THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN WHITE TEACHERS
AND HOW IT IMPACTS CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE
CULTURALLY DIVERSE

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ABSTRACT

Racially diverse populations have risen over the course of the last decade in public schools while the population of teachers continues to be dominated by white teachers. Cultural competence becomes an important component for white teachers as they seek to educate racially diverse students. This qualitative study used interviews, observations, lesson plan reviews and a student focus group to learn from white teachers and racially diverse students in an urban environment.

The study focused on answering one primary question and two sub-questions that centered around learning how white teachers develop their cultural competence and develop connections with racially diverse students. The primary question focused on how white teachers develop their cultural competence to implement culturally responsive practices in the classroom with the first sub-question focusing on the beliefs and teaching strategies they employ to bridge the gap between their culture and the students’ cultures. The second sub-question focused on whether students felt connected to the teachers that use cultural knowledge and culturally responsive strategies in the classroom.

Four themes arose after the data collection and analysis process: (1) Teachers acknowledge and appreciate racially diverse backgrounds; (2) Teachers value a sociopolitical consciousness by reflecting on, assessing, and overcoming biases pertaining to cultural differences, oppressive practices, and privilege; (3) Teachers implement student focused instructional approaches that involve student discourse, collaboration, and engagement at various levels; (4) Teachers care and develop trusting, respectful relational relationship with their students.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Bridging the Cultural Gap Between Teachers and Learners

Teachers in the urban environment are at a crossroads today. Students are growing more racially diverse in public classrooms, and the teaching profession continues to be dominated by primarily white teachers. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects that the student population is expected to increase in diversity (Racial Diversity of Students, 2016). NCES predicts that by 2024, Hispanic students will grow from 24% in 2012 to 29% in 2024 while the white student population will decrease from 51% in 2012 to 46% in 2024 (Racial Diversity of Students, 2016). For over 30 years, educational researchers have continued to uncover and tout the importance of developing culturally competent and responsive teachers as the population becomes more diverse (Bustamante et al., 2016; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The increase of racially diverse students in education exemplifies the importance of preparing teachers for this issue (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). NCES (2016) reported that in 2012, 82% of the public school teachers were white. Despite efforts to engage white teachers in multicultural education, Geneva Gay identified the, “growing chasm between theoretical articulations and classroom practice” (Sleeter, 2018, p. 7). White teachers became more exposed to the ideas of multicultural education, but this effort failed to make its way fully into practice as many teachers opted to follow the system driven by standardized curricula and tests (Sleeter, 2018). How do teachers bridge this gap? How do teachers who are more specifically White, develop their cultural competence to effectively address the complexity of the issue of culture in the classroom?
Geneva Gay, Jango Paris, Christine Sleeter, Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Linda Darling-Hammond are some of the significant contributors to the field of education when it comes to addressing racially diverse teaching methods. Each of these researchers has sought to close the gap between racially diverse students and teachers, the curricula, and methods of instruction. Cultural competence plays an underlying role in understanding and implementing the practices discussed by these researchers. Without it, teachers (who are primarily White) can fall short of connecting with their students in an urban environment.

The ideals, beliefs, and definitions around cultural competence continue to evolve. Researchers define cultural competence using different criteria but several researchers complied multiple studies over the course of many years to come up with what they described as essential elements. Lindsey, Nuri-Robbins, Terrell, and Lindsey (2018) wrote a manual for cultural competency that is now in its fourth edition. They developed several essential elements to cultural competence. The essential elements of cultural competence include: assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to racial diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge (Lindsey et al., 2018). Educators can develop each of these essential elements within themselves which may impact how they approach instruction in their classrooms. These elements represent the overarching themes of what cultural competence is but Rasmussen and Sieck (2015) through their research further identified nine specific areas of cultural competency. Educators can commit to forgoing their fears to change their worldview or paradigms about students’ cultures by acknowledging and enacting these elements and competencies (Lindsey et al., 2018). They can also become
more aware of their privileges and unconscious biases in an attempt to overcome existent oppressive barriers and their impact (Lindsey et al., 2018). Educators do not need to be proficient in all cultures. As educators work on developing the essential elements, they open themselves up to accepting new information about other cultures and increase their ability to change previous misconceptions. Cultural competence is not about knowing all about different cultures but acknowledging the diversity that exists and allowing it to create a new consciousness within oneself (Lindsey et al., 2018).

Many instructional practices currently foster a general view of curriculum coverage and universal teaching strategies such as: Think, Pair, and Share; I do - We do - You do; lectures; modeling; and simulations. Alone, these strategies and general curriculum coverage fail to address the culturally diverse individuals in the classroom. Without acknowledgement, these basic educational elements when implemented by less culturally competent teachers reinforce the background and perceptions of the teacher. American middle-class culture has always been the driving force in the school curriculum (Hollins, 2008). Dominant cultural values of the American middle-class culture act as a standard for education at times and are often more than likely ingrained in many teachers who experienced education through this lens. But, good teaching comes from teachers and the school, creating opportunities to develop connections and relationships with all of their students (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; & Mahari et al., 2018).

**My Background: Story Behind the Research Question**

Teachers both experienced and inexperienced have learned from and developed in a society that has been dominated by cultural values and expectations of middle class,
white America. How can these same teachers who often represent vastly different backgrounds than their students, given all of the barriers in place, not only reach them educationally but connect with them as well? Questions such as these became important to me as a white male teaching in an urban environment. Now, as an administrator in an urban environment with a racially diverse student population, I find myself even more concerned with addressing the ability to increase the involvement of students’ backgrounds in the classrooms. When I began teaching, I had a very naïve sense of what students from the city of Philadelphia should have as part of their education. I believed the curriculum provided by the school contained everything the students needed to succeed and pass to the next grade. I believed in ideals such as being colorblind and that all students deserved to learn and should learn the prescribed curriculum, and it did not matter where they came from in terms of their cultural backgrounds. Experiences, education, and interactions provided valuable lessons to correct these false beliefs and perceptions. An essential component to my classroom remained overlooked and opportunities to improve went unrealized. As I became more immersed in the culture of the students and got to know their families, I questioned my perceptions and approach.

Through education and experience, my perspective towards education, instruction, and the students changed. As I became exposed to different cultural experiences through interactions with the students around food, music, family values, and their worldviews, I asked questions about how others approached their classrooms. Others shared their experiences and it would take me years to uncover so much of what I did not know about the role of culture in education. But, it was these experiences and questions that led me to study this topic further and to uncover how
others were connecting with students and developing their cultural competence as educators.

Growing up in a suburban, rural area provided a limited view of the world as there was a lack of diversity when it came to cultural differences in my community. My experiences in a middle-class American home growing up and through college created within me unknown patterns, thought processes, and assumptions about the world that focused primarily on specific values and attitudes often associated with middle class America. I had limited exposure to different cultures and knew very little about the issues experienced by people from diverse backgrounds. Teaching in Philadelphia helped me realize how little I knew of others, their experiences, and their cultures. Cultural competence is a process that one can work on continually as views, values, and beliefs become altered through new experiences. These new experiences led to new and varied methods to my approach to education in a racially diverse, urban environment. Interactions, experience, and education became avenues of change. Experiences in school, discussions with students, and family connections provided the catalyst to create new levels of a sociopolitical consciousness. These life events fostered changes within me and prompted a focus on educational programming that would create equitable opportunities for the students to be successful in my classroom.

It took me a few years to comprehend the impact that culture could have in the classroom. The basics of instruction and how to scaffold and differentiate instruction remained a consistent part of my practice, but the cultural aspects opened new possibilities to classroom materials, discussions, and culturally sustaining practices. I
learned to adjust my mindset when it came to traditional classroom materials such as assigned textbooks and misguided expectations that included the students need to work harder to succeed. It was not about lowering the expectations but about altering the approach and being open to new methods that would empower all of my students to think critically and challenge conventional approaches.

A few years into my career, graduate courses on urban education became a new method of change. In one class, we read a book titled, *Holler If You Hear Me* by Gregory Michie published in 1999. He was a teacher who wanted to give his students a voice. Within Michie’s book, there were multiple student essays and profiles. The enlightening essays challenged readers to see education from a racially diverse student’s point of view. The book demonstrated the power of a learner’s voice and the influential impact it creates in the classroom. The classroom discussions and readings challenged traditional values and expectations to instruction. Lesson planning took on a new meaning for me as more opportunities to incorporate the students’ voice, background, and the challenges they face became more essential to the process. The book and the class altered my approach to instruction, and ultimately, it led to monumental changes in my own beliefs such as not rushing to judgment on student actions and the singular use of materials that reflect the dominant culture.

While the student interaction and discussions along with the family connections over the years taught me much about accessing student backgrounds and looking at the perspective of others, it was not until I engaged in critical conversations with a Black co-worker about their experiences in education that demonstrated how oppressive a conventional education could be. She and I would talk at length about curriculum,
policy, and the students. These conversations lead me to some of the original research questions explored in this study. She challenged my thinking on values such as working harder to succeed, the types of language used by teachers, and the lack of Black and Brown representation in classroom discussions and materials. I believe it was these continual conversations that allowed me to develop the attitudes, values, and beliefs that I now hold about the importance of developing the cultural competence of educators.

These experiences and lessons led me to questions about existing instructional practices, curriculums, coursework materials, discipline, etc. and later to the following research questions which became the focus of this dissertation:

- Research Question 1: How do a selection of teachers who are white develop their cultural competence to implement culturally responsive practices in the classroom as they work in urban environments?
  - What beliefs do they hold, and what teaching strategies do they employ to bridge the gap between their cultures and the cultures of their students?
  - In what ways do students of each of these teachers feel connected to their teachers based upon the strategies they use and the cultural knowledge they bring to bear on their work?

Culture is difficult to define because depending on one’s perspective it looks different based on who we are and how we interact in the world (Hollins, 2008). Nieto (1992) described culture as, “the everchanging values, traditions, social and political relationships, and world views shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or region” (p.306) While there are many different definitions and it can
be difficult to capture the essence of culture, the definition provided by Nieto closely aligns with how culture is utilized throughout this research project. Race becomes another term that requires a definition for the purposes of this project. The American Anthropological Association defines race as a socially constructed occurrence and has implications from a human-made system of privilege (Starke et al., 2018). Students from racially diverse backgrounds, for the focus of this study, refer to either African American or Latino students. Black and Brown students will also be used as synonyms for African American and Latino students. White is being used to refer to anyone who identifies as non-Hispanic White. These terms supply a background to reference throughout the coming chapters.

**Statement of the Problem**

**The Times Are Changing**

Teachers often have different cultural backgrounds than their students, and these differences create a dynamic that frequently reinforces dominant cultural patterns associated with white culture. According to Fontana and Lapp (2018), persons of color make up 5.6% of the teachers in Pennsylvania. 63% of the teachers of color reside within Philadelphia and Allegheny counties, and it is interesting to note that men of color comprised less than 1% of the teachers of color in the state (Fontana & Lapp, 2018). White teachers bring their background and experiences into the class and may be utterly unaware of their behaviors, actions, and language patterns especially those that can at times diminish the culture of others for the sake of the dominant culture. While this is inherently not a problem because it is unavoidable, concerns can arise when the teacher overemphasizes their cultural values and beliefs and does not acknowledge the
various cultural backgrounds of their students. This is concerning because it reinforces negative dominant cultural trends that are prevalent among middle class America and oppressive practices such as not seeing the students as victims or beliefs of assimilation that continue to either knowingly or unknowingly negatively impact those from racially diverse backgrounds (Lindsey et al., 2019; Nieto, 2017). Educators who are unprepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds can inadvertently reinforce inequity, systems of oppression, and presumptions of privilege (Lindsey, et al., 2019; Nieto, 2017).

The current educational environment is changing, but the disparity between teacher and student backgrounds has been an ongoing issue since desegregation. The demographic makeup of U.S. schools is experiencing a noticeable shift as it becomes more racially diverse, Latino and Asian American children are increasingly enrolling in public schools (Howard & Navarro, 2016, Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). While this trend is certainly not a new concern, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the enrollment of Latino students has been increasing over the years and could rise to 30% of all students by 2019-2020 school year (Howard & Navarro, 2016). These predictions did not quite live up to their projections but Hispanic enrollment did rise to 24% in 2012 and non-Hispanic Whites decreased to 51% (Racial Diversity of Students, 2016). While racially diverse groups of students will continue to grow, the enrollment of white students will continue to decline. Despite the overall changing in demographics, the achievement gap between white students and racially diverse groups continues. The learning outcomes and opportunity gaps between white students and racially diverse groups have been thoroughly studied and despite numerous reforms, students of color continue to underachieve when compared to their white
countercultures (Howard & Navarro, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education reiterates frequently that race matters and will continue to do so (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Teachers face the reality that ethnic and racial lines will continue to be topics of debate as educators seek to address the needs of a racially diverse student body.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study builds on the existing research around multiculturalism and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) by connecting it to the development of teachers’ cultural competence. In celebrating and valuing the group differences and cultural backgrounds of the students while at the same time institutionalizing racial knowledge and adapting to racial diversity, teachers acknowledge the unique nature of the students, and this informs their teaching practices, but it is not without its challenges (NEA, 2018). Without self-awareness, for example, some teachers develop misconceptions about Black and Brown students, and ultimately these beliefs impact their ability to effectively educate them (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009). As a result, researchers are looking into how the development of cultural competence can lead educators to develop not only themselves but impact the incorporation of cultural diversity in schools and classrooms.

In this study, I sought to uncover how six white teachers developed their cultural competence. Through theory, practice, research, and experience, these six educators demonstrated how they fostered a mindset that acknowledged the importance of cultural differences and empowered racially diverse students. This study also endeavored to uncover how the impact of these six teachers’ cultural competence supported their connections with the students.

**Culturally Responsive Education**
The recognition of students’ cultural backgrounds has continued to gain momentum in education. The practice of culturally responsive teaching has evolved over many years and a brief description is provided to give context to the study and how culturally responsive teaching is the action of a culturally competent teacher. Terms like culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy continue to be refined as researchers and practitioners look to better understand the influence culture can have on education.

Culturally responsive teachers make schools more relevant and allow students from racially diverse backgrounds to be more successful because there is a greater connection between themselves and school (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Gay, 2011; Hoffman, 2018). Nieto (2008) stated that a culturally responsive education fosters inclusivity, the antitheist of racism, and democracy. Theorists believed that this approach could call into question the dominant culture in power and how it can enact equitable changes (Nieto, 2008). Culturally responsive teaching advocates an approach that reflects well planned and monitored actions emphasizing the process of learning and monitoring students to create inclusive spaces (Nieto, 2008). Culturally responsive instruction is the action of a culturally competent teacher.

**Transformation of the teacher.**

Individuals do not transform themselves quickly or easily. In the end, educators could seek to have a shared vision of inclusion that does not deny, offend, or threaten others’ cultures (Lindsey et al., 2018). Developing cultural competence is a mindset shift in thinking that cultural differences are a disadvantage to how can these differences
provide value to the educational process by utilizing the student’s unique backgrounds and experiences (Lindsey et al., 2018).

In this study, I will not identify teachers who demonstrate that they are competent in knowing all cultures but that they recognize, understand that there are differences, and implement practices that enhance the acceptance, recognition, and empowerment of students with diverse racial backgrounds. Teachers with this level of cultural competence might have particular attitudes, experiences, actions, or practices they utilize in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

Much of the cultural competence research has revolved around medical professionals, and there is a growing need to continue to conduct research in the educational field around how teachers develop it. Gay, Sleeter, and others agree that there is a growing gap between predominately white educators and students of color (Sleeter, 2018). Sleeter (2018) believes that efforts that have been made towards multicultural education have been “inadvertently diluted” (p. 7). Kristina Rizga (2015) brought up similar ideas in her book *Mission High* when a teacher discussed that she was scared to talk about race in the classroom. This admission further highlights the need to understand how teachers become more culturally competent. The *Mission High* example started out as an attempt to answer questions about student motivation and why building good schools in every neighborhood is so difficult for the United States. Rizga discussed the achievement gap and how one school adopted a new approach. The book covers the qualitative side of the debate on improving low performing schools. It concluded that more teacher and student voice is needed to improve schools along with alternative
measures of judging performance to create more sustainable change (Rizga, 2015). Within the book, Rizga profiled several educators and showed how one could teach students about African American characters but still fear discussions around race. Race and stressful topics should not always follow the incorporation of black characters but teachers need to overcome their fear or nervousness around the possibility of discussing it in class.

This study will seek to understand further the development or transformation to becoming more culturally competent within a specific sample of teachers and how the teachers’ cultural competence impacted their ability to connect with the students they teach in an urban setting. In the next chapter, I will dive further into the history and evolution of the incorporation of the diverse students’ backgrounds in education. I will also explore how teachers can exhibit their ability to incorporate racial diversity, manage differences, and value those differences in the classroom, and the opportunities that some have taken advantage of to increase their sociopolitical consciousness. I will discuss the tenants and indicators of culturally responsive pedagogy. The eight essential elements of cultural competence will be defined along with the challenges that exist around increasing one’s ability to increase their understanding of those elements. Finally, there will be a section on the current thinking of cultural competence, and the new movement towards a more sustaining pedagogy.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Developing Cultural Competence, Its Importance, Barriers, and Current Thinking

In this chapter, I review several of the elements essential to developing cultural competence, but first, an overview of culture and race in other fields provides evidence of how significant and impactful culture is especially in the medical field. Then, I move into education which provides context to the study. An overview of the evolution of culturally responsive pedagogy follows, which leads into presenting the evidence and tenants of cultural competence. Cultural competence is defined based on this evidence. This section also covers research about the challenges teachers encounter that prevent the development of their cultural competence. Then, this section moves into current thinking on cultural competence and factors impacting its development. Finally, the chapter concludes with research completed on individuals and educators taking the next steps toward becoming more culturally competent. Throughout the chapter, I reviewed the findings from extant studies and research and worked them into the review to help maintain a sense of perspective around the concepts discussed.

Cultural Impact in Other Fields

Other fields long ago established a need for professionals to develop cultural competence in their employees to more effectively meet the needs of their clients. The medical field identified that more culturally competent employees provide more effective medical treatment (Giger et al., 2007; National CLAS Standards, 2018). Over the years, a conscious effort to address the health disparities that exist led to panels created to influence the American Nursing Association to explicitly speak to the development of
cultural competence among medical professionals (Giger et al., 2007). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) created standards of performance around cultural competence after research proved its positive impact on the quality of health care provided to racially diverse individuals. Education can better serve racially diverse students by moving towards a similar pathway taken by the medical field.

**Overview of Culture and Race in Education**

Culture plays a vital role in the education of children. In the United States, the dominant culture in power established a socially constructed system that encompasses social networks, organizations, and institutions that would allow them to perpetuate the oppression of others (Starke et al., 2018). In this complex system, the dominant culture exhibits certain racial tendencies or biases, creating inequities that exist in society and in education (Starke et al., 2018). Some researchers study the inequities that exist in education for racially diverse populations and seek to uncover practices, attitudes, and pedagogies that educators can use to break down these social constructs in individuals and systems.

The educational system is not isolated from these complex networks of bias influenced by the dominant culture. It influences the curriculum, teacher perceptions, and teacher attitudes. Some white teachers and administrators can bring elements of these biased systems and tendencies into schools. White teachers and administrators can benefit from an awareness of their perceptions and privilege when it comes to race. Increased awareness around societal inequities and racial bias in educators can address some of the misconceptions about race and culture that occur inside of schools and society because the complex networks are revealed and confronted. For students to have
the opportunity to reach their full potential, teaching and learning require contextualization for the students to incorporate ethnicities, cultures, and individual experiences (Gay, 2018). Before that can happen, educators should first understand some of the complicated relationship between culture and race in education. Race and culture, either directly or indirectly, impact the classroom and the school and have done so for a long time.

The topic of race has been an ongoing one in the field of education for a long time, and it existed well before landmark court cases such as Brown v. Board of Education. W. E. B. DuBois proposed it as a problem over 100 years ago and believed that the connecting of people of different races to better understand each other as individuals was a solution (Gay, 2004). W. E. B. DuBois began analyzing trends that demonstrated inequities that existed at the time. He is a pioneer in the field of race as it relates to educational opportunities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Even though the issue became evident based on the work of DuBois, the country failed to address the educational inequities directly, and it would take many years later for the courts to address the disparities. One of the first court cases to address this issue was in California when Mexican Americans sought to desegregate the schools in Orange County. Mendez v. Westminster, a class-action lawsuit that sought to end the segregation that centered on national origin, more accurately based on the language of the students in Orange County, California (PBS Learning Media, 2020). The court ruled in favor of Mendez and decided that segregation based on language was unconstitutional (PBS Learning Media, 2020). Other court cases in both Texas and Arizona also began to address the issue of
segregation in schools (PBS Learning Media, 2020). Race and the inequities that existed in public schools started to gain more attention.

A major victory for school desegregation came in the 1950s with the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education Topeka*, which supported the desegregation of public schools. Desegregation began the integration of students from racially diverse backgrounds into the classrooms of students from the dominant white culture. Education became desegregated, but new issues arose. In the 1960s, educators began to take note of the impact teacher expectations towards students’ academic outcomes and racial biases could have on the quality of education for racially diverse populations (Lindsey et al., 2019). Racial desegregation further pushed Whites to believe in the negative stereotype of Blacks being unmotivated (Bell, 2004). Some white people believed that students from other cultures benefited from being assimilated into American Culture (Bell, 2004). Culture and race continued to gain attention in education, as researchers began to ask more questions about how racial diversity impacted learning. Even decades later, the impact of these issues still exists in classrooms today in the forms of negative stereotypes and attitudes that resemble the assimilation of American middle-class values such as if all students or people work harder, they will succeed.

*Culture continues to impact education.*

In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as James Banks, Christine Bennett, Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, and others began calling for multicultural education to be part of school culture (Banks, 2004; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). They sought to understand and address racial, ethnic, and cultural demographic changes occurring in public schools (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Howard & Navarro, 2016).
Culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible arose as terms in the 1970s designed to value the cultural characteristics of those from the nondominant culture (Howard-Minkoff, 2017). The scholars listed above rejected deficit theories and explanations that consistently stated how students of color failed due to some fault of their own (Howard-Minkoff, 2017). The early researchers uncovered that unique cultural characteristics become irrelevant in public education, while the dominant cultural characteristics held sway and deficit-based theories became viable reasons for the failure of racially diverse students.

Multicultural education began to gain more and more footing in the 1970s and 1980s. Over the decades, researchers identified the growing need for multicultural education to include practices that could support students from racially diverse backgrounds. During these times, multicultural education began to move away from assimilationist approaches because it tended to only work for those from eastern European areas (Lindsey et al., 2019). Researchers moved away from the idea of blaming those from racially diverse backgrounds for their current lack of progress in favor of more empowering methods. Sonia Nieto (2017), notable advocate for multicultural education quoted William Ryan, author of *Blaming the Victim* written in 1971 in one of her articles:

We are dealing, it would seem, not so much with culturally deprived children as with culturally depriving schools. And the task to be accomplished is not to revise, amend, and repair deficient children, but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the schools to which we commit these children (p. 2).

As others began to delve deeper into the ideas and theories of multicultural education, newer terms developed to meet the ever-changing theories and concepts. Scholars in the
1970s identified the need for educational practitioners to understand the diverse ways that students of color understood information, think, and communicate (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). Thus, terms like culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally compatible became utilized. Still, these terms would evolve further as scholars continued to demonstrate that schools failed to acknowledge diversity and continually failed to address concerns of racism and oppression (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Howard & Navarro, 2016). It became necessary for terms to change to more accurately address the negative systems that had been in place in public schools for so long.

In the 1980s continued into the 1990s, the problem still existed. While researchers and practitioners made headway with further identifying the problem, they still worked on solutions, practices, and methods of changing the state of how students from racially diverse backgrounds receive an education. While the expansion of theories continued beyond the curriculum into pedagogy, the researchers finally landed on revitalizing cultures and languages (Sleeter, 2018).

Gloria Ladson-Billings developed the terminology culturally relevant pedagogy based on the work of previous scholars as she sought to bring together culture and pedagogy to provide students of color more opportunities for success in school (Bustamante et al., 2016; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). She embraced the idea that culture fundamentally impacted the learning process for students of color.

Geneva Gay built on her earlier work and the work of others to usher in a newer term called culturally responsive teaching. Gay wrote about how teachers should become
proficient in the students’ cultures and weave the cultural differences into the lessons and curriculum to support student learning (Bustamante et al., 2016; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). She became one of the prominent figures in the incorporation of culture as a significant component of instruction. Terms, theories, and ideas have continued to change and alter over the years. As the terms progressed, they began to advocate more for the empowerment of racially diverse groups. When terms like multiculturalism and culturally relevant pedagogy first arrived, they tended to focus on the acknowledgment of other cultures and relating the material to the students. As the terms advanced, they became more about being responsive and sustaining. The newest term of culturally sustaining pedagogy coined by Django Paris (2012) further enhanced and built upon the knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy. The latest terms supported the fact that cultures represented in the classroom could be empowering, and all aspects of the students’ cultures could be integrated, connected, and voiced in schools.

Another notable contributor to the discussion and scholarship about culture and race in schools is Lisa Delpit. She described how culture has become a topic that is either avoided or dismissed. Delpit (2006) wrote, *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children* to provide a voice for those who continue to go unheard. Delpit (2006) outlined how the, “culture of power” seeks to maintain the norms and rules that provide an advantage to those in power. The culture of power created written and unwritten rules around race and culture that infiltrate the classroom (Delpit, 2006). Delpit spoke to the power of the curriculum, the power teachers have over students, and how schools prepared racially diverse learners for the workforce. There are
codes and rules for participating in the culture of power, and they exclude minority individuals from achieving success in the same manner (Delpit, 2006). Another rule of power revolved around the idea that those in control are generally the ones that are unaware they are in power or reluctant to admit it (Delpit, 2006). These rules and socially constructed systems created by the culture in power directly impact education and its ability to address the culture and race of racially diverse populations in the classroom.

Over the years, certain negative patterns associated with race and culture became evident in research. African American boys have often been adversely affected by these systems. Young African American males can, at times, be stereotyped as behavior problems, deviant, having low academic motivation, and aggressive (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Educators can fall into these stereotypical traps and focus on the negative attributes of young individuals that have persisted for years rather than focusing on the positive competencies. Some African American boys chose to respond to their circumstances or environment with what some define as deviant behaviors, but if we interpreted these as responses to adversity, then they can be seen through a more empathetic lens (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). These stereotypes can block them from opportunities that could ultimately allow them to be more successful in life. To develop interventions, it becomes necessary to look at the political, cultural, and environmental factors that have influenced the students’ lives. Educators can benefit from avoiding the trappings of looking at students who are racially diverse as at-risk and focus more on their ability to succeed.

Culture’s influence on education continues to be a concern that fails to receive the
recognition required for change (Mahari-de Silva, 2018). The concepts of assimilation, segregation, and marginality are barriers to cultural competence and continue to impact the teachers and students. John Dewey’s vision of schools acting as institutions that foster democracy and equality of opportunity have yet to be realized for many African Americans because the systems are still fraught with injustice and subjugation (Nieto, 2017). Culture and race have continually played a role in education, and students from racially diverse backgrounds could benefit from having it more fully addressed within schools.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Its Development**

Cultural competence is a central pathway to developing culturally responsive classrooms. Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and other researchers wrote on the importance of responding to the individuals in the classroom by addressing their culture and background. Over the years, researchers studied and refined the implantation of cultural responsiveness in schools. Culturally responsive teaching involves pedagogical considerations and impacts teacher/student relationships (Hoffman, 2018). In this practice, teachers incorporate, adopt, and integrate the students’ cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and classroom instructional practices (Bustamante et al., 2016). Culturally responsive pedagogy is the primary focus of this section but it developed through the theories and studies of others like Gloria Ladson-Billings. The term culturally relevant pedagogy is used when referencing Gloria Ladson-Billings’s work as she is considered an authority on this practice in education. Terms evolved and changed over the years and it is necessary to provide a short history on culturally responsive practices to demonstrate that its application and the understanding of it are
continuing to evolve.

**Early tenants and indicators that led to culturally responsive instruction.**

Culturally relevant pedagogy is essentially the precursor to culturally responsive instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy encompasses academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001). The tenant of academic achievement incorporates the idea that the teacher possesses knowledge of how to teach the content to the student with the use of a critical consciousness towards the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Teachers must have a presumption that all students are capable of learning. Effective culturally competent teachers can understand the differences of their students and use them as a basis of learning to impact further education in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Gay, 2018). It can become the responsibility of the teachers to learn about the student’s culture and the local community (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

A third tenant identified with culturally relevant pedagogy is sociopolitical consciousness. Lesson plans and activities need to connect the students to a broader social context and believe in the students’ success in life (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Educators invest in the public good of the community by making broader social connections and believing in the success of students outside of school. Teachers effectively connect with students from racially diverse backgrounds through these tenants and indicators which come when teachers develop cultural competence.

**Pedagogical and teacher relationships.**
Teachers employ specific pedagogical approaches when they demonstrate culturally responsive practices. According to Hoffman (2016), culturally competent instructors use pedagogy that connects the content to the students, includes methods of addressing oneself and the community, approaches curriculum from a socially critical lens that challenges the status quo, addresses implicit bias and prejudice, and engages students as the drivers of their learning (Hoffman, 2016). These pedagogical approaches can lead to developing a connectedness with the students and further the development of cultural competence in teachers as they acknowledge more cultures and create opportunities for diverse cultures to exist in the classroom.

Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that teachers could immerse themselves in a mutual transformational process that allows them to learn about their students and develop contextual knowledge of how to teach in a racially diverse setting. Based on these transformational experiences, teachers form relationships and connectedness with their students as they act on their new cultural knowledge and thought processes (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Connectedness comes through commitment and care but includes high expectations, both academically and socially (Hoffman, 2016). At the core of these relationships, the students feel the teacher is trustworthy and there is a rapport that develops over time, which is one of the significant components of culturally responsive teaching (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

Hammond studied the connection between social emotional relationships and the brain. Culturally responsive pedagogy has the power to increase intellectual capacity which increases the brain’s power to process more complex information (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). This increase occurs because culture, according to neuroscience, plays a
valuable role in the development of intellective capacity (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Social emotional partnership becomes necessary for deep learning (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Teachers develop emotional bonds with the students and leverage the relationship to support the students in fulfilling higher expectations (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Trust and caring are essential when teachers develop their culturally responsive pedagogy or cultural competence because it allows racially diverse students to share their thoughts and experiences in the classroom when given the opportunity.

**Culturally sustaining pedagogy.**

Gloria Ladson-Billings, Django Paris, and Christine Sleeter believed that culturally relevant and culturally responsive represent outdated terms. As studies look deeper into culturally responsive teaching, Django Paris found that culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is a more accurate term. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is a relatively new term and it necessary to mention it as it represents the future of culturally responsive instruction. For the purposes of this study, however, culturally responsive instruction will remain one of the major focuses as it relates to cultural competence because it aligns more with the contextual background of the major definitions utilized to complete this research project. Paris offered up this term because he believed it is the next step in the evolution of culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012). Alim and Paris (2017) explain:

Culturally sustaining pedagogy asks us to reimagine schools as sites where diverse, heterogeneous practices are not only valued but sustained in fundamentally reimagining the purpose of education, CSP demands a critical, emancipatory vision of schools that reframes the object of critique from our children to oppressive systems (p. 3).

Paris asked educators, policymakers, and researchers to take the next step. Terms such as
relevant and responsive no longer meet the needs of the racially diverse students because they focus on acknowledgement and do little to provide a cultural critique beyond laying the groundwork for it (Paris, 2012). Educators can move beyond the past and incorporate the students’ present in the classroom. CSP requires that young people sustain the cultural and linguistic competence of their backgrounds but engage in opportunities to learn and access the dominant culture (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Paris, 2012). CSP seeks to sustain the cultural differences that exist by making cultural pluralism a part of the school process.

Paris entered into a new inquiry that encourages researchers to question the assumptions about cultural ownership and the impact that the youth can have on traditional visions and new visions. Young people are a critical factor in the implementation of CSP because it is essential to analyze how they interpret traditional cultural assumptions and then offer new insights of ethnic and linguistic differences as they combine identities creating new fluid, hybrid representations of past cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). New patterns around CSP look to sustain traditional racially diverse cultures and incorporate the new elements in youth culture, which results in combining aspects of the cultures. CSP seeks to advance pedagogical, curricular, and teacher learning innovations to extend the richness of our pluralist society to include all cultural ways both those of the dominant and those of the marginalized (Paris, 2012). CSP offered the next step in the evolution of the integration of culture in the classroom.

Paris believes that CSP represents the next era of incorporating culture into education. Each of these terms is important and plays a role in the development of how
educators approach culture in education. As educators seek to become more invested in their students’ lives, they can use culturally relevant, responsive, or sustaining ideological theories and practices to connect with their students as they advance their cultural competence.

**Youth culture.**

As teachers utilize cultural competence to build their classrooms, youth culture also impacts the teachers’ development. As educators seek to know better and understand the students they teach, youth culture accounts for part of that understanding because it influences their thoughts and actions. It can be recognized within culturally responsive instruction but in the section below researchers make it the primary focus of their studies. Youth culture impacts the realm of culturally responsive instruction, and it is important to mention its relation to cultural competence. Educators can challenge themselves to become more cognizant of global identities that shape the arts, music, and other forms of media that influence youth (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Educators could get to know the cultural backgrounds and traditions of the students from racially diverse backgrounds, but beyond knowing them, they can start to embrace the evolving cultural traditions such as youth culture (Paris, 2012).

Youth culture is quickly becoming part of the focus in classrooms as researchers begin to study how various cultural elements such as Hip Hop impacts student learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014) said, “in reality, culture is always changing.” She was referring to the fact that the youth, while they maintain many notions of traditional ethnic memberships, they also reshape them through language, arts, and beliefs (Ladson-Billings, 2014). For example, Ladson-Billings studied a program called First Wave,
which integrated Hip Hop into a school because it offered new opportunities to change the way we think, learn, and perceive the world (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These new opportunities allowed the students to play a more active role in the educational process because it made them the experts and the source of information. Theories evolve and change as more research is advocating that elements surrounding racially diverse learners, especially when it relates to Hip-Hop, is impacting the literacy, life, and language of today’s youth (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 2014). Ladson-Billings responded to the idea of CSP and always believed that her theories and research on culturally relevant pedagogy to be unfinished and embraces Paris’ CSP (Ladson-Billing, 2014). CSP pushes us to consider global identities that emerge and this includes how youth culture can profoundly impacting educators’ approach to racially diverse students in the classroom.

**Culturally responsive pedagogy.**

While the term is evolving, it remains one of the more widely accepted practices for incorporating culture in education. Culturally responsive teaching encompasses the validations of the student’s backgrounds, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles (Gay, 2018; Powell et al., 2016). Gay (2018) believes:

Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning.

Culturally responsive teaching means more than ensuring that heritages are valued. It means addressing forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression (Gay, 2018). Teachers are agents of change by confronting social injustices and academic inequalities.

Gay compiled several studies that led to the formulation of culturally responsive
instruction. It is a multidimensional approach that goes beyond instructional practices.

Gay (2018) believed it is comprised of elements from the following table.

Table 1: Culturally Responsive Instruction Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validating, in that it affirms the cultural heritages of students and builds “bridges of meaningfulness between home and school.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive, in that it incorporates strategies that teacher the whole child, i.e., that “develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidimensional, in that it incorporates multiple forms of expression and presents diverse experiences, contributions and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering, which “translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative, in that it challenges the conventions of traditional educational practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emancipatory, in that it reduces what constitutes “truth” and gives students a voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Note: Retrieved from *Operationalizing Culturally Responsive Instruction: Preliminary findings of CRIOP research.* Powell et al., 2016, p. 6.*

The above table outlines key tenets and indicators of culturally responsive instruction.

Culturally responsive instruction/pedagogy is a complex process in many ways. Teachers utilizing this method consider the social, emotional, cognitive, political, and cultural dimensions of every student in the classroom (Gay, 2018; Powell et al., 2016). Research suggests that this approach integrates well with effective teaching practices but urges teachers to incorporate the unique learning needs of racially diverse students along with those practices (Powell et al., 2016). Historically underserved racially diverse students present unique needs and challenges, without culturally responsive instruction these educational needs and challenges can often go unmet.

While it is compatible with effective practices, culturally responsive instruction expands on traditional teaching practices to include the perspectives of racially diverse
students who are marginalized by society (Powell et al., 2016). It seeks to affirm students’ cultural knowledge but also to create new knowledge based on continuous review of situations by those who experience oppression (Powell et al., 2016). Once this instructional approach acknowledges and creates new knowledge of existing experiences, it empowers students as they develop a critical consciousness alongside academic competence (Powell et al., 2016). This method works to empower students to believe in themselves and their ability to change the world around them. Students are placed at the center of the learning and work to develop problem solving skills based around acquiring knowledge, habits of inquiry, and “critical curiosity around society, power, inequality, and change” (Gay, 2018, p. 41). Culturally responsive instruction takes effective teaching practices and vastly alters their traditional approach to meet the unique needs of racially diverse students.

This instructional approach goes beyond traditional methods to develop the students. The student consciousness heightens when the teacher challenges the status quo and this gives recognition to the students’ voices (Kim & Slapac, 2015). Students become empowered to better understand themselves and their positions in the world by deconstructing stereotypes and hidden narratives (Kim & Slapac, 2015). Teachers cannot create lessons or empower racially diverse students to deconstruct hidden narratives without first confronting their own position in society. But teachers open the door to learn from new experiences when they create opportunities for students to feel empowered and voice their perspective in the classroom.

A critical component of this approach is caring. Teachers go beyond the traditional sense of the word because almost all teachers care about their students but
culturally responsive caring has different attributes. Gay (2018) believed, “They extend the meaning of caring beyond personal humanness and instructional judiciousness to embrace righteousness, fairness, and equality” (p.60). Thompson (2004) suggested that “they see the world the children see, and ...help them develop thoughtful responses to cultural difference and to racism” (Gay, 2018, p.61). Traditional caring approaches are no longer sufficient, teachers who are caring in a culturally responsive manner care about the promise and potential of racially diverse students, focus on strengths, and teach skills to negotiate society as it currently exists (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive caring also requires educators to acquire knowledge of ethical and cultural diversity while also becoming more aware of themselves and the role they play as cultural beings (Gay, 2018). Cultural caring means engaging in courageous conversations about fundamental society issues directly impacting racially diverse students (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching allows for the validation and affirmation of racially diverse learners through the acknowledgment of cultural heritages, establishing connections between the home and school, the use of various learning styles, and it teaches students to value their own and other’s cultural heritages (Gay, 2018). But, teachers need a certain level of cultural competence to create these opportunities in the classroom.

**Overview of Cultural Competence and Indicators of Ability to Change**

Cultural competence involves many different indicators and elements. While the definitions of cultural competence as defined by different scholars display their own nuances, the essence of the terms represent similar elements. Key contributors to the field identified evidence and indicators of cultural competence while others studied the term to create a common understanding. Some researchers explored the term
intercultural competence and for the purposes of this research project the studies
involving intercultural competence provided valuable insights and initiatives that could
benefit those developing what others called cultural competence. Through studies,
researchers developed the components needed for cultural competence and a blueprint on
what specific characteristics could lead individuals to higher levels of intercultural
competence.

While the definition has changed multiple times, scholars continue to struggle to
reach an agreement on how intercultural competence should be defined (Deardorff, 2006;
Paige et al., 2003). Darla Deardorff completed a Delphi Study that included the
participation of leading researchers in the field of intercultural competence such as Janet
Bennet, Mitchell Hammer, R. Michael Paige, and Harry Triandis along with several
others to find a consensus on the definition of intercultural competence and its other
tenets (Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff (2006) found the most agreement between
administrators at postsecondary schools when presented with Byram’s work on
intercultural competence which when summarized posits that one must have “knowledge
of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and to
interact; valuing others’ values, and beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self”
(Byram, 1997, p. 34; Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). Deardorff (2006) also found that there
were three common elements in all of the definitions, which are awareness, valuing, and
understanding cultural differences, experiencing other cultures, and self-awareness of
one’s own culture. The Delphi study found that the top-rated definition was “the ability
to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s
intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2004, p. 194.)
The ability to shift one’s frame of reference appropriately also scored above 85% agreement among the top scholars in this area (Deardorff, 2006). The study found a 100% agreement among the participants on “understanding of others’ world views,” which is a common theme among many other intercultural researchers (Deardorff, 2006; Fong & Furuto, 2001; Hammer et al., 2003, Sue & Sue, 1990). All of the components and elements researched appear to follow a pattern that people who are interculturally competent exhibit certain behaviors such as self-awareness, understanding differences, and experiences that allow them to understand others’ world views or positions.

**Evidence and indicators.**

Researchers have been identifying attitudes, behaviors, and experiences as methods of increasing cultural competence. They have looked to identify critical elements located within these attributes to uncover commonalities that can serve as conceptual frameworks for recognizing how cultural competence develops. The Schema Theory is a synthesis of patterns of thinking that transforms how individuals think and learn based on information processing and constructivism (Endicott et al., 2003). Individual schemas grow as they have more experiences outside of their own culture (Endicott et al., 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015; Sieck et al., 2013). These researchers developed and defined these competencies and behaviors associated with cultural competence as well as how individuals synthesize the components cognitively. Schema is the network that interconnects a person’s knowledge and experiences, and with new experience the networks are updated through the cognitive dissonance that occurs when new problems and situations alter current patterns of thinking (Endicott et al., 2003). Cultural experiences occur when new perspectives are encountered through connections
with racially diverse people and the interpretation of these experiences become how our understanding of the world evolves, thus leading to the development of higher levels of cultural competence. Culturally competence involves the cognitive synthesis of our understanding of our cultural experiences outside of our own culture.

After extensive research, Rasmussen and Sieck generated nine specific competencies. These areas are: cultural sensemaking, perspective taking, cultural knowledge, self-presentation, language proficiency, emotional self-regulation, affect/attitude, withholding judgment, and self-efficacy (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Cultural sensemaking is the first competency and a crucial element of development process. Individuals often have an initial possibly biased first reaction to observed behavior and through the use of cultural sensemaking, these first impressions become altered from the original thoughts into a more sophisticated interpretation of the behavior (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Sieck et al. (2013) tested metacognitive processes associated with being able to notice cultural differences, initiating the ability to understand a general cultural schema, inquiry into causes, consideration of differing explanations, and suspending judgment (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). These processes encompass cultural sensemaking. One can use these strategies to gain a deeper understanding when they encounter scenarios or situations that differ from their typical cultural experiences.

Table 2: Nine Cultural Competence Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Competence Area 1</th>
<th>Cultural Sensemaking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Competence Area 2</td>
<td>Perspective Taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Competence Area 3</td>
<td>Cultural Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perspective-taking is another competency that involves seeing things from another’s point of view. There is a great deal of research surrounding the idea that taking another’s perspective is crucial in helping to achieve social goals related to improving the understanding and acceptance of others’ cultures (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Part of perspective taking involves individuals being able to demonstrate flexible thinking because without it, people do not accept cultural differences (Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The acceptance of these differences requires the ability to recognize and appreciate other cultural frameworks (Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Perspective-taking allows individuals to conceptualize others’ perspectives and thus alter their thinking based on the synthesis of this conceptualization.

Cultural knowledge plays an essential role in the maturation process. Rasmussen & Sieck (2015) cited that culture shapes our world, so to be effective in a culturally diverse environment it is vital that individuals know about other cultures. Individuals that appreciate different cultures use cultural theories and apply them when creating new cognitions about the cultural differences experienced (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). It (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Cultural meta-knowledge is imperative in forming new thought processes because it creates a foundation of different cultures that one can then
use to alter their preconceived thoughts and opinions about other cultures.

Self-presentation and self-efficacy play a crucial role in cultural competence. Self-presentation involves the ability to not only understand what is going on around oneself but also utilize that understanding to interact appropriately (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Essentially, it means that individuals learn to adapt or code switch to the environment depending on the cultural context of the situation. Code switching is the ability or adaptation for one to spontaneously act outside of their cultural norms and act within another’s cultural context (Molinsky, 2007; Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). This means that a person can incorporate multiple forms of communications including expressions to interact appropriately within a cultural context different from their own. Self-efficacy/confidence allow individuals to try new behaviors and implement the understanding created based on their new knowledge and or skills (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The belief in their abilities to code switch allows individuals to take risks and to act in multiple contextual ways, given their environment (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Self-presentation and self-efficacy/confidence allows for the development of cultural competence because both give individuals the ability to code-switch based on their newly formed culturally understanding along with the poise to act.

Rasmussen and Sieck identified Language proficiency and emotional regulation as two other competencies of cultural competence. Language proficiency revolves around the awareness an individual has around socio-linguistic awareness (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Individuals must be able to interpret the meaning of language beyond words and understand it within a social context. Emerging culture competence leads to stress at times, language differences can act as one of those stressors. Emotional
regulation is a necessity during development. One must be able to regulate their emotions when encountering intercultural adjustments because these situations often involve stress and conflict (Matsumoto & LeRoux, 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Emotional regulation allows an individual to manage their emotions and ultimately reflect and respond appropriately in intercultural situations.

Managing affect and attitude toward difference and withholding/suspending judgment are the last two competencies. Managing affect and attitude toward difference support in a critical component of cultural competence because it allows one to show respect for others and their cultures (Deardorff, 2006; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Managing affect means possessing the ability to focus on the relational goals of engagement between one’s culture and the differing cultures of others (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). It involves respecting the differences as well as the commonalities of the different cultures that exist between oneself and someone from a different culture. Managing one’s affect and attitude support when it comes to withholding judgment. Withholding/suspending judgment means that one has to withhold their opinion of others’ behaviors and should seek to gather more information before arriving at an interpretation of the act which also plays a role in cultural sensemaking (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). By withholding judgment, individuals take the time to analyze the information they observed and then categorize it based on the knowledge they acquired about the culture. Rasmussen and Sieck (2015) believe that the more experiences and knowledge one has with other cultures, the more likely they are to suspend judgment and seek alternative explanations for behaviors (Bennett, 1986).

The nine competencies offer a guide to the attitudes, values, and practices that are
associated with cultural competence and the development of it. These competencies provide a comprehensive outline of cultural competence. These nine competencies include evidence and several indicators of what a culturally competent individual might possess or strive to possess. As teachers increase their cultural competence especially around the nine competencies such as self-presentation and self-efficacy, it can manifest into culturally responsive opportunities in their classrooms.

In an era of standardized testing and accountability, studying cultural competence is often difficult. The focus of many educators is directly on academic achievement and meeting the accountability standards of their school districts. Barriers exist to this research because there are those who do not want to admit there is an issue with cultural competence and those that are too nervous to talk about it. While attributes and skills associated with cultural competence are continually uncovered through research, it is still unclear the relevant behaviors that are associated with the identified skills and attitudes (Deardorff, 2009; Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). Identification of these skills and attitudes require future studies to focus on actual physical encounters within different contexts and fields (Deardorff, 2009; Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). Another concern with many of these studies are that they are often specific moments in time or directly related to single participants (Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). Lack of experience represented another area of difficulty in studying cultural competence. Endicott et al. (2003) believed a significant amount of experience within a culture is necessary to develop an interconnected schema between their culture and that of others (Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). But their types of experiences drive their schematic development which can make it more difficult to find those whose experiences led to higher levels of
cultural competence (Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). In this study, the participants are studied in a specific moment in time in their classrooms but also asked to reflect back on their historical professional and personal experiences and what brought about changes to their thinking and approach.

**Challenges to Making Teachers Culturally Competent**

Teachers and administrators can benefit from confronting their perceptions about race and culture to create an environment that creates a safe space to promote positive changes in attitudes, beliefs, and negative perceptions. There is considerable evidence that racism pervades American society and has woven itself into how organizations, including schools, operate and how people make decisions (Hollins, 2008; Stake et al., 2018). This led to inequities and the continuation of oppressive practices (Stake et al., 2018). Students experience the inequities and oppressive practices firsthand throughout their school age years such as in the curriculum, ethical decisions, privilege, and reforms (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Starke et al., 2018).

The most devastating factor to the success of racially diverse students is institutionalized racism, which is the unchallenged system of racial biases and the application of privilege that educators exhibit in schools (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Institutionalized racism comes in many forms such as curriculum, testing practices, and administrative mandates based on ethical decisions often associated with fear or nervousness (Starke et al., 2018). Institutionalized racism infiltrates many aspects of the lives of those living in the United States (Palmer & Seashore, 2017; Starke et al., 2018). It acts as a barrier on several levels. These factors result in educators who believe in ideological concepts that reinforce the expectation that poor children will fail because
of the student's actions (Hollings, 2008; Noguera, 2008). Challenges continue to exist within oneself and the educational system as it pertains to overcoming racism and bias in education.

History has shown that ideas about Americanization and assimilation create barriers to the development of cultural competence. Failure to recognize cultural differences has resulted in the perpetuation of these ideals and thus result in unjust practices such as higher rates of punishment for students with diverse backgrounds (Abdullah et al., 2015). The traits and qualities of other cultures are partially accepted, but despite this acceptance, they become assimilated into the overarching political and economic systems of America (Hollins, 2008). These negative traits become intertwined within the framework of the systems that are widely accepted based on the beliefs of those in power (Hollins, 2008). Americanization and assimilation policies promote conformity to the American way of life based on a Eurocentric interpretation of social norms and mores (Hollins, 2008). These beliefs were first used on Native Americans as laws and methods of education tried to assimilate the Native Americans into a particular way of living and thinking (Hollins, 2008). Hollins (2008) furthered her point through a report completed by Cornbleth:

Public schooling in the United States serves the purposes of Americanization and assimilation. Deflecting attention from group exercises and effects - and from critique generally - enables those who benefit from the status quo to sustain it. It also encourages those at the bottom to work within the system, reassuring them however falsely that they too can succeed if only they work hard enough (p.87).

Hollins (2008) discusses how the subjects of the Cornbleth report understand that social changes occurred over the years, but they still tended to support the ideals of “mainstream white America (p.87). Policies and practices such as these pose as critical
barriers to the development of cultural competence but other barriers exist that allow for hidden beliefs and values to control what the others think or believe.

While some of the assimilation practices occur overtly, some practices, attitudes, and beliefs occur more subtly as they promote certain values and beliefs consistent with those that represent the majority. In the deficit perspective, Dr. Payne (2013) claims there are hidden rules that align with middle class American values and that people living in poverty are seen as dysfunctional with no work ethic, and do not comply with the universal standard of Euro-American values (Hollins, 2008; Payne 2013). In a way, this policies of assimilation and Americanization fostered the beliefs that people needed to be saved from themselves, as seen in the deficit paradigm.

This thinking leads to a deficit paradigm, which impacts how teachers approach education. The individuals themselves rarely acknowledge it, but there is data to support that undertones of racial prejudices arise when teachers educate racially diverse students (Lindsey et al., 2018; Payne, 2013). In this paradigm, racial groups receive blame for their position in life based on their background (Hollins, 2008; Lindsey et al., 2018; Payne, 2013). People in poverty are often seen by some in society as untrustworthy and at times, distasteful (Payne, 2013). Some educators’ perceptions and myths about poverty impact how they approach instruction with their students (Lindsey et al., 2018). Teachers providing instruction can use language to dehumanize oppressed people and thus perpetuate the disparity of power in society (Lindsey et al., 2018). Teachers may have different expectations for minority students, even though they openly reject this concept (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Inequitable expectations result in less intellectually engaging instruction and low-level curriculum utilization (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).
The deficit paradigm negatively impacts the ability of students to make progress in the classroom.

Technical rationality represents another barrier to addressing practices that negatively impact racially diverse students’ education. Technical rationality is when one chooses a particular path because it appears to be technically right but does not reflect a solution that best supports a minority group (Starke et al., 2018). Technically rational decisions often ground themselves in the dominant culture, thus perpetuating oppressive practices that exist, especially those practices involved in administration. Public administrators make technically sound decisions based around language often associated with color-blindness which avoids the topic of race, but these decisions can fail to address social inequities or racist practices (Starke et al., 2018). For example, police officers accused of excessive force against minorities often cite a technically rational argument that they followed the correct procedure (Starke et al., 2018). Technical rationality is born out of a racially moral contract that has been preserved by the nervousness of educators to confront racism (Starke et al., 2018). As educators maintain compliance to technical procedures when faced with racial dilemmas, they can often avoid confronting racism (Starke et al., 2018). For instance, school administrators can choose to focus on the improvement of standardized test scores rather than discussing efforts that address social inequities or racism. Individuals can feel trapped and nervous about change ultimately leading them to resist change and maintain the technical rational approach.

Nervousness and insistence on color blindness act as obstacles to the discussion around racial inequities and prevent changes. The idea of color blindness maintains
racial hierarchies by preventing the discussion around race, thus preserving the status quo (Starke et al., 2018). Educators cannot hide behind color blindness as a methodological approach because it fails to allow the students to see themselves as diverse individuals representing different backgrounds. If the educator fails to acknowledge the racially diverse students in their classroom, it results in a lack of acknowledgment of other cultures stunting the cultural competence of the teacher because they do not create the opportunity to gain new cultural experiences.

Additionally, nervousness leads to a lack of growth. Teachers maneuver or avoid discussing difficult topics that would have them reflect upon their views and beliefs (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Singleton & Linton, 2006). They can avoid discussions and plead ignorance to have someone explain the issues to them through examples rather than confront their consciousness and possibly risk the perception of being racist (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Excuses become a part of the conversation. Individuals attempt to provide examples that try to invalidate the issues or reinforce stereotypes (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). When this happens, teachers classify students into stereotypical groups and evaluate them based on their membership to a particular group (Kim & Slapac, 2015). When this occurs, teachers fail to recognize the individuals in the classroom and disregard their actual experiences. Marginalizing learners in this way leads to students acting out the destructive self-fulfilling prophesy that is associated with the overgeneralized groups the teacher has assigned them to (Kim & Slapac, 2015). Educators at times choose to disengage from the difficult conversations to avoid discussing the real issue and allow themselves to continue negative stereotypical patterns for the sake of nervousness or preventing the risk of embarrassment.
Misconceptions about racially diverse students represents another challenge to the development of cultural competence. Gay and Kirkland (2003) found that some teachers make the common mistake of diverting attention away from the issue rather than reflecting on the topic of race or culture. They also maintain misconceptions about how to address underachievement. Teachers often repeat common trends or offer conventional reasons for underachievement (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Teachers and educators unknowingly or purposefully avoid the subject of race because they feel uncomfortable. They try to shift the focus off of race and onto issues of class or individuality (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Teachers become defensive or misguided in their approach to supporting students from racially diverse backgrounds (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Self-reflection and the development of a critical consciousness help them overcome this barrier (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Still, teachers can become defensive or misguided as they attempt to tackle issues dealing with race in the classroom.

Achievement is another barrier to the development of cultural competence because many educators used it to create a negative narrative around the perceptions of racially diverse students. Without addressing the gap, teachers could neglect to create opportunities to resolve cultural conflicts or misunderstandings and to support the development of empathy to better support student achievement (Tonbuloglu et al., 2016). Some educators’ perceptions of educational achievement meant the totality of racially diverse students reduced them to a test, and it does not represent their value as a person or their identity (Gay, 2018). For example, the Advancement Via Individual Determination project found that student achievement was much higher when the interventions or education included the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the
students as instructional resources along with building social capital that allowed them to cross cultural borders (Gay, 2018). Another study focusing on teachers noted that testing mandates, rigid adherence to curriculum standards, and accountability policies negatively impacted their ability to implement practices associated with culturally responsive teachers (Powell et al., 2016). Negative perceptions around achievement also inhibit teachers from accessing the students as individuals (Gay, 2018). There is something that each of the students in a classroom can do well and, Gay (2018) argues, teachers must learn to recognize, honor, and incorporate various learning abilities into their teaching practice to connect with students. If schools can become more culturally responsive than it will impact the engagement of students in the school, but educators need to overcome their perceptions of achievement being solely based on a test (Gay, 2018).

Research suggests that some educators become conditioned by society to believe and think in a way that reinforces a particular worldview and dominant societal norms. Microaggressions convey hidden denigrating messages about minorities that reinforce dominant societal beliefs and norms (Lindsey et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009). Failure to recognize and accept these hidden messages prevents educators from altering their worldview or consciousness (Lindsey et al., 2018). People of color reported that they experience these regularly in their lives, even from well-intentioned people, because most are unaware they committed an offense (Sue et al., 2009). These offenses become brushed aside, and those who point them out appear overly sensitive towards the issue (Lindsey et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2009). These microaggressions further the negative stereotypes of minorities and make them feel as if they are not respected members of society. The societal patterns associated with race and culture are primarily a concern of
those directly affected by it, and this is due to the hegemonic forces that condition the attitudes and beliefs of others to think this is normal (Noguera, 2008). Many come to think that these negative patterns do not impact them as they perpetuate these negative patterns through unknown actions. These microaggressions promote attitudes of cultural deconstructiveness, cultural incapacity, and cultural blindness (Lindsey et al., 2018).

Beliefs and biases negatively impact the growth of cultural competence because through microaggressions and bias, educators make decisions from a worldview that is reflective of the dominant society since hegemonic forces condition them to think it is normal.

Finally, another major obstacle is implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and the positive and negative associations created unconsciously that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions (Kempf, 2020). Human beings rely on these tendencies created over time to understand and interact with the world (Kempf, 2020).

Kempf (2020) further explains:

We are socialized by and in peer groups, teachers, curriculum, family, traditional media, social media, religion spirituality, etc. Additionally, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, language, immigration status, neurotypicality, ability, and other factors inform and are informed by how we walk through the world, how we experience advantage and disadvantage, how we connect and disconnect with others, etc.

From all of these factors, educators can enact behaviors or use language that can sometimes perpetuate racism and oppressive attitudes. For example, school discipline policies are sometimes impacted by unconscious attitudes and stereotypes, especially when it comes to black males. Teachers and administrators make the decisions based on ideals of behavior management and social control from their unconscious minds which can lead to higher rates of black males being removed from classrooms without considering the unmet needs of the child or the factors that caused the behavior (Noguera,
These automatic and unintentional thoughts, behaviors, or attitudes impact everyone and recognizing that some cause harm is important to altering schematic thought processes.

Many barriers to cultural competence continue exist within society and education. Barriers such as nervousness, institutionalized racism, achievement, implicit bias, and microaggressions prevent individuals from entering and creating spaces to confront issues associated with race and racially diverse students. Systems are reluctant to change because there is a resistance to change, a presumption of privilege, and these systems are at times based on oppression (Lindsey et al., 2019). Schools and organizations still emulate negative core values in their vision and mission statements and continue to fail the promotion of equity (Lindsey et al., 2019). Many barriers exist, but teachers can find responsive methods, practices, systems, and dialogue that can overcome these barriers. Developing cultural competence within teachers allows them to confront their fears, biases, and negative presumptions of students with diverse backgrounds for them to better connect with and teach racially diverse students.

**Current Thinking on Cultural Competence**

Milner wrote: Teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy do so because it is consistent with what they believe and who they are...Teachers practice culturally relevant pedagogy because they believe in it, and they believe it is right to practice to foster, support, create, and enable students’ learning opportunities. (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 199).

Cultural competence is increasingly studied by some researchers as a method of improving the education of African American and Latino students. Research has shown that teachers can increase their cultural competence by first challenging stereotypes and generating discussions around how to develop trust with the students (Roth et al.,
2018). But this is one potential starting point, teachers can continue to develop their
culture competence further and expand upon their ability to influence others. It leads to
culturally responsive pedagogy/instruction that bridges the gap between white teachers
and students with racially diverse backgrounds.

NEA policy briefs provide gateways to change and legitimize the need for change
towards more culturally responsive practices that are undergirded by developing
culturally competent educators. Student diversity in schools continues to increase so
much so that the NEA believes there may be a day when cultural competence has the
same status as computer literacy (NEA, 2008). The NEA believes the responsibility lies
with the teachers and administrators to develop the school environment into one that is
nurturing and welcoming of diversity.

Many researchers continue to study and discuss the importance of cultural
competence. Geneva Gay (2018) wrote about the improvement shown by students when
teachers demonstrate more cultural competence. She wrote about it being a vehicle for
closing the achievement gap. It has the impact to potentially create a more democratic
society because it can help students to learn to challenge the status quo and seek to
change the inequities that exist (Gay, 2018). Linda Darling Hammond recently wrote
about the importance of developing teachers and giving them the tools to build positive
classroom climates that promote social justice and engage the parents (Darling-
Hammond, 2017). Research continues to demonstrate potential opportunities for teachers
to develop their cultural competence and the positive impact it has on racially diverse
students in the classroom.

Others picked up on the idea of developing the cultural competence of educators
and methods of changing schools beyond individuals. Cultural competence can develop with the staff from a top-down approach that begins with trust between the administrators and teachers (Poplack & Dleck, 2018). According to Poplack and Dleck (2018), establishing culturally responsive practices requires a committee in schools that focus on cultural competence and support for the development of democratic leadership skills. Structures and processes can be implemented for teachers to begin to engage in these difficult conversations so that they can develop their cultural competence and alter their practice. Cultural competence continues to remain a topic of discussion as educators continue to look for ways to support the engagement of learners from racially diverse backgrounds.

*Current factors impacting the development of cultural competence.*

Studies conducted found crucial aspects of what it means to have cultural competence, but more research is needed to understand further the process of how teachers become culturally competent. Manuals, books, and articles champion the importance of cultural competence, but more evidence and research continues to uncover multiple layers of the issue of addressing the disparity between racially diverse students and white teachers. Newly uncovered challenges such as neoliberalism prevent change, terms evolve as culturally responsive became culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the impact of youth culture all continue to play a pivotal role in advancing cultural competence in educators teaching racially diverse youth.

Researchers continue to unveil reasons for the lack of incorporation of culturally responsive practices despite many efforts to make them a part of all schools. Neoliberalism is a driving force behind this lack of integration (Sleeter, 2018).
Neoliberalism is a paradigm shift around economic and social ideas and gears policies and reforms towards the ideals of competition and privatization for personal gain (Sleeter, 2018). This approach waters down the efforts towards multicultural education because teacher evaluations feature an additive approach to incorporating multicultural principles (Sleeter, 2018). The adding on of these principles prevents them from becoming ingratiated throughout the evaluation tool thus making them an afterthought towards development. Preparation programs and professional developments become reduced to teaching specific strategies on culturally responsive techniques (Sleeter, 2018). In a system influenced by Neoliberalism, standardized curricula and tests become the driving force behind policies and reforms, reducing the consideration for integrating culture to mere cultural celebrations and one and one activities (Sleeter, 2018, 2012). Societal inequities remain unchallenged in this model. Neoliberalism prevents the building of racial consciousness and ultimately culturally responsive education from taking place (Sleeter, 2018). It is imperative to understand that there are currently driving forces in the world and country that prevent the integration of culturally responsive teachers and practices. Educators can benefit from an understanding of these structures such as neoliberalism as they seek to increase their cultural competence.

*Qualitative research studies on the individual.*

Barriers and strategies remain the focus of many studies completed around cultural competence and culturally responsive instruction. While cultural competence remained and still does a focus for many years, studies tend to focus on strategies and practices that can make someone culturally responsive or competent. Researchers noted this gap in research and believe more support is needed for the development of culturally
competent teachers beyond the implementation of practices and strategies even though they are still relevant.

More recent studies look to address teacher attitudes, actions, and reflections as they develop cultural competence. Cautionary tales of culturally responsive teachers emerged from the data, as researchers analyzed interviews, journals, and observations. Whiteness, white supremacy, and white privilege continue to prevent teachers who perceive themselves as being culturally responsive from being “truly” culturally responsive in fact that they cannot develop cultural competence without first addressing themselves and their position in society (Buehler et al., 2009; Matias, 2013; Takimoto-Amos, 2011). White teachers often shield themselves from racially charged topics, but they must first address their white privilege and move past their anxiety and nervousness often associated with their complicity in them (Buehler et al., 2009; Matias, 2013; Takimoto-Amos, 2011). White teachers need to examine their racial identities and cast off their indifference to white privilege and “re-experience the pain of racism” (Takimoto-Amos, 2011; Matias, 2013, p.78). Studies demonstrated that through teacher observation and reflection, cultural competence remained elusive based on the behaviors and attitudes of the white teachers (Buehler et al., 2009; Matias, 2013; Takimoto-Amos, 2011). Through reflection, white teachers identified the powerful impact their whiteness exhibited on their approach to educating black and brown students (Buehler et al., 2009). Buehler et al. (2009) quoted another study, “It isn't information alone that educates people” (p. 489). These studies on white teachers discovered that unconscious beliefs require in-depth examination and self-reflection before the teacher can further develop their cultural competence.
Reflection emerged as a vital component of the development of cultural competence. Bersh (2018) and Tarver & Herring (2019) conducted studies that concluded critical self-reflection provided gains in cultural competence. Tarver and Herring (2019) found self-reflection provided a safe space for participants to deconstruct the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of culturally responsive practitioners. It further allowed them to experience discomfort as they challenged their white privilege and biases to recognize and empathize with the social realities of others (Tarver & Herring, 2019). The thematic analyses revealed that the participants believed critical self-reflection furthered their development of cultural competence because they worked through their resistance to avoid topics such as racism and by exploring their personal biases to develop empathy for others (Tarver & Herring, 2019). Bersh (2018) reported that the participants believed the gains they made in cultural competence outweighed the discomfort further, outlining the significance that critically examining one’s cultural identity, beliefs, and biases can prove transformative. Self-reflection is a powerful element in the development of cultural competence.

Researchers have studied several ways that cultural competence develops through reflections. Cultural competence intertwines with the work researchers completed on intercultural competence. Reflections are how intercultural competence develops (Dewey, 1974, p.247; Onorati & Bednarz, 2010; Paige, 1993, p. 26). Growth occurs when one reflects upon and questions the clashes in diversity that one experiences within themselves so through self-reflection, transformative learning occurs to create a new consciousness within the individual changing their approach to cultural differences (Onorati & Bednarz, 2010; Paige, 1993 p.26). The process of change takes time and does
not follow a linear pathway. Individuals follow a developmental model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The process is incrementally designed to move from the ethnocentric states of denial, defense, and minimization to the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Paige, 1993, p 29). Reflections move teachers through the ethnorelative stages resulting in changes in their values, actions, and behaviors as they become more accepting of cultural differences and seek to adapt and integrate them (Onorati & Bednarz, 2010; Paige, 1993 p. 66). Paige (1993) wrote, “Development of intercultural sensitivity is ultimately the development of consciousness and, through consciousness, developing a new natural approach to cultural difference” (p.26). Paige believed that through reflections on the self that individuals became capable of advancing their views of cultural differences and thus becoming more culturally sensitive, which creates more opportunities for the integration of cultures into one’s dominant culture (Paige, 1993 p. 26). Simple exposure to difference creates the opportunities necessary for individuals to challenge themselves but each stage requires a certain level of tact to prevent the learners from putting up defenses that slow the process (Paige, 1993, 29). Reflections can allow teachers to become more culturally sensitive to the students in their classrooms and advance their thinking as they process cultural differences.

Caring and respectful relationships with their students further enhance the ability of white teachers to increase their cultural competence. Two white novice teachers reflected on their beliefs and experiences teaching in a racially diverse school setting and found they based their beliefs solely on authority based respect, which is when authority is recognized and enforced through discipline and control (Audley, 2020). Failure to demonstrate care and respect for students can result in hegemonic authority, in some
cases, further recreating structural inequalities and oppression in racially diverse classrooms (Audley, 2020). Audley (2020) stated based on several other studies that:

By not employing culturally competent approaches to student-teacher relationships and classroom expectations, teachers not only reinforce the ethnic achievement gap but prime the school to prison pipeline. When it comes to respect, teachers must consider not only the cultural context of the school and their students but also the history of oppression that their students have experienced as well. (p. 894)

Respect is a relational process developed through teacher-student relationships with a balance of caring and authority (Audley, 2020). Caring involves a student-teacher relationship based on nurturing students socially, intellectually, and morally at the individual and community level (Velasquez et al., 2013). Unfortunately, many teacher preparation programs focus on developing authority in the classroom rather than caring relationships (Audley, 2020). Care and respect become essential building blocks in the development of cultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy.

While there is much research on culturally responsive pedagogy and cultural competence, there remains limited research on how teachers develop cultural competence that is “critical and intentional” (Bersh, 2018, p. 40). There is also limited research between a person’s disposition and cultural competence, and it is crucial to continue to develop research around this area of concern to implement effective changes in the future (Edwards, 2011). Another area lacking much research is how the ethic of care develops between teachers and students, specifically when it deals with race and gender because it is often difficult to measure (O’Conner, 2008; Velasquez et al., 2013). Future research continues to require a deeper understanding of how white teachers confront their white privilege, develop culturally competent behaviors, and how they develop connections with racially diverse students.
Researchers Provide the Next Steps

Most researchers agree that there is still much work to be done in the field of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and now culturally sustaining pedagogy (Howard & Minkoff; 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Sleeter, 2018). Teachers could benefit from trying to find new methods of teaching to expose students to critical social issues such as social injustice and dynamics of power in society (Howard & Minkoff, 2017; Sleeter, 2018). But first, they need to overcome barriers such as nervousness, institutionalized racism, achievement, implicit bias, and microaggressions. There needs to be a safe space to dialogue with others about cultural differences and valuing others while confronting the barriers and reflecting on the contradictions it may create in one’s thinking.

Rasmussen and Sieck outlined nine competencies that can support educators in their development of a cultural competence. As long as researchers continue to uncover more significant connections between culturally responsive pedagogical practices and students of color there is going to continue to be a need for further research and development that leads to higher levels of cultural competence among educators. Many studies focus on the competencies and development but few specifically targeted white teachers teaching racially diverse students and even fewer took the perspective of the students into account. My research uncovers the development of six white educators’ journey towards cultural competence by analyzing their experiences and how it impacts instructional practices in the classroom. Secondly, I reveal the connections that exists between white teachers, who expressed higher levels of cultural competence, and racially diverse students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In a school with a student population that is almost 60% Hispanic, 38% Black or African American, and 2% Asian, it is essential that a teaching staff comprised of slightly over 70% white teachers seek to bridge the cultural gap that exists between teachers and students. This exploratory study looked at the process by which white teachers increased their cultural competence and connected with racially diverse students. Measuring the process by which attitudes and beliefs change is challenging to quantify; thus, multiple qualitative measures answered the questions targeted in this study.

Using a qualitative research design, I studied practitioners at one school through surveys, interviews, observations, and lesson plan reviews to answer the following questions. I also utilized a focus group to gain further insights into the second research question.

Research Question 1: How do a selection of teachers who are white develop their cultural competence to implement culturally responsive practices in the classroom as they work in urban environments?

- Sub-Question 1: What beliefs do they hold, and what teaching strategies do they employ to bridge the gap between their cultures and the cultures of their students?

My goal with this question and the sub-question is to uncover how teachers who are white teaching in urban environments alter their practices to incorporate more culturally responsive practices to engage racially diverse students. The questions sought
to unearth how the teachers develop their cultural competence to become more aware of how issues surrounding diversity impact their practice in the classroom. Through this study, others can view examples of how teachers worked to bridge the gap between themselves and the students they teach.

Sub-Question 2: In what ways do students of each of these teachers feel connected to their teachers based upon the strategies they use and the cultural knowledge they bring to bear on their work?

A student focus group provided data that answered how teachers connect with students and the strategies used to establish those connections. The second sub-question allowed for the collection of data about the students’ understanding of how they perceive a teacher who is trying to support and empower them through practices identified by people such as Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings. The student focus group described how they felt the teachers connected their backgrounds to the materials, projects, and assignments in class, and the impact that resulted.

The qualitative design provided an in-depth exploration of how teachers perceive themselves when it comes to cultural competence, how they demonstrate it in the classroom, and how it impacts their ability to connect with the students. A critical component of being culturally competent requires an awareness of one’s positionality; if teachers are not aware of it, then it is unlikely they will demonstrate successful practices and attitudes (Ponterotto et al., 1998). Teachers shared their level of awareness and how it impacts their practice and relationships with the students through interviews, observations, and the survey.

Setting.
The study took place in a charter school system in an urban school district. While the charter system manages many different schools, the study took place at the high school. The high school is considered a Renaissance Charter High School. The urban district described a renaissance charter school as a neighborhood school that operates as a public charter school and can only enroll students from the local catchment zone (Charter Schools Office, 2019). These schools intend to transform neighborhood schools by improving academics and their behavioral climates so that students have an efficacious school close to their home (Charter Schools Office, 2019). The high school houses about 2,000 students from racially diverse backgrounds, but the student body predominately identifies as Hispanic or African American.

The researcher works at the high school in the district in a leadership position as the director of special education. Some teachers rely on the director of special education for increasing their differentiated practices and to advocate for those with disabilities. The director actively supports many of the teachers with any challenges that occur with students with disabilities, both academically and behaviorally.

Sample.

The population of interest consisted of a select group of teachers based on their identified race and responses to a multicultural survey. Purposeful sampling from the results of a baseline survey determined which regular education teachers during the 2019-2020 school year participated further in the study. The teachers selected demonstrated higher levels of multicultural awareness and cultural competence, which further narrowed the sample down to a select number of teachers. Focusing on a relatively small group of teachers provides an understanding of this complex issue (Mertens, 2015).
Ninety-six volunteers participated in the survey about their attitudes towards multicultural awareness and sensitivity. The results revealed six individuals whom all scored in the top quartiles of the questionnaire administered. The top-scoring participants who identified as white partook in interviews and classroom observations. Ten total teachers who identified as white scored highly enough to be among the top-scoring participants on the survey. The sample was further narrowed down based on one of the ten leaving the school, one declined to participate, and two were teaching for their first time in the building. Each of the remaining six teachers agreed to participate in the study.

The remaining six educators allowed for the determination of patterns between their experiences and practices along with a discussion of the potential connections. The sample represents about 6% of the teacher population at the school. The participants consisted of one male and five females which is representative of the educator population at the school. One of the teacher participants was between the ages of 20-25, three were between the ages of 26-30, and two were 31 years old and older. The participants had between 2 and 10 years of teaching experience. Each of the participants earned a teaching certificate in their respective areas. Two of the teachers have secondary certifications in English as a Second Language. Five out of the six teacher participants grew up suburban areas with the remaining teacher growing up in Philadelphia.

Several students from each of the teachers’ classes volunteered to participate in the focus group. The student focus groups provided further details and data around the
day to day context of participating in the classroom of the selected teachers and their own experiences (Leyerzapf & Abma, 2017). The participating teachers and I randomly generated a group of students from a larger group that had 70% or higher attendance from each of the teachers’ classes. The teachers each teach, on average, 150 students. From the 150 students of each of the teachers, I was able to obtain consent from the parents and assent from the students so that ten student volunteers could participate in the student focus group. The ten students who volunteered to participate in the student focus group identified themselves as being Hispanic, African American/Black, and Asian. Five of the students identified as Hispanic, four as African American/Black, and one as Asian.

To obtain access to the participants, I sought permission from the Superintendent, Principals, and Assistant Principals of the schools. Once they agreed upon the parameters of the study, I asked the teachers if they would like to participate via email. The email included a link to the survey. An agreement with the principals allowed the teachers to have time to participate in the study. Both the teachers and administrators granted me access to their classrooms for the observations. I created schedules with the teachers to spread out the three observations of each classroom throughout the observational study period. The variety of data collection methods should provide for a higher degree of triangulation, further supporting the validity of the study (Mertens, 2015). I used lesson plans, interviews, surveys, and a focus group to gather results that could identify the specific codes and themes to attempt to answer my research questions.

**Data Collection Methods**

I collected data through qualitative research methods frequently used in this type of research. I conducted interviews, administered a cultural competence survey,
completed observations and field notes, and conducted a student focus group. The various methods of data collection provided multiple sources of data that can either corroborate or refute the findings and interpretations of the data (Mertens, 2015). The participants understood the goals of the study and the multiple forms of data collection used helped to increase validity (Mertens, 2015).

The Multicultural Attitude Teacher Survey determined which teachers exhibited qualities or attitudes that would be consistent with someone who viewed multicultural education in a positive light (Ponterotto et al., 1998). In a validation study, the TMAS demonstrated that it had a robust single-factor model when it came to multicultural awareness and sensitivity (Ponterotto et al., 1998). The researcher selected the teachers who demonstrated more positive responses to multicultural attitudes. Teachers who did not respond positively to the incorporation of multicultural attitudes could not participate further in the study. Teachers deemed eligible for the study identified as white, score above a 75 on the survey Likert Scale, and they must have taught for at least one year. Special education teachers did not participate in the interview and observation aspects of the study. In my position, I have oversight over special education, and while I do not complete their evaluations, I would not want them influenced by my position. Teachers excluded from the study included those that scored below 75 on the survey Likert Scale and if they identified as having a diverse racial or ethnic background.

No identifying names or nicknames were used in the data collection process to prevent the discovery of the identity of the individuals. I shared with the participants that no members of the administrative team at the school have access to any of the
information collected. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study to protect the participants. A numbered ID system identified the interview data, observations, and assessments collected during the study. The actual names are only known to me.

**Surveys.**

I emailed a Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS) to all of the teachers in the building. The Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey measured teachers’ comfort, sensitivity, and awareness of cultural pluralism in the classroom (Ponterotto et al., 1998). It has a Likert-scale that includes a continuum between strongly agree and strongly disagree to measure the teachers’ attitudes and perceptions towards statements designed to assess teachers’ understanding of multiculturalism (Green Rogers, 2012). The developers used an ethnically diverse team to create the survey, and other researchers choose it based on its reported reliability and validity (Green Rogers, 2012). The survey consisted of 28 questions in all. The first 7 questions attempted to gain an understanding of the participants’ backgrounds and experiences. The next 21 questions captured the participants’ attitudes toward multicultural education based on a variety of culturally pluralistic scenarios. The responses to the 21 questions determined the participants’ scores and subsequent rank. Once ranked, the first 7 questions eliminated any participants who met the exclusion criteria listed earlier. The participants completed the survey via Google Forms from an email that went out to the staff. A sample of the survey is located in Appendix C.

**Semi-structured interview methodology.**

Studying these teachers through semi-structured interviews provided a detailed description of their beliefs and experiences as it related to how they approach and have
approached educating racially diverse students (O’Brien, Tuohy, Fahy, & Markey, 2017). I conducted interviews to determine the six teachers’ perceptions about their cultural competence, its importance, and what strategies, methods, or practices they believe constituted culturally responsive teaching. The semi-Structured Interviews utilized broader questions at first and also included sub questions sometimes generated from the participants’ responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews conducted with six teachers lasted about 45 to 60 minutes. The interview format was semi-structured, and the questions were informed by those used by Gloria Ladson-Billings, who completed a similar study on effective practices used by teachers who are working with young African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Other questions, derived from the 8 principles of cultural competence identified by Rasmussen and Sieck (2015), added multiple research-based layers to the tool. These 8 principles provided the larger construct of the questions and sub-questions demonstrated how teachers believed they arrived at certain conclusions or became influenced by different events and people. A sample of the interview questions can be found in the table below.

Table 3: Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tell me about your family background.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective Taking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Pick one student from your current class and describe how you think they view their connection with you and your classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do you see things from the perspective of your students? How do you step into their shoes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has your thinking changed after working with your students? How have you become more accepting of cultural differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How has your relationships with your students and their families influenced your approach to teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Have there been any specific instances that you can recall that challenged your thinking about instruction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American or Hispanic students?

a. How would you describe the types of relationships you’ve had with parents of students you’ve taught?

b. How have these relationships influenced your approach in the classroom?

8. How do you think the schooling experience of students you teach differs from that of white middle class communities?

**Cultural Knowledge**

9. A student tells you that you do not understand where they are coming from. How would you respond to that student?

10. How have you developed knowledge of your student’s cultural backgrounds?

11. How do you use cultural knowledge to explain student behaviors?

12. How do you think your students make decisions?

a. What thought processes or logic do you think they utilize when making decisions?

13. Can you think of any characteristics that your students as a group bring to the classroom?

14. If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be more effective with African American and Hispanic students, what changes would you make?

a. What experiences, values, or attitudes make you think these changes are necessary?

b. Were these developed over time or is it based off of a one-time experience?

15. Tell me about an interaction you have had with a student’s family that has influenced your approach to teaching.

a. What were the specifics that you can recall that challenged your thinking about instruction?

b. How would you describe the kinds of relationships you’ve had with parents of students you’ve taught?

c. How have these relationships influenced your approach in the classroom?

**Cultural Sensemaking**

16. A student often talks in class and shares his or her opinions with the group. Based on the cultural background of the student how could this behavior be interpreted from two different cultural aspects?

17. How do you handle discipline?

a. Are there special things that teachers of African American and Hispanic students should know about discipline?

18. Tell me about a time when you felt proud of a student’s performance.

b. How do you reflect upon the unknown or ambiguous behavior?

19. Tell me about the strategies you use to better understand behaviors that occur in your classroom?

a. What did you learn from this interaction?

b. How did this interaction change your behavior?

**Self Presentation**

20. How do you address your own cultural norms when it comes to interacting with the students?

21. Does your body language change or alter between your home life and your work life? Do you use different methods of verbal communication or body language when addressing students than your teachers in high school did with you?

22. How do you present yourself to the students?

**Language Proficiency**

23. A student tells you that they did not complete that “jawn.” How do you respond?

24. What patterns are you aware of when it comes to generating and maintaining a conversation with your students within the social context of school?

25. What greetings or expressions have helped you develop a rapport with students? Are these the same ones you use in your social life?
The teachers chose their classrooms as the environment for the interviews so that they might feel relaxed and comfortable. The idea behind the choice was that this would allow them to be more at ease with the questions and answer them more openly and honestly. The teachers had the option to complete the interview after school, during their prep period, or during grade group time on Wednesdays. 4 out of 6 of the teachers chose to complete the interview during the Wednesday afternoon early release times. One teacher decided to complete the interview of multiple prep periods. The final teacher
decided to start the interview on a Wednesday afternoon and then complete the rest of the interview during their prep. I was careful to respect the participant’s time to ensure full cooperation and allow them time to respond thoughtfully to each of the questions.

The researcher explained the interview process to the participants before the interviews took place. At the start of the interviews, I assured the participants of the confidentiality of their responses and any other potential interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word based on the guidelines outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018). The interviews provided a valuable piece of the study that afforded insights into the levels of cultural competence that teachers possess and how they gained it. Member checks ensured that the data collected accurately reflected the position of the participants (Mertens, 2015). The participants had the opportunity to examine the transcription and interpretation of their responses to provide any further points of clarification (Mertens, 2015).

Observations methodology.

Observations are a commonly used practice in qualitative studies and provided this study with supporting information that further informed the themes found in the surveys and interviews. I observed six teachers three times each in an attempt to see how they implemented the strategies, methods, and practices discussed in their interviews. Each of the teachers was observed three times for 60 minutes each. The times and days of the observations for each teacher occurred over several weeks to schedule them during times that benefited for the study. I avoided test days, quiz days, and independent workdays. The staggering of class periods observed provided more of a variety of the observed teachers interactions with different groups of students. The observations noted
interactions, characteristics, dialogue, decision making, and cultural differences in the classrooms (Mertens, 2015). Each of the data collection methods provided insights and meaningful data that provided answers to the central research questions.

Observations of each of the participant’s lesson plans and classrooms further validated the data collected from the interviews and the surveys. The Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP) is a framework that focuses on seven essential elements of culturally responsive instruction (Powell et al., 2016). CRIOP centers the observations around the following elements: classroom relationships, family collaboration, assessment, curriculum, instruction, discussions, and sociopolitical consciousness/diverse perspectives (Powell et al., 2016). The CRIOP model addresses a need to determine the effectiveness of culturally responsive instruction in the class and has shown promise as an observational tool (Powell et al., 2016). An observational protocol developed from this tool created a comprehensive model for observing culturally responsive instruction in the classroom for this study. The observations allowed me to confirm the data collected during the interviews and eliminate any potential for deception (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The observations took place over several weeks with each participant getting observed three times each for one entire class period each time. Three observations on each teacher allowed me to get a better understanding of how the teachers consistently implement practices that they discussed in their interviews. Observations informed the researcher about the teachers’ abilities to implement practices and attitudes that are consistent with their interviews and surveys.

*Student focus group.*
In the student focus group, the students responded to the activities, lessons, and how the teacher connects with them in class. The students provided a unique perspective on their classrooms and further data that informed the impact of the teachers’ responses.

A student focus group determined how students perceive the connections the teacher has made with them based on culturally implemented practices and attitudes in their classrooms. The focus group provided a different perspective on how the teachers connected with the students. The student responses served as another source of data to help provide a context for interpreting the findings from the survey, interviews, and observations. The purpose of the focus group provided more than the member participants’ point of view but how they reacted to one another and responded to differing points of view (Mertens, 2015). Noguera (2008) found that all of the students in a particular study had a sense of what they needed from their teachers and what interested them. Learners can identify how positive connections to their backgrounds can correlate with promoting academic engagement (Byrd & Chavous, 2011). The student focus group provided insights into how their teachers have implemented various practices and methods into the classroom, and if the students connected with the instructor as a result.

The student focus group participants, purposefully selected from the various teachers’ classes, provided data that demonstrated how teachers enact cultural competence, and connect with students. I utilized the class lists from each of the teachers to create larger groups of students based on their gender and race. Students with less than 70% attendance did not meet the criteria to participate because they might not have enough exposure to the teacher’s attitudes and practices in the classroom. I attempted to get a sample that could be equal parts male and female as well as have the inclusion of
different races. Students chosen at random from each of the teachers’ classes based on above groups created one group. The focus group fashioned from students who volunteered from the randomly generated lists provided their input and perceptions of their school and their teachers.

The questions for the focus groups originated from the ones utilized in the Los Angeles Unified School District during a school review process. I selected questions from their examples that had relevance to this study. The students participated in a series of questions as a group to ascertain their perspective on how the teachers connect with them through instruction and other ways. The questions utilized in this study for the student focus group can be referenced in the table below.

Table 4: Student Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How does your teacher talk about issues of diversity? (Define diversity for students.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does your teacher attempt to connect with you as an individual?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What makes the relationship successful or unsuccessful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Tell me about activities that you really enjoyed and why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Tell me about a time when you felt like a valuable member of the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you ever feel respected or disrespected in your classroom? If so, which one and why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How safe do you feel sharing ideas in your classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Tell me about a time when you had to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How well do you think the teacher understands you as an individual?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What makes you think this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Tell me some examples you have of this from class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How does your teacher respond to your behaviors in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Can you think of any specific examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Do you feel free to be yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How often does the teacher create activities that demonstrate knowledge of your cultural background within the class material?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What examples can you think of?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What do you know about your teacher’s cultural background?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Does this impact your relationship with the teacher?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. How does the teacher respond when you are talking to your friends or discussing topics in class?
   a. How does it make you feel when the teacher uses words like “jawn, pound, mines, etc.”?
10. When you have an activity or an assignment, do you know why you are doing it?
    a. How do you know?
    b. Are there times when you are asked to think about differences in the material as it relates to your own experiences?
11. Does the teacher encourage you to incorporate your home life in projects?
    a. Can you talk about a time when you learned about each other’s backgrounds?
    b. How did this experience impact your view of the other students and teacher?
12. How do your teacher address issues that are currently going on in the community or country?
    a. How does your teacher address controversial topics?
13. Think of a time when you were “in your feelings.” How did the teacher support you?
14. Given this (project or assignment from class specifically chosen CRT example), how did this activity help you to relate to the teacher and the classroom?

Adapted from sample focus group questions retrieved from the Los Angeles Unified School District website https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/11783.

Data Analysis

A coding system was developed based on the central themes that emerged from the data. Quotes, descriptions, and examples began to amplify specific patterns during the data analyzation process. I divided the interview responses into the eight essential elements of cultural competence. Codes from existing studies formed the basis for the data analysis at the start, but during the data review, newer codes emerged, and others became redefined. I built detailed descriptions of the codes to develop themes and make sense of the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The work of Rasmussen and Sieck (2015), specific components of cultural competence identified by Deardorff (2006), and Aronson and Laughter’s (2016) work on coding the research of Gay and Ladson-Billings provided the preconfigured codes for this study. Prefigured codes helped to serve as a
guide, but I was also open to the development of new codes during the data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The prefigured codes came from other studies that looked at cultural competence and how these attitudes, actions, and thought processes evolved. Examples of some of the prefigured codes included: critical consciousness, cultural sense-making, perspective taking, critical reflection, and relationships. Newer codes emerged during the coding, and some of the definitions of the original codes transformed. An example of merging codes came about when sociopolitical consciousness became a primary code after spawning from critical consciousness and social justice codes. Critical consciousness prevailed throughout the data, along with social justice. The combination of these codes became one in the form of a newly defined code called sociopolitical consciousness. The two shared similar elements in that critical consciousness meant the teacher knew of societal forces, and when combined with the elements of social justice that involved addressing themes of oppression and privilege, it formed as sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness became the primary form of coding for these instances when they arose in the data. Some of the newer emerging codes included care/trust, exposure, and student collaboration. Document memos helped to inform the codes developed as well as serve as a review of the ideas generated from the multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Coding and memos supported the analysis of the content, language, pedagogical practices, teaching methods, and connections with the students of the educators participating in this study.

I utilized prior researched codes and newly developed ones to compare the codes from each teacher to determine if any relevant themes surfaced. A cross case analysis of
the data created interpretations of universal codes present within each of the cases. Before I cross-referenced the data, a within-case analysis assisted in a data review of each selected participant. The teachers that participated in the study had their responses coded individually. A within-case analysis is a description of each case and the themes that reveal themselves within the specific case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next step involved analyzing across the cases to determine patterns and themes. A cross case analysis occurs when the researcher reviews multiple cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes are analyzed across the cases to determine commonalities and differences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis that took place led to similar resulting codes and, thus, major themes present within each case.

An adaptation of the Culturally Responsive Observational Tool (CRIOP) supported the analysis of the observations. The CRIOP is an observational tool used to measure the cultural responsiveness of a classroom, and it includes seven elements that determine how often culturally responsive practices occurred in the participants’ classrooms. Each of the participants received a score using the model, and then the scores reaffirmed the codes from the interviews. The data collected from the CRIOP supported the findings that occurred during the interviews and focus groups. For example, one of the seven elements of the CRIOP is sociopolitical consciousness/diverse perspectives. The occurrence of this element supported the claims of a similar corresponding code that appeared during the analysis of the transcribed interviews. The model determined the frequency of the culturally responsive practices during the observations and was used to support the corresponding data in the interviews.
Lesson plans supported further specific examples of the codes and themes that became evident during the data review of the interviews. The lesson plans provided insights into the examples discussed during the interviews as well as the environmental context. The lesson plans also detailed more specific examples to discuss with the students’ during the focus group. The student focus group discussed classroom activities and behaviors that arose from the interviews and observations. Examples from the students’ classes assisted the students in answering the questions, which allowed them to respond more appropriately.

The focus group data revealed similar codes used at the starting point of the analysis. The codes originated from the same ones utilized to start the data analysis process for the teacher interviews. Relationships, sociopolitical consciousness, and critical reflection became the foundation of the initially chosen codes. Newer codes such as trust and care surfaced during the teacher interviews also emerged during the focus group analysis. Similar themes and patterns existed between the teachers and the students, but the student focus group also offered additional insights beyond the ones originally gleaned during the teacher interviews. At the conclusion of coding analysis, I created four themes to serve my findings.

**Researcher Role**

As the primary source of data collection in this study, I needed to clarify my position and provide clear boundaries that allowed the participants to provide accurate information voluntarily. I am an administrator at the school in a racially diverse setting studying the cultural competence of teachers, which could have made the participants uneasy. They could have felt intimidated by my title even though I do not directly
oversee them. The participants could have felt compelled to answer in a manner that they believed would be viewed as favorable for the study. Because I lead a department that is not directly related to the participants and have no supervisory role over them, they could have felt more comfortable about their participation in the study. Since I do not influence their job performance ratings, it could have allowed them to feel free to act and respond in a manner they felt was appropriate. The participants could have provided answers that they believe the administration or as I the researcher would want to hear on the topic rather than their own opinions. They could have feared being wrong or judged and participated in a limited basis or by providing vague feedback.

I believe that because I do not directly supervise the teachers and since it was voluntary, I provided an environment to obtain the most accurate responses from the teachers. I believe this was accurate because not every teacher participated in the study, and not every teacher responded to all of the questions. It appeared the teachers responded to the questions honestly as some of the responses indicated attitudes of someone who did not believe that culturally responsive instruction is an essential part of education. Not all of the responses from the participants in the interviews displayed data that prominent figures in the field of culturally responsive instruction would find agreeable. The answers provided assisted in the determination of how they developed their cultural competence. I explained to each of them the study sought to understand their process towards growing more culturally competent, which could have allowed them to feel less threatened by my position as a researcher and an administrator.

Even though I am in a position of authority, I reassured the interviewees that I am only there to collect data on how they exhibit cultural competence to demonstrate best
practices for others to improve the educational experiences of the students who are present in our building. My role in the school is one of support because of my work in special education. The teachers have had the opportunity to see how I support the students regularly, especially those who present challenges both behaviorally and academically, and this could lead them to believe that I am trying to better help the students in the building through completing this study. Transparency about the aim of the made it possible for the teachers to develop a level of comfortability with the information discussed to encourage them to participate with fidelity in the study. I made it a point to reassure all the participants again that any data collected was completely anonymous, and only significant implications, themes, and codes of the study would become public.

My position as an administrator at the school had the potential to influence the answers provided by the students during the focus group. The students received a thorough explanation of the study, and I reassured them that anything they said in the group would remain confidential. Some students might experience some discomfort talking about their teachers if they thought the teacher might find out. To protect confidentiality and ensure civility, I discussed norms before the meeting to ensure that the students remained respectful towards one another but that they also knew to speak honestly, if they felt inclined to talk. I assured them that they might not all share the same opinion or have the same feelings but that it was okay to disagree with someone else but to share their reasoning why. I fretted that I would not get open and honest answers from the students due to my position. It took a couple of questions and a few braver students to speak up, but once they did, the rest of the students followed suit. The
students seemed to forget I was an administrator and spoke freely about themselves, their teachers, teachers from their past, and lesson activities. The students appeared to hold little back during the focus group and even asked for more questions along with if they could do this regularly. The data collected could have been influenced by my position as an administrator, but based on the student responses, in my opinion, it did not appear to be a barrier.

In a study that focuses on the development of cultural competence, I believe it is necessary to clarify further my journey and what has led me to this point. I grew up in a suburban, rural area that did not much have diversity when it came to race. My experiences growing up and through college was very much the same. I had limited exposure to different cultures and knew very little about the issues experienced by people from diverse backgrounds. It was not until I began teaching in an inner-city school in Philadelphia that I began to realize how little I knew of others, their experiences, and other cultures. My position as a white man growing up in a suburban environment should be noted as it is a lens that I view the world through for many years. I am working on growing my cultural competence and approach, but it is something that I am cognizant of due to my background and experiences. It is easy to default to an original schema when one is stressed or does not understand something. Education can be a stressful field, given high stakes testing and other demands often put on educators. I have to continue to make sure that I account for the cultural backgrounds of the students, oppressive practices that continue to exist, and the multitude of other issues that can arise when culture meets education.

Limitations of the Study
A few limitations arose from the study. My role as an administrator, as well as someone who grew up in a suburban environment, can impact my approach to the data because I am analyzing it from my lens. I needed to be aware of my lens when analyzing the data to try not to distort the interpretations based on the very issue I sought to understand further. I had to be careful that my interpretations centered on the research.

An impact on the data could also come from the time of year the study took place. I collected data over several months during the middle of the school year. The teachers and students participated in two state testing windows, and there was a seventeen-day winter break during the data collection process. The gap in instruction and routine represents a barrier that could impact the data. The teachers could exhibit fatigue from the holidays or testing schedule, and their lessons could not represent their best work. The students and teachers could have experienced testing fatigue, anxiety due to the frequent changes in schedules, and possibly ambivalence towards participation because the semester was closing, which always coincides with additional work.

The data represented a limitation as well. The data collected from the student focus group did not completely align with the teachers’ interpretations of classroom activities and teacher connections. A follow up interview with the teachers might provide further insights into their development when they learn how the students felt about their classrooms. These represent a few of the limitations that are present in this study.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative study investigated how a group of white teachers developed their cultural competence while teaching in an urban environment consisting predominantly of students who are Hispanic or African American. It also explored how students connected with these teachers based on instructional practices, attitudes, and approaches in their classrooms. The next few sections report the results. While some of the conclusions reinforce current work by Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings, other findings delve deeper into the individual participant’s journey towards cultural competence. My findings yielded four themes that describe how the teachers developed their cultural competence. The second sub-question is addressed by analyzing the students’ voices. The student focus group provided a unique perspective to the results that brought further understanding of their teacher’s ability to connect with the students.

The results move through several distinct sections. First, in their brief bios, the teachers revealed their feelings about their multicultural attitudes. After presenting these teacher descriptions, I explain how multiple themes arose as I analyzed the data to answer my first research question. A description and evidence supporting each of the four themes follows after the introduction of the cross case analysis. After an explanation of the themes based on the data collected from the teachers to answer my primary research question, I cover how the student focus groups supported various evidence from the teachers but also how it provided some evidence that diverged from the teacher’s perspectives to answer my second sub-question. Four themes became evident across the
data collected throughout this study and exemplified how these white teachers increased their cultural competence. The student focus group produced evidence to support the four themes and demonstrated how teachers connected with students from racially diverse backgrounds through the themes.

**Teacher Demographics and Profiles**

As mentioned in chapter 3, the survey administered, Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey (TMAS), served to support the identification of teachers who demonstrate higher levels of positive attitudes towards multicultural education. This survey is not an indicator of how their cultural competence developed, but it narrowed down the potential sample for this study to those who have favorable attitudes towards multicultural education. The results indicated that the performance of the individuals selected as study participants rose above the average of those within the potential sample who participated in the survey.

The overall average score on the survey determined who would participate further in the study. Ninety-six teachers received the survey, and forty-two of the teachers responded. 43.75% of the surveys returned completed. 63.4% of the surveys represented female responses, and 35.7% represented male responses. 57.1% of the responding group reported their age range as over 31 years of age, 26.2% reported between 26-30 years of age, and 16.7% averaged between 20-25 years of age. From this data, I gathered background demographics on the teachers, such as their exposure to multicultural education, age, gender, and level of certification.

The following tables specifically address the comparisons between the selected teachers and the entire group of responding teachers. Likert scale averages provided
statistical analysis and a data presentation to acknowledge the comparison of the data (Miller & Salkind, 2002; Urdan, 2010). The whole group of responding teachers includes results from teachers who did not identify as being white. The focus of the study is on white teachers, but comparing their results to others demonstrated the significance of why the teachers selected provided the best data to answer the research questions. The six participants scored a total average of 88.66 out of 100 when it came to their responses on TMAS. The average overall score of the group responses came to 84.07.

Table 5. Average Score Comparisons

I chose the sample group based on their higher than average scores of the entire sample size because these participants had the potential to provide data that could answer the research questions.

The participants all represent unique individuals from different backgrounds. Each of them identified as Caucasian. How individuals think and process information is informed by the places they grew up, the people they encountered, and the sociopolitical circumstances that influenced them. Their backgrounds provided context to the data.
collected and played a role in the formulation of a new thought process around the development of a sociopolitical consciousness. As the participants became more aware of themselves and the students, it increased their desire to create student focused approaches in the classroom because they cared for and respected the students on a level that reached beyond the expectation that is often assumed in some classrooms that students need to give respect to get respect.

Ms. Bennett is white and attended k-12 schooling in a suburban environment in Southeastern Pennsylvania. She is part of a large Irish family that enjoyed getting together during the holidays and for other events. Family relationships became a crucial aspect of her life. Ms. Bennett attended a local university and graduated with an English degree and a certification to teach secondary English. She is in her tenth year of teaching. Ms. Bennett expressed the importance of family and that becoming a teacher was her first choice of careers when graduating from college.

Ms. Austen was born in Philadelphia but grew up in a neighboring suburb. Ms. Austen is white and has a background that gave her lots of exposure to different cultures. She was educated in another country for several years and had to learn a new language as well as perform academically. The father of Ms. Austen is a teacher in culturally diverse environments. Ms. Austen has had exposure to racially diverse people throughout different periods of her life and developed a strong sense of education and commitment to international relations. Ms. Austen graduated from a local university with a degree in international relations. She also obtained a master's degree in social studies and teaching. Ms. Austen is in her fourth year of teaching history in an ESOL environment.
Throughout her life, Ms. Austen had various cultural experiences from interactions with her father and through being an ESOL student themselves.

Ms. Roosevelt grew up in Southeastern Pennsylvania in a diverse, suburban environment. Her parents grew up in an urban center and exposed Ms. Roosevelt, who is white, to many different aspects of an urban environment. Her grandparents immigrated to the US from Germany, so her family lineage is relatively newer to the country. Ms. Roosevelt attended a local university and studied to be an ESOL teacher. She also completed her graduate work at the same local university and is currently working on an additional certification. Ms. Roosevelt is in her third year of teaching. She grew up in an environment that took pride in the diverseness of her region and had a strong focus on pursuing a teaching career.

Ms. Cowan is white and grew up in a suburban environment with both of her parents in a close family unit. Ms. Cowan is the second of two kids in her family and reported that she had a relatively normal childhood. She stated that her great grandparents immigrated from Europe but did not know the reason why. Ms. Cowan obtained her degree in teaching from a local university. She is currently in her third year of teaching English in an urban environment. Ms. Cowan always knew she wanted to be a teacher, and she earned her Bachelor’s degree in English with a concentration in secondary education.

Ms. Frank grew up in a suburb in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Ms. Frank said that her parents describe themselves as 100% Irish but do not necessarily believe this to be accurate as she thought there was probably some Welsh in her family bloodline given her father’s last name. Ms. Frank went to school in Central Pennsylvania for college and
obtained an undergraduate degree in writing. She went to a college in Northeastern Pennsylvania to become a teacher and earned her certification in ESOL. Ms. Frank has been teaching in an ESOL environment for five years.

Mr. Campbell grew up in a suburban environment in Northeastern Pennsylvania and believed it was a great place to grow up. Mr. Campbell described the area as homogenous. Mr. Campbell explained how invested his family was in all of his endeavors, but he needed to move on after graduating high school. He graduated from a college in Central Pennsylvania and studied anthropology and sociology. After Mr. Campbell’s undergraduate work, he joined a master's degree teaching program at a local university that focused on educating youth in an urban environment. His concentration of studies included mathematics at the secondary level. Mr. Campbell has been teaching for ten years and has a strong focus on educating racially diverse youth in Philadelphia.

**Themes Developed Through A Cross Case Analysis**

This next section discusses the four themes developed from the cross case analysis I carried out to answer my primary research question. The four themes include:

1) teachers acknowledge and appreciate racially diverse backgrounds and points of view,
2) teachers value a sociopolitical consciousness by reflecting on, assessing, and overcoming biases pertaining to cultural differences, oppressive practices, and privilege,
3) teachers implement student focused instructional approaches that involve student discourse, collaboration, and engagement at various levels, and 4) teachers care and develop trusting, respectful relational relationship with their students, and how this contributed to their cultural competence and how it affected their connections with racially diverse students. Rasmussen and Sieck (2015) discussed how individuals alter
their mindsets based on experience, and in the case of my participants, the evidence demonstrated that experience did play a role in how they increased their cultural competence (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003; Sieck, Smith, & Rasmussen, 2013). While there are four distinct themes in this study, some of the examples presented are multilayered and could possibly fall under more than one category.

Table 6: Themes Across Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1: Teachers acknowledge and appreciate racially diverse backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2: Teachers value a Sociopolitical Consciousness by reflecting on, assessing, and overcoming biases pertaining to cultural differences, oppressive practices, and privilege.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3: Teachers implement Student Focused instructional approaches that involve student discourse, collaboration, and engagement at various levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4: Teachers care and develop a trusting, respectful relational relationship with their students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The four themes resulted from codes utilized from other studies along with ones specifically created during the data analysis process of this research project. General codes from other studies served as a basis at the start of the coding process but through the analysis of the data collected, the codes took on different meanings that directly aligned across each case. Codes from previous studies helped foster the synthesis of data but newer codes emerged that reflected the value of the four major themes as they related to the cultural competence development of the six participating teachers. While three of the major themes represent previously uncovered elements from other studies, each of
them arose from specific examples within the data that became generalized into the findings above. Analysis of the specific examples collected filtered the codes down to four specific themes. In the first theme, the data displayed several examples of the teachers making efforts to know their students’ backgrounds and implement elements of them in the classroom. Through the analysis of these examples, it became clear that the teachers acknowledged and appreciated their students’ diverse backgrounds. Theme #2 resulted from the frequent incorporation of global and societal factors in classroom activities that utilized both the students position and the teachers position in society. It started with the primary code of a critical consciousness but evolved into a sociopolitical consciousness based on the larger societal elements associated with differing world views. Each teacher utilized multiple activities that promoted discussions, collaboration, and engagement resulting in several codes that led to the creation of Theme #3. Codes associated with elements care served to generate the final theme. Throughout the analysis process, similar examples of how each of the teachers cared for the students both in and out of school provided the information needed to arrive at the idea that each of them developed a caring, trusting relational relationship with their students. Specific examples from each teacher served to provide the data necessary that led to the creation of all four themes.

**Theme 1# Appreciating and acknowledging racially diverse backgrounds**

The teachers repeatedly expressed the desire to acknowledge and appreciate the cultural backgrounds of their racially diverse students, which includes behaviors, actions, values, and beliefs. As the teachers planned culturally based activities, they opened themselves up to the opportunity of learning about the diverse cultural backgrounds in the
classroom as well as using this new knowledge to demonstrate an appreciation for them in later lessons.

**Acknowledgment and a movement towards empowerment.**

Connecting to the students’ background became an integral part of each participant’s classroom because it allowed the students to see a reflection of themselves in the curriculum. It demonstrated a level of respect for the racially diverse individuals in the classrooms. For example, Ms. Austen expressed how in discussions and activities she “loves to learn about the students’ cultures because that is the best way to build a positive classroom atmosphere and positive classroom culture.” In an another example, Ms. Bennett discussed the significance of using books and materials that reflect the students' cultures, especially when she said, “I try to make connections through the books, so we read *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. And the students are asked to draw connections between themselves and the text.” The students took turns in the classroom, contrasting various family connections between the book and themselves. In other classrooms, the teachers used surveys, memoir projects, family histories, and conversations to learn about the students’ cultural backdrops. Ms. Austen and Mr. Campbell both expressed an excitement they felt as they learned about their students’ cultural backgrounds. Each teacher found interesting methods of collecting data about their students, but as Ms. Cowan expressed, there needs to be another step. The teachers each learned from their students, and each became aware that superficial acknowledgment during holidays and certain months of the year did not go far enough. From this revelation, they integrated the students’ backgrounds into the classroom activities and materials on a consistent basis.
Acknowledging and respecting the students’ backgrounds became a central notion for each of the teachers as they allowed it to impact instruction and lesson planning. Rasmussen and Sieck (2015) found culture can shape the world, and knowledge of other cultures is one pivotal step in being effective in racially diverse environments. Ms. Bennett used activities to learn more about the students. Ms. Bennett valued:

Personal connections and all of their personalities and stories. I ask the students about their families. We do a lot of reflection and personal statements, so through different activities, we learn about their families and them. Their different backgrounds all add to the classroom atmosphere.

Cultural knowledge created connections and built rapport in the classroom based on respect, trust, and care for racially diverse students (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Ms. Austen’s previous experiences taught her the importance of focusing on the individual because it allowed them to share more of themselves when discussions and activities reflected their racially diverse backgrounds. Ms. Austen, as an ELL teacher, believed in:

Developing relationships with the students one on one inside and outside of the classroom so that they feel comfortable sharing things. I study international news and policy to incorporate it into the classroom. I have students from Guatemala and Honduras, and in my mind, I know how some of them got to the United States. I have students who are homeless, in foster care, and crossed the border, and lived in migrant camps. It changes your approach to the class.

Ms. Austen focused on getting to know the students based on their cultural backgrounds to develop deeper connections with them. These connections drove the relationships that allowed her to discuss difficult topics such as racism and oppression later on because she demonstrated how she valued and respected the students as individuals through conversations and questioning techniques.

Acquiring cultural knowledge helps individuals grow and reshape their understanding of how the world works, especially when they view it from someone else’s
perspective (Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015). Acquiring cultural knowledge at times requires some humility as educators attempt to adapt and change amidst the systems of oppression that exist. As previously stated, Delpit (2006) outlined the “culture of power.” Ms. Bennett provided examples of how she confronted the “culture of power” and sought to connect the learning to the students’ cultural backgrounds as spoken about by Gay (2000) in her desire to create culturally responsive classrooms. Ms. Bennett explained, “I always say that you are right and that I do not always know where you are coming from” when the students confront her about a particular position she took. As she confronted her own views of the cultures, she created new thought patterns that encouraged her to incorporate activities in the classroom that moved beyond acknowledgment.

**Cultural sensitivity leads to opportunities to appreciate other cultures.**

Each teacher believed that teacher education requires changes to include cultural sensitivity. Ms. Cowan thought that the traditional methods of teacher education lack fundamental concepts needed to support racially diverse students, such as the acknowledgment of cultural differences and the inability to sustain the cultures of the students. Sleeter (2018) stated this problem when she argued that teacher preparation programs and professional developments fell victim to Neoliberalism. According to the teachers, cultural knowledge of their students enhanced their ability to work with the students as well as their awareness of biases and stereotypes.

Understanding cultural backgrounds can play a role in the classroom. For example, Ms. Roosevelt made it abundantly clear that student behaviors required more information before judgment. Ms. Roosevelt stated, “sometimes, I do not understand
where they are coming from.” Understanding one’s position and withholding judgments support the confrontation of negative patterns of interpreting racially diverse students’ behavior. Ms. Roosevelt further described how they ask the students questions as a method for increasing their understanding of the students’ position:

Their cultures are always going to influence behaviors, you might not realize it at the time, but you could realize it after you finished talking with them.

Ms. Roosevelt explained the importance of then reflecting on her newly acquired knowledge.

In each case, the teachers explained the need to be open and receptive to the students. It all relates to withholding the initial judgments made relating to cultural backgrounds and creating a new understanding out of discourse (Sieck et al., 2013). Ms. Cowan explained further when asked about her interactions with racially diverse students:

I mean, it puts me in a place of being understanding and receptive, which I think is pretty important...because then you’re letting them do all the talking and all of the reflecting, and you’re just listening.

Ms. Cowan listened to her students to understand the cultural implications of the behaviors she observed and used these interactions to gain a new understanding of the behaviors seen in the classroom. Individuals reshape their schema based on experience outside of their own culture (Endicott et al. 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015).

In another example, the teachers also questioned how their use of the English language prevented racially diverse student voices from being heard due to a lack of acknowledgment of the cultural backgrounds. Each of the teachers originally assumed based on their own preconceived notions of how society and education work that all of their instruction needed to reinforce the English language as the dominant language
without looking at how it impacts marginalized groups. As stated previously, individual languages should not receive privilege over others, according to Ms. Austen based on “readings from Lisa Delpit and Chris Emdin that revolved around theoretical and philosophical discussions about the privilege involved in certain elements of the English language.” Ms. Austen thought that typing the English language in black lettering on her PowerPoint slideshow created by Ms. Austen for her classes included three languages. Each language had an ascribed color so that no one appeared more significant than the other. While this example represented one teacher, each of the other teachers expressed the importance of allowing the students to respond, write, or complete projects in their native language. They each felt that this demonstrated a reverence for the students’ cultural backgrounds.

*Acknowledging cultural backgrounds throughout the classroom.*

Projects, written assignments, discussions, packets, and financial planning projects each included elements of the students’ cultural backgrounds and the influence society has on them. Each teacher sought to encourage higher levels of inquiry beyond the traditional or standard answers as they challenged the students to find the relationships between the material and themselves. The teachers created the academic freedom necessary for the students to incorporate themselves into the projects and provided a platform to appreciate the diverse backgrounds in their rooms. For example, Ms. Bennett asked the students to discuss their families and how their family members may relate to the main character’s family in the book read in class. Additionally, Ms. Cowan used songs chosen by the students to plan a lesson around mood and tone. The
students analyzed the lyrics of the songs to later discuss them as a group. The teachers used classroom activities to learn about the backgrounds of the students and then use that knowledge to create future assignments that focused on giving them the confidence to discuss inequities in the classroom.

The teachers’ experiences in the classroom demonstrated their ability to implement culturally responsive practices while at the same time actively integrating the knowledge they gained of their students. For example, Ms. Frank participated in family dinners with the students. The family dinners occurred once a quarter with the parents and students from her classroom coming into the school to spend time with her so they could get to know each other. Ms. Frank explained how she learned about the students’ backgrounds and later found ways of grouping them so that they could learn about each other. Her goal around this project was to help herself and the other students better understand the thought processes and actions of others. She believed that if they learned about and understood each other better that it would lead to a more conducive, constructive learning environment.

Ms. Roosevelt had a different approach. She discussed the types of music the students liked to listen to as a method of getting to know them and opening up lines of communication. Ms. Roosevelt described how she would sometimes listen to songs in Spanish and look up the lyrics so that she could have a conversation with the students about the songs. Once she became more familiar with the music, she found ways of connecting it to the books they read in class. Acknowledging the music of the students provided another way for Ms. Roosevelt to connect the students to the material. Her goal was to show the students that the themes and content standards discussed in class apply to
their backgrounds. Incorporating cultural backgrounds into the fabric of the classroom served as a method of demonstrating the value the school had for the students’ cultures and let them know how much the teacher respected them.

**Conclusion of Theme #1**

The teachers valued and respected the students’ cultural backgrounds. They each felt the significance of learning about their students and then finding ways to incorporate their backgrounds into the classroom. The teachers sought to make sense of the students’ culture and created activities in the classroom to allow themselves to learn more about the students, but it also allowed the students to feel like the classroom more closely reflected them. The appreciation shown to the students’ cultural backgrounds increased the teachers’ ability to understand the differences of others and use those differences to transform their own understanding of other cultures. Through their actions, the teachers deepened their own cultural competence.

**Theme #2: the value of sociopolitical consciousness**

The individual cases each highlighted a value shown towards a sociopolitical consciousness. This theme became clear as each of the teachers challenged students and themselves in their classes to confront harmful practices associated with privilege and society. This cross-case analysis highlights the commonalities that exist between the development of their sociopolitical consciousness and how experience and exposure to cultural differences became the driving force in how each participant created their lessons. Throughout their classrooms, the teachers showed how they respected cultural differences, addressed oppressive practices, and attempted to have the students discuss negative biases and stereotypes as it relates to American society.
Theme #2 outlined how the teachers came to value a sociopolitical consciousness. Some of the teachers acquired an understanding of racially diverse perspectives growing up, but each experienced growth from their varying degrees of awareness much more when they began teaching in a racially diverse environment. These new perspectives helped them challenge their own views of society and how their privilege impacted their worldviews. Over time, the teachers gained knowledge of how societal norms, policies, and procedures can, at times, work against racially diverse students. The learners taught by these teachers also shared their views of society, and this allowed the teacher’s view to evolve into becoming more socio-politically cognizant. The changes did not happen quickly, and the teachers admitted that as they reflected on their experiences and discussions on racism, oppression, and inequities that they needed to regulate their emotions. Finally, the educators recognized the importance of incorporating more sociopolitical elements into their lessons that empowered the students to speak, question, and act on issues of racism and oppression, which provided the teachers with more topics, narratives, and perspectives to reflect upon and discuss.

**Reflecting on sociopolitical circumstances and regulating emotional responses.**

Each of the teachers interviewed demonstrated an ability to regulate their emotions around fear, anxiety, and nervousness when dealing with stressful situations involving racially diverse students. These stressful situations often came about when students challenged their personal views on society, behaviors, or race. Questioning and reflecting on the experiences and talking with the students led to a deeper understanding and critical awareness of the contextual world (Stenhouse & Bentley, 2018) of the students. The participants consistently mentioned how often they reflected on their
learners, their experiences, and the societal factors impacting these experiences to further understand how their attitudes and emotions evolved. Reflection and respect became vital components of their approach to their classrooms.

Controlling our emotions provides clarity to situations and allows us to reflect on our experiences and actions. The teachers suppressed negative emotional responses such as anxiousness and fear to allow themselves to question their own ideas and beliefs about how sociopolitical circumstances like quality of education, housing, poverty, and unemployment to name a few, impacted their racially diverse students. Each of the teacher participants discussed the significance of not reacting to stressful situations, especially those involving conflicting world views between themselves and the students.

Ms. Bennett, in particular, described how she became defensive when confronted by a student who claimed that she did not know how to teach racially diverse learners. Ms. Bennett explained how she immediately wanted to respond that she is a trained, experienced teacher, and how the student would do better if they followed her directions but suppressed her initial reaction to respond. She had to overcome negative feelings such as discomfort, defensiveness, and nervousness to allow herself to be receptive to a new understanding that she possibly perpetuated some negative stereotypes or biases. Ms. Bennett explained:

You feel like you feel yourself wanting to come back at the students because of all the effort you are putting into your job. But you have to rein yourself in...I sit down with the students and say what can I do better because this is where I am coming from.

The teachers found themselves uncomfortable as students shared their views of various classroom situations. For example, in one instance, Ms. Roosevelt explained that during her first year, she became angry with a student who did not turn in his homework one
day, and out of spite, she informed the student, in front of the class, that they failed the assignment. Ms. Roosevelt said the student erupted with anger, which resulted in her becoming angry as well. She later learned that the student, a senior at the time, was trying to ensure he passes because he has a job that he works after school to support the family and needed to graduate. This was not her experience growing up and vastly conflicted with her worldview because from her perspective homework and school were the only priority for high school students.

The teachers initially reacted through their views of the world that developed over their time as white individuals in society but withheld their emotions to allow the students a platform to express why they thought, felt, or acted a certain way. There was a mutual give and take between teachers and the students when stressful situations arose. The teacher participants understand the complexities of the students and the differences in their backgrounds to withhold their emotional reactions that are often rooted in middle-class American values (Lindsey et al., 2018). While the teachers thought they understood racism, they discussed how during different moments in their discussions with their students that they fought back negative emotions such as defensiveness, anger, or anxiety to allow themselves to grow based on newly acquired knowledge and perspectives on the subject opened their minds to a deeper understanding.

In one example of overcoming discomfort and nervousness when it came to talking about societal inequities, Ms. Austen created projects and utilized materials to challenge the students to identify issues around racial injustices and oppressive practices. She admitted that teachers need to open themselves up to the possibility that there is something wrong with society at large, which can lead to levels of resistance and anxiety.
She controlled her fear of acknowledging that she had been complicit in a society that did not live up to the ideal that “all men are created equal” and began to work on methods of addressing racism in the classroom.

Ms. Austen felt the school’s curriculum presented an Americanized portrayal of cultural differences, which meant it overvalued the values of middle-class Americans, promoting primarily a “whitewashed” version of history focusing on only contributions of dead white men and failed to acknowledge oppressive policies and practices, especially those around immigration. Discussions took place in her classroom as the students debated and created a “declarations of immigrants' rights.” When describing one of her projects, Ms. Austen explained, “the students get to add their rights to a declaration...after studying the Declaration of Independence.” The students worked in two groups as one group focused on increasing their rights within the school, while the other group focused on increasing their rights in society. Both groups attempted to address how the Declaration of Independence and the school failed to accurately provide what they considered essential rights to racially diverse people. The teacher encouraged the students to find out what is wrong with the school as influenced by sociopolitical circumstances and then empowered them to find solutions that are representative of Gay’s (2018) model of culturally responsive instruction.

Another example of overcoming emotions and continuing to value a sociopolitical consciousness came from Ms. Cowan. Ms. Cowan described the difficulty she had attempting to manage her emotions around injustices that occur in society and affect in the classroom consistently. Indicative of her cultural competence, Ms. Cowan learned to embrace moments that caused her to feel uncomfortable, such as when she brought up
topics about racial injustices and immigration control. She tried to withhold immediate reactions within herself so that difficult topics of conversation could take place. Ms. Cowan said, “we’ll focus on those moments more” when they referenced topics of trauma or injustice. Ms. Cowan overcame her nervousness and reflected on the stressful situations she planned on presenting (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Emotions such as nervousness, fear, and anxiety played a role in the classroom and at times prevented the teachers from acting, but these teachers overcame their initial emotional responses to achieve what they believed to be the real purpose of some of their assignments, which was confronting societal biases or systematic injustices.

Critical social analysis is the process by which individuals become aware of sociopolitical circumstances that lead to oppression and exclusion of marginalized groups in society based on the causal relationship between sociopolitical circumstances and the membership in oppressed groups (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Action is the next step of a sociopolitical consciousness after a critical social analysis occurs (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). The teachers took the initiative to act in their classrooms, but first, they needed to manage their emotions to reflect on the social, economic, and political implications of their experiences. They often found that they improved upon their ability to teach their students as well as confront negative biases that may have existed within themselves and stereotypical patterns that exist among society about various racial groups.

**Gaining perspective from students on societal differences.**

Experiences with racially diverse students drove Ms. Cowan and the others to increase their sociopolitical consciousness by taking the perspective of other. The six
participants all expressed that there is still much they do not understand about the perspectives of those from non-white backgrounds. For example, as Ms. Bennett listened and learned from the students’ perspectives on society and schooling, she realized that the students became of a source of understanding for her that despite living in the same society, certain members saw it vastly different than she did. Ms. Bennett expressed this sentiment when she said:

"The biggest thing to do is to know that I don't know. I am never going to be them because I had privilege. I come from a place of privilege, so I need to ask questions and talk to them about things. Learn from them and not pretend I know what their situation is like or know what it is like to live how they live… But like growing up in all white society, it is growing up completely different in an area of color or working in an area of students of color."

Privilege influences how certain members have become favored over others, and without recognizing it exists, it is difficult to challenge the bias privilege creates (Lindsey et al., 2018). Those conferred with systemic privilege must understand its role within the larger social and political arenas to know how it impacts opportunities and access (Stenhouse & Bentley, 2018). Ms. Bennett, like the other teachers, believed in the importance of challenging herself as well as the students when it comes to overcoming biases and continuing to grow by reflecting on difficult topics surrounding their views and beliefs on race (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Singleton & Linton, 2006). For example, Ms. Bennett further developed her sociopolitical consciousness through an experience she had with an African American College Professor who expected students to reflect upon their views. The professor challenged Ms. Bennett to confront her privilege. This moment created anxiety for Ms. Bennett, as expressed in her response below:

"I was like, oh my gosh, this guy does not like white people. What I quickly learned was that when you choose not to see color, it is because of your privilege, and it has stuck with me."
Ms. Bennett challenged her previously held notions of society and how white privilege impacts her position and access. After acknowledging the immediate defensiveness she felt, Ms. Bennett reflected on her views on race and allowed herself to recognize the biases that exist in society, which continue to influence white teachers. Previously, she failed to acknowledge her privilege or its impact on society. Through this new understanding, Ms. Bennett gained further insights into taking the perspective of others through interrogating her own misunderstanding of sociopolitical circumstances and how those circumstances benefitted her and possibly negatively impacted others.

For the teacher participants, their major points of growth in their ability to recognize injustice, biases, and stereotypes came when they first challenged themselves to uncover how white privilege impacted them. Their own white privilege originally stopped them from taking the next step to look at the larger picture. They failed to recognize their own ignorance of it due to the fact that individuals often overlook equity issues, especially when they are part of the dominant cultural group receiving the benefits from their privilege, but once they viewed the world from their students’ perspective, they gained new knowledge that shaped them for years to come.

The teacher participants experienced different personal situations that led to perspective-taking, which allowed them to take learning beyond the classroom and address real world problems (Lee, 2017). For example, some teachers in urban school environments engage in creating self-fulfilling prophecies when it comes to assuming black boys will engage in more behaviors of concern, or some teachers will lower expectations creating moments of success, but it negatively impacts the student’s overall ability to reach higher levels of education. The teachers challenged the typical American
view on work ethic that one can achieve more if they worked harder and began to understand that other factors can contribute to a lack of success despite the level of work exhibited by the students in their classroom. The teachers also analyzed the idea that certain societal systems such as courts and banks may not be fairly balanced for all. The sentiments of Ms. Cowan mirrored the other teacher participants:

I grew up; it was a white majority suburb. So now, I’m just being exposed to more cultures, so there is just a greater understanding.

The ability to view the perspective of others and attempt to understand it is crucial to developing sociopolitical consciousness – an aspect of cultural competence (Stenhouse & Bentley, 2018).

As the teachers learned about the culture of the students, they learned more about the existence of the struggles that sometimes occur within their cultures. This sparked the teachers to attempt to go beyond acknowledgment and address injustice, racism, and oppression associated with various cultural backgrounds. Ms. Roosevelt respected the students’ diverse cultural backgrounds and sought to discuss controversial topics related to them because she felt creating these discussions empowered the students to critically analyze societal challenges. For example, social injustice and police brutality towards black people created high levels of engagement within the students, according to Ms. Roosevelt because she felt that it reflected the point of view of the students. The students read, reflected on, and discussed excerpts from *I am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina, which follows the story of an African American male high school student who is murdered by a police officer after the officer mistakes a clothing hanger for a gun. The students freely asked honest questions about injustice and police brutality while the
teacher facilitated the discussion. Additionally, Mr. Campbell described a similar sentiment on how he “likes to be an open book especially around discussions on how the students are perceived in the world.” Gay and Kirkland (2003), along with Singleton and Linton (2006), discussed the importance of confronting existing patterns and forms of consciousness to create new ones. As the teacher learned more about the students’ cultural experiences, the more they felt compelled to incorporate them in all aspects of the classroom and sometimes address the controversial topics such as those involving racist practices that impact the students.

The teachers challenged themselves and thought critically about their past experiences to address their own potential participation in sustaining inequitable structures as well as ensuring they continue to listen to the perspectives of their students (Stenhouse & Bentley, 2018). Ms. Frank described herself as authoritative but explained explicitly how her perspective changed over time through exposure and conversations. She allowed the students to have more control. For example, Ms. Frank provided the students with a larger voice in the classroom, allowing them to create the rubrics for classroom projects and participate in selecting texts that more accurately reflected the students. In one of her classes, the students choose to read an article on mental illnesses and its impact on criminal behavior.

Each teacher in the study expressed the idea that experiences with racially diverse students challenged their perspectives of growing up in the United States. The teacher participants uncovered that while they lived in the same society as their students, they did not experience the same educational opportunities such as fully certified teachers, tutors, and college access, receive the same exposure to financial difficulties and experience
limitations of oppressive policies such as those that exist in finance and housing that impact people based on their race. These challenges led to their critical social analysis of inequities and those in power who create knowingly or unknowingly the injustices that exist in society (Watts & Hipolito, 2015). Their observations and interactions served to spark new learning as they took on new perspectives and challenged their own beliefs previously held about society and those in power.

**Gaining and refuting perspectives.**

Experiences with racially diverse youth fostered change, and Ms. Bennett, Ms. Cowan, Ms. Frank, Ms. Austen, Ms. Roosevelt, and Mr. Campbell believed that understanding the perspectives of the students enhanced their instructional approaches and sociopolitical consciousness. Endicott (2003) argues that we transform our thinking through experiences. My data revealed that the perspectives of the teachers changed and adapted as they engaged in various personal experiences and developed connections with racially diverse people (Endicott et al., 2003).

For example, Mr. Campbell explained how studying anthropology and sociology opened his mind to more worldviews and ways of thinking. Mr. Campbell’s perspective on sociopolitical circumstances:

I never had any terrible biases or anything to fight against. I think I was always aware of poverty, injustice, and racial bias. I don’t know that it’s changed, but I think I’ve gotten better at recognizing differences and similarities and how we all interact together.

Mr. Campbell knew that differences existed and to continue to recognize differing perspectives to form new levels of understanding around sociopolitical circumstances because he saw and heard from students how white teachers approached instruction differently. Each teacher expressed how negative perceptions around achievement in
their school inhibit teachers from learning about the students as individuals (Gay, 2018). Mr. Campbell described a stereotypical perspective that he believed is held by some teachers when he discussed a revelation he made after observing and talking to other teachers who work with racially diverse students:

> You need them to do the thinking and work. Certainly, putting the onus on them. I think a lot of teachers don't think our students are capable of that. And they have to be spoon-fed everything. That’s absolutely not the case. And there's no way anyone is learning if you’re just standing up there.

Mr. Campbell made the point to reduce his role by becoming more of a facilitator and push the students to run the dialogue in his classrooms. The active participation of all members and the ability to embrace contrasting opinions in his class creates an environment that allowed for mindset shifts and mental growth through critical thinking (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Mr. Campbell had strong feelings about challenging some of the negative thought patterns or biases that he observed from other white teachers in the building.

The teacher participants each described how the differences between their perspective and the students’ perspective impacted their worldview. The experiences made them aware of the structural inequities that exist in regards to racism and class inequality, which other researchers defined as key aspects of a sociopolitical consciousness (Seider et al., 2018). The teachers each acknowledged the diversity that exists in their rooms and allowed it to create new thought patterns that challenged previously accepted views of society within themselves (Lindsey et al., 2018). The teachers challenged their previously held notions of a fair and equitable society as it relates to race, financial institutions, and opportunities. They altered their view of what
the world previously looked like based on looking at it from the perspective of their racially diverse students.

*Societal perspective taking evolves in the classroom.*

The teachers continued to allow their perspective of society to be influenced in the classroom as they began to question opportunities that existed for their students, questioned racial stereotypes and course materials, and began the process of trying to learn from newly implemented activities. The value of a sociopolitical consciousness continued to infiltrate the teacher responses, but it became more apparent when Ms. Austen discussed lesson planning, expectations, and opportunities for racially diverse students. Ms. Austen addressed the importance of understanding that there is a lack of opportunities for the students in her classroom and in the school. Ms. Austen stated:

It is important to talk about their previous experiences and their stories. I realized that the ESOL students do not get as much support for after high school and so in addition to trying to give them the foundation they need. If they decide they want to get citizenship someday that they have that background also thinking about serving these students so that they know what their options are.

Ms. Austen understood that the students’ options became limited if they did not obtain citizenship. She valued the importance of obtaining citizenship and made it an elemental part of the class. Ms. Austen sought to challenge conventional ways of thinking, such as believing a school’s primarily focus should incorporate a rigorous adherence to common standards and a curriculum that is often a one size fits all model. She branched out from the provided curriculum and explored the opportunities that are available to her students with an emphasis on deconstructing any previously held notions about teaching that curriculum as intended would be enough in this instance for a student to obtain citizenship. Ms. Austen, along with the other teachers, often broke from conventional
patterns associated with the prescribed curriculums after reflecting on how the current state of the curriculum impacted their racially diverse students once they left high school.

After addressing overarching patterns in curriculums, the teachers turned their focus on racial stereotypes. Ms. Roosevelt felt it necessary to challenge her current thinking about racial stereotypes and attempt to understand her students further. Ms. Roosevelt described a time when she did not take the perspective of her students into account, and it caused anxiety among some of the students:

It was an interactive video. So, I thought it was really good, and low and behold; I didn’t even notice until I put the video on for the last class when the student says that the bank robbers were only one of two African Americans in the video. And they’re like, you know, that makes me feel uncomfortable. So, after that, I knew I needed to double-check for like racial stereotypes and everything like that.

Ms. Roosevelt recounted how she did not account for how the students would perceive the video, and it negatively impacted the lesson. She questioned her actions after the student pointed out the negative stereotyping that existed in the video. Ms. Roosevelt critically questioned her actions in an effort to reveal the social narratives that perpetuate oppressive elements (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). The negative experience with the students became the basis for taking in new perspectives before creating a lesson and fostered the inclusion of diverse materials.

In another example, Ms. Bennett and the other teachers empowered the students to find stereotypes of racially diverse people groups after discussions about race and culture took place. Empowerment of students comes from getting to know the students and approaching situations from their point of view (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kim & Slapac, 2015). Ms. Bennett explained, “I really push the students to bring up the conversation of stereotypes, so it does not look like I am bringing it up from a
stereotypical or racist standpoint.” Ms. Bennett used her analysis of the social realities from the lesson activities to empower the students to challenge negative viewpoints (Kim & Slapac, 2015; Rubel, 2017). She understood her social existence and stated:

I never really thought I would be able to work in a school in the city. Honestly, I felt from college that I was too privileged, and I did not understand...All of the student stories really changed my mindset for teaching in the city.

Each teacher described some of the barriers outlined by Lindsey et al. (2019) that exist and why some educators might be hesitant or resistant to change. Experience and exposure changed the teacher participants through reflection and allowed them to develop a sociopolitical consciousness towards the importance of understanding the perspectives of others.

Ms. Austen had a vastly different background of experiences than the rest of the participants. Her experiences growing up in foreign countries altered her perspective about American middle-class values and the perpetuation on them in the educational system, along with a significant influence from their parents. Sociopolitical consciousness became part of Ms. Austen’s life early on and influenced how she taught in the classroom. Ms. Austen understood that, currently, a few of the perspectives in the history books related to the students in her classes. Ms. Austen said:

We are teaching U.S. History, so I try to relate it to immigrant experiences throughout U.S. History. That’s a way a student can see themselves in American History; otherwise, they think why do I need to learn about American History.

Ms. Austen attempted to modify the instruction and curriculum of the course to place a focus on immigrants since many of her students immigrated to the United States. Actions taken by Ms. Austen to promote social change and correct institutional policies maintaining an inferior status of marginalized groups support the assertions by Watts &
Hipolito-Delgado (2015) about sociopolitical action. Ms. Austen looked at the perspective of the class through the students’ eyes and based on the students’ perspective altered her approach to better suit their needs.

The other teachers used the experiences from their educational practice to gain a new perspective. Ms. Bennett captured the value of exhibiting a sociopolitical consciousness in the classroom. She provided multiple examples of how she reflected on cultural differences, biases, and challenging existing injustices. Reflection is a crucial aspect of growing and challenging one’s current schema (Endicott et al., 2003). Ms. Bennett provided a lesson on racial injustice that allowed students to challenge the current inequities that exist in housing policies, racial tensions, and gender roles. She also used it to learn from her students:

In 10th grade, we are learning about oppression. And currently, we are learning about oppressive practices in housing segregation while we are reading Raisin in the Sun. I really enjoy this student and, now I have had her in two different grade levels. She has talked about how she has never had a teacher who has talked about race so openly. I just kind of said it makes it awkward if you do not address it. I let them know that there are a lot of things I don’t know about a person of color, so I like to have conversations and learn about you guys.

Ms. Bennett described the importance of challenging curriculum and creating opportunities for the students to confront the status quo by creating a discussion based on oppressive thematic elements that exist in the book and in society. The book served as the catalyst for a deeper discussion around race. Ms. Bennett incorporated an activity called Philosophical Chairs, where the chairs represented statements on social injustices in the world. The plan revolved around the students debating and discussing these topics in their own words.
Each teacher made it known that they understand that each of their students experience varying degrees of barriers and, at times, challenges that impact their ability to access or succeed in the classroom. Evidence from each case demonstrated the teachers’ beliefs in acknowledging the perspective of others and looking to use their newly acquired knowledge from the shared perspectives of the students as a way to confront middle-class American values. The teachers encouraged the students to outline stereotypes, bias, racism, and injustice in classroom materials they read. Each of the teachers discussed topics such as racism, societal conventions, ignorance, issues around immigration, and other areas surrounding the oppression of racially diverse people. Each educator gained firsthand knowledge of how the responding students in their classes experienced these topics, thus giving them the opportunities to question themselves (Gay, 2018).

Examples from several classrooms demonstrated the knowledge the teachers gained from experience through their participation in the incorporation of culturally responsive materials, which allowed deeper discussions around race and oppression to take place. Mr. Campbell encouraged critical thought around racism and poverty related to wealth distribution through videos with discussion questions, Ms. Bennett addressed various societal conventions through poetic discussions, and Ms. Austen assisted the students in challenging the status quo of democracy in the United States. Ms. Roosevelt had the students read a graphic novel called *I am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina. The book addressed themes such as police brutality, the Black Lives Matter movement, youth activism, the criminalization of black males, and more (Colon, 2020). The graphic novel also uses African American vernacular used by many urban youth from New York City.
urban youth to showcase to racially diverse students that academic conversations can include their vernacular (Colon, 2020). Ms. Roosevelt and the students discussed the societal and personal implications of the book. She quoted the graphic novel, “as in Hamlet, the dead shall speak, and the living yield even more surprises.” The quote sparked discussion around the death of racially diverse people at the hands of people in authority. Ms. Roosevelt listened as many of the other teachers did when the students began to speak and, at times, would stop them only to ask more probing questions. Exposure, inquiry, and the implementation of activities around controversial topics surrounding racism provided the teachers with new knowledge and perspectives. Students expressed their thoughts, opinions, and experiences on these topics because the teachers wanted them to think critically about themselves and the society within which they live.

In other examples, Mr. Campbell and the other teachers knew the experiences they had gone through did not compare with their students when it came to police interactions, education, and behaviors. Mr. Campbell admitted his approach and interpretation of how school discipline should be initially came from his background:

I think especially as a white teacher; I’ve never been stopped by the police for anything. They had all these experiences very possibly very likely that a lot of us haven't had. And so, they’re experiencing that outside of school, and then we’re always jumping down their throat. You got to be perfect. I think that’s the big thing is we’re coming from very different worlds.

He learned how his initial responses to discipline represented more middle class American values. Mr. Campbell alluded to the fact that his interpretation of the world expanded through experience. “Knowledge of the social and political realities in which they live” (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p.121) because the teacher is learning about the “larger
sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world” (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019, p 71). The teachers knew the differences required acknowledgment within themselves to reshape their previous thought processes and schemas based on their new experiences (Endicott et al., 2003).

Group, partner, and whole-class discussions reviewed issues of racism, poverty, housing inequities, gender roles, and stereotypes. The teacher participants found ways to weave cultural differences, bias, stereotypes, and other societal issues into their lessons. Through discourse, the students and teachers learned from each other as they sought to identify current oppressive practices and negative stereotypes and ways in which the students can avoid, expose, or use the system to their advantage. For instance, in one lesson, Mr. Campbell presented the financial impact on society of the current breakdown of wealth among minorities in the country and discussed overcoming economic biases by developing short term and long term plans with their financial management project. Each of the teachers challenged conventional approaches to classroom materials and instruction by incorporating content and instructional practices that empowered the students to have the courage to speak and act on their thoughts (Powell et al., 2016).

*Examples of taking purposeful sociopolitical action in the classroom.*

Purposeful action in the classroom became the result of newly gained perspectives and the emotions the teachers managed. The teachers suppressed the discomfort to allow the new perspectives gained from the students to take root in their lesson plans. Discussions, experiences, and consistent reflections supported each of the teachers in honing their sociopolitical consciousness when it came to managing their emotions and affect and then enacting it in the classroom. Personal emotions such as frustration and
anger relating to student actions or expressions must remain withheld at all times to support the growth of the students and themselves when it comes to an understanding of the cultures of others. Goals and objectives become more attainable when emotions are effectively managed (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The teachers created more opportunities to implement lessons, discussions, and materials revolving around sociopolitical factors that influenced the lives of racially diverse people when they focused on challenging negative systemic patterns that exist within curriculum resources and society.

Each teacher confronted biases and stereotypes, but Mr. Campbell approached it from a financial perspective. In Mr. Campbell’s classroom, the students learned about poverty, racism, and harmful stereotypes linked to diverse cultures when analyzing economic trends. Teaching racially diverse students about finance afforded Mr. Campbell newer opportunities to address social justice issues. Mr. Campbell stated, “One thing I love about this class. I think it is a social justice issue. Knowing these things is going to be able to give them so many opportunities in life. No one teaches this stuff.” Mr. Campbell took full advantage of his classroom to confront injustices even when it meant taking risks to break traditional approaches to provide students with more opportunities to overcome financial biases. Encountering intercultural adjustments such as these often leads to stress, but Mr. Campbell regulated his emotions to implement these adjustments (Matsumoto & LeRoux, 2003). Emotions can drive actions, but once managed, Mr. Campbell explained how he overcame traditional approaches to educating students from a racially diverse background to implement his newly formed consciousness around bias and racism, especially in the financial realm.
Further examples of the teachers' practice and approaches included Ms. Austen's ability to ask the students in groups to question the school’s code of conduct as well as the chance to create their own government system. The plan included a debate around the reconstruction of the Haitian Government. The students analyzed rules and norms to uncover how they may have oppressed certain minority groups. Ms. Austen planned to have the students create a new set of rules and norms. The students did not stop there as they had to create a petition that required them to get 30 signatures of approval for their new rules. Students walked around attempted to persuade others why their new rules of government represented them better than the current ones. Likewise, Ms. Frank planned to read *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The students would discuss the perspective of others and challenge stereotypes around diversity. Mr. Campbell planned to discuss the indicators of a healthy economy, and then the students had to explain how the signs represent an inequality to racially diverse populations. The next part of the plan has the students create new indicators for a healthy economy that would be more representative of their position in it. Each teacher planned activities that empowered the racially diverse students to think critically of established powers and then create a plan or act to correct injustices. The teachers planned lessons that focused on sociopolitical themes that evolved out of their newly gained perspectives and their ability to manage their emotions.

**Conclusion of Theme #2**

A sociopolitical consciousness allowed the teachers to create plans that could increase their understanding of the broader social contexts of the students’ lives through further research and discussions deepening their cultural competence. The students often
learned to think critically and respond with solutions to problems associated with oppressive practices and racism while the teachers manage their nervousness, fears, or anxiety that may come with discussing these topics. The instructors took advantage of their ability to regulate their emotional responses to their racially diverse students’ perspectives on society and allow themselves to reflect on why these circumstances exist.

Dialogue is a key component to the process of developing a sociopolitical consciousness (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), and these white teachers used dialogue with their students based on activities they purposefully planned around confronting stereotypes, bias, systemic racism, and white privilege. These activities became the continual catalyst that allowed the teachers to reflect on new perspectives, which helped to increased their value of a sociopolitical consciousness. The value of a sociopolitical consciousness increases the opportunities of the teacher to develop new thought patterns around the ideas of racism and oppression thus increasing their cultural competence.

**Theme # 3: Student-Focused Approach**

Student focused approaches became a centralized theme throughout the data analysis because each teacher believed in the necessity of incorporating student interests, strengths, and backgrounds into the classroom. The instructional practices exhibited by the teachers emphasized a student-focused approach. The instructional practices and content from each of the classrooms involved insights and experiences from the students. Teachers incorporated student interest, backgrounds, frames of references, prior experiences, and performance styles (Gay, 2018; Powell et al., 2016). The teachers held discussions to get to know the students and further understand who they are as people and build trust. They uncovered details about each of the students in their classrooms that
allowed them to create an approach that was tailored to those specific students in their rooms. The results of the survey exemplified the emphasis the teacher participants placed on developing a rapport with students based on planned activities and organized interactions. All of the lessons centered around the students and the teachers’ abilities to find ways to make the material relevant to the racially diverse learners. The results from the interviews, observations, lesson plans, and focus group demonstrated the significance of a student-focused approach in increasing the teachers’ cultural competence as the teachers utilized cultural sensemaking and knowledge of their backgrounds to implement practices that reflected the students.

**Getting to know your students.**

The instructors impacted students in the classroom in more ways than one through student-focused approaches and sought to address the perspective students have on school and teachers. Acknowledging the personal views of their students became crucial to each of the teachers as they sought to develop a rapport with the students. The teachers built levels of trust through norms about establishing respect for all individuals and conversations that provided the students with opportunities to share their thoughts, frames of references, and interests. Connectedness comes through rapport building, which developed over time (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). “Talking to them, finding out what’s going on in their lives, being open and to hear what’s going on,” drove Ms. Frank to form more meaningful connections with her students. These connections established a bond between the home and school and demonstrated to the students that their background had value in the classroom (Gay, 2018). Education became about the individuals and acknowledging their backgrounds in the school more so than the generic practices often
associated with education such as stand and delivery style of teaching or the view that students are empty vessels to be filled by the teacher, meaning that they bring little into the classroom.

Accordingly, Ms. Austen worked to understand the experiences and points of view of others to improve her approach to the students. Ms. Austen assessed the perspective of the students and utilized those perspectives to tailor the classroom to the students. Ms. Austen claimed, “it is so important to talk to the students about their previous experience and stories and what school was like for them.” Gaining this background knowledge and the students’ feelings about school enabled the teacher to create high interest, self-esteem building activities. For example, Ms. Austen had the students create journals. In the journals, she would uncover their thoughts and feelings as well as strengths and weaknesses. The journals became an influential part of her lesson planning as she incorporated goals they set in them and interests shown. Each teacher explained how they felt focusing instruction and the classroom around the students increased their chances of being successful in post-secondary opportunities and school. The teachers sought to understand the differences in their students to understand better how to teach the content by modifying the curriculum and activities to be more student driven (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Student interests and abilities drove much of the instruction in the teachers’ classroom. Each teacher admitted to seeking out materials that aligned with the interests and perspectives of the students. For example, Ms. Cowan stated:

If I’m picking a novel, I think of where their reading levels are first to make sure it's generally accessible, so I have to do things differently...I go through the book room, and I see what things I think would be of high interest. Anything that they find relatable, genuinely a younger protagonist, is good.
Ms. Cowan engaged the students as drivers of their education by offering them choices. She found multiple books that aligned with the curriculum and would allow the students to participate in the selection of which ones best suited the interests of the classroom. These teachers took responsibility to learn about their student’s interests and abilities to create a classroom that focused on them as individuals.

Lesson plan activities allowed teachers to learn of student points of view and build relationships from this knowledge, which resulted in them altering their approach to instruction and the classroom. For example, Ms. Bennett organized a Carousel activity that had the students review posters in groups about what her class should look like throughout the year. She wanted to understand further what the students thought about previous classes they had taken and how she could incorporate what they believed classrooms should look like into hers. Classroom activities put the student at the center of the lessons and frequently encouraged them to voice issues, points of view, and opinions.

Each of the teachers designed activities that fostered the building of relationships in the classroom. In all classes, discussions took place in groups, as partners, or as a whole group. Ms. Bennett also echoed the sentiments of the other teachers when she said, “I like to learn about my students, and I think it is just part of my responsibility.” The conversations allowed the teachers to give discussion based prompts about various school matters or methods of learning and then wait and listen to the students’ thoughts and opinions. All of the teachers had one-on-one conversations with various students and small groups; as an example, Ms. Cowan discussed the assumption of gender roles and issues of race in society. The teachers created meaningful interactions that focused on
the students to demonstrate respect for them and to build a rapport to support in motivating them (Edwards, 2011). For example, Ms. Frank would meet with students on a rotating basis as they worked together to create a daily Do Now question. These conversations provided the students with a higher level of control because they got to pick the question that would be discussed in class. In addition, the one on one conversation with individual students played a significant role in the building of relationships. In discussing one on one conversations, Ms. Frank stated, “It puts me in a place of being understanding and receptive. You’re just listening.” As the teachers actively listen to the students, they learn about them in ways that amend lessons because they listened to altering frames of reference. The teachers created opportunities in their classrooms to allow relationships to increase the frequency of student-focused approaches that often gave racially diverse students a voice and safe space to speak without fear of reprisal or embarrassment.

*Focusing on student backgrounds.*

The teachers admittedly learned little about their students in their early years of teaching. As they matured as educators and developed their cultural competence, they began to focus on who the students are and their backgrounds. But first, they withheld their own personal perceptions of the students to engage in cultural sensemaking. Initial perceptions can derive from attitudes or thought process that are negatively influenced by implicit bias. Sometimes, first reactions to situations including behavior or ability require suppression until further information is uncovered (Sieck et al., 2013). An investigation into causes and seeking differing explanations alters the general cultural schema (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015; Sieck et al., 2013). Getting to know the students changed the
way the teachers thought about them and interpreted what some might consider misbehaviors when they occurred in class.

In one example, the teachers explained the importance of studying conversations to understand where the students come from and where they plan to go. Ms. Austen explained, “It is best not to assume” when they answered the question I asked in the interview around understanding behavior. Ms. Cowan encouraged students to voice their rationale for thinking or acting a certain way. This safe space provided Ms. Cowan the time and opportunity to uncover new meaning behind behaviors they previously misinterpreted. According to Ms. Cowan, “I mean it puts me in a place of being understanding and receptive.” These spaces created opportunities for change. Each teacher learned through personal experience that they needed to address Latino and African American students individually because they learned responses could be interpreted in multiple ways. Through discussions and personal experiences with racially diverse students, these teachers changed their thinking about how they responded to students being talkative, loud, or seemingly unmotivated (Endicott et al., 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015; Sieck et al., 2013). Patience became a vital aspect of the classroom as the teachers sought to focus on the students as they planned and organized the classroom activities, knowing different groups of students act differently. The teachers believed in the withholding of judgments and seeking alternatives to students' actions so they could enhance their ability to instruct the students and increase their own awareness.

Furthermore, Ms. Roosevelt embodied the ideals of suspending judgment to place the focus on the students rather than their own perceptions. She believed it necessary to
“take a step back.” Ms. Roosevelt explained the process of how she used to react to the students rather than the behaviors. After suspending judgement of the students and reflecting on the various situations, she learned to talk to the students to examine the observed behaviors from their frames of reference. Reflection creates new thoughts as the original thoughts become withheld to make way for new ways of thinking (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Ms. Roosevelt’s philosophy of discipline changed from authoritarian to restorative. The students became more involved in the disciplinary process to reduce the rate of reoccurrence and maintain the relationships that Ms. Roosevelt worked to develop in her classroom.

*Continuing to regulate emotions and maintaining a student focused approach.*

Emotional regulation became a crucial part of the teacher participants’ experience working with racially diverse students. The teachers explained how easily one’s emotions could force an immediate reaction, but they needed to “rein themselves in” and focus on the students. The teachers processed the new information provided by dialogue with the students and focused on the relational goals of engagement between the school’s culture and the racially diverse students’ cultures (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). They listened to the students’ concerns and tried to take their emotions out of the situation and reflect on how their actions may or may not have impacted the situation. Ms. Bennett said:

> I would sit down and say what can I do better because this is where I am coming from, and this is where you are coming from...I show them that I can be reflective and can take criticism, which is important.

Managing affect and attitude toward difference allowed the teachers to show respect for others and their cultures (Deardorff, 2006; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015).
Projects, articles, and books changed as the teachers learned more about the students. Their experiences drove them to complete research on articles and projects that closely aligned with the racially diverse learners in their classes. The teachers described how students felt disengaged and openly disregarded the hard work they initially put into lessons during their first years of teaching. Once they overcame the defensiveness felt about previous activities and materials, the teachers focused on the specific students in their rooms to make the instructional elements more relevant to them. While some of the examples provided overlap with Theme #1, the teachers focused on grouping the students and assigning them projects that incorporated their interests, past experiences, and strengths, which embodied a student focused approach.

One example given by Ms. Austen described a student-focused approach that had the students create a declaration of immigrants’ rights. The students drew on previous knowledge of struggles, trauma, and oppression to add their own additional rights to the Declaration of Independence. Ms. Austen expressed that many of her students immigrated to America and how the project asked them to reflect on their journeys and create rights that they believed all immigrants should have upon arrival to the United States. In another example, Ms. Cowan used the book *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker to discuss gender inequities and racism. She purposefully grouped the students of different genders, ethnicities, and creeds together so that each member would have a chance to share their experiences and thoughts. Each group member was responsible for supporting new rights so they had to uncover what rights interested them the most and then convince others why these should be in their declarations. The teachers planned
projects and materials to align more closely with their students’ diverse backgrounds and life events.

The teachers planned regular classroom, group, and partner discussions throughout the lessons. Students regularly practiced putting the content into their words, whether that meant they translated it into Spanish or a local vernacular. In each of the classrooms, students became the primary focus of the lessons as they broke down complex academic concepts with their peers. The discussions provided an opportunity for validation of the students’ backgrounds and heritages (Powell et al., 2016). In each of the classes, the teacher acted as the facilitator to discussions that took place. The teachers each used varying degrees of questions to promote academic thought among the students. Ms. Austen posed questions that caused the students to question terms such as democracy, oppression, slavery, and class issues. Ms. Cowan used scaffolded questions to discuss racism. Mr. Campbell used discourse to review inequities in wealth and financial patterns of racially diverse people. In each example, the teachers continually withheld their expectations, attitudes, and opinions. The teachers inwardly felt challenged by the students’ expectations, attitudes, and views revealed during planned discussions that incorporated elements of their lives.

Reflecting on students and instructional practice.

Each teacher discussed moments of reflection on their experiences, creating a shift in their schema, and altering their actions taken as a result. They felt that knowing them as individuals informed their thought processes. Ms. Bennett utilized multiple forms of communication, such as expressions and sayings developed during her student interactions in the classroom (Molinsky, 2007; Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck,
Ms. Bennett explained the process of change and how it started with a focus on the students:

Things that I have to change is knowing that I don’t know. You come in with preconceived notions, and all of those notions are thrown out the window when you interact with the students. I didn’t think I came in with preconceived notions, but I learned that I did.

Discussing the individuality of the students as people allowed the teachers to act outside of their cultural context and adapt their social and emotional approach (Molinsky, 2007; Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Listening and reflecting enhanced the teachers’ knowledge of their students. Ms. Roosevelt said:

I had to take a step back and think about how I was interacting with all of the students...I think if you listen more, you understand more of their problems, and therefore you become more culturally responsive.

Through self-reflection and listening to the racially diverse students, each educator generated new attitudes and acted upon their experiences to generate more approaches that centered around the learners (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Racially diverse student reactions and responses influenced how the teachers increased their student focused approaches. Through a student focus, Mr. Campbell explained one does not always figure it out, but one must keep working at acknowledging the differences to alter instructional practices. Acknowledgment is not enough, Mr. Campbell said:

If we give people a chance to succeed in what they want to succeed in, what their interests are, they’re capable of doing really great things. I think the whole education system needs to change based on that.

Each teacher learned to empower racially diverse students through listening to them and learning about who they are and how they think, which is an ideal reinforced by several educational researchers (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kim & Slapac, 2015). The
teacher participants made calculated attempts to move from acknowledgment to empowerment based on the ideal of focusing on the students.

Inquiry based approaches created opportunities for the students to share more of their ideas and perspectives in the classroom. In one example, Ms. Austen had the students question the framers of democracy. Some students examined whether or not the Federalist Papers #10 accurately reflected the racially diverse people in society, while others analyzed the rules and regulations in Puerto Rico. The Spanish speaking students from Puerto Rico reviewed the laws and regulations from their home, and both groups worked on creating a petition to implement changes they believed were necessary. The students created changes in societal rules and norms based on their experiences and opinions after reading various documents associated with those rules and norms. In addition, Ms. Cowan focused on having the students analyze their views on rich versus poor after reading *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scot Fitzgerald and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. The students discussed the various themes of the books and analyzed how they could relate to the various characters and why. Each activity observed in all the classes put the students at the center of the instructional activities providing them with avenues to express themselves. The teachers allowed the students to drive the lessons activities by letting them create and respond to questions during discussions or projects, which in turn presented them with unique opportunities to learn how the students thought and felt about the various subjects discussed

* A focus on student language and empowerment.

Each teacher discussed the importance of respecting language patterns and words utilized by the students. They made sure to appreciate the language the students brought
into the room. Ms. Bennett said, “I want them to speak freely, but I tell them to explain it.” Each teacher translated complex topics into the students’ language, including Spanish or terms often associated with the youth from that area. As in other research, Ms. Bennett felt it was necessary to learn the social context of the words utilized by the students to fully comprehend the meaning of student responses (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). She also felt it was essential to teach the students how to code-switch between languages and understand how to express themselves utilizing two sets of language patterns. Ms. Bennett believed that code-switching would better allow the students to manipulate two different worlds to generate more success for themselves. The teachers learned from talking with students about the social context of words used by the students as a sign of respect but also to gain further understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the students.

Each teacher found themselves adopting the terms and words of the students and weaving it into their interactions with them. Ms. Frank explained the importance of language and trying to learn from the students. The teacher stated, “I take a lot of cues from the students” when asked about how they alter their patterns of communication. Utilizing the students' words demonstrated regard for the students’ culture and fostered a relationship that the teachers cultivated over time through conversations. Ms. Austen used the students’ greeting of “K lo K” to address them. She explained how this simple greeting and acknowledgment of the students’ culture created a space where the students felt more comfortable expressing themselves. Each teacher showed in one way or another the importance of greeting the students with their various learned cultural
expressions to create a more synergistic relationship between the home and the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Additionally, assessment practices offered to the students allowed them to express their mastery of the content in a variety of ways. All assessment practices observed resulted in the students having a lot of choices. The students picked the language they responded in both verbally and in writing. The students answered in Spanish in all observed classes, and in five out of the six classes, they wrote in Spanish as well. For example, in Ms. Bennett’s room, the students rewrote lines of poetry in their own words. In Ms. Austen’s room, the students made posters and created petitions. In Mr. Campbell’s classroom, they made financial plans from reviewing market trends, career analysis, and budgetary expectations. The teachers expressed that they did not feel the need to correct the students’ cultural language but allow it to be a natural part of the classroom. The focus on enabling the students to weave their language into the classroom promoted a deeper connection with the classroom and fostered stronger relationships (Gay, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

**Conclusion to Theme #3**

The lesson plans demonstrated a framework for the teachers' lessons that ensured discourse based on the individuals in the room and their interaction with the content as well as collaboration with their peers. Each teacher worked on demonstrating effective teaching practices when they created opportunities to develop connections and relationships with all of their students based on their backgrounds (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; & Mahari et al., 2018). Each of the participants emphasized the need to take a step back, reevaluate complex situations, and dialogue
with the students to understand their point of view more clearly. Their cultural competence continued to develop as they implemented more student focused approaches. Acting on new knowledge and behaviors allowed them to interact more appropriately with the students and have the confidence to implement more culturally responsive practices. These teachers made a point to plan their lessons around the students’ interests, perspectives, and experiences after learning from their conversations and experiences with them in the classroom.

**Theme #4 Care/Relationships**

The teacher participants demonstrated levels of care and developed a trusting, relational relationship with their students. Care goes beyond the general definition and it is a foundational aspect of the other themes. If the teachers did not care, they could not take the time to learn about the students’ cultural backgrounds, look at the world from their perspective, and implement approaches that directly related to them. Caring and respectful relationships enhanced the ability of these teachers to increase their cultural competence because it created opportunities for them to openly and honestly discuss difficult topics with the students. The participants in this analysis demonstrated the importance of how respect is a relational process developed through teacher-student relationships with a balance of caring and authority (Audley, 2020). The educators developed trusting relationships in their classrooms and demonstrated compassion as they worked to build a rapport with their students.

The caring, relational relationship bond is not developed quickly and occurs over time. Due to the fragility of these relationships, the teachers expressed how vital it became to continue to develop and nurture the relationship. Teachers connect with their
students through commitment and care, but care is not limited to their wellbeing and includes academic and social goals (Hoffman, 2016). These relationships centered around the teacher’s ability to nurture students socially, intellectually, and morally at the individual and community level (Velasquez et al., 2013). Small group settings, respect for diversity, dialogue, and accommodating for unique needs and interests are often elements of a caring environment (Velasquez et al., 2013). Caring and trusting relationships became an essential component of each teacher's development because the relationships and experiences they encountered all contributed to the growth of their ability to work with racially diverse students.

All in all, these teachers knew and understood the stakes if they did not address the students’ perspective from an ethic of care. Dialogue with the students became a critical learning tool for understanding their perspective, according to the teachers. As Ms. Austen explained, “I do think building relationships is important and having the students be able to talk about their families without feeling judged.” Failure to demonstrate care and respect for students can result in continued systemic practices that further entrench structural inequalities and the oppression of people from racially diverse backgrounds (Audley, 2020). Each teacher talked about creating a space that allowed the students to talk about their thoughts and ideas openly and honestly, but this could not first happen if the students did not believe the teacher trusted and cared for them.

_Caring through conversation and discussion._

Discourse became the primary tool used by the teachers to gain an understanding of their racially diverse learners. The instructors used whole group, small group, and one on one conversations to learn the students’ perspectives. One on one discussions
primarily occurred after an issue in a room and helped to enhance the teacher’s abilities further to work with the students on an individual level, but it also demonstrated to the students that their teachers took the time to acknowledge them individually. These one on one sessions allowed the teachers to challenge stereotypes and generate discussions around how to develop trust with the students (Roth et al., 2018). These conversations proved to be pivotal learning experiences for the teachers.

The teacher participants made efforts to know each student through engaging them in conversations that took place one on one or within the contexts of the classroom lesson. During the observations, the teachers frequently walked around the room from student to student or group to group to engage with them on multiple levels. For example, Ms. Bennett engaged in three separate conversations on respect towards diversity during one class period. In furthering an attempt to converse with the students, Ms. Austen tried to speak Spanish with her Spanish speaking groups. The students responded with a laugh, but they both worked with each other to continue the conversation in Spanish. The teachers resisted the traditional dominant recycling practices that would have them push the English language upon the students when they spoke or wrote in the classroom (Matias, 2013). Each teacher made a point to engage with almost all their students during the classroom observations.

Once a level of trust became established, it allowed for the movement to a deeper demonstration of care and respect for their students. The teachers and their students discussed challenging topics around racism, oppression, and gender roles. They showed reverence for these topics during their introduction to the class but, more importantly, focused the lessons around the students. The levels of care extended beyond the students
as individuals to how sociopolitical factors impacted them. For example, Ms. Bennett used questions to stimulate the students to think deeply about gender roles in America. Ms. Roosevelt asked the students to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement in their groups. In addition, Ms. Cowan sparked a discussion with two larger groups about rich versus poor and the impact of wealth. Each time the teachers used questions or provided examples to force the students to challenge stereotypes, but by approaching it through questions and often in small groups, a bond of trust formed between the teacher and student (Roth et al., 2018). The students freely shared examples of racism, oppression, and issues around gender because the teachers developed greater levels of respect that moved beyond cultural context and dealt with students' personal experiences with racism and oppression (Audley, 2020). Allowing the students to speak showed the teachers trusted the students to discuss the topics, and by the students sharing, it demonstrated that they trusted the teacher.

**Desire to learn about and believe in the students.**

According to teachers, if students saw the teacher taking an interest, it allowed for a more caring, respectful classroom environment to evolve. The participants all expressed the joy they felt when learning about the students and the importance of taking a personal interest in each one. When discussing the relationships with each student, the teachers expressed their desire to believe in the students. For instance, Mr. Campbell summed it up when he said, “you need a general open-mindedness to different people...but believing every student can do is obviously important and legitimately believing it.” The teacher participants created plans and developed relationships that connected the students to a broader social context, and they all believed in the students’
ability to succeed (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2001). The teachers felt understanding the students and accessing their backgrounds allowed them to treat the students with more respect. It led to an educational environment that revolved around the respect of various identities which enriched the learning environment (Keskin, 2018).

**Attitude impacts relationships.**

The teachers believed in displaying a caring, empathetic, and compassionate attitude towards the students. Each teacher learned from previous teaching experiences that one should not assume when it comes to students because it prevents displaying the above characteristics. Ms. Cowan witnessed a negative interaction between a teacher and a racially diverse student after the student broke the rules of the classroom. The teacher acted with an air of superiority and proceeded to explain to the students that they knew how to teach, but the student needed to understand how to learn. This observation influenced how she acted and reflected on her assumptions about culture. From this experience, Ms. Cowan learned to develop opportunities to demonstrate care and respect for the students as she worked on how she presented herself to the students. Through an empathetic and compassionate focus, the teachers understood alternative explanations for behaviors and gained new knowledge of cultures that impacted the way they conducted themselves in the classroom (Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Relationships built on respect and caring attitudes allowed the teachers to alter their schema and thus better understand the world around them (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). Through changes in their attitudes, the teachers connected with the students because they demonstrated to them that they cared.
The teachers’ attitudes changed over time. Multiple experiences over time allowed the teachers to evolve into demonstrating more caring and respectful attitudes. For example, Ms. Frank stated, “It took me the first two years to recognize that my students are people.” She felt that in her first two years of teaching, she primarily focused on trying to improve her actual practice that she forgot about the students along the way. Once Ms. Frank came to this realization, it led to a new approach focused on building relationships. As each teacher learned to formulate these new relationships, it impacted their attitudes and practices. Learning became increasingly more relevant to the racially diverse students as the teacher continued to utilize the new bonds to influence their thinking and lesson planning (Gay, 2018). Through these actions, new connections developed with the students, and according to the teachers, it had a profound impact on the work produced by the students. They felt the students became more engaged in their classrooms. Time and experience working with students from racially diverse backgrounds played an important role in the development of their empathetic and compassionate attitudes.

**Caring for their well-being.**

Each of the teachers explained that their relationships with the students reached new levels when they cared for them beyond their academic responsibilities. For instance, Ms. Austen said, “I care about them and their well-being” when asked about the importance of interacting with students. The teachers utilized greetings to deepen their connection with the students because they could learn about how each student felt in those interactions. According to the teachers, these daily personal interactions allowed the students to bond with them.
Body language and verbal expressions became a necessary part of each day. The teachers explained the importance of recognizing specific language patterns and creating opportunities to acknowledge and support the students’ patterns. They believed in the importance of greeting each student and acknowledging them individually because they could learn nuances about the students’ patterns. They began to recognize pitch, speaking rate, and other body language signals that could indicate the student needed support or encouragement. For example, in Mr. Campbell’s classroom, each class worked with him and designed a classroom handshake that created an engaging interaction with the teacher every day. This greeting put the focus on the relationship the teacher had with the students and started a foundation of trust that eventually led to a deeper rapport (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, Mr. Campbell expressed, “I care about what is going on with them.” These interactions allowed him to learn about their current state of mind each day. Deeper connections with the students formed stronger relationships between the teacher and the students (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

All of the teacher participants showed their deep level of respect and care for the students as they learned to create opportunities to connect with each student personally.

*Caring impacts practice.*

Each teacher took the time to plan and prepare instructional activities that broke down complex topics and allowed the students to infuse parts of themselves into the content or lesson. Students picked how they learned or expressed their understanding of the material. In one instance, Ms. Austen allowed the students to select from three different manners of presentation for a topic. Ms. Cowan asked the students to make comparisons between the characters in the books they read and themselves. The teachers
gave the students decision making power in the lessons and allowed students to share their views over time, thus allowing the teacher and student to become more familiar with each other (Velasquez et al., 2013). These practices represent a level of care for the students (Velasquez et al., 2013). Each instructional practice allowed the teacher to meet the students at their level and learn what the student thought about the topic or how they experienced it, further demonstrating the respect they felt for their students.

In other practices, each teacher relied on various assessment methods to meet the needs and interests of the students. During the observations, formal standardized assessments such as multiple-choice questions did not exist as the teachers used group work, projects, presentations, debates, and writing for the students to demonstrate mastery of the content. These practices fostered a caring environment because it allowed the students to express their interests, discuss the topics more in-depth in smaller groups, and often had fewer rigid rules (Velasquez et al., 2013). For example, Ms. Frank included a video project to help the students increase their speaking skills because many of them spoke primarily Spanish. The assessments observed attempted to assess the content, but they also sought to increase the students’ ability to relate to the material. Mr. Campbell asked the students to write financial plans based on their interests and consider economic stereotypes. Furthermore, Ms. Bennett encouraged the students to use their life experiences to compare and contrast the novels they read. Lastly, Ms. Austen asked the students to take their experiences growing up to change the laws to make the country better. These teachers taught the students to embrace equity and assisted them in learning skills to negotiate society as it currently exists (Gay, 2018). Each teacher modified the
assessments in the room to meet the needs and interests of the racially diverse students they taught.

Each teacher continued to demonstrate care for their students in a variety of ways. All of the teacher participants allowed the students to utilize the language they felt most comfortable with to discuss the content and complete projects. In another example, Ms. Bennett asked the students to present their long term and short term goals as a method of better tailoring the classroom to the students. Ms. Bennett also planned for the students to write a personal narrative that works towards getting the students to discuss themselves, therefore, creating a comfortable atmosphere within which to develop a relationship with the teacher (Velasquez et al., 2013). The teachers planned lessons around the need to understand their students further by utilizing methods that showed they cared about the students’ native language and allowing them to incorporate themselves into projects.

Each of the observed teachers planned activities that allowed them to learn about the students through projects, debates, discussions, writings, and group work. Each teacher found a way to immerse themselves in the students' experiences and backgrounds, which allowed them access to a relationship that could lead to their consciousness being transformed (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The bond the teachers formed through discussions, taking an interest in their lives, demonstrating high expectations for their growth as individuals led to increased participation (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Caring, relational relationships provided the teachers with an opportunity to listen to the racially diverse students and gain new insights and knowledge about their experiences and who they are as individuals.
Theme #4 Conclusion

Each teacher displayed positive attitudes that embodied elements of compassion and trust to show that they cared about the students. The teachers explicitly exclaimed how they love learning about the students and their lives because they believe it is essential for their student-teacher relationships. Mr. Campbell said, “I think it comes down to those little interactions, so they know, they feel respected no matter where they are coming from.” Rasmussen and Sieck (2015) believed that the more experiences and knowledge one has about other cultures, the more likely they are to respect the students as individuals (Bennett, 1986). These teachers embraced learning about the students and discussed the positive impact it had on them as individuals as well as their practice in the classroom. The cultural competence of the participants continued to develop as they learned and cared about their students especially through those “little interactions” that expanded their schemas. The teachers approached their pupils with respect and care as they sought to develop deeper relationships with them.

Student Focus Group Answers Sub-Question #2

While the students responded to my interview questions, similar themes arose, demonstrating a connection between the teachers and the students. The student participants appeared to feel comfortable in the setting and with the interviewer because their responses seemed genuine as they addressed both positives and negative aspects about their teachers. The focus group recognized their teacher’s abilities to plan cultural activities, create discussions around inequities, and their ability to address topics such as racism on varying levels. The students expressed ideas that aligned with a sociopolitical consciousness, student-focused approaches, acknowledging their backgrounds, and care.
Acknowledging and appreciating students’ cultural backgrounds.

The students believed the teacher participants valued and respected their cultural backgrounds. While they expressed many different experiences with other teachers throughout their educational careers, the students admitted that the teacher participants planned activities to get to know their heritages, asked them questions, and engaged them in conversations about their families. The focus group participants described how they felt more comfortable and willing to engage in the classroom when their teacher took the time to develop connections that breached the traditional student-teacher relationship.

For example, one of the members of the group stated, “that white teachers have no idea what is going on with us.” The student then went on to describe how Ms. Bennett admitted this fact but then used the personal statements projects as a method of gaining more knowledge about their lives, including their cultural backgrounds. One participant explained how their connection with Ms. Bennett grew when she did this because they felt pride in the fact that they could express their backgrounds in the classroom and appreciated her for wanting to learn more about them.

The focus group members explained how autobiographical projects in Ms. Roosevelt’s class helped them connect with the teacher but also with the other students in the room. Here is one participant’s view on the teacher and the project:

She just does things differently. She wants to know everything little thing about you. I don’t open up to people, but I present my whole life story. We all have our own little things, but I like the fact that she has us present, and that project lets us connect with each other.

The students continually expressed how much they enjoyed learning about each other and the different cultures and experiences. Again, the teachers planned and implemented
activities that integrated the students’ cultural backgrounds into the classroom, further
developing the rapport they built with their learners.

The youth often cited many negative examples from their experiences with white
teachers over the years despite the questions being directed towards the teachers who
participated in this study. The focus group also provided a counter-example that they felt
made their culture feel inferior. Some expressed that the only time their cultural
backgrounds receive acknowledgement in the classroom was when it related to slavery.
As one student described, “we have been learning about slavery forever!” Another
student chimed in:

But I know we do talk about black heritage, but it is bad things like slavery, and
then we go to current events. It is like some black person died, like basically
every downfall of our people.

As this quote suggests, over-acknowledging certain aspects of cultural backgrounds can
contribute to a negative reaction within the students. The members expressed how their
teachers, the ones from the study, are different. Opportunities to voice their opinions in
class presented themselves often along with frequent activities that valued and respected
their cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, the student participants discussed the positive impact the teachers
in this study had on them when they incorporated their cultural backgrounds in the
classroom. The teachers found unique ways of encouraging the students to act as the
leader in the classrooms and share about themselves. The members felt their connections
with the teacher deepen after these activities because they felt more comfortable
expressing themselves and discussing various aspects of their culture and the cultures of
others.
Students Connect with the Sociopolitical Consciousness of the Teacher

During the focus group, the students openly discussed issues related to racism, oppression, diversity, ethnorelativism, and whiteness. The learners often discussed these terms about their experiences as a whole in education but continually cited the teacher participants as being understanding and empowering. Responses from the group often referred to broader social constructs that related to members of the school and community. Intriguing insights provided by the participants revealed the connections the group developed with teachers who addressed issues such as racism and whiteness. Discussions and projects on these topics had a profound impact on the members of the group but they also noted there is not enough of a discourse around the topics of racism and oppression in school. The racially diverse student focus group discussed the school environment in broader contexts and the role the teacher participants played and could play in further formulating connections between the school and its students. The focus group believed that the teachers sought to gain cultural knowledge about their students, discuss emotions involved with planning projects, and connect with the students as they discussed difficult topics revolving around society’s treatment of minorities, racism, and the role the teacher has in the process.

*Address and acknowledge there is a difference.*

The focus group outlined the significance of discussing topics such as racism and diversity. The students openly discussed these topics in the group, and many felt empowered to share their experiences in the classroom. The students connected these terms to their lives, and some expressed the difference a teacher makes in the classroom when they do address it. One student explained how they do not open up for anyone, but
this one teacher created an atmosphere that allowed the student to share their thoughts. A member of the focus group explained:

We connect with each other. The teaching finds something we all have in common with each other, and then they put us in a group, and we all connect. I love my sixth-period class. We all understand each other, and everything we say stays in there. That’s what I love about it. No matter that we are all different or not.

The teacher connected with the students by learning about them as individuals and then pairing them together based on similar interests. According to one student, this allowed them to discuss diversity and racism without fear of judgment or ridicule from their peers.

Discussions became a critical method of connection between the student focus group and teachers. The group explained how some of their instructors enacted high levels of patience to better understand and connect with the students. According to the focus group:

most kids don’t use their words, most use actions, they don’t know how to express themselves in a way speaking for everyone else to understand them, you know, break down what they say or what they do.

The teachers allowed the learners to speak and discuss with them their actions to form deeper relationships because the students from this group explained how they felt more understood. The students explained how teachers uncovered their experiences and thoughts.

Several students in the group agreed that there are teachers in the school that acknowledge the racial diversity between themselves and the students. First, they explained how some teachers try to act like they understand what it is like to be a minority or what it might be like to be in their shoes, according to the group, but it
became clear the students failed to connect with this approach. The group described the significance of how the white teacher participants being honest about their position in society as compared to the students had a significant impact on them. One focus group member said, “She knows like I’m white, so I really don't know what you all go through…she’ll actually talk to you.” Through these discussions, the students explained that the teacher forms a bond with them because they take the time to learn about them as people without making assumptions about their behaviors, work ethic, and language. The teachers admit their positionality in society, and the students felt that it is acknowledged there was a vast difference between them.

As teachers look to connect with students through the students’ cultural language, the group expressed two differing opinions. Some members of the group felt that when white teachers tried to use their words that it sounded “weird.” According to the group, “It’s our Philly vocabulary.” Some described how it appears funny when white teachers try to use their vocabulary, but others felt that they connected with teachers who taught them to speak without using African American urban vernacular associated with the area. One of the focus group members explained that their teachers demonstrated how to code-switch. They said:

I feel like they are trying to help us out, like telling us to stop saying that when you get a job interview, and you’re not going to want to say yea, I forgot my jawn at my home, and it’s your resume.

The group member explained how their teacher discussed the difference between professional language and taught them to “separate the hood” by presenting themselves differently within different cultural contexts (Molinsky, 2007; Bennett, 1986; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The members of the focus group found different teacher approaches
connected with them in different ways because one involved the teacher learning about the students’ backgrounds while the other involved increasing the students' ability to succeed in the world but still maintain who they are as individuals.

**Barriers connecting with the students in a sociopolitical manner.**

While the focus group described how the teachers connected with them and the often difficult to discuss topics, they could not help but focus on barriers to connections as well. Many felt compelled to share their personal experiences with race in the classroom, multicultural projects, and Black History Month. While they cited the teacher participants at times, they continued to focus on teachers throughout their time in school. The students demonstrated their sociopolitical consciousness around race and common mistakes teachers make that cause them to withdraw in class.

Race can raise emotions in individuals, both in teachers and students. The student focus group expressed how they felt that many teachers exhibited nervousness around the issue or made incorrect assumptions based on their experiences. The group felt strongly that few teachers outside of the teacher participants address race, and fewer allow the discussion to take place. The student focus group said, “They (the teachers) address it, but nobody talks about it. They mention it and move on from it.” The students expressed that some teachers allow a video to play on events related to racism but fail to follow up with a discussion about it. “They play the video, so they don't have to talk about it themselves.” The students believed these topics made the teachers nervous or uncomfortable.

Teachers are not the only ones who can feel uncomfortable in the classroom. One student shared how uncomfortable they are sharing their background for fear of being
judged. Teachers can fail to recognize microaggressions that can potentially reinforce dominant societal beliefs about certain groups of people (Lindsey et al., 2018; Wing Sue et al., 2009). The student identified themselves as Mexican and felt that “they just think that we hop over borders, bring drugs over. It just makes us seem like the worst. I’m scared to tell them I am Mexican.” The comment sparked other group members to discuss how they interpret and process traditional cultural assumptions resulting in them suppressing their cultural backgrounds. By these actions, the group explained how teachers fail to acknowledge and understand cultural differences, and this prevents them from cultural sensemaking (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The group agreed that assumptions break down relationships and prevent them from engaging in the classroom.

*Teachers fall short on addressing racism to create relational bonds.*

The focus group answered questions revolving around projects that teachers plan in their classrooms. When asked about how projects incorporate racially diverse backgrounds, one student responded, “Never, never, never! We talk about white people the most like it’s the only thing in history,” but they referred to their overall experience and not specifically the teachers participating in this study. The group felt that teachers only covered negative topics around people from diverse backgrounds. The focus group expressed they learned about issues such as slavery, and three members responded in unison saying. “We have been learning about that forever.” The students said that slavery is an important topic, but it is often the only topic of discussion. Outside of slavery, the group discussed how few, if any, teachers attempt to incorporate projects that acknowledge their backgrounds. The student focus group touched on the topic of neoliberalism without knowing it. In a system influenced by Neoliberalism, standardized
curricula become the driving force behind policies, reducing the consideration for integrating culture to cultural celebrations and, as one student put it Black History Month (Powell et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2018, 2012). Three of the students explained that Black History Month is actually “like a week or two or three days and then it goes back to, yeah,” implying that they go back to learning about white people. The group did not believe that many teachers cared about Black History Month outside of the teacher participants. The students described how other teachers failed to confront the issues of race, especially during Black History Month, and in essence, they maintained compliance with the technical procedures they followed throughout the year (Starke et al., 2018).

The students discussed barriers that teachers can face when working with racially diverse youth and how these impacted their engagement in the classroom and the ability to form a relationship with the teacher.

The racially diverse student participants outlined some of the barriers often associated with the inability to develop cultural competence. A sociopolitical consciousness increases as teachers become more culturally competent, and it helps to break down barriers between the teachers and the students as they incorporate cultural backgrounds and form connections (Darling-Hammond, 2006 & Ladson-Billings, 2001).

The focus group displayed their ability to connect themselves to broader social constructs as well as how many teachers do and do not connect with the students as they acknowledge cultural differences or racism. While they did admit the teacher participants address difficult topics such as racism, the focus group felt compelled to point out more so how often it did not happen in their other classrooms.

**Connecting with the Teacher Through Student Focused Approaches**
The student focus group outlined several student-focused approaches that they felt connected with them. The students took turns discussing how they felt how their teachers created classrooms that involved student discourse, collaboration, and engagement at various levels. These student-focused approaches allowed the students to feel respected and valued (Hollings, 2008; Lindsey et al., 2018). Discussions, projects, and classroom collaborations permitted students the opportunity to connect with their teachers.

**Projects and activities foster relationships.**

The group focused on how the teacher participants put them more at ease by implementing activities that allow them to open up about themselves. For example, teachers used computerized game programs like Kahoot to create opportunities to, as the students described it, “joke around and allow them to open up and start to feel comfortable with your classes...it makes it easier for us to get along with each other.” Teachers also designed projects and activities that allowed the students to collaborate. One student said, “the teacher finds something that we all have in common with each other, and then she puts us in a group, and we all connect.” The students described that the activities created levels of trust (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). The students “loved” classes that afforded them the chance to share parts of themselves and understand that they are valued members of the classroom community.

Furthermore, the students outlined specific projects that furthered their sense of self and the fact that the teacher participants valued them as people. Several of the students expressed the significance of a poem they wrote in English class because it addressed their backgrounds and varied learning styles (Gay, 2018). The teacher asked them to write a poem that personified them as a person or reflected who they are.
students described the emotions this activity invoked in some of them. One student became emotional when they recalled a poem they wrote about their mother, who lives in the Dominican Republic, and the distance they now experience from their family. The focus group touted the respect they had for teachers who took the time to learn about them as people.

In addition to projects, the teachers created activities that focused on collaboration and class discussions, which further allowed the students to bring themselves into the classroom. The discussions centered on the students and validated their backgrounds and heritages (Powell et al., 2016). The teachers empowered the students to participate and instilled confidence in them to share about themselves (Powell et al., 2016). In one example, the students brought up a specific debate that the teacher allowed the students to give their opinions on racial equality and then chose which side of the discussion they had to defend. The students appreciated the chance to share their opinion but also that the teacher allowed them to share in small groups if they did not feel comfortable sharing in front of the whole class. The students recognized the teachers’ attempts to learn about their opinions and respected the teacher for giving them the chance to voice it.

The student focus group discussed how they appreciated the classroom discussions and activities that allowed them to share their opinions. The implementation of these activities created connections between the students and the teachers. The student focus group expressed the significance of the approaches the teacher participants exhibited in the classrooms because it had a positive impact on how the students felt about the class, their classmates, and the teacher.

**Caring Connections**
Relationships play a crucial role in the development of a relational student/teacher relationship. The relationships the teachers form with their students directly impacted their ability to develop new thought processes and patterns. The student focus group outlined the activities and other examples of how the teachers demonstrated care for them and their development. The teachers had to develop a rapport, create a safe environment, and believe the students could succeed. These traits and activities allowed for deeper connections to develop. The students explained the significance of trusting their teachers and others in the room, especially when it is related to discussing topics that are often considered sensitive such as race.

Believing in the students’ ability to succeed.

The students explained the significance of care and expectations. They felt that teachers connected with them when they believed in their ability to succeed. The students described the high expectations the teacher put on them led to higher levels of commitment, both academically and socially (Hoffman, 2016). The group stated that, “the teachers actually care about you and want you to succeed...but they’re not going to do much if they don’t like you.” The focus group believed that teachers needed to care about their students as people genuinely; otherwise, the students would not complete higher quality work. The social-emotional partnership allowed the teachers to leverage their relationships with students to support them with higher levels of achievement (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). The students made it clear that a relationship based on care leads to their ability to connect more with the classroom and share more of themselves. The more comfortable the students feel about sharing, the more likely the teacher experienced interactions outside their culture, which increases their ability to
develop their connections with the students.

**Building a rapport and safe space.**

Students refused to open up about themselves if teachers did not first implement activities that allowed them to develop a rapport over time. The students felt that educators who granted them multiple opportunities to speak about themselves in class relieved the pressure or fear that can arise when sharing personal information in front of a group. The teachers utilized team-building strategies and high interest activities to demonstrate to the students that they have common ground, but the students explained that their teachers would stop lessons to address student concerns. The focus group shared an experience with one teacher:

The teacher understands, they know like I really don’t know what you all go through...she is honest with us, and she’ll actually talk to you and ask you questions...they give me space, and I love the fact she will stop a whole lesson just to make sure you’re okay.

The teacher cared for the students by giving them space and the opportunity to voice their feelings based on their experiences around racism, creating a context upon which interactions between the teacher and student foster new learning (Gay, 2018). The teachers took the pressure off the students and created spaces based on care and trust that allowed the students to feel comfortable in sharing.

The instructors created safe spaces for the students to express themselves. According to the focus group, the teacher participants achieved this by first sharing about themselves and being vulnerable. The students specifically mentioned the openness of teachers altered the dynamics of the classroom environment, allowing them to further connect with the teachers. The student focus group said:
She opens up to us like she has to see us as more than just students because she has the heart to open up like that to us about her family. Even if she doesn't know us personally, she has the trust in us to open up and tell us. She is giving us the benefit of the doubt, giving us that chance. The teacher said you are still people too inside and outside of school. It is good to know that you have teachers that you can open up to. Just because they are your teacher does not mean that they didn't go through anything as traumatic as you did as a child...Everyone goes through things, and it’s difficult, but it’s good to know that teachers have that trust in their students.

Teachers respected the students and developed relationships that balanced care and their authority in the classroom (Audley, 2020). A reciprocal relationship of caring formed as the students expressed they cared and connected more with teachers who cared for them as the teachers committed to the development of the relationship (Garza, 2009). The focus group found that connections between the teacher and students become deeper when the teacher openly and honestly shares with them because they feel valued as people.

**Conclusion to the Student Focus Group Answers on Teacher Connections**

The student focus group demonstrated the significance of developing caring and trusting relationships with racially diverse students. Without caring and trust, the student focus group felt that they would not be honest or willing to participate in classroom discussions. Without caring for the students as individuals and valuing them as people, there appeared to be a much smaller chance of the teacher connecting with them. Connections through discussions, rapport building, believing the students could be successful furthered the bond between the teacher participants and the student focus group. The teachers increased their opportunities to develop connections with the students when they implemented an ethic of care because the students felt more comfortable to express themselves and voice their opinions.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Restatement the Purpose

This study builds on the existing research around multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy by connecting it to teachers’ cultural competence development. The educator participants discussed factors that led to their continued development of cultural competence. These educators sought to learn from opportunities that presented themselves over time both in and out of the classroom. The teachers cited how their experiences with racially diverse youth impacted their thoughts, attitudes, and practices.

The six white teachers developed their cultural competence through education, experience, and reflection on exposure. This study also uncovered how these teachers’ cultural competence supported their connections with the students. The student focus group revealed increased student engagement and unique perspectives regarding the teachers' attempts to address racism and other critical social issues in the classroom.

Four major themes emerged during the analysis of the data focused on answering the primary and secondary research questions. The results align to studies completed by researchers such as Geneva Gay, Christine Sleeter, and Rasmussen and Sieck. The six White teachers and the student focus group provide four significant themes that can help others further recognize and challenge their cultural competence development. The data and results support starting more conversations in the field about how White teachers' cultural competence impacts relationships with racially diverse students.

Summary of Findings
Research Question One

This study's first focus determined how a selection of White teachers developed their cultural competence to implement culturally responsive practices in the classroom as they work in urban environments. The first question's secondary focus sought to uncover what beliefs the teachers hold and what teaching strategies they use to bridge the gap between their cultures and their students’ cultures. The results indicate that the study participants valued the development of a sociopolitical consciousness and appreciated the cultural backgrounds of the racially diverse students they taught. The teachers recognized the importance of looking into racially diverse perspectives, which caused them to challenge their own thought processes. As they developed their appreciation for a sociopolitical consciousness, the teachers became more critically aware of their students’ contextual world and the sociopolitical factors that impacted it. The study demonstrates how the teachers valued cultural differences and challenged racial stereotypes along with policies often associated with systemic racism, such as those in education and housing. This analysis supports the theory that Rasmussen and Sieck developed around their nine elements of cultural competency. The data suggests how each teacher took others' perspectives, sought to understand and make sense of racially diverse students’ cultures, and then act on their reflections to interact appropriately (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015). The results indicate that the participants grew their cultural competence by emphasizing withholding judgment and challenging themselves to learn from the experiences outside of their own culture.

The student focus group answered the second sub-question. The results taken from the group members indicate that students felt more connected to the teachers who
acknowledged them and challenged them to discuss difficult topics. Data suggests that students want to discuss matters related to race and that they need a relationship or rapport with the teacher for this to occur. The student focus group's data also demonstrates the importance of the student to teacher relationship and that the relationship deepens the more culturally competent the teacher becomes. The student focus group expresses how their teachers attempted to value cultural differences and engage in activities that challenged societal norms. For example, one teacher had the students rewrite the school and government rules based on their perspectives. The data suggests that the teachers who develop relationships based on care and trust connect with the students allowing them to feel comfortable discussing topics such as racism and diversity. The student focus group claims that teachers who learn about each of their students and use it to support classroom discussions develop greater connections with them. The analysis supports the theory that student focused approaches allow the students to feel valued and respected (Hollings, 2008, Lindsey et al., 2018). The study demonstrates the impact care and relationships have on teachers and students. The results indicate that students felt that trusting their teachers impacted their ability to connect with them. This analysis supports that theory that White teachers who are more likely to engage in new experiences outside of their culture, afford themselves the opportunity to increase their cultural competence when they better connect with the students because they feel comfortable enough to share their experiences and thoughts (Endicott et al., 2003; Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015; Sieck et al., 2013).

Verifications of Results
The results aligned with ideas and theories espoused by significant contributors to the field of cultural competence. The data supported the elements identified by Rasmussen and Sieck's cultural competence, but it also aligned with Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay's theories. While there is a growing cultural gap between racially diverse students and the educators' population, some White educators seek to bridge that gap (Sleeter, 2018). The six teacher participants each use the students’ cultural aspects to empower them socially, emotionally, and intellectually (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mahari et al., 2018). Close analysis of the data confirms some of my own experience of how I continue to work on developing cultural competence through reflection, discussion, and experience. The results fit within the context of the research associated with cultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The value of a sociopolitical consciousness shown by the White teachers demonstrates the link between the results and the theories contextualized within the research. The data presents how the teachers used reflection and experiences to develop their sociopolitical consciousness, which is a central tenet in culturally relevant pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dodo Seriki, 2016; Ladson-Billing, 2001). The teachers’ evidence displays the nine competencies of cultural competence and how they link to the surveys, interviews, observations, and lesson plans. The data analysis reveals the mindset changes that occurred within the teachers based on experiences that allowed them to question their current schemas (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003; Sieck, Smith, & Rasmussen, 2013). The data consistently shows the impact experiences with racially diverse students had on the teachers through their responses and actions.
Student focused approaches allow the teachers to interact with the students to create opportunities for discourse, collaboration, and engagement at various levels. The results support White teachers maintaining student focused approaches that value the worth of the racially diverse students in their classrooms to increase the value of the educational experience (Hollings, 2008; Lindsey et al., 2018). The interview, observation, and lessons plan results reaffirm the importance of maintaining student focused approaches that allow the students to engage in culturally responsive instructional activities that will enable them to share their perspective and cultural differences. The data displays how the teachers connect instructional practices to the students’ lived cultures and create activities for critical thinking (Delpit, 2012). The results support the theory that without taking others’ perspectives in an approach to the classroom, there is a risk that their white privilege impacts their ability to genuinely participate in conversations that are not influenced by it (Buehler et al., 2009). The student focused approach allows the teachers to experience the students in a manner that increases their ability to participate in conversations outside of their cultural norm.

The data supports the theories around teachers developing caring and trusting relationships with their students. Students from the focus group express the need for teachers to cultivate these relationships because they are less likely to participate in activities without it. Culturally competent approaches allow teachers to develop relationships (Audley, 2020). The results demonstrate the importance of care in the teacher’s ability to connect with the students. The teacher results align with Geneva Gay’s ideas of a culturally responsive classroom. The students express the gravity of trusting the teacher and knowing they care to engage in activities that voice their feelings
or perspective (Gay, 2018). Without the safe space, the study results draw on similar conclusions to Gay’s theory that new learning cannot occur without the teacher becoming exposed to new experiences in a culture outside of their own (Gay, 2018). This study finds an impact on developing caring relationships with the students and that it can lead to deeper connections with the students, further resulting in new mindset patterns on behalf of the teacher.

**Interpretations**

The teachers participating in the study demonstrate multicultural attitudes, implement culturally responsive instructional practices, and confront society's conventional norms around race. These White teachers challenge their mindsets around race, but the individuals in the study each have had unique experiences that helped them reach their current state of cultural competence. Experiences and exposure to racially diverse students directly impact their thought patterns and actions. The teachers reflect on their experiences and interaction and, through the reflection, incorporate more culturally responsive approaches and increase their sociopolitical consciousness. Each teacher discusses the significance of relationships and how they impact them and how it impacts the students. White teachers expand the possibility of further developing their cultural competence when interacting with racially diverse students while remaining open to their students' perspectives and cultural differences.

The nine competencies, outlined by Rasmussen and Sieck, offer a guide to the attitudes, values, and practices that align with the teacher participants' development of cultural competence. The evidence supports their outline as each individual demonstrates through the interviews and observations that they exhibit elements of each
competency. As the teachers discuss aspects of their cultural competence, such as those associated with self-presentation and self-efficacy, it manifests into culturally responsive classroom opportunities. Culturally responsive practices represent the focus of the teacher participants. The nine competencies in the experience of these teachers lead to culturally responsive practices.

According to the survey, interviews, observations, lesson plans, and student focus group, the data shows that even the most seemingly culturally competent White teachers still need to continue their development. The student focus group recognizes the teachers' efforts, but according to them, the issues stopped at identification. Identification of the problem is part of the process, but there is much more to do with challenging systemic racism, nervousness, fear, and other barriers. The student focus group expresses the idea that the teachers do not go far enough beyond the identification level when it comes to racism, biases, and stereotypes. The White teachers confidently express the need and ability to implement activities that result in change. Still, their students did not feel their efforts went far enough despite the teacher participants demonstrating the highest responses to multicultural attitudes in the building. They are implying that the teachers necessitate further growth.

The teachers demonstrate activities and thinking associated with attempts to integrate cultural differences and a sociopolitical consciousness in the classroom but the students felt nervousness or fear prevents many teachers from taking controversial topics past identification. The students describe events that took place and how they felt that after acknowledgement there was not enough time to discuss issues with racism. They also describe their feelings on holidays or Black History Month being reduced to a week
or a few lessons. The analysis supports the theory of Neoliberalism and that integrating culture is merely superficial as it mostly relates to celebrating holidays (Powell et al., 2016 & Sleeter, 2018). The student focus groups data demonstrates the students’ ability to recognize the differences between integration of culture and the mere acknowledgement of it. Teachers who are open, challenge themselves, because they are not content with acknowledgment. The student focused group declares acknowledgement did not go far enough because they believe acknowledging issues and backgrounds is only the beginning.

Caring and focusing on the students can impact racially diverse students more than some teachers may know. Teachers who focus on students and care enough to push them to reach higher levels can result in more successful academic outcomes in the lives (Delpit, 2012). Teachers can empower students to break through barriers such as socioeconomic status (Delpit, 2012). The student focus group demonstrates the impact teachers have on them. Students feel the more teachers care, focus on them, and incorporate sociopolitical consciousness values, the more they connect with the teacher. The connections can lead to higher engagement levels and increased opportunities for teachers to learn more about the students’ cultures and lives, thus creating experiences that could alter their mindsets, possibly leading to further cultural competence development.

One unexpected result from the data exemplifies the lack of family connections between the teachers and the students’ home lives. The data supports the idea that the teachers did not connect, contact, or interact with the families of the racially diverse students on a regular basis. The family provides opportunities to learn more about the
students, their backgrounds, and their experiences but this resource remains
underutilized. The teachers openly admit this fact. Students offer essential information
about their backgrounds, cultures, and experiences but there is the possibility for more
opportunities to demonstrate other levels of care and culturally responsive practices that
involve the incorporation of the family. The developers of the CRIOP observation tool
feel strongly about the family connections but the data did not support a strong family
connection between the teachers who present as more culturally competent and their
students.

Implications for Practice

The data shows that the teachers take an active role in their cultural competence
development. Some of the teachers’ experiences include lectures about racial diversity in
their teacher preparation programs, but mostly they learn from experience. The
experiences between the teachers share similarities and through critical reflections of
themselves they gain new insights into becoming more culturally competent. Cultural
competence in teachers can no longer be an afterthought or supplement considered after
creating curriculum and teacher preparation programs but they also must continue to
overcome barriers such as systemic racism and assimilationist tendencies. Cultural
competence based on the results deepens teachers' and students' connections and has
implications that directly address instructional practice. The findings add to previous
research that addresses how cultural competence development benefits both the teacher
and the students in the classroom. Still, it also provides specifics about development and
the connections it supports in the teacher to student relationship. Students express that
they feel more connected and engage more when teachers develop richer connections,
acknowledge cultural diversity, and align it with classroom activities. The study results suggest that teachers should continue to develop on their own through engaging in experiences that result in deep, critical reflection but it also suggests that professional development around these practices could impact development on a larger scale than one individual at a time.

Through some sought-after experiences and some naturally occurring experiences, these six teachers demonstrate individuals who value a sociopolitical consciousness resulting in focused approaches around cultural differences and challenging systemic issues associated with race. It shows that some teachers actively seek to build their cultural competence. Many of the teachers who responded to the survey still did not return results consistent with someone who values and acknowledges cultural differences. While these six teachers sought to change, it appears that others did not, and there is a dangerous line between challenging conventions of systemic racism and falling into assimilationist attitudes. The idea that some educators want to change and others accept negative stereotypes illustrates why support from school administrators and professional development opportunities could provide safe spaces for teachers to complete their reflective practice, hold discussions, and continually implement or study practices associated with culturally responsive pedagogy.

Teachers reviewing this study can look on the development of these teachers and utilize similar patterns to address their own cultural competence. The study participants continue to overcome the barriers that can prevent others from developing their cultural competence which can help others as they become more aware of them. These individuals withhold judgments as they seek to understand cultural differences and how
privilege and systems of racial biases might impact them as teachers. Experience alone cannot change people’s minds as negative experiences can reinforce harmful stereotypes. It takes critical reflection in a safe space that allows for the continual analysis of the sociopolitical and cultural circumstance of situations to understand the implications it has on the observer and others. As a White, male administrator working with teachers, I am in a position to play a small part in others’ development by admitting the problem, fostering growth, and demonstrating the significance of change. Given my position and encouragement, there is the possibility that teachers will feel comfortable enough to openly and honestly engage in situational conversations around race that may be uncomfortable. For example, a safe space created with one of the teachers from this study could benefit others at the school as they learn about the traits and qualities of other cultures to better accept, study, and empower them. More importantly, they discuss the barriers preventing growth and find methods of working around them.

Small groups of can focus on misguided attitudes such as the idea of colorblindness and assimilation. The teacher participants’ actions and attitudes can demonstrate to the group the importance of resisting assimilation to the overarching political and economic systems of America (Hollins, 2008). The members need to work together to acknowledge systems of racial bias in schools and learn to empower students to challenge them, which allows them to continue to critically analyze and reflect upon the students' perspectives on these topics. Some teachers can also benefit from being in a small group with a culturally competent teacher especially when they need to discuss why colorblindness fails to value racially diverse learners. A critical analysis of how colorblindness reinforces attitudes and actions that devalue the black identify (Delpit,
2012) is crucial to the development of those who think they can teach all children the same way. Learning how others develop through group discussions can encourage other teachers because they can see that the thinking of others evolves and this can provide them with a path to follow as they seek to change and grow themselves.

Racially biased systems prove devastating for racially diverse students (Singleton & Linton, 2006). The White teachers in the study use their experiences with racially diverse students to reflect on differences and their own backgrounds to base their decisions on challenging pre-existing societal norms and the students’ culture rather than fear and nervousness (Starke et al., 2018). If exposure and experiences followed by critical reflection improve growth, we need to create opportunities for teachers to participate in them. For example, facilitated discussions with racially diverse youth and teachers about education can provide educators with new perspectives. Facilitators would require training and the support of all stakeholders including parents and administrators. These discussions have the potential to uncover bias stereotypes or improper judgements of the students but the opportunities need to exist if change is going to happen. Not all teachers will feel empowered enough as the ones that participated in this study to have candid conversations with their students about cultural backgrounds, race, and other sensitive topics until they receive the appropriate training.

The decisions these teachers make challenge patterns of biases that exist in education and their lives. They use their knowledge to impact their practice. Research demonstrates culturally responsive instruction integrates well with effective teaching (Powell et al., 2016). More teachers need to critically self-reflect and allow experiences and culturally diverse experiences to increase their value of the sociopolitical
consciousness. As teachers evolve, so will educational practices, and it is possible to align cultural practices with effective instruction. The next step would be to reform educational policies advocating for the development of cultural competence in teachers starting at my charter school. Eventually, policy reform should reach the district and state levels to demonstrate the importance of this initiative to change how we approach racially diverse students in education.

Policy changes around professional development and other areas are needed but for my school the first place we need to start is the school’s Vision and Mission. The wording often references that we want “all” students to succeed through rigorous learning and persevere. We fail to mention anything about the black and brown students specifically in the vision and mission. It falls dangerously close to colorblind attitudes and without the necessary encouragement through training and small group discussion, I believe we fail to cultivate the attitudes necessary to foster culturally competent growth among the teachers. Revising the vision and mission statement to include elements such as the importance of the value of differences, culture, and identify could go a long way in starting the process of creating more teachers feeling the pressure along with the given opportunity to grow their consciousness.

Culturally responsive instruction fosters inclusivity, democracy, and the antitheist of racism (Noguera, 2008), but more emphasis is required on individual teacher development and not only instructional practices. There are colleges and programs that focus on culturally responsive practices but without first creating culturally competent individuals much will be lost in the translation to practice if much is translated at all. The individual needs to come first before they can change their practices, otherwise it can
look like superficial coverage of cultural differences such as holidays and food that occurs once in a while in classrooms. As the students point out for some of their teachers, they incorporate activities that appear culturally responsive but fail to move beyond acknowledgement. This could partially come from nervousness, fear, and unknown mindsets that allow assimilationist decisions to prevail. Knowing this, could impact reformation around evaluations and college preparatory programs for educators.

First, colleges can address the courses in the teacher education programs. The inclusion of classes that discuss microaggressions and myths of the achievement of black and brown children can serve as a method of starting the conversation towards the enlightenment of cultural competence. The more courses that acknowledge the damage microaggressions have on the black identity the more exposure teachers will have towards understanding their own perceptions of differences. Lisa Delpit (2012) believes that if microaggression are not challenged, the black identify will continue to be devalued by those unaware of gravity certain comments can have on students especially around achievement. Schools hold negative views of black culture and intellectual capacity (Delpit, 2012). Starting these conversations in college courses opens the opportunity for new teachers to be aware of the concerns surrounding racially diverse learners in their classroom and continue to work on making sure they are not part of the problem but support the creation of solutions.

Additionally, professional developments could ask teachers to critically self-reflect on how their perspective may incorporate privilege, negative racial stereotypes, and biases. New and veteran teachers can become exposed to same experience as aspiring teachers if college programs change. Veteran teachers can benefit from the same
training because many are working with racially diverse youth now. The faster change occurs in schools the less likely students will have to give up parts of their identify to be valued and rewarded. Teachers need to be aware of these stereotypes and biases to confront them and prevent the negative impact that can occur from microaggressive statements or oppressive policies.

While these teachers represented those who exhibited higher levels of cultural competence and more positive attitudes toward multicultural education, several still approached racially diverse students with some elements of the deficit paradigm. At times, some of the teachers expressed ideas that emphasized the indication that the students’ diverse experiences represented “obstacles to overcome, rather than an asset to be embraced” (Fox, 2016, p.645). A deficit approach does not incorporate the strengths of the students into the classroom, therefore preventing the students and teacher from benefiting from this cultural capital. Each of the teachers admitted to having limited contact with parents. This creates a lack of Social and Family capital within the classroom (Fox, 2016). Family capital scored the lowest on the observational tool and the teachers admitted to a lack of communication with the students’ parents or guardians. Networks of individuals and community resources represent social capital that can receive affirmation and perpetuation in the classroom (Fox, 2016). Even teachers possessing positive attitudes towards multicultural education and higher levels of cultural competence can exhibit aspects of the deficit paradigm in their actions and speech. Asset paradigmatic approaches allow for the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the students to be a strength in the classroom and thus demonstrate the teacher’s ability to utilize various forms of social and family capital of the students.
Finally, we can focus on altering evaluations for teachers to integrate cultural components throughout the process. Many schools, including mine, currently use the Danielson Model to evaluate their teachers. While this does address student interests and seeks to encourage high levels of learner involvement, the model’s broadly worded domain components do not specifically motivate teachers to utilize elements that are culturally responsive. Programs and evaluations could further understand the importance of the development of cultural competence and incorporate programming and evaluation tools to increase culturally pedagogical components in classrooms.

Furthermore, in the nation’s current state, it is difficult to fully understand the implication this study could have on the practice of educators. A recent memo coming from the president's office called for the revision of cultural sensitivity training funded by the government. In short, the notice called for an end to teaching systemic racism exists, the issue of white privilege, or anything that insists the country is inherently racist in cultural sensitivity training that receives funds from the federal government (Haberman, 2020). This could limit schools from implementing professional developments or individuals from thinking that there might be something wrong in how they perceive other races or the way society does. The memo can prevent individuals from confronting difficult issues such as white privilege and systemic racism that they may potentially be complicit in or prevent them from discussing various sociopolitical circumstances that impact racially diverse students in the classroom. In conclusion, it is difficult to determine the implications of this study completely, especially if memos and the mentality behind them continue to exist in the country because it can suppress self-
reflection on experiences with racially diverse students or the participation in professional developments that could lead to mindset shifts.

**Implications for Research**

While this study displays how six White teachers develop cultural competence and connect with their racially diverse students, it only provides readers with how specific individuals accomplish this goal. This research shows that more exploration into interventions utilized to increase the cultural competence of White teachers is needed, especially considering the rising population of racially diverse students in public education. There is limited research between a person’s disposition and cultural competence. It is crucial to continue developing research around this area of concern to implement significant changes in the future (Edwards, 2011). While this study uncovers some development patterns and elements, it opens up the idea that further research on practices that can alter the mindsets of White teachers could benefit the field. Another area lacking much research is how the ethic of care develops between teachers and students, specifically when it deals with race and gender because it is often difficult to measure (O’Conner, 2008; Velasquez et al., 2013). Future research requires a deeper understanding of how White teachers confront their white privilege, develop culturally competent behaviors, and develop connections with racially diverse students.

Research can further look at the implication of cultural competence on student achievement. Lisa Delpit discussed the impact microaggressions has on the black identify and the disidentification that occurs in black youth from the occurrence of these in educators (Delpit, 2012). These subtle damaging comments or actions can happen on a daily basis in schools and there is research to show that it is one of the barriers to
academic success of racially diverse learners. Future research can focus on how teachers can learn to become consciousness of the meaning behind what could be meaningless words or actions to them but detrimental to others and better seek to unlock the unlimited potential within black and brown students. The movement towards more culturally competent teachers could gain more momentum if there was a direct correlation between achievement and the increase of cultural competence in educators.

The student focus group provides insights that many previous studies do not include. The student focus group provided a counter perspective to the results gathered from the White teachers who scored highly on the multicultural attitude survey and provided answers in the interviews that demonstrated higher levels of cultural competence. The data displays students feel classes still do not reflect their racial backgrounds or consistently address racism and sociopolitical circumstances negatively impacting them. More research on the student perspective can benefit teachers. Racially diverse students can provide feedback and perspective to planned classroom activities and teacher interactions. Teacher observations and interviews can only provide data from limited perspectives but gathering more data from the students provides a new perspective that allows the voices of the racially diverse learners to impact instructional practice and educators.

Limitations

The results cannot tell us exactly how motivation played a role in the teachers' ability to increase their cultural competence, but what it does imply is that they took an active part in exposing themselves to culturally diverse students and reflect deeply on their experiences. Only one focus group could be conducted during the study due to
outside circumstances but if given the opportunity additional focus groups would have been conducted to further support the findings gathered from the students. This study cannot tell us how each person individually can increase their own cultural competence, but it provides specific examples of how others approach their own development and relative themes associated with their journeys.

**Conclusion**

There does not seem a more poignant time to act, then now. Racism and systemic racism are a concern that is not going away, and it could represent the time to act with policy reform and within schools. Educators have a unique opportunity to empower racially diverse youth by developing sociopolitical consciousness in themselves and their students through student focused activities that critically reflect upon societal inequities. Throughout this study, I was constantly reminded of a Marcus Aurelius quote, “Get active in your own rescue.” I learned from experience and research in this study that passivity and complacency do not have any room in developing cultural competence. White educators working with racially diverse youth cannot expect change to happen, and they must actively seek out opportunities to improve their sociopolitical consciousness, their appreciation of cultural backgrounds, their ability to focus on the students, and their relationships with the students. These elements increased the cultural competence of White teachers in this study, and focusing on these elements can help others. The data contributes to a clearer understanding that experience, exposure, and critical self-reflection are the next steps in a White educator's journey if they seek to develop their cultural competence.
REFERENCES


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APPENDENCES

APPENDIX A: TEACHER CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM
Title: Development of Teachers’ Cultural Competence and How It Impacts Instructional Practice and Connections with the Students
Investigator: Chris Jennings
2817 St. Marys Rd
Ardmore, PA, 19003
USA
Daytime Phone Number: 609-458-4210
24-hour Phone Number: 609-458-4210
RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

What should I know about this research?
- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don’t take part, it won’t be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won’t be held against you.
- If you don’t understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will I be in this research?
We expect that your taking part in this research will last about 6 hours.

Why is this research being done?
The purpose of this research is to uncover how teachers develop cultural competence. It will look at the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs you hold about multicultural education and how those perceptions impact your ability to incorporate multicultural practices in your classrooms. Curriculums and teaching practices are often geared towards the majority of students without accounting for diverse cultural differences in the classroom. The research conducted here will look to unlock the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers towards the development of cultural competence and how it informs their practice. This will be used to determine how curriculums and practices are being altered from the curriculums given to teachers and the practices they are traditionally taught. The research for this study will include surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups. The data collected will be reviewed to determine how development of teachers’ cultural competence impacts their practice.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?
If you decide to take part in this research study, the general procedures include surveys, interviews, and be observed in the classroom. A single researcher will conduct the surveys, observations, and interviews. You can also expect to be asked to present your lesson plans for review. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and be audio recorded. There will also be several observations of your classroom that will last about 60 minutes each. The interview will consist of about 40 questions with the opportunity for follow up questions to be asked during the course of the interview based on your responses. There will be a follow up interview to clarify some of your responses on the first interview and explain the data collected during the observations. These additional questions will be used to further provide insights or clarification on the data collected.

Could being in this research hurt me?

The risks or discomforts that you may expect from taking part in this research include the potential to be uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about race.
or culture and how that relates to your instructional practices. Every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained and your private information will be well guarded. If your data were released, it would represent a minimal risk to you because the information does not include any incriminatory or discriminatory data.

Will being in this research benefit me?

The benefits that you may expect from taking part in this research may include greater awareness of your instructional practice. We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include a greater awareness of how your perceptions of cultural competence and the impact it may have on your practice. This greater awareness could benefit the students that participate in your classes and further change the way you think about instruction.

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research.
DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant. In this consent form “you” generally refers to the research subject. If you are being asked as the legally authorized representative, parent, or guardian to permit the subject to take part in the research, “you” in the rest of this form generally means the research subject.

What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- If you don’t understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to uncover how teachers develop cultural competence. It will look at the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs you hold about multicultural education and how those perceptions impact your ability to incorporate multicultural practices in your classrooms. Curriculums and teaching practices are often geared towards the majority of students without accounting for diverse cultural differences in the classroom. The research conducted here will look to unlock the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of teachers towards the development of cultural competence and how it informs their practice. This will be used to determine how curriculums and practices are being altered from the curriculums given to teachers and the practices they are traditionally taught. The research for this study will include surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups. The data collected will be reviewed to determine how development of teachers’ cultural competence impacts their practice.

About 16-23 subjects will take part in this research.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last about 6 hours.

Could being in this research hurt me?

The risks or discomforts that you may expect from taking part in this research include the potential to be uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about race or culture and how that relates to your instructional practices. Every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained and your private information will be well guarded. If your data were released, it would represent a minimal risk to you because the information does not include any incriminatory or discriminatory data.

In addition to these risks, taking part in this research may harm you in unknown ways.
Will it cost me money to take part in this research?
Taking part in this research will not lead to any costs on your part.

Will being in this research benefit me?
The benefits that you may expect from taking part in this research may include greater awareness of your instructional practice. We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include a greater awareness of how your perceptions of cultural competence and the impact it may have on your practice. This greater awareness could benefit the students that participate in your classes and further change the way you think about instruction.

We cannot promise any direct benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include a greater awareness of how your perceptions of cultural competence and the impact it may have on your practice. This greater awareness could benefit the students that participate in your classes and further change the way you think about instruction.

What other choices do I have besides taking part in this research?
Your alternative is to not take part in the research.

What happens to the information collected for this research?
To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

The data collected in this study will be kept on file for five years. It is will be stored in a secure location within the researcher's personal office and only the researcher will have access to the data.

Who can answer my questions about this research?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.
This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:
• You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
• You are not getting answers from the research team.
• You cannot reach the research team.
• You want to talk to someone else about the research.
• You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
Can I be removed from this research without my approval?
The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

• **You quit working at the current location where the research is taking place.**

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?
If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team so that the investigator can excuse you from participating in the study and appropriately dispose of the data that was collected relating specifically to you.

If you decide to leave the research early, there are not any risks with this decision.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
You will not be paid for taking part in this research.

Your initials_________ indicate your permission to audio record the interview.

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of adult subject capable of consent  Date

___________________________
Printed name of subject

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent  Date

___________________________
Printed name of person obtaining consent
APPENDIX B: STUDENT ASSENT/PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Title: Development of Teachers’ Cultural Competence and How It Impacts Instructional Practice and Connections with the Students

Investigator: Chris Jennings
2817 St. Marys Rd
Ardmore, PA, 19003
USA

Daytime Phone Number: 609-458-4210
24-hour Phone Number: 609-458-4210
RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don’t take part, it won’t be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won’t be held against you.
- If you don’t understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last between 30 and 45 minutes.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to uncover how teachers develop cultural competence. It will look at the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs teachers hold about multicultural education and how those perceptions impact their ability to incorporate multicultural practices in your classrooms. Curriculums and teaching practices are often geared towards the majority of students without accounting for diverse cultural differences in the classroom. The research conducted here will look to unlock the connections and attitudes of teachers and how they incorporate culturally diversity in your classrooms. This will be used to determine how curriculums and practices are being altered from the curriculums given to teachers and the practices they are traditionally taught. The research for this study will include surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups. The data collected will be reviewed to determine how development of teachers’ cultural competence impacts their practice.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

If you decide to take part in this research study, the general procedures include a student focus group. A single researcher will conduct the focus group with a note taker present. The session will be audio recorded. You can also expect to be asked a series of questions while sitting with a group of your peers. The focus group will take approximately 30-45 minutes. The focus group will be asked about 12 questions with the opportunity for follow up questions to be asked based on the group’s responses. You will not be expected to answer every question but to participate when you feel comfortable enough to provide input that could inform the question.

Could being in this research hurt me?

The most important risks or discomforts that you may expect from taking part in this research include is the possibility that you could become uncomfortable or
embarrassed talking about your teachers and participating in your classes. You could become uncomfortable speaking in front of your peers but there is no obligation to speak. Every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained and your private information will be well guarded. If your data were released, it would represent a minimal risk to you because the information does not include any incriminatory or discriminatory data.

Will being in this research benefit me?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include a greater awareness of your teacher’s instructional practices and your own levels of participation in the classes. There is the chance that you are able to recognize your own levels of commitment to the class and this could help you recognize how to improve your own participation levels in your classes in the future.

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from your participation in this research.
DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant. In this consent form “you” generally refers to the research subject. If you are being asked as the legally authorized representative, parent, or guardian to permit the subject to take part in the research, “you” in the rest of this form generally means the research subject.

What should I know about this research?

• Someone will explain this research to you.
• This form sums up that explanation.
• Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
• You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
• You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
• If you don’t understand, ask questions.
• Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to uncover how teachers develop cultural competence. It will look at the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs teachers hold about multicultural education and how those perceptions impact their ability to incorporate multicultural practices in your classrooms. Curriculums and teaching practices are often geared towards the majority of students without accounting for diverse cultural differences in the classroom. The research conducted here will look to unlock the connections and attitudes of teachers and how they incorporate culturally diversity in your classrooms. This will be used to determine how curriculums and practices are being altered from the curriculums given to teachers and the practices they are traditionally taught. The research for this study will include surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups. The data collected will be reviewed to determine how development of teachers’ cultural competence impacts their practice.

About 16-23 subjects will take part in this research.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last between 30 and 45 minutes.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to participate in a group discussion if you choose to volunteer for the research.

Could being in this research hurt me?

The most important risks or discomforts that you may expect from taking part in this research include is the possibility that you could become uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about your teachers and participating in your classes. You could become uncomfortable speaking in front of your peers but there is no obligation to speak.
Every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained and your private information will be well guarded. If your data were released, it would represent a minimal risk to you because the information does not include any incriminatory or discriminatory data.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?
Taking part in this research will not lead to any costs on your part.

Will being in this research benefit me?
There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research.

What other choices do I have besides taking part in this research?
Your alternative is to not take part in the research.

What happens to the information collected for this research?
To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

The data collected in this study will be kept on file for five years. It is will be stored in a secure location within the researcher's personal office and only the researcher will have access to the data.

Who can answer my questions about this research?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page. This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:
- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Can I be removed from this research without my approval?
The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:
- Derogatory comments about other students.
• **Mocking other student’s responses.**

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

**What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?**

If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team so that the investigator can excuse you from participating in the study and appropriately dispose of the data that was collected relating specifically to you.

If you decide to leave the research early, there are not any risks with this decision.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

You will not be paid for taking part in this research.

**Statement of Consent:**

- All children are required to assent.
- If assent is obtained, have the child sign the consent form, unless the investigator determines that the child is not capable of signing.

Your signature documents your permission for you or the individual named below to take part in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of adult subject capable of consent, child subject’s parent, or individual authorized to consent to the child subject’s general medical care</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Printed name of adult subject capable of consent, child subject’s parent, or individual authorized to consent to the child subject’s general medical care</th>
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</thead>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Printed name of subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(not required if subject personally provided consent)

Your initials________ as the individual authorized to consent for the child indicate your permission to audio record the interview.
Your initials_________ as the individual assenting to participate in the study indicate your permission to audio record the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of person obtaining consent</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person obtaining consent</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of assenting subject</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of person obtaining consent</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person obtaining consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: TEACHER MULTICULTURAL ATTITUDE SURVEY (TMAS)

Please respond to all items in the survey. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.
1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

Demographic Questions
1. My major within education is:
   1. Elementary Certification and/or Elementary Certification with Special Education
   2. Early Childhood Certification
   3. Secondary Certification
   4. Child Development
   5. Other
2. I am
   A. Male
   B. Female
3. My age is:
   A. 20-25 years old
   B. 26-30 years old
   C. 31 years old or older
4. The amount of training or courses in diversity or multicultural education I have had is:
   1. Very little or none
   2. A small amount (one course)
   3. A lot (two or more courses or extended life experiences)
   4. So much that I consider myself an expert (you have given trainings or workshops)
5. In my hometown and/or school I had a lot of contact with many races and ethnic groups.
   1. Very little or none (there were virtually no people of color)
   2. A small amount (there was a small percentage of people of color)
   3. A lot (around half my school or town had diverse people)
   4. So much that Whites were in the minority
6. Ethnic Background_________________________
7. Cultural Background_________________________

1. I would find teaching a culturally diverse student group rewarding.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

2. Teaching methods need to be adapted to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student group.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

3. Sometimes I think there is too much emphasis placed on multicultural awareness and training for teachers.
   1. Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Uncertain (4) Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

4. Teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their students’ cultural backgrounds
1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

5. I plan to frequently invite extended family members (e.g. cousins, grandparents, godparents, etc.) to attend parent teacher conferences.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

6. It is not the teacher’s responsibility to encourage pride in one’s culture.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

7. As classrooms become more culturally diverse the teacher’s job becomes increasingly challenging.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

8. I believe the teacher’s role needs to be redefined to address the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

9. When dealing with bilingual students, some teachers may misinterpret different communication styles as behavior problems.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

10. As classrooms become more culturally diverse, the teacher’s job becomes increasingly rewarding.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

11. I can learn a great deal from students with culturally different backgrounds.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

12. Multicultural training for teachers is not necessary.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

13. In order to be an effective teacher, one needs to be aware of cultural differences present in the classroom.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

14. Multicultural awareness training will help me work more effectively with a diverse student population.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

15. Students should learn to communicate in English only.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

16. Today’s curriculum gives undue importance to multiculturalism and diversity.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

17. I plan to become aware of the diversity of cultural backgrounds of students in my classroom.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree
18. Regardless of the racial and ethnic makeup of my class, it is important for all students to be aware of multicultural diversity.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

19. Being multiculturally aware is not relevant for the subject I plan to teach.
   1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

20. Teaching students about cultural diversity will only create conflict in the classroom.
    1. Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Uncertain (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

21. Do you have any thoughts or comments about this survey, or about the research topic?

*Note.* Copyright 1995 by Joseph G. Ponterotto et al.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background
1. Tell me about your background. When and where were you educated? When and where did you begin teaching?
2. Tell me about your family background.

Perspective Taking
3. Pick one student from your current class and describe how you think they view their connection with you and your classroom.
4. How do you see things from the perspective of your students? How do you step into their shoes?
5. Has your thinking changed after working with your students? How have you become more accepting of cultural differences?
6. How has your relationships with your students and their families influenced your approach to teaching?
   a. Has there been any specific instances that you can recall that challenged your thinking about instruction?

7. What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American or Hispanic students?
   a. How would you describe the kinds of relationships you've had with parents of students you've taught?
   b. How have these relationships influenced your approach in the classroom?
8. How do you think the schooling experience of students you teach differs from that of white middle class communities?

Cultural Knowledge
9. A student tells you that you do not understand where they are coming from. How would you respond to that student?
10. How have you developed knowledge of your student's cultural backgrounds?
11. How do you use cultural knowledge to explain student behaviors?
12. How do you think your students make decisions?
   a. What thought processes or logic do you think they utilize when making decisions?
13. Can you think of any characteristics that your students as a group bring to the classroom?
14. If you could revamp teacher education so that teachers would be more effective with African American and Hispanic students, what changes would you make?
   a. What experiences, values, or attitudes make you think these changes are necessary?
   b. Were these developed over time or is it based off of a one-time experience?
15. Tell me about an interaction you have had with a student’s family that has influenced your approach to teaching.
   a. What were the specifics that you can recall that challenged your thinking about instruction?
b. How would you describe the kinds of relationships you've had with parents of students you've taught?
c. How have these relationships influenced your approach in the classroom?

Cultural Sensemaking
16. A student often talks in class and shares his or her opinions with the group. Based on the cultural background of the student how could this behavior be interpreted from two different cultural aspects?
17. How do you handle discipline?
   1. Are there special things that teachers of African American and Hispanic students should know about discipline?
18. Tell me about a time when you felt proud of a student’s performance.
   b. How do you reflect upon the unknown or ambiguous behavior?
19. Tell me about the strategies you use to better understand behaviors that occur in your classroom?
   c. How did this interaction change your behavior?

Self Presentation
20. How do you address your own cultural norms when it comes to interacting with the students?
21. Does your body language change or alter between your home life and your work life? Do you use different methods of verbal communication or body language when addressing students than your teachers in high school did with you?
22. How do you present yourself to the students?

Language Proficiency
23. A student tells you that they did not complete that “jawn.” How do you respond?
24. What patterns are you aware of when it comes to generating and maintaining a conversation with your students within the social context of school?
25. What greetings or expressions have helped you develop a rapport with students? Are these the same ones you use in your social life?

Emotion Regulation
26. A student shouts out in class you do not know how to teach us. This invokes an emotional response within you. How do you respond to this situation?
27. Tell me about a stressful situation and/or conflict within the classroom?
   a. Did you have a clear understanding of the reasons for the student’s behavior?
28. Tell me about an example of when you modified your instruction to match the cultural backgrounds of your students.
   a. Did this have an impact on the student’s behaviors?

Managing Affect and Attitude Toward Difference
29. After a devastating natural disaster, a group of five new students from Haiti join your classroom. How would you address the new dynamic of different cultures that exist in the classroom?
30. Tell me about how you demonstrate respect for other cultures in your classroom.
31. How do you embrace the differences and commonalities between your culture and the students’ culture?
32. How much of what you know about teaching African American and Hispanic students did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?
33. What experiences have had an impact on your teaching style and how has it evolved over time?
   a. Have you had to change or alter your approach to instruction based on your experiences? Have they evolved over time and why do you think they have changed?

Self Efficacy
34. Tell me about a time when you questioned your skills and attitudes.
   a. Do you feel this increased your cultural competence?
35. Tell me about the behaviors or attitudes you have implemented to be more culturally responsive.
36. What makes you a culturally responsive teacher? Have you read any books or articles, observed a particular teacher that influenced you, reflected on your practice, or attended any professional development or workshop that have supported your practice?
37. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching?
   a. What do you believe “works?”
38. What kinds of things have you done in the classroom that have facilitated the academic success of African American and Hispanic students?
39. What practices, approaches, or activities do you feel best connect with students?
   a. How do you know the students felt connected?
   b. What experiences, beliefs, or attitudes have led you to think this?

Adapted from Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) interview questions from Dream Keepers. Questions generated from 8 principles of cultural competence from Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015.
APPENDIX E: OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL


School (use assigned number):____________________________ Teacher (assigned number):
Observer:____________________ Date of Observation: ______ # of Students in Classroom:
Academic Subject:____________________ Grade Level(s): ____________
Start Time of Observation: ____________ End Time of Observation: ______ Total Time of Obs:

Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol
Fourth Revised Edition (January 2017)

Rebecca Powell, Susan Chambers Cantrell, Pamela K. Correll, and Victor Malo-Juvera


Revised 2012 by:  R. Powell (Georgetown College), S. Cantrell (University of Kentucky), P. Correll (University of Kentucky), V. Malo-Juvera (UNC-Wilmington), D. Ross (University of Florida) and R. Bosch (James Madison University)

Revised 2017 by:  R Powell (Georgetown College), S. Cantrell (University of Kentucky), P. Correll (Missouri State University), V. Malo-Juvera (UNC-Wilmington)

School (use assigned number):____________________________ Teacher (assigned number):
Observer:____________________ Date of Observation: ______ # of Students in Classroom:
Academic Subject:____________________ Grade Level(s):
____________________
Start Time of Observation: ____________ End Time of Observation: ______ Total Time of Obs:

DIRECTIONS

195
After the classroom observation, review the field notes for evidence of each “pillar” of Culturally Responsive Instruction. If an example of the following descriptors was observed, place the field notes line number on which that example is found.

Then, make an overall/holistic judgment of the implementation of each component. To what extend and/or effect was the component present?

4 – Consistently
3 – Often
2 – Occasionally
1 – Rarely
0 – Never

Transfer the holistic scores from pp. 2 through 9 to the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRI Pillar</th>
<th>Holistic Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. CLASS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. FAM</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>III. ASMT</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. INSTR</td>
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<tr>
<td>V. DISC</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VI. CRITICAL</td>
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# I. CLASS  
## CLASSROOM RELATIONSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRI Indicator</th>
<th>For example, in a responsive classroom:</th>
<th>Field notes: Time or line(s) of example</th>
<th>SCORE for Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. The teacher demonstrates an ethic of care (e.g., equitable relationships, bonding)

   - Generally Effective Practices:
     - Teacher refers to students by name, uses personalized language with students
     - Teacher conveys interest in students’ lives and experiences

   - Practices that are Culturally Responsive:
     - There is a “family-like” environment in the classroom; there is a sense of belonging; students express care for one another in a variety of ways
     - Teacher promotes an environment that is safe and anxiety-free for all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students; students seem comfortable participating in the classroom
     - Teacher differentiates patterns of interaction and management techniques to be culturally congruent with the students and families s/he serves (e.g., using a more direct interactive style with students who require it)

2. The teacher communicates high expectations for all students

   - Generally Effective Practices:
     - There is an emphasis on learning and higher-level thinking; challenging work is the norm
     - Students do not hesitate to ask questions that further their learning; there is a “culture of learning” in the classroom
     - Teacher expects every student to participate actively; students are not allowed to be unengaged or off-task
     - Teacher gives feedback on established high standards and provides students with specific information on how they can meet those standards

   - Practices that are Culturally Responsive:
     - There are group goals for success as well as individual goals (e.g., goals and charts posted on walls); every student is expected to achieve
     - Students are invested in their own and others’ learning; they continuously assist one another
     - Teacher takes steps to assure that emerging bilinguals understand directions and have access to the same content and learning as native speakers
### 3. The teacher creates a learning atmosphere that engenders respect for one another and toward diverse populations

**Generally Effective Practices:**
- Teacher sets a tone for respectful classroom interaction and teaches respectful ways for having dialogue and being in community with one another
- Teacher implements practices that teach collaboration and respect, e.g., class meetings, modeling and reinforcing effective interaction, etc.
- Students interact in respectful ways and know how to work together effectively
- Teacher and students work to understand each other’s perspectives

**Practices that are Culturally Responsive:**
- Positive and affirming messages and images about students’ racial and ethnic identities are present throughout the classroom
- Teacher affirms students’ language and cultural knowledge by integrating it into classroom conversations
- Teacher encourages students to share their stories with one another and to have pride in their history and linguistic and cultural identities
- Classroom library and other available materials contain multicultural content that reflect the perspectives of and show appreciation for diverse groups
- Classroom library (including online resources) includes bilingual texts that incorporate students’ native languages

### 4. Students work together productively

**Generally Effective Practices:**
- Students are continuously viewed as resources for one another and assist one another in learning new concepts
- Students are encouraged to have discussions with peers and to work collaboratively

### II. FAM FAMILY COLLABORATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRI Indicator</th>
<th>For example, in a responsive classroom:</th>
<th>Field notes: Time or line(s) of example</th>
<th>SCORE for Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. The teacher establishes genuine partnerships (equitable relationships) with parents/caregivers | Generally Effective Practices:
- Parents/caregivers’ ideas are solicited on how best to instruct the child; parents are viewed as partners in educating their child
- There is evidence of conversations with parents/caregivers where it’s clear that they are viewed as partners in educating the student

**Practices that are Culturally Responsive:**
- Teacher makes an effort to understand families and respects their cultural knowledge by making a concerted effort to develop relationships in order to learn about their lives, language, histories, and cultural traditions
- Teacher makes an effort to communicate with families in their home languages (e.g., learning key terms in the student’s home language, translating letters, using translation tools involving a family liaison, etc.) | | |
| 2. The teacher reaches out to meet parents in positive, non-traditional ways | Generally Effective Practices:  
- Teacher conducts home visit conferences  
- Teacher makes “good day” phone calls and establishes regular communication with parents  
Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
- Teacher plans parent/family activities at locations within the home community  
- Teacher meets parents in parking lot or other locations that may be more comfortable for them |
|---|---|
| 3. The teacher encourages parent/family involvement | Generally Effective Practices:  
- Parents/caregivers are invited into the classroom to participate and share experiences  
Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
- Parents from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are invited to share their unique experiences and knowledge (e.g., sharing their stories, reading books in their native language, teaching songs and rhymes in their native language, etc.) |
| 4. The teacher intentionally learns about families’ linguistic/cultural knowledge and expertise to support student learning | Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
- Teacher identifies families’ “funds of knowledge” so it can be used to facilitate student learning (e.g., through home visits; social events for families where information is solicited; conversations with parents and students about their language, culture, and history; attending community events; home literacy projects; camera projects etc.) |

### III. ASMT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRI Indicator</th>
<th>For example, in a responsive classroom:</th>
<th>Field notes: Time or line(s) of example</th>
<th>SCORE for Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Formative assessment practices are used that provide information throughout the lesson on individual student understanding | Generally Effective Practices:  
- Students are able to voice their learning throughout the lesson  
- Informal assessment strategies are used continuously during instruction, while students are actively engaged in learning, and provide information on the learning of every student (e.g. “talking partners,” whiteboards, journal responses to check continuously for understanding)  
- Teacher modifies instruction or reteaches when it’s clear that students are not meeting learning targets | | |
2. **Students are able to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices</th>
<th>Practices that are Culturally Responsive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Divergent responses and reasoning are encouraged; students are able to share the processes and evidence they used to arrive at responses versus simply providing “the” correct answer</td>
<td>· Students with limited English proficiency and/or limited literacy can show their conceptual learning through visual or other forms of representation (e.g., drawing, labelling, completing graphic organizers etc. depending upon their level of English language acquisition)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Authentic assessments are used frequently to determine students’ competence in both language and content.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
<th>Practices that are Culturally Responsive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Students’ written and oral language proficiency is assessed while they are engaged in purposeful activity</td>
<td>· Teacher assesses both academic language and content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher primarily uses authentic, task-embedded assessments (e.g., anecdotal notes, targeted observation, rubrics/analysis of students’ written products, math charts/journals, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. **Students have opportunities for self-assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Students are encouraged to evaluate their own work based upon a determined set of criteria</td>
<td>· Students are involved in setting their own goals for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Students are involved in developing the criteria for their finished products (e.g., scoring rubrics)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Instruction is contextualized in students’ lives, experiences, and individual abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Learning activities are meaningful to students and promote a high level of student engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Materials and real-world examples are used that help students make connections to their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Learning experiences build on prior student learning and invite students to make connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices that are Culturally Responsive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher uses instructional methods/activities that provide windows into students’ worlds outside of school (e.g., “All About Me” books, student-created alphabet walls, camera projects, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher views students’ life experiences as assets and builds on students’ cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and “cultural data sets,” making connections during instruction in the various content areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Materials and examples are used that reflect diverse experiences and views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Families’ “funds of knowledge” are integrated in learning experiences when possible; parents are invited into the classroom to share their knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Students engage in active, hands-on, meaningful learning tasks, including inquiry-based learning

| · Learning tasks allow students to practice and apply concepts using hands-on activities and manipulatives |
| · Learning activities promote a high level of student engagement |
| · Exploratory learning is encouraged |
| · Teacher engages students in the inquiry process and learns from students’ investigations (e.g., inquiry-based and project-based learning) |
| · Students are encouraged to pose questions and find answers to their questions using a variety of resources |
| · Student-generated questions form the basis for further study and investigation |

3. The teacher focuses on developing students’ academic language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· There is an emphasis on learning academic vocabulary in the particular content area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Students are taught independent strategies for learning new vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Key academic vocabulary and language structures are identified prior to a study or investigation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices that are Culturally Responsive:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher develops language objectives in addition to content objectives, having specific goals in mind for students’ linguistic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher articulates expectations for language use (e.g. “I want you to use these vocabulary words in your discussion; I expect you to reply in a complete sentence” etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher scaffolds students’ language development as needed (sentence frames, sentence starters, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Academic language is taught explicitly (identifying it in written passages, dissecting complex sentences, using mentor texts, creating “learning/language walls,” etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The teacher uses instructional techniques that scaffold student learning
   - Teacher uses a variety of teaching strategies to assist students in learning content (e.g., demonstrations, visuals, graphic organizers, reducing linguistic density, etc.)
   - Teacher models, explains and demonstrates skills and concepts and provides appropriate scaffolding
   - Teacher uses “comprehensible input” (e.g., gestures, familiar words and phrases, slower speech, etc.) to facilitate understanding when needed
   - Teacher builds on students’ knowledge of their home languages to teach English (e.g., cognates, letter-sound relationships, syntactic patterns)

5. Students have choices based upon their experiences, interests and strengths
   - Students have multiple opportunities to choose texts, writing topics, and modes of expression based on preferences and personal relevance
   - Students have some choice in assignments
   - Students have some choice and ownership in what they are learning

V. DISCOURSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</table>
| 1. The teacher promotes active student engagement through discourse practices | Teacher employs a variety of discourse protocols to promote student participation and engagement (e.g., call and response, talking circles, read-around, musical shares, etc.)
   - All students have the opportunity to participate in classroom discourse
   - Teacher uses various strategies throughout the lesson to promote student engagement through talk (e.g., partner share, small group conversation, interactive journals, etc.) | | |
2. The teacher promotes equitable and culturally sustaining discourse practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Students use collaborative, overlapping conversation and participate actively, supporting the speaker during the creation of story talk or discussion and commenting upon the ideas of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher uses techniques to support equitable participation, such as wait time, feedback, turn-taking, and scaffolding of ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practices that are Culturally Responsive:
· Students speak in their home language/dialect when it is situationally appropriate to do so
· There is an emphasis on developing proficiency in students' native language as well as in Standard English; bilingualism/multilingualism is encouraged (e.g., students learn vocabulary in their native languages; students read/write in their native languages; students learn songs and rhymes in other languages, etc.)

3. The teacher provides structures that promote academic conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Students engage in genuine discussions and have extended conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher explicitly teaches and evaluates skills required for conducting effective academic conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practices that are Culturally Responsive:
· Teacher provides prompts that elicit extended conversations and dialogue (e.g., questions on current issues; questions that would elicit differing points of view)

4. The teacher provides opportunities for students to develop linguistic competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally Effective Practices:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Teacher provides many opportunities for students to use academic language in meaningful contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Students are engaged in frequent and authentic uses of language and content (drama, role play, discussion, purposeful writing and communication using ideas/concepts/vocabulary and syntactic structures from the field of study)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practices that are Culturally Responsive:
· Students are taught appropriate registers of language use for a variety of social contexts and are given opportunities to practice those registers in authentic ways

VI. CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCORE for Indicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. The curriculum and planned learning experiences provide opportunities for the inclusion of issues important to the classroom, school and community | Generally Effective Practices:  
· Students are engaged in experiences that develop awareness and provide opportunities to contribute, inform, persuade and have a voice in the classroom, school and beyond  
· Community-based issues and projects are included in the planned program and new skills and concepts are linked to real-world problems and events  
Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
· Students explore important contemporary issues (poverty, racism, global warming, human trafficking, animal cruelty, etc.)  
· Teacher encourages students to investigate real-world issues related to a topic being studied and to become actively involved in solving problems at the local, state, national, and global levels |
|---|---|
| 2. The curriculum and planned learning experiences incorporate opportunities to confront negative stereotypes and biases | Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
· Teacher facilitates students’ understanding of stereotypes and biases  
· Teacher encourages students to examine biases in popular culture that students encounter in their daily lives (TV shows, advertising, popular songs, etc.)  
· Teacher makes intentional use of multicultural literature to facilitate conversations about human differences  
· As appropriate to the grade level being taught, teacher helps students to think about biases in texts (e.g., “Who has the power in this book? Whose perspectives are represented, and whose are missing? Who benefits from the beliefs and practices represented in this text?” etc.)  
· As appropriate to the grade level being taught, teacher challenges students to deconstruct their own cultural assumptions and biases both in the formal and informal curriculum |
| 3. The curriculum and planned learning experiences integrate and provide opportunities for the expression of diverse perspectives | Generally Effective Practices:  
· Students are encouraged to challenge the ideas in a text and to think at high levels  
Practices that are Culturally Responsive:  
· Texts include protagonists from diverse backgrounds and present ideas from multiple perspectives  
· Students are encouraged to explore alternative viewpoints  
· Opportunities are plentiful for students to present diverse perspectives through class discussions and other activities  
· Students are encouraged to respectfully disagree with one another and to provide evidence to support their views |

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Participants_______ Date:____________ Location:__________

Teacher:__________

1. How does your teacher talk about issues of diversity? (Define diversity for students.)
2. How does your teacher attempt to connect with you as an individual?
   a. What makes the relationship successful or unsuccessful?
   b. Tell me about activities that you really enjoyed and why.
   c. Tell me about a time when you felt like a valuable member of the classroom?
3. Do you ever feel respected or disrespected in your classroom? If so, which one and why or why not?
4. How safe do you feel sharing ideas in your classes?
   a. Tell me about a time when you had to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.
5. How well do you think the teacher understands you as an individual?
   a. What makes you think this?
   b. Tell me some examples you have of this from class.
6. How does your teacher respond to your behaviors in the classroom?
   a. Can you think of any specific examples?
   b. Do you feel free to be yourself?
7. How often does the teacher create activities that demonstrate knowledge of your cultural background within the class material?
   a. What examples can you think of?
   b. What do you know about your teacher’s cultural background?
   c. Does this impact your relationship with the teacher?
8. How does the teacher respond when you are talking to your friends or discussing topics in class?
   a. How does it make you feel when the teacher uses words like “jawn, pound, mines, etc.”?
9. When you have an activity or an assignment, do you know why you are doing it?
   a. How do you know?
   b. Are there times when you are asked to think about differences in the material as it relates to your own experiences?
10. Does the teacher encourage you to incorporate your home life in projects?
    a. Can you talk about a time when you learned about each other’s backgrounds?
    b. How did this experience impact your view of the other students and teacher?
11. How do your teacher address issues that are currently going on in the community or country?
    a. How does your teacher address controversial topics?
12. Think of a time when you were “in your feelings.” How did the teacher support you?
13. Given this (project or assignment from class specifically chosen CRT example), how did this activity help you to relate to the teacher and the classroom?

Adapted from sample focus group questions retrieved from the Los Angeles Unified School District website [https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/11783](https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/11783).
APPENDIX G: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Good morning Olney Charter Teaching Staff,

My name is Chris Jennings and I am the Director of Specialized Student Support Services but I am reaching out to you today as a student investigator in an Educational Leadership program at Temple University. I am emailing you to ask if you would like to take about 10 minutes to complete a survey for a research project on how teachers develop their cultural competence and how this contributes to connections with the students. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will only be known to the primary and student investigators.

Three $10 Café Exceptional gift cards will be raffled off at random to those who volunteer to participate in the survey. Once the survey has closed, each participant will be assigned a random number. The numbers will be entered into a drawing and the first three winners chosen will each receive a gift card. Winners will be notified via email.

No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey and any discomfort or inconvenience to you are not expected to be greater that anything you encounter in everyday life. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Olney Charter High School. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time; you may also skip questions if you don't want to answer them or you may choose not to submit the survey.

Since data will be collected using the Internet, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third party. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used.

If you are willing to participate, please complete the following survey. Your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study.

By completing the survey below, I confirm that I have read this description and decided that I will participate in the study described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Chris Jennings
Doctoral Candidate
Temple University