differentiate instruction, classroom management, and like different techniques and strategies to use for teaching. A lot of it was very relatable to you know, like things that are in Teach Like a Champion.

The core content went through like all the basic relearning and exposure to the four content areas. So, math, social studies, science, and language arts. It was really rigorous and actually pretty intense. Like I relearned about genocide and the history of Northern Africa. It was really good and really in depth. (Interview, September 2022)

Lindsey talked in depth about the various instructional strategies she learned. When I asked her what the most beneficial part of her preparation was, the first thing she mentioned was the depth of learning she got about instructional strategies.

It was really impactful to learn about the different ways to deliver direct instruction. The book, direct instruction, something, it is up in my classroom, but it provides checklists of things to follow if students aren't understanding the content. It provided us with ways we could adjust and switch up our wording or you know, like

engagement strategies. It was really a good read. I still have it and I still look at it a lot now when planning my lessons. (Interview, September 2022)

When talking about this, Lindsey also talked about the importance of learning about classroom procedures and routines. She believes having tight procedures and management routines in place from the beginning of the school year help to make teaching more transferable to students. She also mentioned that she believed an effective teacher is a “master in knowing all subject areas” (Interview, September 2022) and that it was important to relearn and assess on all of the core content subject areas. She stated:

I know some programs don’t even reteach or assess on the actual knowledge of the core content subjects. And we have teachers that haven’t had that type of learning, teaching our kids. Like, that is very scary for our future kids. So, I was really happy to have that in my preparation. (Interview, September 2022)

When talking about her preparation experiences, Lindsey used language and examples that showed her beliefs about being a prepared and an effective teacher are based upon knowing the content of academia.

Aside from talking about how well Crumble prepared Lindsey to relearn the academia necessary to teach, Lindsey felt that her preparation was not focused on learning anything other than academics. She referred to this as being a meaningful part of teaching, but also recognized that her experiences at Crumble did not give her any preparation for working with diverse or urban school students. Lindsey talked about the little to no focus on anything that had to do with diversity in her experience at Crumble. She mentioned that she believed it could be due to the length of the program and felt that maybe the timing was a reason for this. She said, “since it was an online program and so fast paced, we may not have had time to dive deep into those types of topics” (Interview, September 2022). She continued to elaborate on her lack of preparation:

Crumble was just basically giving me the knowledge I would need to learn for teaching in like a parochial type of school district, or like a private school. It was all a very matter of fact, just kind of, you know, trying to, you know, figure out what's going on with the children academically by following a one size fits all approach and like a checklist. It helped me to be a good and effective teacher of content but didn't prepare me to deal with all the problems that I would encounter with children behaviorally or emotionally. (Interview, September 2022)

I jotted down "*Problems?*" (Field note, September 2022) in my field notes as I listened to Lindsey elaborate on how she was not prepared to teach diverse or urban students. As Lindsey talked through specific scenarios she has encountered as a teacher, she had a deficit view of urban students. Through a lot of the examples Lindsey spoke about, it appeared she used some deficit language when talking about her students. For example, when talking about her unpreparedness to work with diverse students, she said:

I wasn't prepared to work with kids who were so unsupported at home and had so much trauma that they can't even learn at school. Like how do you blame them? We can't expect them to come into school and learn these rigorous standards when they don't have the home support they need. Like it starts at home. And a lot of these kids don't have any guidance or support at home. I feel bad for them but there is only so much we can do as teachers. (Interview, September 2022)

As I reread our interview transcripts time and time again and looked at my field notes I could not help but feel some anger. I knew I had to address this, and I reflected in my journal later that evening.

I am outraged at Lindsey's perspective of teaching urban students. She identified them as having "problems" then identified them as being incapable of learning. She also made a pretty bold assumption that some students don't have support at home. Then to say she feels bad for them and only so much we can do as teachers. It feels as if she displays sympathy for her students rather than empathy and doesn't really understand how much she can actually do as a teacher. I am wondering if the lack of focus on underserved populations, or lack of focus on anything other than academics within preparation is the outcome of this type of thinking for her. (Journal entry, September 2022)

After reflecting in my journal regarding Lindsey's deficit thinking and stereotypical views, I also processed through her interview transcripts with my advisor. Doing so allowed me to better understand my personal feelings and better control for my bias.

Lindsey spoke about having no coursework or experiences that focused on diversity, trauma, or real-life contexts pertaining to urban students. She also had mentioned six different times that she was not prepared to work with urban students. Her comment about Crumble being a good preparation avenue for teachers pursuing a private or parochial school spoke volumes and showed me part of the secret story she had in regard to her preparatory experiences at Crumble.

At this point in the interview, Lindsey began to talk about the preparation she had in her associate teaching job prior to being hired as a full-time teacher. She referred to this job as, "sort of like my student teaching since Crumble had no student teaching or field experiences within the program" (Interview, September 2022). As Lindsey shifted to talking about her associate teaching experience, she expressed the lack of opportunity she had in her preparation experiences to apply her learning or practice teaching. Because of the lack of application in her preparation experiences, she considered her job of associate teaching as the only experience where she was able to actually apply the learning she had gained while in her preparation experience. She was an associate teacher for two years in a suburban district outside of Kansas City. The school in which she was working was the Title I school of the district, so she felt that this experience gave her the preparation she needed prior to being a teacher on her own in an urban school.

As Lindsey spoke in great detail about her experiences as an associate teacher, she shared a lot of scenarios with me that she had encountered. In these experiences, she talked

about how she was working as a behavior interventionist and gained a new perspective on how to best manage student behaviors. When talking about this, she explained:

I was able to actually get to know students and see how their emotional well-being impacted or amplified their behavior. I never got that experience or learning through Crumble. Like I said earlier, it was all assumed that a basic behavior protocol would fit for every student.

All of my experience was so independent and self-driven, and also had no focus on thinking of students at all. So, once I had the chance to work directly with students, and have a team to talk about what I was doing or wasn't doing, I got more preparation on how I would actually encounter real life teaching issues. (Interview, September 2022)

Lindsey continued to talk about different scenarios which she encountered as a behavior interventionist and associate teacher as well as some experiences in her two years at Stonecrest Elementary. She repeatedly mentioned how she was not prepared to address them based on what she had learned at Crumble. When asked to explain why she rated her sense of preparation as a four, Lindsey mentioned the lack of exposure to anything other than academia as a main factor in her score. She felt that had she worked in a different type of school, she would have felt that she was more prepared than she was. "I put a four because the question was how I was prepared for urban schools, and I was not. But I was prepared to teach if I would teach at a different school, like I said, like a private school or something" (Interview, September 2022). It is apparent through her examples of how she was prepared that the context of students does not matter as much as the content they need to learn.

Lindsey felt that her unguided experiences and lack of exposure coupled with the lack of application hindered her overall sense of preparedness to teach diverse student populations. The way in which she spoke about her upbringing also highlighted some factors that influenced her sense of awareness.

Lindsey's cultural awareness was highlighted as she spoke about her personal upbringing, her preparation experiences, and her own views as to what makes teachers prepared and effective within urban school contexts. Lindsey shared with me quite a bit about her upbringing and family beliefs during our first interview together. She began by telling me about what it was like to grow up in a suburb north of Kansas City while living under extreme conservative and Baptist household views. Lindsey pointed out almost immediately that as she grew up, she had limited cultural experiences with anyone of a diverse culture.

Within our neighborhood there was maybe one mixed kid, but the majority of us were White. And that is how it was throughout all of my school experiences. You know, like maybe there were some ten Black kids in my entire school that I knew of, but like I didn't think of anyone having necessarily any other type of culture other than White.

And my parents weren't really the most welcoming or spoke kindly at all about other cultures, views, or races other than their own. You know, they were very borderline racist. So, I grew up pretty culturally unaware. (Interview, August 2022)

Lindsey elaborated on the fact that when she grew up in the seventies, things were different, and her school experiences were not nearly as diverse as they are now. She explained that even the neighborhoods were still segregated and according to her perspective, it was not uncommon for people to have stereotypical views of other cultures. Lindsey talked about how her parents' thoughts, views, and actions deeply influenced her own views of cultural awareness. She shared another secret story with me about when she realized how different her own views were than her parents'.

I remember reading a book when I was a little girl that was a story about a Black girl. And a white girl. That we're the same age, they were in the same class and the white girl didn't know if the Black girl's skin felt the same way as hers. She didn't know why her hair was so different. So many differences were brought up in the book. Anyway, they became good friends, and they started talking about those types of things. And I remember this book really opened my mind up, to a little bit of, you

know, like thinking of how, okay everybody is deep down alike. And that idea was very much different from my parents'. Like I remember even telling my mom about it, and she like shutting me down. Like no, we are not like them, and we are not all alike. And that was just weird, realizing these things and having it be so different from my family's ideas. So, we just never talked about it. (Interview, August 2022)

As I listened to Lindsey talk about this, I jotted down what I noticed about her body language in my field notes, "*Looking down, not making eye contact, tone of voice shaky*" (Field note, August 2022). It appeared that Lindsey was almost embarrassed to share this with me, and she seemed a little uneasy talking about this part of her story. I knew I would want to come back to this point when analyzing the transcripts, so I placed a star by it in my journal. She elaborated on the idea that as she got older, she started to become more culturally aware based on some different life experiences. Lindsey talked about how she had an eye-opening experience while attending a university in Kansas City. She shared:

Going to university, you know the demographics were flipped from my high school experience. In high school, White was the majority and at this university, it was more of the minority. And I was taking a philosophy class and our professor really pushed for discussions, debates, you know, conversations that encouraged us to hear each other's perspectives and challenge our thoughts and ideas. Get to see other experiences other than our own.

And you know, for the first time I experienced, you know, like a gay man saying that he had thought about settling down with a woman just to have a child because he wanted to be a parent so badly and then they were coming to an agreement on doing this. To me, that was completely outside of my circle of realm of experience.

Then there were people of color in that class talking about how underprivileged their life has been because of factors they can't control. Like only because of their skin color. And so, you know, I feel like that set me up to like, to open my mind a little bit more about other cultures or ways of living. Much more so than any experience I had growing up. (Interview, August 2022)

Lindsey continued to talk about how as she grew up and moved away from her family, her cultural awareness broadened quite a bit. She shared stories with me about her time living in Los Angeles and St. Louis where she became good friends with people of different cultures.



Lindsey shared a specific story with me that helped her to better understand and realize her own privilege as a White woman.

Living in St. Louis I became such good friends with this girl, Amy who was Black. We worked at multiple restaurants together and were always spending time together outside of work. You know she was the one who convinced me to go back to school and get a degree. She told me I was a fool if you didn't go back because she explained to me how she had fought and worked so hard her entire life to go to college, and I didn't necessarily have to. You know she pointed out so many things to me, like the reality she faced every day because she was Black, the poverty her family lived in, and how that impacted her own experiences. It just really opened my eyes and made me realize, damn, I am actually extremely lucky. Then I was able to realize like no, that's not luck, I am very extremely privileged. (Interview, September 2022)

As I listened to Lindsey acknowledge her awareness of being privileged, I could see her sense of vulnerability and awareness. She utilized language that showed her awareness as to thinking she was lucky, but then realizing that it was not luck; it was privilege. She elaborated on how she expanded her worldview the more she became immersed in relationships with people of different cultures. She talked about having a couple of friends in college who were Palestinian and Asian and how learning about their ways of living was also eye-opening to her. Lindsey shared parts of her story that showed me she was becoming culturally aware but she was still quite influenced by her family's beliefs, which were almost opposite. This made it difficult for to develop her sense of cultural awareness.

And you know, when your family is telling racist Black jokes at holiday dinners, and then they make it seem like you're blowing things out of proportion when you say I'm not okay with it. Um, you know, you're fighting an uphill battle. And so, I just kept repeatedly over and over saying, you know, this is not okay. And it finally got to the point where they at least shut up about the stuff. But it was still hard. (Interview, August 2022)

When the interview shifted to talking about preparation experiences in regard to teaching diverse students, Lindsey talked again about the lack of focus on cultural relevance throughout her experiences at Crumble. She mentioned that she did a lot of her own

independent reading and research to build her awareness about teaching students from poverty and how to find culturally relevant text types. The lack of diverse coursework caused Lindsey to seek out how to be a culturally relevant teacher on her own.

Lindsey continued to share some scenarios with me which she encountered during her time of associate teaching. Throughout the scenarios she spoke about, she mentioned lack of family involvement and trauma informed behaviors, and made biased assumptions about students. As I listened to her talk about multiple experiences, the following words and phrases stuck out to me: “These kids; different types of kids; terrible kids; fathers not being involved; parents don’t care; impossible for them to learn; you can’t expect teachers to give these students the love and support they are lacking at home” (Interviews, September 2022).

Each of these words and or phrases showed insight into her way of thinking through a deficit viewpoint. Lindsey’s language in talking about urban students’ needs and experiences she encountered, exhibited deficit thinking about the students, families, and communities in urban contexts. When asked about what she believed urban students needed academically, she utilized language and examples that showed assumptions about students. As she spoke through these experiences and utilized this language, it appeared that she did not recognize how harmful and biased she sounded. For example, at one point she was talking to me about how people tend to judge urban students, and she shared a story with me in which she was justifying how great her students are in her current classroom:

You know, I look at Aria, for example, and like, she’s obviously mixed somewhere down the line with some other kind of things. But she really is actually a sweet, good girl. She has some major difficulties and everything, but she is actually sweet. And I mean I can’t blame her, like her father is around, but like who knows to what real extent. And her mother seems kind of like a mess and to just not care or ever think Aria does anything wrong. But like, regardless how messy her life may be outside of school, she does come to school, and she is trying when she is here given all the

challenges she faces. At least she tries. So, I mean there are sweet and good kids regardless of their cultures and their living situations. And I think sometimes people just assume they aren't that way. So, I feel very hypersensitive to it. (Interview, September 2022)

I reflected on this part of our interview in my journal, as I was very uncomfortable, and a little bit upset, to be honest.

How! How in the world could you say “mixed somewhere down the line with some other kind of things” when talking about a little girl’s culture! How insensitive, ignorant and unaware. It seems as if Lindsey thinks what she is saying is appropriate?? It feels like this example reiterates how unaware she truly still is, regardless of if she claims to have become more aware throughout her previous experiences. I think she lacks the knowledge on how to move forward and truly enact culturally relevant pedagogy into her teaching. She made a lot of assumptions about Aria’s family that were based on deficit stereotypes. Maybe her experiences have amplified her deficit thinking? (Journal entry, September 2022)

Lindsey also spoke about some practices she utilizes in her current classroom which she believes are important to teaching urban students. She mentioned bringing up topics that are culturally sensitive and bringing awareness into realities of how people view certain cultures.

I’ve even, you know, I’ve turned it around on my kids in the class because I sat there and said, you know, when we tried to talk about race and everything, I said, “Well, you know, what if people said that people with names like Juan is such a weird name? Why don’t they just call themselves John?” and my students were like, “Oh my gosh! Ummmm.”

You know, then I said to them, like what if people said, “You know, those people with brown hair and brown skin, they’re just not as good as other people.” And my students were like, “What! You can’t say that! What are you saying, that is not okay!” and I’m like, “Well, I’m just telling you that that’s what people say out there, but they’re wrong about it.”

So, what I was trying to do is empower them by saying that stuff to them and making them aware that sometimes people view them that way. And you know what though, it’s true. They need to know that there are a lot of people out there saying that kind of nasty stuff and it is wrong. (Interview, September 2022)

When speaking about making students more aware, she also shared with me a story in which she filmed a student to make her aware of how she was acting.

One time, I videotaped a girl having a temper tantrum for 19 minutes because she couldn't find a paper. And when I showed it to her and showed her how insane she was acting, we were able to talk through the root of the problem. Like her seeing that opened her up to help me to understand that her father was in jail and her mother was a druggie, and she never gets to see her. And that she lives with her grandmother.

And so, obviously a lot of the turbulence and the disorganization and everything that was going on, may have had some biochemical problems for her, you know. Like from mom and dad, you know, drugs when she was pregnant probably. And definitely probably dealing with some emotional regulation problems. So, like showing my students about the reality of how they are acting or what people say about them, helps them to also see the different perspective, you know. (Interview, September 2022)

It was clear to me at this moment that not only did Crumble not prepare her to work with diverse cultures, but it also did not prepare her how to appropriately interact with students who may be disadvantaged and underserved. As Lindsey talked through the type of practices she has utilized in her experience and within her current classroom, some of her practices were more alarming than beneficial. The examples and language around instructional practices that Lindsey shared were not the most appropriate or culturally sensitive way to interact or bring awareness to students.

When speaking about her preparation experiences, life experiences, and her own cultural awareness, Lindsey appeared to lack awareness of her own biases. Toward the end of our interview, Lindsey shared that she was not able to be hired within the school district in which she did her associate teaching because she was White:

Because I was a White teacher, they wouldn't hire me. They wanted to hire people that were a different race, because they were Black. They wanted to hire people that were Hispanic or Black.

Even though the principal loved me, she wouldn't hire me. She wanted to make everything culturally more relevant there through her program, including the teachers. So that really sucked, because I am White, I guess I couldn't be a part of the program. (Interview, September 2022)

Overall, Lindsey made a lot of assumptions that were based on deficit stereotypes. I think she is becoming aware; however, she lacks the knowledge about how to move forward and truly enact culturally relevant pedagogy into her teaching. Her experiences amplified deficit thinking because there was a lack of critical reflection that could have allowed her to make meaning of her thoughts and personal biases. Even when she was providing examples when talking about herself as a good teacher, she used deficit language when she spoke about Black and Brown children.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the stories that were uncovered by the study. I shared the participants' stories holistically utilizing the sociocultural narrative lens. The findings were blended with stories from the participants, as well as my journal and field note reactions and reflections, to provide a comprehensive view of the overall participants' lived experiences pertaining to their perceptions of preparedness. In the following chapters, I provide a cross-case analysis of the findings related to the research questions driving this qualitative study as well as provide a discussion of the implications of the findings and the need for additional research. I provide my recommendations for pre-service preparation programs and school leadership. Finally, I reflect on my final thoughts as I conclude the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I shared each participant's story, bringing all the data together and utilizing the processes of three-dimensional narrative analysis through a sociocultural lens. The process of creating participants' restored narratives was tedious but enlightening. I began by rereading each survey response, interview transcripts, and journal entries numerous times. Finally, I combined the three-dimensional approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with the sociocultural approach (Grbich, 2013) to capture and analyze the cultural, political, and socialization aspects of the stories. My participants' stories were so reflective that at times I struggled to pull out the highest leverage elements of their interviews for addressing the research questions through the application of within case and cross-case analysis. Pre-service teacher faculty have focused more on "considering psychological constructs such as epistemological beliefs, self-awareness and reflection, and identity together with curriculum, learning, and classroom management strategies when educating pre-service teachers (Friesen & Besley, 2013, p. 23). Several participants did not elaborate during the interviews, which sometimes made it difficult to capture their teacher identities and perceptions regarding preparation. Interestingly, these were the participants that gave me discrepant data and unexpected findings. Hsiung (2010) explained the nature of unexpected findings and their benefits:

Contradictions in the data can give rise to unexpected findings, which ultimately strengthen theory. In fact, qualitative researchers actively look for "negative cases" to support their arguments. A "negative case" is one in which respondents' experiences or viewpoints differ from the main body of evidence. When a negative case can be explained, the general explanation for the "typical" case is strengthened. (para. 1)

Overall, it was exciting to hear their stories and see their identities unravel as I captured their secret, sacred, and cover stories related to preparation to teach in urban schools.

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of within case and cross-case analysis for answering the research questions. I have centered the research questions here for the purpose of this task, the final section. I wanted to know how novice teachers talk about their preparedness to teach in an urban elementary school. Three sub-questions gave rise to this intention:

- a. How do novice teachers describe their preparation for teaching in urban schools?
- b. What professional practices and experiences do novice teachers perceive as being instrumental to the preparedness to teach within an urban school?
- c. How are teacher preparation programs preparing teachers for the challenges of teaching in an urban school?

### **Within Case and Cross-case Analysis**

Case study was the major design element of this narrative collective case research (Stake, 2013) with each participant's study considered an individual case and all six cases viewed as a collective case. Within case and cross-case analysis are at the heart of case studies for identifying theory linked to themes. Within case analysis involved identifying themes in each holistic story of participants, as framed in Chapter 4. After refamiliarizing myself with the multiple methods collected for each participant, I utilized a process of enumerative content analysis and interpretive coding (Miles et al., 2014), labeled here as sub-themes, and then clustered similar sub-themes to identify broader themes (Grbich, 2013) in each story. Next, cross-case analysis was applied for seeking similarities and differences among the themes and sub-themes of each story for addressing research questions.

Cross-case analysis, a data analysis approach for case studies, facilitates the comparison of commonalities and differences in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analysis (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). While the preparation experiences were different for most participants, each expressed the uniqueness of experiences that shaped their overall sense of preparation to teach in an urban elementary school. The six participants all have their own stories to tell (Stake, 2013), and cross-case analysis helped me to display “the phenomenon exhibited in those cases” (p. vi). Stake (2013) called this phenomenon a “quintain,” which is what we seek to ultimately understand through a multi-case study. The quintains of this study are the stories novice teachers told regarding perceptions of preparation experiences. Within case analysis indicated five themes through clustering of multiple sub-themes: *field experiences*, *exposure to culturally relevant practices*, *reflective practices*, *life experiences*, and *relationships with faculty*. In the following section, Table 2 highlights the findings of within case analysis (theming the data), and cross-case analysis displays the similarities and differences across the six cases.

### **Findings**

Collectively, the data reflect the aforementioned five themes as theory that intensively affected preparation for teaching students in urban contexts. As Table 2 depicts, the sub-themes clustered to form themes, and cross-case analysis revealed similarities and differences among the six cases. The themes, as theory, are captured by Turner (2009) as “concepts and explanations to understand social reality...the social theorist strives to convince others about the nature of social reality by the use of evidence, narratives, hunches, concepts, and even material objects as ‘exhibits’”(p. 4). I present the findings which reflect the social realities of the six participants’ preparation experiences. I first report on the most



**Table 2*****Themes and Sub-themes***

Sub-themes	Jane	Johnny	Sheridan	Monae	Katheryn	Lindsey
Field Experiences						
Immersion in Urban Environments		X	X		X	
COVID Impact	X	X	X	X		
Opportunity to Practice/Apply Learning	X	X	X	X	X	
Opportunity Gap	X	X		X	X	X
Experiences with varying cultures and or communities		X	X	X	X	
Exposure to Culturally Relevant Practices						
Coursework	X	X	X			X
Importance of Building and maintaining relationships with students & families	X	X	X		X	
Sub-themes	Jane	Johnny	Sheridan	Monae	Katheryn	Lindsey
Reflective Practices						
Collaboration	X	X	X	X	X	
Self-Awareness	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engaging in Reflections	X	X	X	X	X	
Life Experiences						
Personal Experiences outside of preparation	X	X		X	X	X
Family Influence	X	X	X	X		X
Representation of teachers of color		X		X	X	
Relationships with Faculty						
Support and Mentorship	X	X	X		X	
Trust	X	X	X		X	
Relevance		X	X	X	X	

frequent theme in participants' stories, followed by the sequential ordering of frequency of subsequent themes, highlighting similarities and differences among the sub-themes. For example, three of the six participants perceived immersion in urban environments as important *field experiences*.

### **Theme 1: Field Experiences**

*Field experiences* are particular and unique aspects within a teacher's professional learning experience (Jacobs, 2014). Within this context, field experiences are defined as the intentional opportunities pre-service teachers have in classroom contexts within the field. While field experiences are often depicted as spaces to learn about specific pedagogical practices (Ball et al., 2009), they are often the first time pre-service teachers engage and interact in school communities since their own K-12 school experience (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005), making them crucial in the preparation teachers receive. I expected that all participants would have had numerous field experiences and was surprised that the survey data showed the opposite. "It was baffling to me to see that some participants had one field experience and another participant had none. How can preparation programs be so vastly different?" (Journal entry, August 15, 2022).

This theme was influential for all participants immersed in urban environments and given the opportunity to observe, interact, and apply their learning in varied cultures and communities. Across the six cases, field experiences, or lack thereof, influenced the sense of preparedness of novice teachers. The five sub-themes that helped to build the overall theme of field experiences were opportunity to practice/apply learning, immersion in urban environments, experiences with varying cultures and communities, opportunity gap, and COVID-19 impact.

### *Opportunity to Practice or Apply Learning*

Johnny, Sheridan, Katheryn, and Monae all identified in the survey data that field experiences were a major factor in their feelings of preparedness. When asked what the most powerful aspect of their preparation was, each spoke positively about the number, quality, and breadth of field experiences they had during their teacher preparation programs. Sheridan described the power of field experiences:

I think that we started practicum so early. Like I know people from other universities, that they really didn't get a ton of like experience in the same classroom or really any classrooms over and over again until student teaching. And we did. Like we were in rooms a lot before we student taught, working with students and actually practicing hands-on. (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022)

These field experiences started early in their teacher preparation program, beginning in the first semester of their preparation journey. The variety and exposure to different grade-levels and schools within practicum placements was also a critical factor in the significance of their preparation. Being able to see classrooms at a span of grade-levels helped participants identify the age group they on which they felt they could have the most impact and allowed them to see the progressions of academia (Journal entry, September 26, 2022). The field experiences were intentionally scaffolded and connected to what they were learning through their classes, which made the experience more enriching. "At first we observed, but we had a specific look for that related to what we were learning in our classes, so it felt purposeful and helped make meaning of the learning" (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022). Similarly, Johnny spoke about the connections he had in field experiences with the coursework in his classes:

Like early on we had to do some observations that were like guided by certain things to look for based on like what we were learning in class, then we did some tutoring where we would work with small groups of kids, like plan lessons for their reading

needs, we did a lot before student teaching our final year. (Johnny, Interview, September 2022)

This type of structure referenced by both Katheryn and Johnny was supported by Arthur Levine's (2006) national study of university-based teacher education programs. In his study, Levine found that effective teacher preparation programs achieve "curricular balance," integrating "the theory and practice of teaching" by "balancing study in university classrooms and work in schools with successful practitioners" (p. 21). Extensive opportunities and time in classroom settings provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to observe multiple models of effective teaching practices and allow them to view schools through the lens of a teacher, rather than a student (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2021). The amount of field experience coupled with coursework allowed participants a more effective way to learn the competencies or skills necessary to be effective teachers.

Participants spoke about the joy they felt while they were in actual classrooms, which is also why this feature is one of the most influential parts of their preparation experience. Each teacher talked about how field experiences increased their motivation and confidence in becoming an effective teacher. "It was so good to have those practicums. Like I actually got to practice teaching before doing it on my own and that made me more confident by the time, I got to student teaching!" (Monae, Interview, August 2022).

In contrast, the survey data of two participants, Jane and Lindsey, indicated below average ratings regarding their sense of preparation, due to the lack or absence of intentional field experiences. Lindsey reported having no time in classrooms whatsoever throughout her preparation experience, and Jane mentioned having a few experiences that lacked focus and were not beneficial. Field experiences should function as critical bridges between theoretical

aspects of formal teacher training and the practical aspects of teaching (Canrinus et al., 2016; Feiman-Nemser et al., 2014; Meyer, 2016). In Jane’s story, she spoke about the lack of connection and building of that bridge which made her field experiences feel pointless.

I felt like I just didn’t get any opportunity to practice things or trial and error and take things into my own hands. Like, you know, I just didn’t get to do anything other than sit there and listen, which is helpful, but like, I learn by doing. (Jane, Interview, September 2022)

The lack of opportunity to practice the essential components of teaching was a void that impacted not only Lindsey’s and Jane’s preparation experiences, but also their confidence. Lindsey talked about seeking out a job as an associate teacher prior to applying for a full-time teaching job so she could gain the exposure and could apply her learning in the field since she did not have the opportunity to do so in practicum experiences. Lindsey recalled feeling anxious to run a classroom lesson for the first time and wished she had had the chance to do so prior to completing her preparation program. Likewise, Jane’s story echoed the message of having limited confidence to deliver instruction for a full day in a classroom. She reported, “I never had the chance to ever do it before, so I didn’t feel like I really was ready” (Jane, Interview, September 2022). I reacted to her lack of experience as “I can’t imagine the mismatch of learning one thing in a class and not having the opportunity to see it in field experience” (Journal entry, September 2022).

Feiman-Nemser et al. (2014), in their “Choosing to Teach” study, reported that preparation programs with structures that communicate a guiding vision aligned with assignments and learning opportunities are likely to impact teaching candidates’ classroom practice several years after graduation. Further, Canrinus et al. (2016) asserted that “in coherent programs, core ideas and learning opportunities—both in course work and in

clinical work—are aligned” (p. 27). This literature, directly reflected within both Lindsey and Jane’s responses, explains the rating of their sense of preparation. Clearly, the two teachers did not experience a coherent field experience model (Journal entry, September 2022).

### ***Immersion in Urban Environments***

Sheridan, Johnny, and Katheryn reflected specifically on how the immersion within different urban environments allowed them to self-reflect and build awareness of the realities, resources, and communities that impact urban schools. Sheridan told stories about how her practicum experiences in urban school contexts brought awareness to her own privilege she had growing up as a White woman in a suburban school and community.

You know, growing up, the schools that I attended were incredibly whitewashed and very privileged. You know typical privileged private school views on everything. Which I never knew at the time and being in it, but looking back and what all I know, I can absolutely say that now.

So being immersed in an elementary school that is not that way, was very eye-opening and refreshing. Like to actually see the realities of the resources, the academic levels of students who aren’t from such privilege and you know, like seeing how the community contributes to all of that for children, was just helpful. Having that exposure prior to my first year made me feel like I was more prepared because it wasn’t all new to me when I started teaching. (Sheridan, Interview, August 2022)

Each of these participants also mentioned the immersion in urban environments allowed them to see the assets of the students, families, and communities surrounding urban schools, resulting in affirming decisions to teach in an urban school context. Lee et al. (2019) pointed out that placing teacher candidates in actual urban classrooms throughout their program “allows the candidate multiple opportunities to observe, reflect, and decide over the course of their collegiate career, if an urban school setting is a good fit, and if it is, to prepare to teach in that setting” (p. 105). Sheridan captured the passion this experience inspired for teaching in an urban setting.

They ignited a passion for urban education that was not there before I started my higher education, and it has only grown the more time I spend in urban schools. I mostly chose urban because of the people. Like, mainly because the students are absolutely amazing. I mean their resilience knows no bounds. (Sheridan, Interview, August 2022)

Monae mentioned multiple times during our conversations the importance of immersion in urban school contexts during her field experiences. Although she had plentiful and intentional field experiences, she believes they would have been more enriching to her development as a teacher, had they been within urban environments. “I didn’t have any practice in urban classrooms or learn anything really about urban kids or communities, at all. And I wish I would have had more exposure to that, for real” (Monae, Interview, August 2022).

### ***Experiences with Varying Cultures and/or Communities***

Four of the six participants spoke about experiences with varying cultures or communities throughout their field experiences. Jane, Monae, and Sheridan each spoke about the exposure and involvement experienced through an assigned community involvement project during their coursework. Given that all three of these participants attended different preparation programs, it was interesting to hear that each of them had a similar community service project that allowed them to directly work within communities outside of school walls. As Jane, Monae, and Sheridan each spoke about this experience, the word “impactful” and the phrase “wish we had more of those experiences” were used at least once by each of these participants, indicating the power these experiences had on their sense of development (Journal entry, September 2022). The three participants shared how the exposure to varying communities opened their eyes and built their awareness of the realities which some students

face, which helped them to better understand the impacts of the community or surroundings on kids.

It made me realize that kids go through so many different things that I would have never imagined. And I had no idea how that all impacted kids, until I was there with them, cleaning out their spaces and helping them acclimate to this new environment with them ... Made me think of like, you never know what your students are going to be going through. Just made me more aware and mindful (Monae, Interview, August 2022).

Sheridan and Johnny both talked about how their entire program was centered on urban education, which led to purposeful placements in their field experiences, providing them experiences with varying cultures and communities. What is different about their stories is that they had more than just one experience working within communities. Throughout their entire program, they were given opportunities to be immersed in the communities surrounding urban schools, which deepened their awareness of the resources and realities that impact these schools.

We had to drive through the community and like take note of what was surrounding it. Like what did the houses look like, what stores are around. And then we would discuss like how the surrounding community impacts the ways our students learn, like all of this and how they live is an important piece of what they bring into the classroom with them. And like I never thought of it really like that before (Johnny, Interview, September 2022).

Opportunities to interact with multiple cultures within community settings are not typical of most preparation programs. A major finding in Meyer's (2016) survey of Missouri teachers was that while most teachers thought they had adequate resources and support in field experience during their professional preparation, they believed the opportunities to interact with parents and communities were limited.



## *Opportunity Gap*

When talking about their field experiences, two of the participants spoke deeply about the opportunity gap they witnessed through their exposure to diverse types of schools.

Johnny and Katheryn reflected specifically on how their field placements in two different schools in different geographic areas shined a light for them to see the inequities among students between urban schools and suburban schools.

Like, it was just so weird, and I think shocking to see firsthand how far off the two groups of students really were, even in the same year and month of school. And at the time I was like, “I wonder what we can do to get these kids to like remember these things and better conceptualize and support them in math.” Like I think of like, how are we as a school system, able to make sure these students are all on the same level and make sure we are giving all students that same high level of learning? If anything, seeing that like, made me kind of mad. Like how uneven it is. And it made me more excited to jump in and do that myself, for these students (Johnny, Interview, September 2022).

Katheryn shared a parallel experience about the types of schools where she had field experiences during her preparation. She mentioned having observations in an affluent school where the resources were “so high tech, so insane and so readily available for every student” (Interview, September 2022) and about how the majority of the teachers in that school held a masters and had been teaching there for over 10 years. She then compared this experience to one she had in an urban school in the same city.

Like, they didn’t even have certified staff really. Like they just were getting education majors who wanted to volunteer there to come like help, not even do like quality teaching. And their curriculums were so dated, and the books were so old and torn up. There was no technology for students. It was just kind of disgusting honestly. You know, to like, see the vast difference between the quality of education being offered in the same city, just in different areas. (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022)

### ***COVID-19 Impact***

As stated in Chapter 4, COVID-19 was a major influence in this study. Johnny, Jane, Monae, and Sheridan each spoke about their field experiences during COVID. Both Johnny and Jane were in their student teaching experience when COVID-19 hit, causing their experience to be cut short, resulting in a lack of consistent practice or exposure teaching for a full day. This affected their sense of preparation, as they had anticipated having more experience in the field in order to feel fully comfortable and confident in their instructional practices.

And at that point in my student teaching I had taken over two or three content areas, but still I'd never taught a full day of school from start to finish before coming here and teaching. So, it was like, I didn't feel like I was all that prepared at all. I did not feel confident because I never had even taught a full day of school! I didn't ever get any real practice. Like at all (Jane, Interview, September 2022).

Monae was also in her final year of her program when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but not in her student teaching experience. COVID-19 impacted her sense of motivation, focus on coursework, and effort she put into her learning.

I mean my motivation kind of faded for real. I didn't care as much about that last semester only because things were so check box type of feeling. There wasn't any real learning that took place that semester really and no professors even cared really. (Monae, Interview, August 2022).

In contrast to Johnny, Jane, and Monae, Sheridan was in the junior year of her program when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Because of where she was in her program, she reported feeling considerably impacted by the pandemic and felt all the repercussions of what that meant for her preparation. It was apparent that her entire preparation experience and mindset about her learning experiences drastically changed due to the pandemic (Journal entry, September 2022). Like Monae, Sheridan also expressed how her motivation and

attitude weakened because she felt that everything was meaningless and did not feel purposeful or worthy via Zoom. She also talked about missing out on the opportunity to practice teaching with small groups or have a true student teaching experience in person, face-to-face with students.

I mean, then I think we kind of got the shorten end of the stick because we were paying the same amount, but our education was not the same ... I think the biggest thing of COVID was how it cut our time out of what could have been purposeful experiences, interactions, classes, discussions and coursework. Nothing felt good or worthy at all on Zoom. I mean Zoom just sucked. (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022).

Through all participants' stories, field experiences or the lack thereof were significant factors in their perceptions of preparedness. As indicated in the survey data, when participants were immersed in an urban environment and given opportunities to connect theory to practice through ample opportunities in the field, participants rated their sense of preparation at a higher score. Participants who had an absence of field experiences expressed a shallow understanding of students as learners and rated their sense of preparation dramatically lower.

## **Theme 2: Exposure to Culturally Relevant Practices**

As historically underserved students populate today's classrooms, instructional practices and dispositions must reflect the cognitive and cultural distinctions of their students (Alim et al., 2020; Gorski, 2006, 2009, 2013). A culturally relevant approach is significant to be effective, responsive, and equipped to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students of today's nation. As stated previously, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) was conceptualized by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a), a forerunner of this approach, along with Geneva Gay (2002), who explained CRP "serves to empower students to the point where

they will be able to examine critically educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society” (p. 110). In a review of research on cultural relevancy, Aronson and Laughter (2016) reiterated the need to invest in efforts to provide teachers with quality and necessary tools to promote student success and understand the tenets of CRP.

While understanding the ways that a teacher’s preparation experiences impact their sense of preparedness, *exposure to culturally relevant practices* emerged as an essential theme with two sub-themes: coursework and importance of building and maintaining relationships with students and families. The frequency with which participants talked about their exposure to culturally relevant practices was prominent, which illuminated the significance of perceptions of preparedness in this area. I had assumed that participants would have much to say about their experiences and exposure to culturally relevant practices. However, I was quite shocked to hear the vagueness with which some participants described their learning experiences with exposure to culturally relevant practices (Journal entry, September 2022).

### ***Coursework***

As reported previously, Johnny and Sheridan graduated from the same teacher preparation program, though in different graduation years. Their program had a focus on urban education, which appeared to make a difference in the coursework they encountered (Journal entry, September 2022). Both participants talked about experiencing coursework grounded within the principles of CRP, which built both their exposure and awareness of what culture is and how students’ cultures impact ways they learn. Survey data indicated that the majority of their classes were focused on constructs of cultural diversity. Sheridan

reported “It was literally a part of every experience and class we had” (Interview, September 2022).

Their coursework also was centered around critical reflections and deep discussions, allowing them both to better understand their own biases, values, and backgrounds, know the cultures of urban schools and communities, and have opportunities to work with urban students to practice culturally responsive pedagogy (Alim et al., 2020; Cochran-Smith, 2003a; Garcia et al., 2017; Gay, 2018; Haberman, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Dixson, 2021). They both felt there was a good balance between learning core curricula and theory, as well as learning about the instructional strategies and components of delivering effective instruction through the lens of CRP. Johnny said:

I was like amazed, when I read the articles, I thought, like this is the first time I like listened and learned about how the Hispanic culture doesn't learn the same or like they struggle more with this so and the African American culture learns this way. And like seeing that type of stuff on paper really made me aware of the differences in cultural learning types and like made me feel more prepared to be a culturally relevant teacher (Interview, September 2022).

Apart from Johnny and Sheridan, it was interesting to see how the stories of the other four participants echoed and intertwined to tell the stories of dissatisfaction and surface-level experiences in their preparation programs regarding a lack of exposure to culturally relevant practices. Whether the participants were part of a diverse community, educated in local universities, or had non-university-based preparation experiences, the data illuminated their dissatisfaction with their preparation and understanding of working with diverse student populations. The dissatisfaction came from either the lack of diversity within their coursework, readings, and discussions or the lack of exposure to diverse topics in general.

It was all assumed that we were going to all teach in a very White middle class type of school. Like everything we learned was from this White male perspective. Like I said, very White way or the highway up there. (Monae, Interview, August 2022)

Survey data revealed that Jane, Monae, and Katheryn each reported having only one class centered on diversity, and each of these participants recalled the course as not being beneficial. These participants talked about the coursework as being surface-level and considered the topic of CRP or culture diversity, as Jane expressed, an “afterthought or footnote” (Interview, September 2022) throughout their courses. Monae described coursework as a “one size fits all approach” and “geared mostly toward middle class White students” (Interview, August 2022). I questioned if Jane, Monae, and Katheryn shared these secret stories of their preparation with other teachers. Their stories capture an outdated traditional approach to preparation for teaching, which did not keep in mind the global nature of an ever-changing 21st century world students experience, which ultimately influences classroom practices (Journal entry, September 2022). I am mindful of what McLeod and Richardson (2013) said about the locally oriented, traditional analog pedagogical strategies most schools cling to instead of the shift to digital technologies that put classrooms in touch with a globally oriented world.

In the survey data, Lindsey was the only participant who reported the lack of exposure to culturally relevant practices entirely. She recalled her coursework being focused on the academic content teachers should know and teach, as well as instructional procedures for daily teaching instead of attention to the background knowledge, language, interests, and culture of students. Research has consistently reported that the majority of novice teachers perceive themselves underprepared to teach diverse students due to the lack of multicultural focused courses (Banks et al., 2019; Bunch, 2013; Deng et al., 2021) which sometimes is not

enough if, as Gorski (2006) asserted, attention is only given to “food fairs, human relations activities—reflect more of a compassionate conservative consciousness than an allegiance to equity” (p. 163). Additionally, Au (2017) questioned if multicultural is enough: “Many of our students are living in fear, traumatized by the impact that police violence, ICE raids, hate speech, and racist attacks are having in their communities” (p. 149). Because of this absence, Lindsey reported her confidence being impacted as she was unaware of how to teach students who had vastly different cultures and ways of learning.

There was nothing about students who were culturally diverse. Crumble was all geared toward like, teaching students who were on grade-level and predominately White. So, I do feel like it didn’t prepare me to be a teacher in an urban school, at all. (Interview, September 2022)

The next subtheme connected to exposure to culturally relevant practices was building and maintaining relationships with students and families. As previously mentioned in Meyer’s (2016) survey of Missouri teachers, field experience opportunities to connect with parents and communities were somewhat lacking.

### ***Importance of Building and Maintaining Relationships with Students and Families***

Both Johnny and Sheridan talked about having experiences in their preparation that focused on building relationships with students and families. They spoke about specific coursework that taught them how to become more aware of who their students are, resulting in being able to build more authentic relationships and partnerships with students and families. A requirement of their program included conducting home visits with their students in order to build partnerships and get to know more about the students and families outside of the classroom. These experiences helped them to recognize, value, and use students’ assets

from their cultural backgrounds, utilizing an asset-based pedagogical approach (Paris & Alim, 2014) as a way to be a more effective teacher.

We also learned about how the family make up and structures also impact our students. We had learned about the need to build that partnership with families, so they see as a support and partner, not like an authority figure. So, we did home visits, and I loved those. We got to know families better in a place that they were comfortable and talk about the student not just school wise or academically. That built like, trust for them to see us that way. I noticed the students who I did home visits for, were the ones whose families were much more comfortable with me. That made a difference in how they would respond on talking points, or their interaction at school events. They were just more comfortable, so it was like they trusted me more because they saw me build that relationship with them outside of our school. (Johnny, Interview, September 2022)

Johnny's and Sheridan's experiences intricately connect to Moll et al.'s (2013) framework, which recommends that teachers rely on the funds of knowledge of their students and obtain this information from family members through interactions such as home visits. The intentionality of exposure to CRP stimulated Johnny's and Sheridan's development of sociocultural competence for working with diverse student populations (Milner, 2010; Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005) as well as the confidence to build relationships with their students, which impacted their effectiveness as teachers (Journal entry, September 2022). Sheridan conveyed these benefits:

It is helpful to have had the learning of how culture impacts ways of learning, because that has paid off so much when I am working with my students and their families. Like I can build more trusting relationships because I actually have learned how to best communicate and support them. I also have been able to take that learning into my classroom and promote that type of cultural awareness within my students as well. (Interview, September 2022)

In contrast to Johnny and Sheridan, Katheryn, Monae, Lindsey, and Jane did not have this type of purposeful exposure or learning, which was a hindrance in learning how to build authentic and respectful relationships with their students and families. Each of these



participants implied that the absence of this type of learning harmed their ability to effectively build relationships with students and families during their first year of teaching.

I wish I would have had more learning around students who were culturally different than myself; I didn't know how to connect with my students whose cultural norms were so different from mine. (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022)

I never learned how to have important or impactful conversations with families, so it was uncomfortable trying to do so when the culture mismatch was so entirely different. I wish I had that practice prior, especially with different cultures than my own. (Monae, Interview, August 2022)

In comparison to the data from these four participants, Schaffer et al. (2012) found that many teacher preparation programs are taught through a middle-class and White cultural lens that is detrimental to the development of pre-service teachers to work with historically underserved student populations. The experiences and limited exposures to building relationships with students and families that each of these participants spoke about, reflects the previous research that states pre-service programs are not doing enough to prepare pre-service educators to fully understand and build their racial background (Milner, 2019) in order to be a successful educator in urban school contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

*Exposure to culturally relevant practices* was a vital component of preparedness for each participant. Participants who had more exposure through coursework grounded in culture diversity and opportunities to build relationships with students and families communicated an awareness of who their students were and felt more confident about their teaching practices for working with urban students. They also reported feeling better prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse student populations within their first year of teaching, as indicated in survey data. Conversely, participants who had little to no exposure to culturally relevant practices reported feeling unconfident, uncomfortable, and

hesitant to build relationships with students and families. They also reported not feeling aware of how to enact best instructional practices. This is supported by research that views the failure to teach all students as a civil rights and equity issue (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Greene, 2008; Haberman, 1996; Harper, 2013; Kelly et al., 2021; Liu & Ball, 2019; Naassana, 2020). Our most vulnerable students are racially minoritized (Bensimon, 2018; Rodini et al., 2018) by our policies and practices in schools. Minoritized students are defined by Harper (2013) as:

The social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in US social institutions, including colleges and universities. Persons are not born into a minority status nor are they minoritized in every social milieu (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or places of religious worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of whiteness. (p. 207)

Gorski and Dalton (2020) argued that reflection is significant to becoming equitable educators that champion social justice. Their analysis of multicultural assignments of multicultural and social justice teacher education in U.S. courses resulted in a typology for reflection that included: “(a) amorphous ‘cultural’ reflection, (b) personal identity reflection, (c) cultural competence reflection, (d) equitable and just school reflection, and (e) social transformation reflection” (p. 363). The theme of *reflective practices* was embraced by the majority of participants, but often there was an absence of examining oppression and social justice inside and outside of schools.

### **Theme 3: Reflective Practices**

The idea of reflection can be traced back as far as Dewey (1933) who underpins that reflective thinking involves active and persistent efforts to “explore, identify the nature of the problems, the generation of several potential solutions, and a means-end analysis of the

alternatives” (Dewey, 1916, p. 3). True reflection, according to Dewey, must engage the practitioners in real problems and attempt to resolve them in rational manner. *Reflective practices* are utilized in teacher education programs to address the pedagogy of pre-service teachers, help them make meaning of learned content, and apply learning in various classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Papay et al., 2017). Reflective practices are personal and social and may promote transformation of educational practices (Nieto, 2006; Sirrakos, 2017). Growth and development of social justice leaders must involve deep reflection to the point of questioning oppression and seeking to be advocates for equity (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). The three sub-themes that gave energy to reflective practices were engaging in reflections, collaboration, and self-awareness.

### ***Engaging in Reflections***

Five out of six participants told stories of frequently completing written reflections during their practicum experiences, allowing them to make deeper connections between course content and observed actions in the field. Through reflections, pre-service teachers are able to construct their own understanding of the critical components necessary for meeting the needs of all learners (Liu & Ball, 2019).

We would have written reflections where we would have to connect what we were learning in class to what we observed in the field. And then we would always be asked what implications those observed behaviors would have on us as teachers. ... It really helped me process and make meaning of it all (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022).

Every week we had to reflect in our journal after field experiences. And it was a way to capture my personal feelings, but then also connect with what I was learning in my classes. Then our professor would collect them and like write us a note back that usually had a question or a thought to even push us further and reflect more. Like I loved that. I actually took that practice into my classroom now with my second graders. (Jane, Interview, September 2022)

Gorski and Dalton (2020) contended reflections are critical to the field but do not always result in encouraging pre-service teachers to examine their biases and stereotypes that may be barriers to meeting the needs of all students, particularly historically underserved students.

One of the typologies for equity-minded educators to guard against, identified by Gorski and Dalton (2020), was “amorphous ‘cultural’ reflection” (p. 363) of vagueness and silence about racism, heterosexism of other justice issues, including dangerous stereotyping of the other. Sheridan was one of the few who talked about learning how to be culturally responsive and not prepared to have difficult conversations with students. Sheridan stated:

Everything was like you know, “Oh, be culturally responsive” but we had no preparation on how to have difficult conversations with students. Like I have students who very clearly do not trust the police, and rightfully so. But we were never taught how to ACT and bring up these difficult conversations and topics with students to make a change. It was like yes; we are culturally aware of the injustices—but now what? Like what can we do about it? And that was a missing piece I feel like. (Sheridan, Second interview, September 2022)

Johnny also raised the importance of engaging in critical reflection aligned with “cultural competence reflection on one’s teaching practice with ‘diverse learners in light of one’s identities and life experiences’” (Gorski & Dalton, 2020, p. 363).

And I appreciated him giving us like real-life issues that need to be faced and talked about with kids. Then he’d give us space to digest it and actually collaborate and reflect together to come up with solutions and or ideas of how to do it. So, it was like he forced us to reflect on how to be a better teacher for like, equality and social justice. Does that make sense? (Interview, September 2022)

Dervent (2015) found that once teachers use reflective practices to enter a more critical level of reflection, a comprehensive focus on relevant practice in the classrooms develops. Ongoing reflection provides novice teachers opportunities to deepen their growth and development required to reach the most complex levels of their practice (Dervent, 2015; Lawrence-Wilkes & Ashmore, 2014). Contrary to this goal, the data revealed cohesion

between the majority of the participants' experiences with reflection, coursework, and field experiences to deepen and develop their teaching competencies instead of sense of identity for becoming social justice leaders (Journal entry, September 2022).

### ***Collaboration***

Through most of the participants' stories, collaboration with their peers was a vital component that impacted participants' learning experiences, mental well-being, and exposure to innovative ideas (Journal entry, September 2022). Participants spoke of the trust that was established between their peers that allowed them to reflect and grow their perspectives. "It was so nice to be able to hear others' perspectives and understand different points of view, challenge each other, or have one another to problem-solve with when things would come up in our practicum" (Johnny, Interview, September 2022). The sense of emotional support from peers with like-minded beliefs and shared experiences helped create a sense of confidence, belonging, and passion throughout their preparation journey. In addition, each participant shared stories of the power of motivation from their peers when the learning felt tough. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) discovered similar findings of peer learning and collaboration across educational programs resulted in higher levels of intrinsic motivation and understanding of solidified pedagogical knowledge. Some participants talked about having peers to snowball and test ideas and process hard days, which made them feel less alone and more connected in their role of learning how to be effective teachers. "It was nice to have classmates that were in the same boat, because we all understood, and we were going through it together. You didn't feel as lonely or crazy" (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022).

Additionally, several participants spoke about the value of learning from their peers. Jane and Monae both spoke about opportunities they had to co-create lesson plans with their

peers and how they gained better ideas or resources when collaboration took place: “that was like a game changer. Seeing that resource and being able to learn from the tools she had in her toolbox, just being able to collaborate with one another and share ideas was helpful” (Jane, Interview, September 2022). Having structured opportunities to problem-solve and plan lessons together with peers deepened content understanding, which directly mirrors the responsibilities of what it entails to be a teacher working within a grade or team-level professional learning communities. Collaboration is vital for participants to experience, as “they will also encounter professional collaboration with peers during their professional teaching careers” (Journal entry, September 2022).

Lindsey was the only participant who did not have intentional opportunities to reflect or collaborate with others during her preparation experience. Since her preparation experience was completely online, self-paced, and in the format of independent modules, she talked about never having any real exposure to humans throughout her experience, leaving her feeling “isolated and alone in her preparation journey” (Journal entry, September 2022). She recalled her learning experiences as being all through pre-recorded videos, reading assigned texts, and completing online assessments. The focus of her entire program was on teacher knowledge over the core content areas and theoretical practical strategies within classroom contexts. This type of format did not have structured opportunities for her to reflect or make meaning of content. “It was rather that she needed to learn the prescribed content in order to pass the tests instead of making meaning about the learned content” (Journal entry, September 2022). After her preparation experience and shift to an associate teacher, Lindsey realized the impact that lack of reflection and collaboration opportunities had on her as a teacher. “It was nice, I never had the chance to do that through Crumble, and

I didn't realize how helpful it really is to talk through and process with people" (Lindsey, Interview, September 2022). Reflection also leads to self-awareness, which contributes to one's identity as a teacher.

### ***Self-Awareness***

Reflection is a vital aspect of transformative learning—the kind of learning that shifts students' worldviews and understandings of themselves (Brooks, 2000; Mezirow, 2003). Self-awareness is linked to the self-concept of teachers that promotes actions relevant to their identities as professionals, the essence of self, and possibilities of self (Hamman et al., 2010). As emphasized earlier, reflection is significant to multicultural and social justice teacher education (Liu & Milman, 2010; Nieto, 2006); becoming aware of self, including biases teachers may bring to the profession.

Gorski and Dalton's (2020) topology pointed out for growth as a social justice educator, reflection is critical to raise issues of oppression and social justice. Research has consistently shown that reflective practices can encourage educators to examine their biases (Lin & Lucey, 2010; Pang, 2006) and positionalities related to privilege (Acquah & Commins, 2015; Nieto, 2000), develop understandings of oppression (Morley, 2008), and strengthen their overall commitment to educational justice (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Liu (2015) described critical reflection as:

a process of constantly analyzing, questioning, and critiquing established assumptions of oneself, schools, and the society about teaching and learning, and the social and political implications of schooling, and implementing changes to previous actions that have been supported by those established assumptions for the purpose of supporting student learning and a better schooling and more just society for all children. (pp. 10–11)

Most of the participants shared stories about how reflective practices throughout their preparation experiences allowed them to learn more about their own identity by electing awareness of their own values, biases, and assumptions which supported the sub-theme of self-awareness. Johnny and Sheridan both shared stories of opportunities to self-reflect and think deeply about their culture and implications of their cultural worldview. They were exposed to various readings and involved in facilitated discussions that pushed their thinking and deepened their understanding.

Everything was centered on diversity and building awareness, like every experience, discussion, assignment, all of it. That focus and having to dig deeper into topics that sometimes aren't always within our comfort zone, helped me to see different perspectives and actually learn more about what culture means and how that impacts teaching and learning. (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022)

Some participants shared specific incidents when they were asked to identify their own assumptions about teaching and learning by recognizing their own personal beliefs and dispositions. "I never really was asked to think about my own personal beliefs, or really had been checked before on my assumptions" (Katheryn, Interview September 2022). Doing this enabled participants to create new ways of thinking and provided them with the opportunity to challenge their preconceived thoughts. This type of reflection allows the teacher candidate to challenge assumptions and beliefs which will impact the betterment of their instructional practices. In this instance, self-awareness through reflective practices can lead to committed efforts to use pedagogies that demonstrate an understanding of student cultures and how to create a plan to better instruct students based on their needs (Carrington & Selva, 2010; Crichton & Valdera, 2015). Johnny communicated self-awareness of his culture and the assumptions he brought to the profession.



I was a little, like taken back the more that I learned about how many harmful assumptions I had. I didn't even know they were harmful at the time. And I think that is because of how I was raised. But like I didn't realize I held some of those thoughts with me until I learned how to identify and unpack them. It was helpful and I think that is important to be able to do if you are going to be a teacher for urban students. Or just important for anybody in life really. (Interview, September 2022)

Some participants also told stories about having uncomfortable conversations and discussions within some of their classes, which allowed them to become more aware of varied perspectives and critically think of perspectives that were different than their own (Journal entry, September 2022). Using active listening and collaboration, participants were able to hear other points of view, which impacted how they thought about certain topics and allowed them to construct new ways of learning, thus increasing self-awareness. "Hearing my peers talk about a situation that I had never encountered, or would have known anything about, really made me more aware and think differently about how my privilege has shaded my way of thinking for so long" (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022).

Lindsey was the only participant who did not have opportunities for engaging in reflections, collaboration, or learning that allowed her to develop self-awareness during her teacher preparation experiences. Her experience was self-paced and in the format of online modules, which were prescriptive to intended content learning only. Lindsey referred to the learning as presented in a way that was, "very checklist like, assuming all students needed the same thing to be successful and no thought of individual student needs were taken into account" (Interview, September 2022). This type of structure did not allow Lindsey to unpack or process her thoughts about culture or how different cultures impact student learning. As she said, her learning came from the assumption that all students learn the same way and need the same things. Therefore, she was never challenged to think of the impacts of

culture or stereotypical behavior. As Kohli (2014) identified in a study, her socialization took place within a system that normalized and perpetuated White supremacy and settler colonialist ideologies and practices. As a result, Lindsey was never provided the opportunity to acknowledge her own assumptions or biases as strategically as other participants were able to. In examining her interview transcripts, it appears that the complete absence of engaging in reflection, analyzing her own thoughts, and making meaning of theory and practice perpetuated her stereotypical way of thinking, causing her to hold deficit views of diverse communities (Journal entry, September 2022). Parts of her second interview were telling:

I wasn't prepared to work with kids who were so unsupported at home and had so much trauma that they can't even learn at school. Like how do you blame them? We can't expect them to come into school and learn these rigorous standards when they don't have the home support they need. Like it starts at home. And a lot of these kids don't have any guidance or support at home. I feel bad for them but there is only so much we can do as teachers. (Second interview, September 2022)

In summary, reflective practices impacted the degree to which participants were able to engage in reflections, collaborate with their peers, and deepen their self-awareness. When reflective practices were embedded in their programs, they were able to make meaningful connections in their courses and experiences, as well as develop a deeper self-awareness than those who did not have the same intentional opportunities. Reflective practices must be a focus of teacher preparation to foster educator mindsets and instructional practices “that cultivate civility, empathy, cultural humility and authentic caring for diverse student populations” (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 12).

#### **Theme 4: Life Experiences**

For this study, life experiences is defined as the experiences the six participants encountered outside of their preparation, contributing to their sense of cultural awareness,

which affects preparation to teach within urban school contexts. Brayboy (2013) asserted that stories are authentic data and “serve as our moral and practical guideposts in life” (p. 96). Thus, understanding the life experiences novice teachers have encountered is essential to understanding their sense of preparation.

Hedges (2012) explored teachers’ funds of knowledge, explained as “the bodies of knowledge (including information, skills, and strategies) that underlie the functioning, development, and well-being of teachers in curriculum decision-making and interactions with children in educational settings” (p. 13). Teachers’ funds of knowledge are categorized by three contexts: family-based funds of knowledge, school-based funds of knowledge, and community-based fund of knowledge (Hedges). Within these three contexts, it is imperative to note teachers’ funds of knowledge draw on more than disciplinary knowledge, meaning that it details the sources and contexts which are based on socially situated personal experiences, shaping teachers’ professional practice (Freeman, 2020; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Le, 2020). Some researchers argue that the funds of knowledge a teacher brings into their preparation can be molded by the practices and pedagogical knowledge they experience throughout preparation, indicating that it is not a major contributor to the sense of preparedness for novice teachers (Banegas, 2022; Flores & Smith, 2009; Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Participants’ narratives revealed funds of knowledge outside of preparation and linked to life experiences that had an effect on their sense of preparation for teaching in an urban school: personal experiences outside of preparation, family influence, and representation of teachers of color.

### *Personal Experiences Outside of Preparation*

Johnny and Monae shared secret stories about how they were treated differently growing up because of their skin color. Johnny recalled his first schooling experience when he came to America and shared the bullying and harmful comments toward him and his sister: “They like told us to go back to Mexico because we didn’t know the language. They told my sister she belonged in the SPED [Special Education] classroom” (Interview, September 2022). He talked about how this altered his sense of belonging for inclusion in America’s culture, and he started to question his own cultural identity. As he talked more about his personal struggles, he communicated hope that his students never have to endure similar circumstances.

Monae shared a comparable story about an experience as a young girl when she tried to play with a girl in the neighborhood. She heard the little girl’s mother say, “Lucy, you need to be careful. There are a lot of people around here like that and we need you to be safe” (Interview, August 2022). As Monae shared her story, she talked about her realization at an early age about differential treatment or being assumed to be “dangerous” because she was Black. Like Johnny, she also connected this personal experience to the reason she felt more prepared to teach students of color.

Like I remember young knowing I was gonna be looked at differently because I was Black. And until you actually live something like that, I just don’t think you really understand. So, I think that like, messed up experience I had, really can help me connect with students who are also judged or like excluded because of their skin color. You know? (Interview, August 2022)

For both Johnny and Monae, these experiences shaped their self-awareness and identity. Through their use of critical self-reflection, this life experiences worked to motivate, encourage, and support their ability to “critique societal and educational inequity, privilege,

power and oppression” (Carter Andrews & Castillo, 2016, p. 118) because they experienced societal injustices because of their cultural backgrounds.

Representing the White culture, Jane and Sheridan both told stories about limited life experiences with people from different races or languages as they were growing up. Each talked about being from a White community and attending schools with little to no diversity. Previous literature proposes the idea that to become more humane, one must be engaged and conscious of their presence in the world as a way to navigate and make meaning of the world around them (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Freire & Betto, 1985; Schapiro, 2001). The absence of exposure and engagement with varying perspectives or cultures made it difficult for them to develop a sense of cultural awareness that would lead to understanding racial and ethnically diverse students or a world different than where they grew up as children and youth (Journal entry, September 2022). This impacted Jane’s first year of teaching, and she talked about not being able to connect or interact with some of her students, as she told a secret story.

So, I was unsure how to navigate some of the traumas or way of living in which they have encountered. Within my first year I was so unaware of their cultural ways of living it made it very hard to assume positive intentions with not only my students, but also their families, which is something I know I needed to do. That just showed me that I needed to learn more about their culture so I could be a better teacher for them. (Interview, September 2022)

Both Jane and Sheridan shared examples about how their personal experiences outside of preparation did not allow them to develop their cultural awareness.

Katheryn’s story was like Jane and Sheridan’s regarding her limited cultural experiences growing up. Different in Katheryn’s story was that once she moved to another state, she became exposed to more diverse cultures and ways of living and realized she had a

limited worldview. The sense of exposure to a more culturally diverse demographic helped Katheryn become more aware of the injustices different cultures experience and the perspectives of individuals of various racial and ethnic groups. These life experiences encouraged her to do more self-reflection and analysis about her previous ways of thinking and inspired her to become more open-minded. She sought opportunities to continue to deepen her cultural competence, as expressed by Gorski and Dalton (2020) as becoming aware of “cultural competence framing related to teaching ‘diverse learners’” (p. 363) and “absence of reflection on beliefs or actions related to oppression against or advocacy for marginalized students” (p. 363). She also talked about her time teaching in Honduras after she graduated college and the benefits to her development to become an effective urban schoolteacher.

And it made me really dive into how people’s cultures impact the way they think and live. I read that before going to Honduras but, it helped me see how even my own culture impacted my sense of thinking and how I interact with people. Which is important to really see how you fit in a world that is so culturally diverse. (Interview, September 2022)

Additionally, some participants shared sacred stories of experiences that helped them with lesson delivery and behavior management skills through personal experiences that entailed interacting with students as volunteers or summer jobs. Participants perceived these experiences, which gave them more exposure outside of their program and in some instances even gave them more quality learning, as critical to their development and preparation. Jane highlighted this idea when she spoke about her time as a summer school teacher and what she experienced, referring to it as “super beneficial and I feel like I learned more about behavior management there than I did in any of my preparation” (Interview, September 2022).

The findings suggest that participants' life experiences molded their cultural literacy, which in turn influenced their initial sense of preparedness to teach in urban school contexts. Haberman and Post (1998) wrote about the power of life experiences for molding the identity and self-awareness of teachers. Further, Gorski and Dalton (2020) maintained the teacher's effectiveness "develops as they integrate significant life experiences" (p. 99). When teachers' life events are immersed in their preparation and they are exposed to meaningful content, their knowledge base is deeply influenced and expanded (Haberman, 2005; Kokka, 2016; Nieto, 2006). In short, events and experiences in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to their preparedness and performance of their professional roles (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Freeman, 2020; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2002; Hedges, 2012; Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Kohli, 2014; Le, 2020). Family influence is connected to the preparation of teachers.

### ***Family Influence***

Teachers' development of their identities began long before they enter a preparation program, shaped by a combination of different experiences which creates the self and possibilities of self as a result of socialization within the family unit, the cultural community, and schooling experiences (Flores et al., 2008). Over two decades ago, Crow (1987) emphasized the term "teacher role identity" to explain how teachers' self-identity sculpted their beliefs and ways of teaching. More recently, Williams (2016) found the relationships of teachers' childhood upbringing and life experiences influenced their beliefs about themselves and the world.

The cultural influence of family was a major contributor to the self-awareness and identity of most participants. Some participants spoke about their upbringing and how their families' perspectives and views deeply influenced their ways of thinking, contributing to

their identity as a teacher (Ewing, 2021; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Flores et al., 2008; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Williams, 2016). Lindsey told a secret story in which she revealed an interesting perspective on how the views of her family influenced her life. Research supports the idea that the social environments in which children are raised influence their development and affect their worldviews (Albanese, 2019; Holden, 2019; Trent et al., 2019). Lindsey referred to her family as being “borderline racist” (Interview, August 2022) and never accepting of cultures or views other than their own. She told stories about her family making racist jokes and insensitive comments at the dinner table throughout her childhood. Lindsey also shared a secret story in which she challenged her mother’s view of cultural acceptance at a young age and felt that she was shut down and silenced. This experience instilled in her the sense of not feeling comfortable “to ever challenge thoughts that were different from her family, which also contributed to her own biases and the way she thought about diverse cultures” (Journal entry, September 2022).

Lindsey said once she moved out of her family home and got into the world on her own, she became more aware. This awareness grew out of various experiences in her jobs, career path, and schooling. She acknowledged that she became more aware of how wrong her parents’ views were and how those views had sheltered her and had contributed to her way of thinking. As she spoke about urban students and the language she used, Lindsey seemed to be more prone to stereotypical insights and language than she thought she was. Like Dumas (2014) noted in his study, I believe that she was unaware of how her deficit stances could “endanger the bodies of students” (p. 11).

We can’t expect these kids to actually be in a mindset to learn or really comprehend anything. Like they just can’t when they are coming from the home lives that they



come from. And we can't expect them to learn at the same rate, so we have to be mindful of that when teaching these types of students. (Interview, September 2022)

Lindsey has become more culturally aware but still lacks the understanding or guided experiences to critically develop cultural awareness. The influence of her family's way of thinking could be impacting her more deeply than she thinks (Journal entry, September 2022).

Other participants shared stories that highlighted their upbringing as being of limited cultural exposure due to the socioeconomic status and structures of their families. This brought about a sense of privilege that did not always allow them to see varied perspectives or other ways of living. Jane did not directly elaborate on how her family influenced her way of thinking, but implied that since she grew up in a White and privileged environment, she found herself struggling to understand other ways of thinking due to pure unawareness, which hindered her way of connecting with varied cultures of students during her first year of teaching.

Whereas Katheryn and Sheridan both directly talked about how their family influenced them due to their beliefs and views, Katheryn mentioned being raised in a "sheltered environment" (Interview, September 2022) because her "father was a Pastor and [her] mother was sick, so they lived in a little bit of fear." This affected her exposure to anything other than what her family wanted her to be exposed to throughout her childhood. Family influence hindered her worldview until she was able to come to some understanding of a larger view of the world for herself. Trent et al. (2019) wrote about the sometimes unintentional hindrance parents place upon their children through social determinants based on the conditions in which they are born, raised, live, and work. His research stated that as

children develop and are held back from certain exposures, they may inadvertently display racist thoughts or actions due to the limited exposures and experiences they encounter throughout childhood (Trent et al.). Sheridan shared parallel experiences when talking about her background and what it was like growing up in a Catholic suburban town. “My family had some very close-minded cultural thoughts and perspectives and I never realized that until I became old enough to learn things and really develop my own views” (Interview, August 2022). Williams (2016) introduced radical honesty as a critical framework for teacher educators to form relationships, shape effective practices, and heighten their critical consciousness. Radical honesty is a critical component of pedagogy as it calls for honesty about our identities, practices, and dispositions, all of which these participants exhibited as they critically reflected on how their families’ influence played a part in their overall identity.

Johnny shared a secret story during one of his interviews about the cultural expectations and views his family held regarding the teaching profession. The views his family held about education were major influences and shaped Johnny’s sense of cultural identity and acceptance with his family. He talked about struggling to know if going into education was the right decision for him, and how he constantly feels like he must prove himself to his family since they do not think of it as a highly respected career path.

I remember my father telling me that it was a woman’s profession. And like as a Hispanic male I should be doing something like he does, like construction or landscaping or using my hands. I mean eventually he got over it, but he still tells me like, “oh you don’t work that hard, or oh, that is just easy money.” They just don’t get it. And I am not sure if they ever really will. (Johnny, Interview, September 2022)

This family influence has caused Johnny to question himself throughout his years of preparation (Journal entry, September 2022). He also talked about how his family’s influence

has played a major role in motivating him to stick with the profession and help end that stigma within his culture.

Johnny's experiences are related to the findings of Christensen et al.'s (2022) survey of 495 parents of school-aged children in nine Utah districts to determine their perceptions of the teaching profession. The researchers discovered some reasons for remaining in the field included respect for teachers, a gender-related field, self-efficacy, and working conditions. Like Johnny's father who perceived teaching to be a "woman's profession," parents surveyed often encouraged their children to consider other professions. Many of their reasons were connected to "things like the number of pupils per classroom, general working conditions, sufficiency of resources, teacher pay, and student behavior" (p. 8).

### ***Representation of Teachers of Color***

Teacher diversity is not a new topic in teacher education and rightfully so, as it is a topic that holds great significance (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Montecinos, 2004; Perez Huber, 2010; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Currently, teachers of color comprise approximately 20% of the U.S. public school population, whereas students of color represent about 54% of public-school students (McFarland et al., 2018). Teachers of color make a major difference in all students' learning and schooling experiences (Boser, 2011; Carver-Thomas, 2018), especially for racially and ethnically diverse students (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Previous literature analyzed the value teachers of color add to schools and classrooms that consists predominantly students of color. Teachers of color serve as role models for all students (Brown, 2009; Gist et al., 2019; Rogers-Ard et al., 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), display more multicultural awareness (Brown, 2009; Weisman & Hansen, 2008), play a strong role in achievement of students of

color (Eddy & Easton-Brooks, 2011), and hold higher expectations in general (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Yosso (2005) found that teachers of color bring in a variety of strengths to the profession such as a community cultural wealth that imbues them with “an array of knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively teach Black and Brown children” (p. 77). In a more recent study, Cherng and Halpin (2016) reinforced the findings that students of all races expressed preference for teachers of color for many of the reasons identified above. In this context, it is critical to retain and recruit teachers of color, as they are essential in understanding the strengths of diverse student populations and increasing academic expectations for all students (Brown, 2009; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gist et al., 2019).

Both Johnny and Monae told stories about how their identity and cultural background help them to connect more easily with their urban students. They both spoke about their own educational journeys and the need to see teachers that looked like them and that when they had a teacher of color, they found themselves more vested and motivated to learn (Journal entry, September 2022). In their stories, both Johnny and Monae mentioned that they wished they had had more teachers of color because of the high impact they had on their learning, which parallels previous research highlighting the importance of racial representation in the teaching field (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

For each of these participants, personal life experiences motivated them to pursue careers in teaching. Johnny spoke about his cultural identity struggle in leaving Mexico and coming to America and how this made him keenly aware of what it is like to teach students who may experience the same type of identity struggle.

I think because of what I experienced, it is easier for me to think about how I can be a good teacher for my students, because I actually get it and I can provide the type of things that I needed for my own students. (Johnny, Interview, September 2022)

Similarly, when talking about connections with students, Monae shared that she could reach her students well because of her cultural connection and lived experiences which are like some of her students.

I mean the biggest thing I got to prepare me for urban schools was my own background and lived experiences. Like, I grew up in the hood, so I get it. (laughs) and I am Black. Like I know how to reach these kids because I was one.

I had some really great teachers but to see someone who looked like me, in a field that I wanted to pursue, and see someone that looks like me in a professional stance, I think it would have made me feel more excited about school and more supported. Like I was supported growing up but would have felt more support if I had more teachers of color I think. Like to have somebody who understands me and what it means to look like me. I think it would have helped a lot to have somebody that could relate to me about certain things. So, I wanna be that for students, they need to see more people of color in the field who can relate and motivate them. (Interview, August 2002)

Monae is among many of the Black teachers who have continued the work of ensuring that students of color are encouraged to navigate the systems of White supremacy that affect their lives in numerous ways (Duncan, 2020). Because of her life experiences, Monae expressed her commitment to working as a racial justice-oriented teacher who wants to ensure Black Lives Matter (Journal entry, August 2022). She understands that representation is vital to the success of diverse student populations (Brown, 2009; Howard, 2003b; Lynn & Jennings, 2009).

The ideas that Johnny and Monae expressed are supported by numerous studies which indicate the need for recruitment and retention of teachers of color in schools serving students of color. Educators of color bring with them important cultural perspectives that allow them to engage in a pedagogy of resistance (Ross et al., 2008) or an “unwavering commitment to student educational success” (p. 87). Due to the foundational knowledge

Johnny and Monae had about their own culture and each of their personal experiences with trying to fit into society, they both were more aware of what it meant to be an individual from a diverse culture. This allowed them to show more cultural competence by paying attention to the role culture and representation play in student learning and understanding the value a diversified teaching force brings to student development (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Concisely, life experiences endured by participants outside of preparation, through family influence and representation of teachers of color, contributed to the depth and sense of preparedness participants had for teaching in an urban school. The findings indicate that when participants had life experiences that immersed them in the world and allowed them to critically reflect and expand their worldviews (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Kokka, 2016; Nieto, 2006), they became more culturally aware, thus more prepared to work with urban school students than those who did not have the same intentional experiences in their lives outside of preparation. Participants were also able to show radical honesty (Williams, 2016) about the role family influence had on their motivations and identities as teachers, highlighting the complexities of teacher identity and need for critical reflection (Ewing, 2021; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Flores et al., 2008; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Williams, 2016). When participants of color had teachers of color, their sense of motivation and self-efficacy increased (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015), and they were encouraged to see the value of representation of teachers of color in the profession. To understand the effects of participants' life experiences, it is essential to explore teacher identities and understand what contributes to their funds of knowledge (Hedges, 2012), cultural awareness (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Dumas, 2014; Gorski & Dalton, 2020),

and overall sense of preparation for teaching in an urban school. Overall, these six participants felt that relationships with faculty were significant to their preparation.

### **Theme 5: Relationships with Faculty**

A student-teacher relationship is a positive relationship between the teacher and the student to gain trust and respect from one another (Vanner et al., 2022). A positive relationship with students can help them to become more successful and deepen their knowledge of the content presented (Conley & You, 2017). In addition to academic advantages, a positive student-teacher relationship can improve health and assist students in developing their self-worth (Conley & You, 2017). Some authors refer in similar ways to the relationship between faculty and pre-service teachers, which influences their cognitive resources, motivation to learn, and self-regulation (Kordts-Freudinger, 2017; Willis & Leiman, 2013). Regan et al. (2012) and Walker and Palacios (2016) argued insufficient attention has been given to this dimension of the learning process. The three sub-themes of support and mentorship, trust, and relevance worked together to create the overall theme of relationships with faculty.

#### ***Support and Mentorship***

Support and mentoring are the most important practices teacher educators can use when pre-service teachers are acquiring skills necessary to be successful in their careers (Conley & You, 2017). Findings showed that when participants experienced constant feelings of support, they were more confident in their learning and roles of becoming teachers. The data also suggest that when meaningful relationships were established between faculty and students, students were more motivated to do a good job in their coursework. Cavendish et al. (2021) explored, using semi-structured interviews, surveys, and field notes,

the perceptions of 11 supervising clinical teachers and nine pre-service teachers placed in two high-need urban schools. Through partnerships with schools and support through mentoring, students felt safe in discussing deficit thinking, dispelling their notions about urban schools, and experiencing non-evaluative advice from their mentors.

Johnny could not say enough good things about his preparation program in all interactions during the study. An important element for him was the level of support he received from his professors. “It was nice to have people who continuously checked in on you throughout the program. Like professors or faculty that cared about you and made sure you were doing a good job” (Johnny, Interview, September 2022). Johnny talked about how that constant checking-in allowed him to feel more supported throughout his educational journey. This mirrors the findings of previous studies on the frequency of interactions (Cotten & Wilson, 2006) or formal/informal interactions (Meeuwisse et al., 2010), which concluded the aspect of “checking-in” and “open door policies” of faculty members resulted in greater student engagement and sense of preparation for pre-service teachers. The support Johnny experienced also contributed to his sense of confidence both personally and professionally (Journal entry, September 2022). Similarly, Katheryn spoke about how she loved that her class sizes were small, which allowed her to get more guidance from professors and develop relationships over time (Journal entry, September 2022).

Most of my professors were my same professors throughout the entire program. And that was so helpful because I felt like I got to know them better, and they got to know me better. I just feel like because our classes were so small, I was able to build a better relationship with them, and it just seemed intimate and like they actually cared about me and my progress (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022).

In contrast, Sheridan spoke about the lack of support she received and how that hindered her confidence throughout her program, causing her to feel unsuccessful and



unprepared. She shared stories of feeling like a burden and never knowing if she was doing anything correctly. Sheridan's low confidence and negative self-talk due to the lack of support from professors is similar to Stanton-Salazar's (2011) findings related to the relationships among students and their professors in a southern University. The data in this study consisted of course evaluations, surveys, and personal interviews with 20 undergraduate students to identify the factors of feeling successful by analyzing the empowerment dynamics of institutional agents and the effects on students' college careers. The findings indicated when students felt unsupported, their sense of self-worth diminished, and academic standings were significantly lower than students who reported having a sense of support from their professors.

As Jane elaborated on her experience, she mentioned many times the lack of caring she started to develop because she did not feel that she was supported or that any of her professors cared, making her feel more isolated and unworthy of becoming a teacher. As she talked about her relationships with professors throughout her preparation experience, the data imply she needed more support in order to truly feel comfortable with learning and feeling that she truly belonged within the university community (Journal entry, September 2022).

There were a few professors in particular that it kind of like, if you approach them with questions that were vulnerable or something then it was almost like you were talked down on for having those questions and needing clarification. It's like okay, well, I'm not coming back to you for anything. So, I would say just like the broad picture of things, it more felt like I was a check for their program every semester, rather than like an actual member of society that you know, they were trying to shape into being a good teacher. (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022)

It was apparent that these types of interactions played a major role in Sheridan's sense of preparedness. When she was asked to talk about her preparation experiences, her relationship

with professors was the first thing she mentioned and continued to elaborate on in detail throughout all the interviews and our interactions (Journal entry, September 2022).

In short, the level of support the majority of participants felt through their relationship with faculty contributed to their sense of success, belonging, and preparation. The absence of support deeply affected participants' motivation and effort in their preparation experience. Trust was also gleaned as a significant element connected to the relationship with faculty theme.

### ***Trust***

Trust is the foundation of meaningful relationships and requires mutual respect and open communication. As participants spoke about their preparation experiences, specifically when highlighting relationships with their professors, the sub-theme of trust was revealed. According to Felten and Lambert (2020), a trusting relationship between a faculty member and student can be considered one that shows faith in each other, dependence on each other, and that students and teachers can rely on each other. Thus, trust is one of the most critical aspects of building a meaningful and productive relationship. Similarly, according to the research of Brown and Grothaus (2019), trust is built when teachers and students can communicate effectively, respectfully, and productively. Trust is an essential element in student learning (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Nadler & Nadler, 2001; Snijders et al., 2020).

Some participants shared stories that highlighted the safe and respectful environments created throughout their program with their professors. Feelings of safety allowed them to be more vulnerable and make deeper connections with the content, discussions, and experiences encountered. Participants spoke about the quality of feedback professors offered them, and

they used language that reflected trusting relationships with professors. “I knew they would give me meaningful and constructive feedback because like, I knew they had my best interest at heart” (Johnny, Interview, September 2022). Most participants also spoke about the level of trust they had with their professors based on the depth of relationships established over time. This allowed participants to feel comfortable asking for support and led to feelings of safety, which ultimately influenced their learning. “It was so nice having that like, mentorship throughout that experience because my supervisor was someone I had known throughout my entire program, and I knew I could like trust her to not judge me” (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022). Titsworth et al. (2010) revealed that when students perceived that their faculty listened and showed immediacy through behaviors, they experienced learning more positively and felt more emotionally supported, impacting the process of learning in more a authentic manner.

In contrast, Sheridan spoke about her lack of trust in faculty members, which significantly affected her ability to receive feedback that she felt could help her grow and develop in the profession. Seatter and Ceulemans (2017) claimed that an absence of guidance, feedback, or trust in a student-faculty relationship contributes to poor development and growth as students navigate through their higher educational careers. Sheridan elaborated about treatment from some of her professors as if she were a child; and because of these interactions, she began to doubt herself and her worth both professional and personally, parallel to the findings previously highlighted in Stanton-Salazar’s (2011) study. The lack of trust compromised relationships with faculty she encountered and played a part in her self-efficacy. Umbach and Wawryznski (2005) noted that the absence of trust in student-faculty relationships “lead to a deeper lack of belief in oneself” (p. 159). This is something I also

reflected upon in my journal: “Sheridan’s negative experiences with her professors not only impacted her overall identity as an educator, but also affected her belief in the potential to be worthy of becoming the teacher she wanted to be” (Journal entry, September 2022). Sheridan said:

Like my supervisor, she was supposed to you know support me and offer feedback and check in and help. But every time she came in it was like she only pointed out what I did wrong and never gave me any advice that was impactful. She was condescending and rude. Nothing that could actually help me grow as a teacher or made me feel like I was doing anything right! It just overall made me feel really unmotivated and unconfident in myself. Like who I was as a person and a teacher (Sheridan, Interview, September 2022).

Relevance was another important sub-theme that contributed to the theme of relationships with faculty which was connected to the ability to engage with students through meaningful and growth producing instruction that is culturally relevant.

### ***Relevance***

Bakker et al. (2015) defined relevance in the context of student-faculty relationships as “grounded, up to date in theory and engaging with instructional methods and practices” (p. 54). Howard and Milner IV (2021) pointed out the relevance and importance of subject matter knowledge and the intersections of pedagogical knowledge pre-service teachers need to engage their students with attention to cultural knowledge. In turn, faculty members who are deemed relevant have higher levels of student engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Verhoef et al., 2010). The student engagement scale, developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) and designed to investigate student engagement, includes the elements of vigor, dedication, and absorption in a higher education setting. These engagement dimensions were depicted by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) as elevated levels of energy and mental resilience with willingness to be persistent when faced with difficulties. A dedicated individual is highly

engaged in one's life work, which results in experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Finally, when one is absorbed in work, concentration occurs and they are so captivated and engaged that time passes quickly, and it is difficult to disengage. These three dimensions capture all aspects of engagement: behavioral, emotional/affective, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012), which work together to strengthen the academic performance, preparation, and well-being of students (Bakker et al., 2015; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Verhoef et al., 2010). The subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and cultural knowledge of faculty members imparted to pre-service teachers ultimately mirror expectations for teaching in urban schools. I am mindful of Gary Howard's (2016) book, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, which expresses the need for content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and cultural knowledge that faculty members need to effectively prepare teachers.

Monae and Katheryn both spoke about the importance of having professors who were relevant and up to date in their teaching practices. Monae specifically talked about how engaged she was in her multiculturalism course, simply because of the professor and his ability to share personal teaching stories of time spent in classrooms. "He was a Black male, which already drew me in, but so the way that he taught everything and what he told us about his former teaching in the classroom, was intriguing and like relevant and fun to listen to" (Interview, August 2022). She talked about the respect she had for him and how his relevant teaching style encouraged, intrigued, and motivated her more than those of other professors.

When asked to elaborate on preparation experiences, Katheryn mentioned how excited her professors were to teach. The in which manner Katheryn spoke about her

professors highlights previous literature that supports the connection between the enthusiasm and passion of faculty members and increasing the sense of engagement and investment of students in their preparation (Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016). She talked about how she felt that they were invested in the class and had recent knowledge of an elementary school environment (Journal entry, September 2022). As Katheryn spoke, she mentioned the depth of learning retained from the courses.

I felt like all of my professors were just so passionate and really in touch with what it meant to be a teacher. Like they were either still in the actual classroom environment and that made such a difference. They could give us a real insight on how things were and not just hypothetically talk about what the research or previous studies have found. That made me more willing to really learn from them and take in more of what they were saying. (Katheryn, Interview, September 2022)

In this same vein, Sheridan mentioned related experiences about needing teachers who were more in touch with what it meant to be a teacher in today's classrooms, influencing generations of students. Unlike Katheryn, though, she felt that she did not have professors who were relevant in their teaching practices or philosophies. Quite the opposite of Katheryn, Sheridan talked about how this factor affected her and was unable to take them seriously or find their perspectives to be worthy:

Umm, I have a hard time with professors that have not been in the classroom for years. And I feel like I experienced that a lot in our education. And especially from the ones that were like the big professors that taught multiple courses. It usually had been that they had very little actual classroom instruction before. Then they, you know, went on to teaching other people to be teachers, or it had been so long that they really didn't know what it was like anymore. So, I feel like they were just really unhelpful, and I didn't learn anything from them (Interview, September 2022).

Sheridan expressed the lack of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2006) she had throughout her college experience, due to the absence of relevant faculty members, which resulted in low levels of engagement or efforts to learn from

them. This theme, which was described in detail above, was not something I was expecting to hear from the interviews. I did not ask any questions guided toward this topic and was surprised to hear how this data emerged throughout the stories. It was interesting to see how Sheridan's viewpoint differed so vastly from the other participants' stories, which reveals the influence relationships with faculty can have on the preparation experience novice teachers encounter.

A quality teacher is the single most significant determinate of student success (Jones, 2018; Rice, 2003). Additionally, students cannot learn from teachers without growth producing relationships (Haberman, 1995, 2005). The relationships, experiences, and knowledge students gain during their college years can ultimately shape their personal and professional career outcomes (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2015; Pascarella & Terrenzini, 2005). These relationships established between faculty members and pre-service teachers are paramount to the sense of preparedness they will need to be effective teachers. When participants had meaningful relationships grounded in support, trust, and relevance, they were more motivated, confident, and able to make deeper connections between content and experiences they encountered (Jones, 2018; Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016; Titsworth et al., 2010). Poor relationships with faculty members eventually affected the level of confidence and self-worth of participants both personally and professionally and were harmful, impacting their sense of preparation.

### **Unexpected Findings**

Hsiung (2010) referred to unexpected findings as the contradictions in the data which strengthen theory. These findings are ones "in which respondents' experiences or viewpoints differ from the main body of evidence" (p. 1). Throughout this study, there were certainly

some significant unexpected findings that ranged from recruiting participants for the study to finding a theme in the data related to leadership and the culture of urban schools. When coding the data, I remained open to what I might find and resisted a deductive process that would narrow my findings.

As previously discussed, the timing of the study during the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the context of this study. I was not expecting such a low number of teachers who were willing to participate in the study. I was hoping to recruit participants with whom I did not have prior relationships; however, that was not the case. I knew four of my six participants in professional settings outside of this study. Although it was not my intention to have an established relationship with participants, I felt that it enhanced their level of comfort, allowing them to be more vulnerable and open in our conversational interviews. I assumed if I knew my participants, it may have influenced the way they interacted with me during interviews, which was proven wrong entirely. This highlights the importance of building trust and relationships with participants when we are asking them to be vulnerable. Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought about some unforeseen circumstances, I find myself thankful for the opportunity to study the lives and stories of teachers who were willing to be vulnerable and tell such compelling stories of their preparation.

There was an unexpected finding that did not pertain to or answer the research questions but was important to consider: school leadership and climate and the effects on novice teachers. In finalizing my analysis of the data through coding for research questions, I returned numerous times to identify what other phenomena were apparent. Based on culling survey and interview data, as well as closely examining my journal entries, school leadership and culture emerged as important regarding teachers' sense of preparedness, support, and



confidence to teach in an urban school. This finding did not surface in the majority of the participants. Only two participants interrogated this area, but it is worth reporting due to its significance in supporting novice teachers.

School leadership and culture influence the ways novice teachers feel supported and prepared to meet their students' needs. Caruthers et al. (2019) described school culture as "the myriad of traditions, beliefs, perceptions, and relationships, including unwritten rules about the way we do things here—those tacit agreements that guide the lives of students in schools" (p. 304). In their role as instructional leader, principals play an important part in developing and maintaining the culture and success within a school. Student learning success and staff success can be directly molded by the culture that is developed and established by the instructional leader (Bulach, 2001; Gordon et al., 2018; Leonard, 1999). Novice teachers find the early years of teaching filled with challenges for which they seek continuous support from their instructional leaders (Connor, 2017; Redding & Henry, 2018). Learmond's (2017) research showed that novice teachers crave instructional support during initial career stages in order to be effective educators, and often feel that support is inadequate in meeting their needs, leading to feelings of burnout and attrition. The motivational effects of school leadership and culture contribute to novice teachers' sense of preparation and are vital to recruit and retain quality teachers in urban schools.

In the survey data, Katheryn and Sheridan shared secret stories of frustration, rating their sense of support from their instructional leader as five on a Likert scale of 1-10. As the two participants shared their stories, it became apparent that the lack of culturally relevant practices in classrooms and absence of opportunities for individualized professional

development embody the finding of school leadership and culture (Journal entry, September 2022).

They spoke about the struggles encountered in the first few years of teaching with leadership in their buildings. They both described the culture as limiting in meeting individual needs of students and felt that they were not providing the best instruction and education for their students (Journal entry, September 2022). Katheryn expressed feelings of defeat within her first few years of teaching, because she was not able to modify her instructional resources in ways to connect to students' life experiences or interests. She explained:

We've been told to follow CKLA [Core Knowledge Language Arts Tier 1 resource], not to modify or stray away from pacing and like that just isn't engaging for my students, like they deserve to see themselves within their curriculum, but we can't do that. (Interview, September 2022)

Sheridan, like Katheryn, spoke about the pressure from leadership to push through the curriculum resource because students needed "exposure rather than mastery." She talked about "getting in trouble" for not teaching the resources with fidelity (Interview, September 2022). As she relayed this secret story, she violated the cover stories that teachers often tell of politicized context emanating from policy issues. Westheimer (2022), regarding learning loss during the COVID-19, communicated less focus on an accountability context of standardized tests as a result of federal and state mandates, and more on helping students "become the best version of themselves, and to envision a future for their communities and the planet that isn't yet realized –but that they can help bring about" (p. 27). She shared her feelings of frustration regarding contributing to opportunity gaps by plowing through curriculum maps that were not necessarily appropriate for where her students were

developmentally (Journal entry, September 2022). Yet teachers must also be cautious of replacing higher level thinking with lower level skills. I contend missing skills can be taught through higher order thinking. Howard (2010) brought attention to 53 transformational leaders who successfully closed opportunity gaps among students of color by giving attention to the instructional aspects of their leadership duties in schools. These leaders maintained a strong belief that closing gaps was possible by engaging families in their children's education and challenging those who held deficit beliefs by communicating care and concern for staff members and students.

Sheridan also questioned if her leadership was aware of what it meant to set a culture within the building that was centered around culturally responsive education because she felt that the individual students were not considered; rather, the focus was predominately on state standards and "business-like expectations" (Interview, September 2022). Working under this type of school leadership and culture has created angst for both participants, as they both aspire to be culturally responsive educators, which highlights the necessity of having culturally relevant leaders who create a school culture grounded in culturally responsive education (Journal entry, September 2022).

The type of school culture that both Katheryn and Sheridan explained is one that contradicts the tenets of culturally responsive education entirely. Gay (2002) described culturally responsive education as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them" (p. 108). Researchers and theorists have documented the effects that culturally relevant pedagogy has on student instruction, engagement, and achievement (Broughton, 2019; Gay, 2000, 2010; Howard, 2001, 2010; Ladson-Billings,

2009; Long et al., 2018; Nicol, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017), and these efforts are no less important to the work of educational administrators, given their role as instructional leaders (Branch et al., 2013; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; McKenzie & Alexander, 2006; McKenzie & Locke, 2014). This asserts the need for culturally relevant leaders who recognize how important their pedagogical approach is to their ability to successfully lead and support teachers and students who represent diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and experiences (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2020; Wilson, 2016).

Katheryn mentioned that she needs her leadership to be more understanding of the needs of her students and aware of who her students are, in order to best support her. She also mentioned wanting an instructional leader whose work and beliefs are grounded in an equity lens when thinking of instructional approaches to fill the academic gaps she has in her classroom.

It is always expected that we stick to teaching the grade-level content and I agree, rigor and exposure is important, but our students also deserve an education that meets them where they are and helps fill the academic holes that they have. Otherwise, they will never meet these proficiency standards set forth. (Interview, September 2022)

As Katheryn expressed her frustration for the pressures put on her by her principal, she shared a secret story with me in which she felt that her principal was completely unaware of who her students were as learners. Khalifa (2020) introduced the school leader as a warm demander who establishes a deep and caring relationship with students first, then leverages this relationship to hold high expectations for all students. This is quite the opposite of how Katheryn described her principal, highlighting the lack of culturally responsive leadership

and leading to a school culture that is not supportive of diverse student populations (Journal entry, September 2022).

The students don't even know she is the principal...she never interacts with them...She doesn't even know what our new curriculum is about, because she is never in the trainings, and she just pushes the district's idea of teaching a White middle-class textbook series, rather than pushing for something better for our students. If she actually knew who they were, and where they were academically, she may be better at that. (Interview, September 2022)

Khalifa (2018) mentioned that when principals are not viewed as culturally responsive school leaders (CRSL), they can become complicit with oppression as they remain passive and “choose not to challenge the status quo” (p. 62). Through Katheryn's secret story, it appeared she perceived her principal made it extremely difficult for her to feel supported in doing what was best for her students and providing culturally relevant instruction.

Similarly, in telling their stories, Katheryn and Sheridan each expressed a lack of confidence in providing the best instructional approaches for their students with high levels of academic needs, while also teaching grade-level content. The commonality of wanting more support and training on how to best fill academic gaps while maintaining rigor within their current school contexts emerged through the findings. This parallels the research that many novice teachers do not feel prepared to provide effective instruction to all students in their diverse classrooms (Doran, 2020; Johnson & Uline, 2005; Kraft et al., 2014; Madler et al., 2022). Both participants mentioned that they craved more training and learning around this area within their current professional development opportunities, but have not received any additional support, which influenced their sense of preparedness, confidence, and support to best enact instructional practices for their diverse learners. Previous research (May & Supovitz, 2011; Portin et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008) has shown that promoting and

offering individualized teacher learning and development as one of the highest leverage and predictive practices linked to teacher self-efficacy and positive student outcomes. In a more recent study, Kraft et al. (2014) found that when instructional leaders offered supportive professional development for teachers to overcome barriers to meet the diverse needs of their students, novice teachers reported feeling more effective, supported, and satisfied with their role as a teacher. School leadership must focus on providing individualized professional development for novice teachers in order to retain and deepen their subject matter, pedagogical, and racial and cultural knowledge in order to be more effective for the most vulnerable students. In examining these unexpected findings, it is worth noting that school leadership and culture contribute to the sense of confidence, support, and preparedness of novice teachers to be effective culturally relevant educators for their students.

### **Answering the Research Questions**

This study was focused on one central question with three sub-questions to further interrogate the topic. These questions were essentially the root of the study, which Maxwell (2009) referred to as providing the researcher with focus and intention as they progress through the research process. The central question, “What stories do novice teachers tell about their preparedness to teach in an urban school?” were addressed with the three sub-questions, which aimed to understand the experiences participants encountered during their teacher preparation programs.

#### **Sub-question One: How do Novice Teachers Describe Their Preparation for Teaching in Urban Schools?**

The stories told by participants regarding their perceptions of preparedness to teach in an urban school varied based on factors such as the structure of their experiences, the foci of

coursework, the field experiences encountered, and life experiences outside of preparation. Each of the five themes were illuminated as participants described their preparation for teaching in urban schools but varied in the sub-themes that comprised each theme.

To my surprise, all the participants spoke about their life experiences prior to their pre-service education. Some participants described their life experiences as motivators to become teachers; other participants talked about family dynamics and how they were raised helped to construct their identities as educators; and several expressed life experiences shaped their cultural awareness by identifying biases, assumptions, and exposure to different cultures and perspectives. Each participant elaborated upon their life experiences in a manner that revealed their beliefs, giving me insights into their identities as educators. Nonetheless, the data showed that participants attribute their preparation experiences to their identities, funds of knowledge, and cultural awareness.

Most of the participants described their preparation for teaching in urban schools by highlighting the balance between required courses, field experiences, and interactions within communities. Several highlighted multiple activities in field experiences early in their college careers. The structures of their preparation program played a vital role in how most described opportunities to learn, apply, reflect on their learning experiences, and make connections to effective teaching practices.

Most participants told stories that described their preparation experiences as having a heavy focus on content knowledge, lesson planning, learning how to scaffold instruction, and implementing behavior management techniques. The focus on subject matter for the majority enabled them to have vast experiences with subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of teaching with few references made to racial and cultural knowledge elements of teaching

(Howard & Milner, 2021). The majority of the participants described their preparation experiences as having little exposure to diverse student populations, culturally relevant practices, and learning how to build and maintain relationships with students and families. This influenced the way in which they felt prepared to teach diverse student populations in urban schools. This finding supports the previous literature in which novice teachers identified perceptions of inadequacy in teaching diverse students but were confident in their abilities to teach subject area knowledge (Cervera, 2013).

Two participants, Sheridan and Johnny, who attended a program that was specific to urban education, described their preparation experience in a vastly different manner than the other participants. This speaks volumes about the depth and power of a program that specifically focuses on urban education for teachers aspiring to teach in urban schools. Representing the urban focused program, these two teachers portrayed their experiences as centering on the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and having coursework that was grounded in becoming social justice educators. They reported their experience contained a good balance of coursework and field experiences with a focus on relationships with students, families, and communities. Sheridan and Johnny each described experiences that immersed them directly in urban environments, and they both had many opportunities for reflective practices. The deep discussions, coursework, and readings supported the analysis and critical reflections of their values and beliefs and enhanced their awareness and sensitivity toward diverse cultures. Although they did not describe experiences with subject matter knowledge, lesson-planning, and learning the best instructional strategies, their language reflected an in-depth understanding of these practices.



One participant described her preparation experiences as being “very white-washed” (Lindsey, Interview, September 2022), self-guided, and lonely. Enrolled in an entirely online program with no interactions with people, Lindsey talked about the lack of opportunities she had to learn from and alongside others and recognized the program as a hindrance to her sense of preparation. Her description of her experiences was subject matter heavy; the way she was prepared communicated that teaching is solely about learning subject knowledge and teaching through prescriptive methods. Lindsey described her preparation as being “very good if I was teaching at a private school” (Interview, September 2022). This highlighted Lindsey’s teaching philosophy in general. The language and examples she used during our interviews showed that she held a belief that good instructional practices such as relationship building, reflection, and being a culturally responsive educator are only important for historically underserved students and teaching in urban schools.

**Sub-question Two: What Professional Practices and Experiences do Novice Teachers Perceive as Being Instrumental to the Preparedness to Teach in an Urban School?**

As participants reflected on the practices and experiences they perceived as being instrumental to their sense of preparedness to teach in an urban school, several commonalities were illuminated through their stories. As noted in the previous discussion, few participants highlighted the exposure to culturally relevant practices as being instrumental to their preparation experience; however, most identified field experiences and reflective practices as a key experience or practice. Reflective practices were absent from the critical reflection regarding race, ethnicity, and other differences for supporting social justice efforts inside and outside of schools (Gorski & Dalton, 2020).

Five of the six participants elaborated on their field experiences as being the most instrumental to their preparation experiences but alone were not what participants found to be instrumental to their preparedness. The structures in place during those field experiences were reflected in their voices. They spoke about the gradual release of responsibility, progressing through the process of observation, teaching small group lessons, and eventually having complete responsibility for a classroom. The field experiences for most exposed them to different cultures, economic conditions, and environments that helped them recognize the inequities that exist within different types of school systems. In some cases, this awareness fueled their fire and sparked a passion for ensuring equitable education was at the forefront of their practices.

Community-based and field-based experiences were beneficial and ranged from volunteering at community shelters and nonprofit organizations, conducting community demographic analyses, and home visits. Regardless of what participants experienced directly in community and field-based experiences, a commonality was their views of these efforts as powerful opportunities that opened their eyes and allowed them to see their students in a different light. As a result, their cultural awareness and worldviews were expanded. These same five participants described how constructive it was to understand the social and economic backgrounds of students and their influence on learning and teaching practices. When participants had a higher number of field experiences and community-based field experiences, their ratings of confidence and perceptions of preparedness were dramatically higher, as reflected through survey and interview data. Meaningful field experiences should be an essential component of the preparation experiences for novice teachers.

A powerful practice that was common in the majority of the stories was grounded in having opportunities to collaborate and engage in reflective practices. The ability to collaborate with peers through reflective practices allowed most of the participants who had the opportunity to enhance their connections between course content and observed actions in the field. Because of this, these participants expressed the critical role their peers played in their experiences, because not only did they push their thinking and develop their teaching competencies, but their peers also served as encouragement and support throughout their preparation experiences.

Reflective practices were supported by all participants in a variety of ways and were expressed to be the most valuable element of preparation which helped to make meaning of course content and observed actions in the field. Reflection also contributed to self-awareness for all participants, the most frequent sub-theme of reflective practices. Self-awareness was an important aspect of transformative learning for supporting their understanding of self. This was the point at which participants expressed how they developed their identities as teachers and the possibilities for acting, but for most these actions were not about becoming social justice advocates.

Only two of the participants talked about the value of reflective practices to enhance their identities for becoming social justice leaders. Two participants described the practice of critical reflection as challenging their own preconceived beliefs, assumptions, and identities, as an immensely powerful practice they experienced throughout their preparation program. These participants talked about how critical reflection gave them space to challenge their preconceived beliefs and access new learning, enabling them to enact culturally relevant practices in their daily instruction.

Johnny and Sheridan talked about the depth of exposure to culturally relevant practices as being important to their preparation. They elaborated on the power of coursework, experiences, and discourse grounded in the pedagogical framework of CRP, to help them become culturally relevant, competent, and socially just teacher for diverse student populations. They specifically highlighted the practices, strategies, and learning they encountered about the topic of building relationships with students, families, and communities as instrumental in shaping their beliefs and practices. They viewed pedagogical knowledge and racial and cultural knowledge as significant for preparation in urban schools. Survey data indicated that when participants had a higher number of courses centered on culturally relevant pedagogy, their sense of preparedness was also rated higher, indicating that the exposure to culturally relevant practices should be deemed essential for the preparation of novice teachers.

**Sub-question Three: How are Teacher Preparation Programs Preparing Teachers for the Challenges of Teaching in an Urban School?**

In examining ways in which novice teachers are prepared for the challenges of teaching in an urban school, the participants had vastly different perspectives. The majority of the participants felt that this was an area that was lacking in their preparation experience. Overall, lack of exposure to culturally relevant practices was common among the majority, and the idea of varied perspectives was almost non-existent. Half of the participants felt the lack of these experiences was due to where their preparation programs were situated, and being in a non-urban area hindered opportunities to become immersed in urban environments. These views were connected to the structure of their program described as

“White way or the highway” (Monae, Interview, August 2022) and operated in a “close-minded, White view of reality” (Jane, Interview, September 2022).

Although reflective practices were common findings related to many of the participants’ preparation experiences, the depth of critical reflection on self-awareness, life experiences, or pre-conceived assumptions was lacking. Participants told stories about how this hindered their ways of thinking about urban students, and some were more prone to utilize stereotypical and deficit language. I believe this stems from the lack of guided and critical reflection for participants to make meaning of how their biases shaped the intense work of becoming culturally relevant educators.

Sheridan and Johnny were the only two participants who felt they had adequate training and preparation for understanding the complexities of working in urban schools. Common threads throughout both of their stories were immersion in urban environments, exposure to culturally relevant practices, and critical reflective practices. Both were directly immersed in urban environments, and throughout their field experiences they worked within the communities where schools were located. Sheridan and Johnny explained these experiences as being imperative for understanding the resources made available to students, and they were able to better understand the context of students’ lived experiences and connections to classroom behaviors. They had coursework that provided exposure to culturally relevant practices and learned deeply about building and maintaining relationships with students and families. They spoke about many opportunities for reflective practices, which helped them develop self-awareness and address their own biases.

Participants were eager to describe their preparation experiences and were vulnerable about discussing their burgeoning sense of confidence based upon their preparation

experiences. Overall, these teachers told stories about their preparedness to teach in urban school, honestly admitting their shortcomings where appropriate. They mostly told sacred and secret stories about the experiences they encountered in their field experiences, coursework, and interactions with peers and faculty. All participants reflected deeply about their sense of preparation and ways they were influenced by experiences. Participants told stories that revealed their identities as teachers, each story communicating how their preparation affected their sense of beliefs, and practices related to teaching in urban schools.

### **Filling the Literature Gap**

As demonstrated in the literature review, scholarship about teacher education centers broadly on teacher preparation as a field as well as separately and explicitly on urban-focused preparation, leaving the implication that not all programs need to address culturally relevant and responsive teaching and/or that not all teachers should be prepared to teach students who may identify differently from the teacher. There should not be a division of general preparation versus “urban” preparation. Nationally, the U.S. student population is becoming more and more diverse, and all programs must prepare teachers for teaching diverse student populations.

Although my research questions state urban, my study results make it clear that **all** programs need to prepare all teachers to teach changing demographics of students. This makes it highly likely that over the course of their career, a teacher will teach students from varying cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Furthermore, even White teachers who teach White students need to be teaching diversity. The United States is being divided by urban and nonurban education, contributing to the social justice problem our nation faces. All teachers must be prepared to teach for equity and social justice. This is a major gap in the

literature, as preparation programs continue to operate as if they are preparing teachers for two different sets of students. The literature must stop differentiating between the two and education programs must start preparing all teachers for a multicultural democratic society. As illustrated throughout the findings, participants who had the core competencies of pedagogical knowledge and racial and cultural knowledge, coupled with ample experiences in the field, reported feeling more prepared to teach diverse student populations. Participants who did not have these same experiences dramatically scored their sense of preparation much lower. This recommendation is further detailed in Chapter 6, as it stands as a gap in the literature and a critical recommendation for preparation programs, based on the findings of this study.

Another gap this study fills in the existing literature is the shift of faculty and teacher candidate relationships. Existing literature highlights the importance of positive relationships between students and faculty members at the university level. Most of the literature focuses on the idea of having relationships that provide feedback, give students support, and help them reach their academic goals.

There is a gap in the literature about the separation of “faculty/student relationships” from “teacher candidate/teacher educator relationships” and the importance of teacher educators modeling the expectations of a culturally responsive educator. This entails teacher educators going beyond relationships that are only grounded in helping candidates reach their academic goals. It must go deeper, to really getting to know, embrace, and respond to the “whole teacher candidate” in the way culturally responsive educators are taught to respond to the whole child.

We must start outlining what it means to foster these types of relationships with students at the university level. As faculty, we should be modeling what it means to be a culturally responsive educator if we expect our teacher candidates to carry the same dispositions, practices, and attitudes with them into the field.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented within case and cross-case analysis to answer the research questions. I also provided a discussion of the findings related to the research questions driving this qualitative study, organized by the themes and sub-themes. In the next and final chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings and recommendations for pre-service teacher preparation programs and the implications for school leadership in preparing and supporting novice teachers in urban school contexts. I also offer recommendations for future research.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study was based on my previous experiences as a teacher, interventionist, adjunct professor, and instructional coach, all within urban school contexts. I sought to explore ways novice teachers were prepared and the experiences that molded their sense of preparedness and confidence. Because of my own history with this topic, as well as my desire to better understand their perspectives by uncovering the secret, sacred, and cover stories of my participants, I conducted a narrative case study to learn more about the lived preparation experiences of teachers working with urban students. The study consisted of a survey, two interviews, journaling, and member checking; all aided in answering the research questions. The intended audience includes faculty members of preparation programs, teachers, and administrators at the building, district, and university levels.

In Chapter 1, I provided a general overview of the study which gave a holistic view of the study. The rationale for qualitative inquiry contributed to insight related to the selection of case study through the lens of narrative inquiry. Chapter 2 provided a literature review of culturally relevant teaching, teacher preparation in an urban context, and the role of instructional leadership in supporting novice teachers. Further, the literature review established a theoretical framework and a solid foundation to build new knowledge gained from this study and to make meaning of the data. Chapter 3 provided detailed information regarding participants and site, as well as the data collection and analysis process, rooted in the major design of case study inquiry. Chapter 4 presented the participants' stories holistically utilizing the sociocultural narrative lens and three-dimensional narrative analysis. The multiple data sources of case study as well as my journal and field notes of reactions and

reflections were used to restory the data. Chapter 5 presented within case and cross-case analysis to answer the research questions. I also provided a discussion of the findings related to the research questions driving this qualitative study, organized by the themes and sub-themes. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings, provide recommendations for preparation programs and leadership, offer areas for future research, and conclude with final reflections on my research journey.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of the study have significant implications to the field of education for preparing future teachers and to increase the overall understanding of how novice teachers experience preparation. In the following sections, I examine the implications of findings, both theoretically and practically supported by the existing research. During the analysis of data, it became clear that the amount of field experiences, the focus of coursework, and opportunities for reflection and collaboration played compelling roles in the confidence and preparation of the six teachers. But for the most part, several of the participants had to learn on their own, especially those who attended alternative pre-service programs. One teacher even lamented the isolation of an online program.

Pre-service education to retain teachers is essential, given the retention rate of teachers which looms largely for public schools. Pre-pandemic, 8% of teachers left the profession, and between 19% and 30% of the teachers of less than five years of teaching left the profession; novice teachers were much more likely to leave than seasoned teachers (Herman et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with the literature that reports that teachers with less than five years are more likely to leave the profession (Broughton, 2019; Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Howard IV & Milner, 2021). Despite these

numbers, by the beginning of COVID, the 2019-2020 school year, one in three teachers planned to leave their positions (EdWeek Research Center, 2020). Filling teacher vacancies became a real problem in 2021-2022 (Bleiberg & Kraft, 2022). These numbers indicated 45% of educators had significant areas of stress when returning to the classroom with difficulties communicating to parents, administrative support, and teaching (Herman et al., 2021). While these were unusual times for public schools faced with transition to online classrooms, teacher efficacy during the pandemic was found to positively relate to the commitment to teaching but negatively added to teacher burnout (Haines et al., 2022; Pressley & Ha, 2021; Zamarro et al., 2022), compounded by a policy and accountability environment of standardized tests. These social complexities continue to place demands on the preparation of quality teachers who face an increasingly diverse demographic of students (Cavendish et al., 2021; de Brey et al., 2019; Howard & Milner IV, 2021). This brings me to several issues, emphasized by Howard and Milner (2021), who suggest the investigation of three areas impinging on preparing teachers for urban schools should continue to involve subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and racial and cultural knowledge.

Subject matter knowledge in the educational discourse regarding teacher preparation has been deemed important but alone insufficient for the last two centuries (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Haberman (1995) argued having a deep sense of subject matter knowledge is not enough to be successful within urban schools contexts. Through his work and studies of over 40 years, he found that many urban teachers fail because they do not have the ability to connect and build relationships with students. Subject matter knowledge can be referred to as the “what you teach” (Gess-Newsome, 2013) in regard to the core content areas. Having a deep knowledge base of the core subject areas has been seen as

vital to the effectiveness of a teacher (Carlson et al., 2019; Howard & Milner, 2021; Munby et al. 2001; Shulman, 1987). Teachers knowledgeable about their subject matter appear to be more confident in helping academically struggling students and have higher academic outcomes than teachers less confident about their subject matter (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Garner & Kaplan, 2019; Howard & Aleman, 2008). The most vulnerable students are students attending urban schools, who are more likely to have teachers who do not have subject matter mastery, despite the efforts that have been put forth at the state and national level (Howard & Aleman, 2008; Roza et al., 2004). Reform efforts in urban schools must ensure that every student has access to highly trained teachers who have mastery of subject matter content (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As previously highlighted, subject matter knowledge alone is not sufficient; there has to be a balance of pedagogical knowledge in order to effectively deliver the subject matter knowledge (Ball & Bass, 2000; Gess-Newsome et al., 2010; Guerriero, 2017).

Pedagogical knowledge can be defined as the knowledge of how to teach (Filgona et al., 2020) which also involves interactions and relationships with students (Delpit, 2002; Gay, 2010; Grant, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2006a; Milner IV, 2019; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2016). Ozden (2008) expanded this definition, stating that pedagogy is the science of teaching, instruction, and training. Other researchers have defined pedagogical knowledge as, “the generic knowledge about pedagogy, teaching approaches, how students learn, methods of assessment, and knowledge of different theories about learning” (Awidi & Paynter, 2019; Cantor et al., 2019, p. 86; Filgona et al., 2020; Hawley & Nieto; 2010; Hmelo-Silver &, 2004; Olorunsola, 2019). From these definitions, it is understood that pedagogical knowledge is specialized knowledge of teachers creating and facilitating quality

and effective teaching and learning environments for all students, regardless of the subject matter (Cavendish et al., 2021; Howard & Milner, 2021; McCaughtry, 2005; Milner, 2010). Both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge cannot work in isolation; they must work together in order to be deemed effective. Today, more than ever, there must be an emphasis on providing pre-service teachers with subject matter knowledge in addition to the pedagogical knowledge necessary to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Filgona et al., 2020; Howard & Milner IV, 2021; Milner IV, 2011; Olorunsola, 2019) which leads to the third tenet of knowledge necessary for successful teaching and learning in urban contexts, racial and cultural knowledge.

Racial and cultural knowledge has been viewed as integral to the education of teachers for quite some time (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Foster, 1997; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Shujaa, 1994). Teachers must build their knowledge and awareness of the racial and cultural backgrounds students bring to school in order to provide culturally relevant practices to support their learning (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Howard & Milner IV, 2021; Kang & Windschitl, 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Reissman et al., 2019). Providing adequate attention to racial and cultural form knowledge throughout teacher education has been quite complex due to the varied curricula in teacher education (Banks & Banks, 1995; Brown, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Irvine, 1992; Milner & Smithey, 2003) There is often a mismatch between the depth and exposure of cultural and racialized curricula that pre-service teachers receive (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Milner & Smithey, 2003).

Unprepared teachers, regardless of their gender or racial and ethnic backgrounds, are likely to struggle to implement curricular and instructional practices consistent with the needs

of all learners (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010). In other words, teachers from any cultural or racial background must obtain the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions for effective teaching (Broughton, 2019; Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Howard IV & Milner, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner IV, 2010). Gay's (2000) words resonate with this argument: "similar ethnicity between students and teachers may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness" (p. 205).

The first step in building racial and cultural knowledge about their students requires teachers to attend to their own deep-rooted beliefs, ideologies, and values. It is paramount that attention be given to the values, ideologies, and beliefs that teachers bring to the classroom in order to better understand them in relation to their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Gay, 2010; Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Howard, 2003a, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2011). Moll and Arnot-Hopffer (2006) noted the importance of the self-reflection and awareness necessary to develop teachers' racial and cultural knowledge by making a call for assisting teachers to develop their sociocultural competence to effectively work in urban schools. There is a need for teachers to also have a deep understanding of the sociopolitical context of urban communities, how environments developed over time, and the larger historical set of factors that influence them, grounded in the building of racial and cultural knowledge. When developing their racial and cultural knowledge, teachers must also understand how these contexts have contributed to oppression and injustices for urban students (Carter Andrews & Castillo, 2016; Fook & Morley, 2005; Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Haberman, 1995; Howard IV & Milner, 2021; Khalifa, 2018).

Subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and racial and cultural knowledge should be the three precepts every preparation program focuses on to produce effective

teachers who are knowledgeable, socially just, confident, and grounded in equitable practices. These areas have long been the concerns of researchers and practitioners, and teacher educators and schools have not made much progress (Cavendish et al., 2021; Howard, 2010; Howard & Milner, 2021). Howard and Milner (2021) cited the work of Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005), who provide critiques of the urban education field. They include the following:

- Confusion exists about what teacher education should address in both traditional and nontraditional programs due to a “discourse dissonance” (p. 205) related to urban schools. Discourse dissonance has resulted in confusion between and among studies creating barriers among researchers and inconsistencies in language for expanding the knowledge base—an epistemology issue.
- The scattered literature makes it difficult to theorize about preparation for urban schools. What tools of analysis should be used to explain “teacher education practices for/in urban schools” (p. 205)? How must the knowledge be built from the ground up to for developing practices? What theories should support urban education in PK-12 classrooms and contexts?
- Need clarity about student teaching and practicum experiences implemented across and between programs to determine the linkage of teacher education and practices employed with students.
- Teacher education programs assume that teachers are adequately prepared to teach in diverse settings, resulting in students of color consistently on the margin; considered “racial demographic” (p. 205) issues. Individuals often assume that teacher educators are prepared themselves to teach in urban settings.

These challenges are parallel to the themes identified in the stories of the six participants. Based on findings from the narrative case study of six teachers as well as the challenges, critiques, and implications described above, I provide recommendations for both preparation programs and leadership in the following sections.

### **Recommendations for Preparation Programs**

A recommendation for preparation programs should be an in-depth analysis of pre-service teacher programs in colleges and universities, as well as alternative route pre-service preparation programs. Pre-service preparation programs have not traditionally prepared candidates to be educators teaching diverse student populations and often lack coursework and practicum experiences related to the diverse population school contexts (Buchanan, 2016; Cohen et al., 2020; Hollins, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2012). The themes captured in the stories the six teachers related to the need for critical subject matter, pedagogical, racial and cultural knowledge, intentional field experiences with immersion in community and families, as well as focus on effective and credible faculty members within preparation programs.

Secondly, all preparation programs should have a variety of field experiences in which candidates are able to observe, interact, and teach in PK-12 schools and work directly with students, teachers, and the community surrounding their schools. Participants reported that when this type of progression was present in their practicum experiences, they felt the learning was scaffolded in manners that allowed them to make deeper connections between subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. There must be variety in the type of field experiences that allow candidates the opportunity to advance through all stages of involvement (Clarke et al., 2014; Gareis & Grant, 2014). The data show that when



participants had field experiences that were based solely on observations, they did not feel these efforts were meaningful to their development as teachers. A practice-based approach in practicum experiences is key to providing candidates with the type of preparation that instills confidence and promotes success in all schools (Lee & Radner, 2006).

Third, coursework that includes constructive discourse allows candidates the opportunity to digest, reflect, and collaborate with their peers to make meaning of the experiences they encounter. Candidates must be provided with opportunities to socially process theories, models, and arguments within a community that feels safe and supportive (Hollins, 2011). When participants had these opportunities, their depth of conceptual understanding and critical thinking about topics deepened. The findings of Caudle et al. (2021) supported the findings of this study. They assert that in order for teachers to feel more confident and prepared, they must be given ample opportunities to take part in learning experiences to share varied perspectives and co-construct new knowledge through active and reflective learning for making connections to prior experiences.

Fourth, programs must incorporate the community into learning experiences by allowing teacher candidates to understand “community funds of knowledge” to better understand and serve their students (Moll et al., 1992). When candidates were immersed in urban communities, they displayed less use of negative stereotypical language, which is often the result of limited contact with urban communities (Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Leitze, 2006). In contrast, the participants who did not have urban community immersion were more prone to negative stereotypes when discussing the communities of urban schools, which reflected their racial and cultural knowledge base. While some programs offer student teaching or practicum experiences in urban environments and communities, many have not been

adequate to engage and prepare teachers (Grant, 2021; Hamilton & Margot, 2019; Szucs et al., 2019).

Fifth, there must be coherence and integration between subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and opportunities to develop racial and cultural knowledge in practicum experiences (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Solomon & Sekayi, 2007). Pre-service teachers can begin the study of culture by conducting demographic analyses of communities where their programs are situated. Preparation programs must expand the notion of culture and its contours. Alcoff (2009) pointed out it is not a binary term of Black and White, and “contradictions [in] binaries flourish in situations where simplifications are preferred over complex analysis” (p. 114) and “anti-Latino racism gets lost in the discourse” (114). Nieto (2010) provided an encompassing definition of culture as “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and religion” (p. 136). Gay (2010) viewed culture as all we do in education, including decisions made about curriculum, instruction, administration, and assessment. “Even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we teach and learn” (Gay, p. 9). All teachers can benefit from a deep understanding of ways to address culture in classrooms, and preparation coursework must include an emphasis on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Grant, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Milner, 2019; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2016).

Findings from this study showed that when teachers were faced with identifying and recognizing their own ideas, beliefs, and values, they were able to become more aware of

their own cultural identity and expand on racial and cultural knowledge, which supported feeling more prepared and confident to teach in school contexts. An environment that fosters critical reflection about being a social justice educator requires pre-service teachers to not only consider their ideologies but “to look beneath the surface to see what may influence the situation and consider the “bigger picture” or examine entire context of situations with children and families (Lynch & Hanson, 2011, p. 19).

A final recommendation for preparation programs, as a result of this study, is the need for faculty members to have a deep understanding of the subject matter, pedagogical and racial and cultural knowledge for preparing teachers (Howard, 2016). Preparation programs must have faculty members who have taught in urban schools, aware of the complexities surrounding urban communities, and understand how to create and model culturally responsive lessons for their students. They must create preparation environments that are supportive, caring, and safe environments where prospective teachers can expose their secret, sacred, and cover stories of schooling in U.S. schools (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016). This goal is no different than what we expect prospective teachers to do for their own students and classrooms. Teacher educators who are mindful of adult learning theory have a strong sense of interpersonal skills to hold constructive conversations and offer constructive feedback grounded in growth and development (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2015; Jones, 2018; Schaufeli et al., 2006).

### **Recommendations for Leadership**

A recommendation for leadership based on this study is to focus on developing all leaders through an equity framework. Due to the inequities that are often present in urban schools, educational leaders must be prepared for equitable leadership (DeMatthews &

Mawhinney, 2014; Goddard et al., 2017; Khalifa, 2018). Merchant and Shoho (2010) argued that many of the inequities often reflect societal injustices related to issues such as poverty, racism, and heterosexism. Equity leadership is a way to provide justice and create equitable learning experiences in schools. Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) indicated that leadership for equity means that leaders “lead, create, and cultivate educational environments where all of the children in their care are achieving academic success” (p. 3). The practices in leadership for equity frameworks might allow for:

[a] shift from efforts that manifest a deficit articulation of problems and solutions that seek to address individual deficits or poor socialization to practices that reflect an equity lens with actions that address structural and systemic conditions, processes, and barriers that exacerbate societal inequities. (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 7)

These practices align with literature related to transformative leadership, social justice, and culturally relevant leadership. In two participants’ stories, the data spoke to needing leadership through an equity framework. They shared experiences in which they spoke about the structures of their content blocks feeling inaccessible to their struggling students.

Administrators’ dispositions and capacities to advance equity reforms might be due to colorblindness and liberal racial ideologies that often hinder their ability to talk about race and other forms of oppression (Holme et al., 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Pollock, 2013; Welton et al., 2015). Far too often, administrators are hesitant to challenge the status quo, and race neutrality and colorblind approaches exacerbate the inequities by masking the roles racism and Whiteness play in the structures of school leadership and improvement (Holme et al., 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Welton et al., 2015). School leaders must be prepared through an equity-lens framework in order to challenge the oppressive structures and systems that are in place within urban school contexts. Our teachers and more importantly, our students, deserve

leaders who understand and demonstrate what it means to lead through an equity lens and to promote social justice.

Secondly, based on findings here I recommend leaders implement a focused professional development plan for novice teachers within the first three years of their careers. Instructional leaders can best support novice teachers by providing meaningful and tailored professional development (Bauml, 2015; Inman & Marlow, 2014). Prior research illustrated many new teachers expressed concern about being underprepared to provide effective instruction to all students in their diverse classrooms (Choy et al., 2013; Johnson & Uline, 2005); likewise, most of the six teachers spoke about similar concerns. It would be beneficial for leaders to provide additional targeted and tailored professional development focused on the needs of their novice teachers. When professional development is centered on individual teachers' needs, growth happens much more rapidly, and teachers feel that they are supported in ways to become better (Chong et al., 2014; Lazarides et al., 2020). I found it apparent that many novice teachers lack a sense of preparedness in some contexts and could benefit from additional preparation and support once they enter their professional careers. It is the responsibility of leaders to further the development of novice teachers so they can become effective, confident, and prepared to meet the needs of their diverse classroom.

A final recommendation for leaders is to seek partnerships with local universities or colleges which would allow their schools to be sites where pre-service teachers can be hosted for practicum experiences. Participants reported having a deeper sense of preparedness when they were immersed in urban school contexts early and throughout their experiences. This aligns closely with research regarding the power and purpose of university and school partnerships (Grant, 2021; Haberman, 1994, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2000; Sleeter,

2001; Weiner, 1993, 1999) for preparing our most trusted professionals who can educate children to follow their dreams. Effective teaching practices are developed and enhanced when teachers are immersed in environments where they are expected to teach and learn alongside students (Szucs et al., 2019).

Donnell's (2007) argument of immersion raised significant concerns about the critical growth of beginning teachers' confidence and development. "As teachers move toward getting to work, pupils are not seen as blank slates or empty vessels; they are active agents in their own learning and in the teacher's learning about teaching" (Donnell, p. 225).

Pre-service teachers must have the opportunity for this type of intentional immersion to perfect their practice between subject matter, pedagogical content, and racial and cultural knowledge (Hamilton & Margot, 2019; Hollins, 2011; Lee et al., 2018; Howard & Milner, 2021). Leadership should be intentional about creating effective partnerships in order to best prepare urban teachers. This recommendation could be mutually beneficial to both leaders and teachers, and school administration could see how the candidate interacts with the school climate and culture prior to making a hiring decision.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study adds to the growing body of research that addresses the realities of teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach in urban school contexts. Like many other studies, I not only answered the research questions, but illuminated several areas of additional research needed based on themes uncovered in the stories of the participants.

Based on the findings, I recommend the following future research:

- The connection between the coursework syllabi of teacher preparation programs with the stories of the participants would have been insightful for this study.

Future research could investigate the gap between what faculty plan and implement in their course syllabi and the stories candidates tell about their preparation.

- It would be interesting to replicate this study again in a few years when the repercussions of COVID-19 are no longer present. These repercussions impacted the experiences of some of the participants' preparation for teaching in urban settings. Therefore, this study may be anomalous in that the teachers may have vastly different responses to the interview questions in future years.
- A study that is replicated aiming toward the way in which secondary novice teachers rate their sense of preparedness and discuss their preparation experiences since elementary preparation varies vastly from secondary teacher preparation.
- A study to explore how leaders become social justice educators and what they do to increase their racial and cultural knowledge, in turn, would complement the range of findings in pre-service teachers' stories regarding their preparation.
- A study related to the support novice teachers experience once they entered the profession would deepen their perceptions of preparedness, support, and confidence.
- It would be interesting to conduct a study on how leaders support novice teachers over the course of five years and the impact on retention of teachers.

### **Conclusion**

An equitable education is something all students deserve, regardless of in what zip code their schools are situated; our failure to educate all students has been deemed a civil rights issue (Gorski & Dalton, 2020; Greene, 2008; Haberman, 2001; Harper, 2013; Kelly et

al., 2021; Liu & Ball, 2019; Naassana, 2020). The most important factor influencing student achievement is a prepared, high-quality teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fauth et al., 2019; Howard & Milner, 2021; Howe et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2004). Personally, I have witnessed how teacher turnover eventually affects the lives of our students, families, and communities in urban schools. Relationships are hindered, academics are impacted, and the opportunity gaps only widen as schools continue to lose quality teachers. It has been discouraging to see the numbers of teachers leaving the field, due to their sense of under-preparedness. As a nation, to address the social justice problem of inequitable education, we must do better. Educators at all levels must provide students with high-quality, prepared and confident teachers in order to give them the opportunities they deserve.

Throughout this study, it was eye-opening to hear stories of the depths and differences of preparation the six teachers experienced. I enjoyed hearing the stories my participants told, and I truly valued their insights, perceptions, and vulnerability. I found myself captivated by their stories and eager to learn more after our first interviews. It was clear that they love what they do and entered the profession for the right reasons. It was refreshing to hear their passion as threads throughout their stories and see their dedication shine as they spoke about students and preparation experiences. They have taught me so much, and I found myself rejuvenated and inspired to keep pushing to contribute to their sense of preparedness for teaching in urban schools.

I am encouraged to think of ways to create meaningful experiences for novice teachers, based on my role as an instructional coach and adjunct professor. It was apparent that novice teachers come into the field at different levels of understanding their own identities and what it means to be a culturally relevant educator. This study taught me to be



more mindful of teacher identities when I am coaching novice teachers. The findings encouraged me to think about how I can create experiences for novice teachers to critically reflect on their identity and draw connections between their identity and practices in the classroom. I can interweave these types of experiences into my role as an adjunct professor, working directly with teachers in their preparation program. My interest in learning more about developing a culturally relevant leader has also grown based on the stories told in this study. I want to continue to learn more about the preparation of leaders since the instructional leader plays such a vital role in teachers' and students' sense of preparedness, belonging, and support. I realize that my knowledge and skills in these areas will ultimately influence the development of coursework.

I am empowered and motivated to continue to take on the responsibility to recruit, train, and retain qualified and effective teachers. I am inspired that the findings and results of this qualitative study give hope to improve the outcomes for students and communities situated in urban contexts, making the promise of a free and equal education a reality for all.

## APPENDIX A

### SCHOOL SYSTEM CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Study Title:**

*A narrative case study exploring the preparation experiences to teach in an Urban Elementary School*

**Authorized Study Personnel**

**Principal Investigator:** Hailee Brewington, MA

Cell: (816) 752-8202

**The researcher is asking your school to take part in this research study because there is a high population of novice teachers working within this urban school system. The researcher would like to hear about novice teachers experiences by first sending an anonymous survey to the novice teacher population within the school district. Then, the researcher would like to conduct two 45-minute interviews with participants whom have volunteered to be interviewed. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. I will go over this consent form with you. Ask me to explain anything that you may not understand. Think about it and talked it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.**

**KEY INFORMATION**

Your district is being asked to take part in this research study because there is a high population of novice teachers (within their first three years) working within this urban school district. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is to learn about your preparation experiences to teach diverse student populations. The total amount of time you would be in this study is three hours total. During your participation, you will be involved in two interviews with the researcher. Taking part in this research involves the following risks or discomforts: there is a possible breach of confidentiality or privacy, or emotional discomfort in discussing your experience. To protect against these risks, please know that a pseudonym will be assigned to protect your identity and that all data will be safeguarded by the principal investigator. You also have the option to not answer any question you may find too personal or distressing. Additionally, your participation is voluntary and you may leave the study at any time. Taking part in this study includes the following benefits: there is no direct benefits afforded to you during the study; however, the results from this research study will help the research learn more about preparation experiences and could improve preparatory practices in pre-service programs. You have the alternative of not taking part in this study. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. As the researcher discusses this consent form with you, please ask 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 learn about novice teacher preparation experiences to teach within an urban school. I want to hear about their individual experiences.

Your district is being asked to take part in this research study because there is a high population of novice teachers (within their first three years) working within this urban school district.

### **WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?**

Novice teachers will be asked to complete an anonymous survey, then will be able to volunteer to advance to the second phase of the study, where they will be asked to participate in two 45-minute interviews with the researcher. Novice teachers that are willing to participate, will also be asked to participate in a process of reviewing the findings, which will take approximately 90 minutes. It is anticipated that the novice teachers participation in the study will be three hours in total.

### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

This study will occur over the course of the spring and summer of 2022 (April 2022-July 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.

### **ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

This research will add to the evolving body of knowledge around best practices for preparing teachers to teach diverse study populations and this might include a better understanding of how preparation experiences can affect the lives of students, faculty, and staff. You may not get any benefit from being in this research study; however, the results of this could inform improvements to practices at University and Non-University teaching programs.

### **WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

*The University of Missouri System, Authorization No. 00-018 requires research data to be retained for 7 years after the final report.*

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

The data will be stored electronically via UMKC Box through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 7 years after the study is complete. Audio files will be transcribed verbatim and any identifying information (e.g., name) will be removed. In reporting results, pseudonyms will be used. The key to these pseudonyms will be kept in a secure location separate from the transcripts/responses. Once the transcriptions are complete, the audio files will be deleted. All data will be kept in a UMKC Box folder on a password protected secure service.

### **WHAT ARE THE COSTS TO YOU?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study

### **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

Your well-being is a concern of the researcher. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this consent form.

### **WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS TO DECLINE PARTICIPATION OR WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**

You can choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are entitled. However, if you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the researcher first to make sure it is safe to do so.

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or with the University of Missouri Kansas City (list others as applicable).

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

### **WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, concerns or suggestions related to your participation in the research, or to obtain information about research participant’s rights, contact the UMKC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office

- Phone: (816) 235-5927
- Email: [umkcirb@umkc.edu](mailto:umkcirb@umkc.edu)

### **STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, risks and benefits have been explained to me. I have been allowed to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my

satisfaction. I have been told whom to contact if I have questions, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, or to obtain information. I have read or had read to me this consent form and agree to be in this study, with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.

By checking this box, I give consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

---

Time

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

---

## APPENDIX B

### EMAIL SCRIPT

Colleague,

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a novice teacher working within an urban school. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is to learn about your preparation experiences to teach diverse student populations within urban schools. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw from the study until such time as the work is accepted for publication. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating, you will not be penalized. There is no risk related to participation in this study for you or your school district.

The procedure involves filling out an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes.

All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, I will only be reporting a final summary of responses and there is no risk to participants and their affiliated school. Results may inform preparation experiences for teaching diverse student populations.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the email or phone number provided below.

LINK TO SURVEY

Thank you for your time,  
Hailee Brewington  
[Has5gd@mail.umkc.edu](mailto:Has5gd@mail.umkc.edu)  
(816) 752-8202

APPENDIX C  
SAMPLING SURVEY

Colleague,

Thank you for taking the time to fill out my survey.

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a novice teacher working within an urban school. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is to learn about your preparation experiences to teach diverse student populations within urban schools. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw from the study until such time as the work is accepted for publication. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating, you will not be penalized. There is no risk related to participation in this study for you or your school district.

The procedure involves filling out an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes.

All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, I will only be reporting a final summary of responses and there is no risk to participants and their affiliated school. Results may inform preparation experiences for teaching diverse student populations.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the email or phone number provided below.

Thank you for your time,  
Hailee Brewington  
[Has5gd@mail.umkc.edu](mailto:Has5gd@mail.umkc.edu)  
(816) 752-8202

1. At which school and district do you currently teach?
2. What grade-level do you teach?
  - a. Kindergarten
  - b. First grade
  - c. Second Grade
  - d. Third grade
  - e. Fourth grade
  - f. Fifth grade
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How did you obtain your teaching certification? (If pick alternative program-skip to question 6)
  - a. University based undergraduate program
  - b. University based graduate program
  - c. Non-university based alternative program
4. Where did you obtain your teaching certification from?
5. How many field placements did you have prior to student teaching? (field placements are practicums or formal internships prior to student teaching; do not count student teaching/final internship in this response)
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4 or more
  - e. 0, my first field experience was student teaching or a yearlong residency
6. How long was your student teaching experience?
  - a. 1 quarter
  - b. 1 semester
  - c. I was in same school all year
7. How many days a week were you in your student teaching placement?
  - a. 5
  - b. 4
  - c. 3 or less
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Did you have courses that prepared you to teach diverse student populations?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
9. About how many courses did you have that prepared you to teach diverse student populations?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. Most of my courses had a focus on teaching diverse student populations.
10. After your preparation experiences, how prepared did you feel to teach students in urban schools?
  - a. 1 not prepared
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8



- i. 9
  - j. 10, extremely prepared
11. What area(s) of teaching do you feel like you were the most prepared to teach?
12. How supported do you feel from your principal?
- a. 1 not supported
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8
  - i. 9
  - j. 10, extremely supported
13. Please expand.
14. What support do you need from your principal to be a successful teacher?
15. Would you be willing to advance to the next phase of the study which consists of two interviews? The interviews will be face-to-face and conducted in a location that is chosen by the participant. Each interview will be approximately 30 to 90 minutes in length and focused upon the preservice preparation experiences you have had to teach within urban schools. If you are willing to advance to the next phase, please provide your name, phone number and email address.

## APPENDIX D

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Study Title:**

*A narrative case study exploring the preparation experiences to teach in an Urban Elementary School*

**Authorized Study Personnel**

**Principal Investigator:** Hailee Brewington, MA

Cell: (816) 752-8202

**The researcher is asking you to take part in this research study because you are a novice teacher working within an urban school. The researcher would like to hear about your experiences and would like to conduct two 45-minute interviews with you. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. I will go over this consent form with you. Ask me to explain anything that you may not understand. Think about it and talked it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.**

**KEY INFORMATION**

You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a novice teacher (within your first three years) working within an urban school. Research studies are voluntary and only include people who choose to take part. The purpose of this research is to learn about your preparation experiences to teach diverse student populations. The total amount of time you would be in this study is three hours total. During your participation, you will be involved in two interviews with the researcher. Taking part in this research involves the following risks or discomforts: there is a possible breach of confidentiality or privacy, or emotional discomfort in discussing your experience. To protect against these risks, please know that a pseudonym will be assigned to protect your identity and that all data will be safeguarded by the principal investigator. You also have the option to not answer any question you may find too personal or distressing. Additionally, your participation is voluntary and you may leave the study at any time. Taking part in this study includes the following benefits: there is no direct benefits afforded to you during the study; however, the results from this research study will help the research learn more about preparation experiences and could improve preparatory practices in pre-service programs. You have the alternative of not taking part in this study. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. As the researcher discusses this consent form with you, please ask 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 learn about your preparation experiences to teach within an urban school. I want to hear about your experiences.

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a novice teacher who works within an urban school.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?**

You will be asked to participate in two 45-minute interviews with the researcher. You will also be asked to participate in a process of reviewing the findings, which will take approximately 90 minutes. It is anticipated that your participation in the study will be three hours in total.

**HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

This study will occur over the course of the spring and summer of 2022 (April 2022-July 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.

**ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

This research will add to the evolving body of knowledge around best practices for preparing teachers to teach diverse study populations and this might include a better understanding of how preparation experiences can affect the lives of students, faculty, and staff. You may not get any benefit from being in this research study; however, the results of this could inform improvements to practices at University and Non-University teaching programs.

**WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

*The University of Missouri System, Authorization No. 00-018 requires research data to be retained for 7 years after the final report.*

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

The data will be stored electronically via UMKC Box through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 7 years after the study is complete. Audio files will be transcribed verbatim and any identifying information (e.g., name) will be removed. In reporting results, pseudonyms will be used. The key to these pseudonyms will be kept in a secure location separate from the transcripts/responses. Once the transcriptions

are complete, the audio files will be deleted. All data will be kept in a UMKC Box folder on a password protected secure service.

### **WHAT ARE THE COSTS TO YOU?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study

### **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

Your well-being is a concern of the researcher. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this consent form.

### **WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS TO DECLINE PARTICIPATION OR WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?**

You can choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are entitled. However, if you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the researcher first to make sure it is safe to do so.

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or with the University of Missouri Kansas City (list others as applicable).

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

### **WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, concerns or suggestions related to your participation in the research, or to obtain information about research participant’s rights, contact the UMKC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office

- Phone: (816) 235-5927
- Email: [umkcirb@umkc.edu](mailto:umkcirb@umkc.edu)

### **STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, risks and benefits have been explained to me. I have been allowed to ask questions, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been told whom to contact if I have questions, to discuss problems, concerns, or suggestions related to the research, or to obtain information. I have read or had read to me this consent form and agree to be in this study, with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date                      Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent



\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant Giving Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date                      Time

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant Giving Consent



## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*I would like to ask you some questions that will allow me to understand what pre-service education and school practice looked like for you when thinking about teaching urban students in education? I want to know how you were prepared to address the needs of urban youth in your pre-service education and what your current practices look like as you work with these youth. There are no right or wrong answers and if at any time, a question becomes uncomfortable you can refuse to answer it. You may also stop the interview at any time. Your unique experiences and your stories will help me to better understand the preparation you have received.*

#### **(Interview 1) Context of who my participants are**

- 1) When did you finish your pre service program?
- 2) What is your current position?
- 3) How long have you been teaching?

#### **(Interview 2) Interview Questions**

- 1) Describe your pre service experiences in regards to teacher preparation
- 2) What was the most impactful piece of your preparation experience?
- 3) How did your pre service experiences prepare you to teach in urban settings?
- 4) What were some of the most powerful practices you learned in your pre service experience?
  - a) What skills and knowledge did you learn that were most impactful when educating urban students?

- 5) How would you describe your preparation experiences with the communities surrounding urban schools?
- 6) What do you think the ideal pre service program would be like?
- 7) What would you change about your pre service program?
  - a) What experiences, knowledge and skills do you wish you had when it comes to educating urban youth?
- 8) How would you describe the educational needs of urban students?
- 9) Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your pre service preparation?

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## VITA

Hailee Brewington is a lifelong learner and a passionate educator. She was born and raised in St. Joseph, Missouri, where she attended the public school system. She earned her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from the University Missouri-Kansas City in 2014, and her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, also from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, in 2017.

A passion for social justice education was ignited in Mrs. Brewington when she moved to Kansas City and began her journey at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her positions have included fourth grade teacher, academic interventionist, and instructional coach, all within urban school settings. Currently, Mrs. Brewington is an Instructional Coach at Guadalupe Centers Elementary in Kansas City, Missouri. She is dedicated to ensuring all students have access to enriching curriculum and varied perspectives and have qualified teachers. Mrs. Brewington also enjoys being an adjunct instructor for the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She thoroughly enjoys her work as an adjunct instructor as she loves to contribute to the growth and development of aspiring teachers.

Mrs. Brewington is an advocate for equitable learning opportunities and loves what she does in every sense. She thrives when working with teachers to better develop their craft and is dedicated to retaining quality teachers. She enjoys curriculum development to better meet the needs of diverse student populations. She is motivated most when working with teachers, administrators, students, and families to help ensure curriculum is engaging, culturally relevant, and representative of our multicultural society.

Mrs. Brewington entered the University of Missouri-Kansas City Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program with a thirst to learn more about making a socially just education a reality for all students. Understanding the facets of culture continues to be a source of inspiration and hope for Mrs. Brewington. She is eager to embark on the next chapter of her career, and is hopeful for change in the educational school systems. Mrs. Brewington plans to continue her career as an instructional coach for the near future and is also exploring ways that she can continue to combine her love for education and her love for curriculum design into more authentic coaching and consulting for school stakeholders. She plans to publish books and articles within the educational community, as well as to continue her work as an adjunct instructor.