

**EMPTY CUPS: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PRACTICES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER
WELL-BEING DURING A PANDEMIC**

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ABSTRACT

Historically, American schools have reflected the larger societal structures. When crises occur across the nation, they seep into the classroom and impact the educational experiences of students. Scholars and social advocates have worked across professional arenas throughout history to reduce the injustices embedded in schools. Ongoing discussion and debate about educational equity in schools highlights the importance of an educational system that works for all learners. In more contemporary times, American schools are experiencing overlapping crises. These crises consist of the teacher well-being crisis, the school discipline crisis, and the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the proposed study is to examine the intersection of these three crises by exploring the relationship between teacher early childhood well-being and equitable educational practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study utilizes a convergent design that includes both quantitative and qualitative data gathered sequentially. The quantitative data examined the association between early childhood teachers' feelings of efficacy in culturally responsive instruction and their emotional state as it relates to their profession. The qualitative data explored how early childhood teachers make sense of culturally responsive teaching and classroom management. The two forms of data were combined to better understand the three current crises impacting schools. Participants in the survey data collection included a total of 88 early childhood teachers (pre-kindergarten through third grade) working during the 2020-2021 academic school year. Qualitative interview data were gathered from a subsample of those early childhood teachers ($n=11$) via phone interviews. Qualitative findings revealed that teachers generally had a superficial understanding of culturally responsive

teaching and culturally responsive classroom management (CRT-CRCM), although some expressed a desire to learn more. Quantitative results indicated that teachers' self-reported beliefs and ability in CRT-CRCM did not relate to their self-reported well-being.

However, access to professional development was associated with well-being, suggesting a potential mechanism for cultivating greater CRT-CRCM skills in teachers while also supporting their well-being. I intend for the results of this study to contribute to the nascent literature regarding the needs of our nation's teachers during this unprecedented time.

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of formal schooling in the United States, crises impacting access to education have always persisted, beginning with the restrictions on educational attainment based on race and social status (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars and social advocates have worked across professional arenas throughout history to reduce the injustices embedded in schools. These changes have resulted in landmark rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *Serrano v. Priest* (1971), and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which have significantly changed the trajectory of children's educational experiences for generations. Ongoing discussion and debate about educational equity in schools highlights the importance of an educational system that works for all learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In more contemporary times, American schools are experiencing overlapping crises (Losen & Skiba, 2010). These crises consist of the teacher well-being crisis (Friedman, 2006; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977), the school discipline crisis (APA, 2008; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamilton & Ercikan, 2022). While many Americans would acknowledge the critical work teachers provide, as a society, their position at the foundation of education is not highly valued (Camera, 2019). Teacher well-being is an increasing concern that has resulted in very little policy change to ensure retention of one of the most crucial components of formal schooling – teachers. As a result of the crisis of teacher well-being, increased stress and burnout has created a great exodus from the teaching profession (Rahman, 2022). Over the past two decades the percentage of teachers leaving the profession has been on a steady increase of 3%. Title 1 schools and racially diverse settings experience mores

teacher turnover compared to more affluent or white schools (Carver-Thomas, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This is especially concerning given that teacher stress, burnout, and turnover from the field not only hurt teachers but also impact the educational experiences of students (Friedman, 2006; Jennings & Greenburg, 2009).

The school discipline crisis overlaps with the teacher well-being crisis. Discipline plays an integral role in the school-to-prison pipeline (Mowen & Brent, 2016). School policy has mirrored public policy as mass incarceration has taken hold in the United States. Three strikes laws and mandatory minimum sentences have contributed to zero tolerance and no excuses policies in schools (Simmons, 2017). Like the carceral system's disproportionate impact on Black communities, school policy has also disproportionately impacted Black students (Majd, 2011), and even our youngest students are affected (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Unfortunately, inequitable discipline practices have been tied to teachers' experience with stress (Eddy et al., 2020). For example, Eddy and colleagues (2020) found that teacher emotional exhaustion was associated with exclusionary disciplinary practices, with results indicating that lower levels of stress were linked to lower odds of exclusionary discipline. Also, Zinsser and colleagues (2019) found that implementation of social and emotional learning supports helped to reduce the likelihood of a teacher requesting expulsions, but the effects were dependent on a teachers' stress and well-being. Their findings suggest that in order to rectify the crisis of preschool expulsion, *both* teachers' and students' social emotional well-being must be addressed (Zinsser et al., 2019). The COVID-19 global disaster has further amplified the overwhelming implications of teacher well-being and school discipline, as another crisis impacting the American school system.

In March of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO; 2021) named the rapid spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by the SAR-CoV-2 virus a “global pandemic” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The pandemic put a great strain on school systems, and emerging research from the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that teacher well-being is now at an all-time low (Walker, 2022). During the pandemic, feelings of stress were higher among teachers compared to working adults within the general population, and the stress associated with the COVID-19 disproportionately impacted Black teachers (Steiner & Woo, 2021). The resulting change in work demands such as longer hours and navigating unfamiliar remote instruction resulted in greater desires to leave the teaching profession. Half of the teachers who voluntarily left their jobs after March of 2020 named the pandemic as the reason (Diliberti et al., 2021). Among those still in the profession, 30% were considering leaving the classroom in March of 2021, compared only 24% holding the same sentiment in March of 2020 (Zamarro et al., 2021). These findings suggest that the pandemic further exacerbated the already elevated levels of stress among teachers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of these three crises by exploring the relationship between teacher well-being and equitable early childhood educational practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study conceptualizes equitable education practices as culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management (CRT-CRCM). The study utilizes a convergent design that includes both quantitative and qualitative data gathered sequentially. The qualitative data explored how teachers make sense of culturally responsive teaching and classroom management in the context of the pandemic. The

quantitative data was used to enhance the qualitative data by examining the association between teachers' feelings of efficacy in CRT-CRCM and their emotional state as it relates to their profession. The two forms of data were combined to better understand the three current crises impacting schools. In this dissertation study, I focus on early childhood teachers, defined as teaching in prekindergarten through third grade, because of the concerning trends related to early childhood educator stress (Maslach & Pine, 1997; Whitaker et al., 2013) and harsh discipline practices used with young students (Lopez, 2020; Loomis et al., 2021; Meek & Gilliam, 2016).

Insights from the quantitative and qualitative data provided implications for enhancing early childhood teachers' efficacy in culturally responsive educational practices as a means of reducing stress and ultimately reducing institutional violence toward minoritized youths. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their approach to culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management (CRT-CRCM) during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' feelings of competence in CRT-CRCM and their self-reported well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?

CHAPTER 2 : REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the highly contagious SAR-CoV-2 virus created one of the most extensive disruptions to schooling in U.S. history (Daniel, 2020; WHO, n.d.). The global crisis led to the shutdown of classrooms across all fifty states and significant pressure on an already buckling system. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the field of education was experiencing employee burnout (Friedman, 2006; Lopez & Sidhu, 2013), a shortage of teachers (Ryan et al., 2017), and racial disparities in disciplinary practices and academic outcomes (Wald & Losen, 2003). These structural flaws contributed to ineffective learning environments for children. The pre-existing challenges and the exacerbated impact of COVID-19 provided an essential backdrop for understanding the intersection of multiple crises in the education system. Additionally, it is nearly impossible to mention the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic without also mentioning the monumental Black Lives Matter protest which occurred in the summer of 2020.

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) began to follow a viral threat, pneumonia of unknown etiology. By January of 2020, the threat of the COVID-19 virus reached American shores (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). At that time, schools were already experiencing tremendous inequities, such as funding practices that resulted in affluent communities having more well-resourced schools (Semuels, 2016; Tienda, 2017) and Eurocentric educational practices that disenfranchised racially minoritized children (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A blooming disaster was not going to reduce the danger; instead, these preexisting factors would be further magnified as COVID-19 spread. A few months later, the threat of COVID-19 had spread

across the United States, and discussion of its impact on schools was brewing. Due to the decentralized manner in which U.S. school districts make decisions, individual states and local municipalities were navigating how to mitigate the danger while maintaining children's rights to education (Hamilton & Ercikan, 2022). On March 11, 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, and by March 15th, New York City, the largest school system in the United States, had closed schools along with districts around the country (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

The structure of schools was already the center of lengthy discourse regarding the connection between academic performance/access and lifelong outcomes (Shores et al., 2020). Therefore, when COVID-19 impacted schools, many educators predicted the potential widening of academic gaps and deeper disparities in educational access.

American schools faced the challenge of an inadequate number of digital devices and a lack of high-speed internet in students' homes (Herold, 2020). Schools in economically oppressed communities experienced greater difficulties moving to remote teaching and learning, underscoring the inequities that exist in schooling (Hamilton & Ercikan, 2022). For example, data gathered in the Philadelphia area highlighted the significant gaps in access and opportunity based on geographic location. In March of 2020, 31% of students in Philadelphia did not have high-speed internet. In contrast, in Lower Merion, a wealthier neighboring suburban school district, only 8.9% of students did not have high-speed internet. The School District of Philadelphia used data obtained the previous year to determine the level of need in their district. Using data from a 2019 survey about internet access, the district spent millions of dollars to bridge the digital divide. While some districts were able to immediately pivot to virtual learning, Philadelphia aimed to

distribute Chromebooks over a month after schools shut down, resulting in lost learning time for students in the district (Han et al., 2020).

While the impact of the pandemic continues, literature from around the world has been published to provide data on a rapidly shifting phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic and the concurrent social protests were events shared across the entire world. Globally, students and teachers experienced economic shocks, food insecurity, and elevated feelings of fear due to the pandemic's impact on daily life (Reimers, 2022). Policies and practices created to mitigate the danger of the virus were being created, implemented, and designed quickly creating uncertainty among frontline workers, including educators. With the potential of schools being a "superspreader" and the connection between teacher well-being and students' school experience, COVID-19 presented a significant threat to children in schools. Unfortunately, prior to COVID-19, Black students were already experiencing increased danger in schools (Ladson- Billings, 2001; Sevon et al., 2021).

The Discipline Crisis

As author, Jonathan Kozol, presented in 2005, one of the greatest shames of the nation is the educational experiences provided to Black children in the United States (Kozol, 2005). The application of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) in education asserts the saliency of race across the United States and its lasting effect on schooling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For Black children and families, schooling has been weaponized and used as a means of marginalization and oppression (Sevon et al., 2021). The criminalization of literacy and the policies which supported racial segregation and defunding of schools have directly aimed to create barriers to education for Black

people (Span & Sanya, 2019). Currently, racial disparities are prevalent in schools, including disproportionality among special education eligibility (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009), unjust academic access (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010), and the over-policing of students in schools (Blad & Harwin, 2017). With awareness of the salience of race, inequities within education are expected based on the racialized nature of the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The sociohistorical processes related to racism and other forms of bigotry in education have resulted in the marginalization of Black children. The ramifications of these failing systems have led to generations of poor outcomes, creating the racial discipline gap (APA, 2008). Some scholars have identified school discipline practices as one of the most problematic injustices facing students (Gregory et al., 2010). The default use of punitive discipline and modeling consequences to students' behaviors on the carceral systems contribute to making schools hostile environments (Wald & Losen, 2003). These ineffective and racially biased school discipline practices begin as early as preschool and span across the educational continuum (Lopez, 2020; Loomis et al., 2021; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). National educational data indicate that Black children represent less than 20% of the population but are the subjects of nearly half of exclusionary disciplines in preschool settings (Gilliam et al., 2016). Overall, preschool expulsions and suspensions are three times the rate of students in higher grades presenting a national concern (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). The findings from empirical evidence have led to changes in policies and best practices within schooling. Although some states have banned the use of suspension in early childhood, data shows that the use of exclusionary discipline, such as the removal from the classroom or other exclusionary responses to

student behavior continues to occur. Schools also utilize police officers in educational settings to enforce rules (Blad & Harwin, 2017), and students as young as five years old have been arrested in a school setting (Holloway, 2013). The vital work of educational scholars has influenced awareness of these issues yet changes in policies have not addressed racism as underpinning the structural problem within public education (Carter et al., 2017; Sevon et al., 2021). Such is evident by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recently published *Framework for Effective Discipline* (NASP, 2020). The framework addresses the need to reduce the use of exclusionary school discipline and provides practical solutions. However, the framework missed the opportunity to highlight the racial bias in education that forms the foundation for discipline disparities (Sevon et al., 2021).

The harmful experiences of Black children start during early childhood as they are perceived as older, removing the assumption of childlike innocence (Goff et al., 2014) and needing less care and nurturing (Epstein et al., 2017). This perception of students leads to their inequitable treatment with increased likelihood of school arrest. Black children are more likely to attend school with police officers, which increases their risk of involvement with law enforcement while on school campus. Black girls are 1.5 times more likely to be arrested in schools than White boys (Blad & Harwin, 2017). Overall, school arrest data are alarming with tens of thousands of children being handcuffed at school annually. Black students represent 34% of those arrested while only making up 15% of the student population. For example, during the pandemic, a Black 10-year-old child was arrested due to a picture she drew (Chavez, 2021). A Black third grader in Philadelphia was removed from his art class by a police officer, berated in the bathroom

and told to “stop crying like a little girl” after he refused to leave class (Mitchell et al., 2021). Social media has also provided a glimpse of the violence toward Black children as they are forcibly removed from spaces in school (Stafford, 2021). This response to students does not merely result in experiences of discomfort, but it can be fatal. In April of 2020, a Black student with a disability died while being restrained by seven adults for 12 minutes after throwing food at another student (Kingkade & Rappleye, 2020). As our schools grow more racially diverse, inequity within school discipline can no longer persist.

Historically, the discussion around school discipline centered the experiences of boys, yet recent research has found Black girls are disproportionately disciplined for objective and less threatening offenses, such as dress code violations, noncompliance, and disruptive behaviors (Morris & Perry, 2017). The responses to Black girls' actions are often harsh, developmentally inappropriate, differ from responses to girls from other racial groups, and are mainly based on interpretation. In addition to race, disability status, income level, exposure to trauma, gender expression, and sexual identity greatly impact students' educational experiences. Students with educational disabilities make up less than 10% of the student population yet compose 32% of the children in juvenile detention centers (Carone, 2019). Additionally, children living in economically oppressed communities and those with trauma exposure are adversely impacted by this disproportionate school discipline (Ramey, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). Previous studies have shown the prevalence of adversity exposure among school-age children (e.g., Felitti et al., 1998). Yet, children with a trauma history are negatively impacted by this dangerous problem of ineffective and harsh school discipline (Burke et al., 2011).

Students holding diverse gender expressions or who do not fit in the problematic heteronormative spaces in schools are also disproportionately disciplined. Studies have found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students are faced with toxic educational environments and discrimination. They are often subjected to an over-policing of their gender expression and sexuality from their peers and adults (Burdge et al., 2014; Payne & Smith, 2012). Black LGBTQ students experienced hyper-surveillance and reported experiencing exclusionary discipline at near twice the rate of their cisgender/heterosexual peers (Chmielewski et al., 2016). Unpacking of the discipline gap shows the most vulnerable learners are experiences the most detrimental educational environments. Additionally, it is essential to examine the intersection of race and other identifiers. Centering racial identity and adding additional social categorization such as gender identity, ethnicity, social class, and other socio-demographics, highlights the complexity of individual experiences and acknowledges intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Examining racism in schools from an intersectional lens removes the invisibility of further minoritized groups (i.e., Black girls, students with different abilities, LGBT youth) from the literature (Sevon, 2022).

Ineffective disciplinary action used in schools leads to the removal of access to education. By taking an expansive look at the potential factors that may be undergirding the school discipline crisis, we can better understand the interaction of multiple intersecting factors that contribute to the adverse harm of Black students. In particular, two critical issues that likely contribute to the discipline crisis are the concerning high levels of teacher stress across U.S. schools and a lack of teaching efficacy and skill in

utilizing culturally responsive teaching and classroom management (CRT-CRCM) practices.

Teacher Well-being

As schools closed in the spring of 2020, discussion surrounding teacher attrition was reaching national attention. In July of 2020, a NewSchools Venture Fund/Gallup survey found nearly half of the teachers around the nation did not know if their district was planning to return to in-person instruction in the fall of the same year. The pandemic continued to present unpredictability creating elevated levels of stress. More specifically, the pandemic had impacted teachers' feelings of well-being and competence. The aforementioned survey also found over 80% of teachers found teaching students at home to be difficult (Calderon & Carlson, 2020). Teachers also reported increased demands associated with virtual teaching such as providing technological support to families and spending more time communicating with parents (Cardoza, 2021). Given the significant dependence on virtual schooling, those with previous training and experiences in online learning presented with lower emotional distress (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). Additionally, those with a greater level of teaching experience also reported feeling more confident about the coming school year (Calderon & Carlson, 2020). For educators who returned to in-person instruction in the fall of 2020, there were increased responsibilities due to educators enforcing and maintaining COVID-19 precautions in addition to their regular duties (Cardoza, 2021).

Over two years after the New York City public schools closed their doors in the spring of 2020, schools continue to struggle with an ongoing teacher shortage. The shortage was present prior to COVID-19 but is now at a troubling level and poses dire

outcomes for students. While the federal government is developing policies and distributing funds to rectify the impact of COVID-19 on children's learning, states are scrambling to address the lack of teachers (Czachor, 2022). Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), second largest district in the country, employs 25,000 teachers yet had 2,100 vacancies in the summer of 2022. At the start of the 2022 school year, LAUSD still had roughly 200 openings and similar trends were reported across the state (Lazar, 2022). Missouri has been facing the shortage for decades and in 2019 some districts had transitioned to four-day school weeks to address the challenges with staffing. As the crisis grows more districts are joining the shortened school week (Benincasa, 2022). Just as educational crisis negatively impacts our most vulnerable learners, the same is true for the current teacher shortage. In the summer of 2022, Montgomery County Public schools in Maryland moved their extended school year program to virtual learning due to the staffing challenges (Jones, 2022).

Increased demands and limited resources within schools have negatively impacted teachers' psychological functioning (Bottiani et al., 2019). The rapidly declining state of teacher well-being, defined as positive emotions and thoughts about the teaching profession, is predicted to be the primary source of the teacher shortage (Sandilos & DiPerna, 2022; Walker, 2022). The emotional state of teachers continues to require investigation to ensure students can access better learning environments. However, there has been insufficient educational policy change to address teacher well-being and improve problematic working conditions that contribute to occupational dissatisfaction.

Toward the latter portion of the 20th century, psychologists began to explore *burnout* (Bradley 1969; p.366), a feeling of emotional exhaustion. Early literature on the

rising theory of burnout was received with skepticism when applied to all professions, suggesting it was psychology making working Americans appear as victims (Morrow, 1981). Schwab (1983) challenged critics of burnout and aimed to uncover the reality of elevated stress and emotional fatigue among teachers. Schwab argued that the very nature of teaching is an emotionally taxing profession due to consistent and often intense interactions with others throughout their day (Schwab, 1983). While the discourse surrounding teacher stress and well-being has spanned several decades, the outcomes connected to increased occupational dissatisfaction within the teaching profession continue to be a growing problem. Moreover, the percentage of teachers leaving the profession has been on a steady increase. Title I schools and racially diverse settings experience more teacher turnover compared to more affluent or White schools (Carver-Thomas, & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Concerns related to teacher well-being are prevalent in the educational environments of our youngest learners. One study found depression and other stress-related illnesses were higher among Head Start female teachers as compared to the national population of women (Whitaker et al., 2013). Educational research has long sought to determine the sources of such high dissatisfaction within the teaching profession (Friedman, 2006). An early investigation of stress among daycare workers, found increased risk of stress due to the elevated level of contact with others and the lack of professional support systems (Maslach & Pine, 1997). Additionally, factors such as the work environment, work overload, and the depletion of emotional resources compound to produce job-related stress and the potential for burnout (Friedman, 2006; Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981).

Conceptual Models And Sources Of Teacher Stress

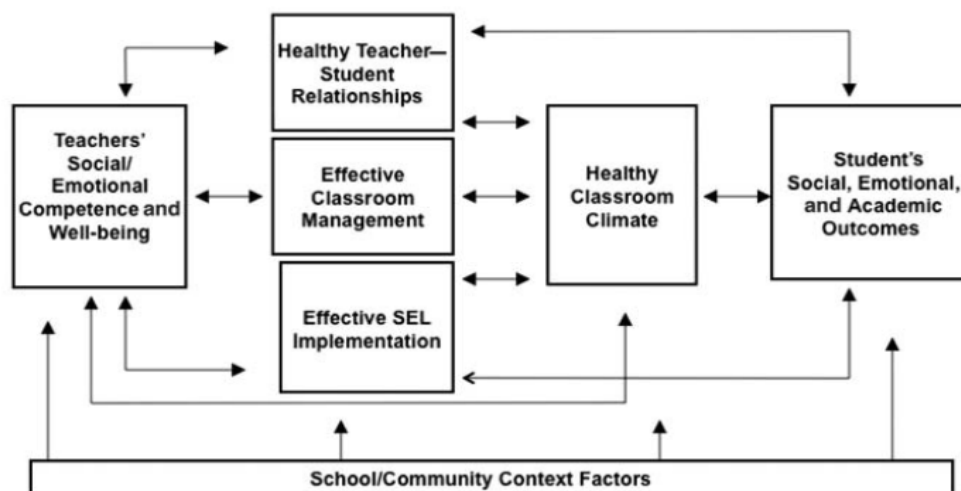
Occupational burnout and stress were initially explored outside of the teaching profession, with studies looking broadly at workplace satisfaction (Friedman, 2006). The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that stress appears under the following conditions (1) feeling one's resources are under threat, (2) one's resources are depleted, and (3) there are not enough resources to meet one's needs (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). When examining professional stress, researchers suggested two broad categories of work characteristics, job demands and job resources. *Job demands* are aspects of a job that require sustained effort, while *job resources* are aspects which help achieve job related goals. The job demands-resources model (JD-R model; Demerouti et al., 2001) examines the interaction among these two factors to explain and make predictions related to employee engagement and outcomes (Bakker et al., 2014). The JD-R model predicts that unfavorable job demands, such as poor environmental conditions and time pressure, have a significant relationship with work-related exhaustion. Furthermore, lack of job resources, such as supervisor support and job control, yield damaging implications for employees' feelings of exhaustion and disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands and resources are known to have an impact on workplace satisfaction. Moreover, the JD-R model indicated that job demands and resources can interact to predict occupational well-being in two different ways; an interaction in which job resources buffer the impact of job demands, and an interaction in which job demands amplify the impact of limited job resources. In turn, these two processes influence employee performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)

A more recent explanation of the JD-R model, expanded to the JD-R theory, included a more flexible view of the interactions among job demands, resources, and well-being. The updated theory examined the influence of stress and motivation and suggested both should be considered simultaneously (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Extending this theory to the teaching profession, job resources can include teacher autonomy as well as supportive colleagues, while demands may include disruptive classroom behaviors, low student motivation, or work overload (Dicke et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Additionally, recent literature using the JD-R theory included the role of the individual in modifying the impact of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In reference to teachers, the JD-R theory points more directly to self-efficacy as a personal resource which could be a significant variable in the discussion surrounding teacher stress (Dicke et al., 2018; Pas et al., 2012).

Reports of increased stress and reduced well-being among teachers indicate that these experiences are precursors to teacher burnout and depersonalization as well as reduced feelings of personal accomplishment due to work-related stressors (Friedman, 2006; Lopez & Sidhu, 2013). Teacher burnout has negative impacts on both teacher performance and student outcomes. Herman and colleagues (2018) found that teachers who reported feelings of stress and low coping led classrooms with the highest rates of student behavioral and academic challenges. Such results highlight the connection between teachers' emotions and their performance in the classroom. In comparing academic achievement and student behavior, the latter has the most significant relationship to teacher burnout (Friedman, 2006).

The Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) provides an additional exploration of sources of teacher stress and its influence on classroom dynamics. Student behavior has been well-established as a source of teacher stress (Herman et al., 2018). Within the Prosocial Classroom Model, deteriorating classroom climate and disruptive behavior lead to emotional exhaustion on the part of the teacher. At the same time, emotionally exhausted teachers are more likely to have hostile classroom climates and use less effective behavior management strategies, which can result in more disruptive behavior on the part of students. This conceptual model underscores the cyclical relationship among teacher well-being, classroom management, and student behavior using the term *burnout cascade* (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; p. 492). Similar to the JD-R model of teacher stress, personal resources have the potential to mitigate the risk of job-related exhaustion among teachers.

Figure 2:1 *The Prosocial Classroom: A Model Of Teacher Social And Emotional Competence And Classroom And Student Outcomes (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009)*



Self-Efficacy As A Buffer Against Stress

One of the most impactful job-related resources to buffer job-related exhaustion is self-efficacy. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory suggest one's beliefs, such as perceived capability, have a significant impact on what they can accomplish. Self-efficacy, or one's judgement of their ability to execute a specific skill or meet an expectation, greatly informs displayed behaviors. The implications of self-efficacy extend beyond observable behavior, but also inform goals, aspirations, and perception of opportunities and obstacles (Bandura, 2006). Within the teaching profession, teacher self-efficacy is one's confidence in their ability to perform the duties of teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and is an integral component of the discourse surrounding the teacher stress crisis (Pas et al., 2012). Notably, the construct of teacher self-efficacy is not the same as "collective teaching efficacy," or the beliefs of what can be achieved collectively through education, but the two constructs are positively correlated (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Teachers with a more intact sense of self-efficacy are more likely to believe they can positively impact their students' achievement and are less likely to refer their students for disciplinary actions or special education services. More efficacious teachers also tend to have more effective instruction and classroom management (Pas et al., 2010). Bandura (2006) suggested that decreased self-efficacy leads to increased dwelling on deficits and amplifies perceived severity of possible threats. In classrooms, the described impact of low self-efficacy impairs teachers' interpretation of the environment and their students. Typically, schools located in economically oppressed communities have low resources and high demand creating an ecosystem for greater levels of teacher burnout.

However, feelings of efficacy in effective teaching strategies potentially decreases the chance of burnout among teachers and, in turn, may improve classroom climates in urban schools (Bottiani et al., 2019). More specifically, teachers' self-efficacy in practices known to best reduce educational injustices, such as culturally responsive practice, may serve as a crucial mechanism for strengthening classroom dynamics (Siwatu et al., 2017).

Impact Of Teacher Stress

In addition to understanding the sources of emotional exhaustion among teachers, investigating teacher stress requires an examination of its implications. Psychological theory provides an understanding of the impact of stress on mental functioning. High levels of stress affect logical thinking, problem-solving skills, and responses to stimuli (Lupien et al., 2007). More specifically in schools, stressed teachers struggle with higher cognitive load (Lupien et al., 2007) and negative affect. This strain on cognition impacts teacher decision making and the climate of the classroom. Teachers with greater well-being and social-emotional competence are able to meet their students' emotional needs, are proactive in their classroom management strategies, and engage in classroom interactions effectively (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, returning to the *burnout cascade*, teachers who are emotionally exhausted and stressed may not have the internal resources to meet the challenges of teaching and, as a result, engage in ineffective interactions with students. Consequently, behavioral challenges increase along with negative classroom interactions ultimately resulting in increased stress among teachers. Furthermore, higher levels of cognitive load, often caused by increased level of stress, result in negative interpretations of student behaviors (Blackley et al., 2021) and reduces utilization of effective teaching strategies (Bottiani et al., 2019).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus 1991; Lazarus & Folkman 1987) indicates that an individual's reaction to a stressor is based on a subjective analysis. The analysis is related to goals and values held by the individual. The perceived threat to access goals or challenges to values triggers greater emotions (Goh et al., 2010). The evaluator of the situation interprets the level of threat which, in turn, impacts the feelings of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Spilt and colleagues (2011) elaborated upon the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping in their research on teacher well-being. They isolated two prominent features of the model which appeared most related to teacher well-being and the teacher-student relationship. The authors argued that the first feature, the intensity of stress, is dependent on teachers' perceptions of the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Secondly, teachers' perception of their relationship with students will affect their emotions in situations with students (Spilt et al., 2011). This study highlights the ways in which teacher-student dynamics are closely intertwined with teacher-well-being. In terms of application, teachers' reactions to student behavior are not simply objective perceptions, but are also reflective of teachers' level of stress (Bottiani et al., 2019)

Indeed, a recent study employing the Transactional Stress theory (Lazarus, 1999) found a strong relationship among student behavior, the teacher-student relationship, and teacher emotions (Hagenaurer et al., 2015). Early childhood teachers' ability to manage their classrooms and form positive relationships with their students is a particularly important aspect of occupational well-being (Jennings, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have found that positive teacher emotions are likely to evoke positive emotions in students, suggesting teacher emotions directly impact student well-being and learning

(Hagenauer et al., 2015). Depersonalization, an aspect of burnout, can lead to an approach to discipline that is harmful to learners (Jennings, 2015), suggesting a relationship between teacher stress and the discipline crisis.

Currently the interactions between teachers and Black students are often based on misinterpretations and hostility toward Black students and the disrespect of Black tradition and culture (Stevenson, 2008). Schools are not immune to the racism weaved into the fabric of the United States, rather educational settings reflect it (Stevenson, 2008). Literature indicates a disturbing relationship between burnout and implicit bias (Dyrbye et al., 2019). Implicit bias is an unconscious thought based on a particular characteristic such as race. In the context of schools, implicit bias describes an underlying reason that Black children are harshly and more frequently disciplined even when, at times, a behavioral concern is not present (Ramey, 2015; Stevenson, 2014). Increased stress and occupational burnout can also lead to increased vulnerability to reacting based on implicitly biased thought patterns. Mechanisms behind stress and susceptibility to implicit biases have been examined in the field of medicine (Dyrbye et al., 2019). Studies examining burnout among medical professionals suggest explicit and implicit biases were associated with symptoms of burnout which resulted in harmful implications for medical decision making. In short, in the healthcare field burnout elevates the depersonalizing of, and negative attitudes toward, Black patients (Vogel, 2019). Recognizing the severity of the medical professional's impact, it is possible to infer that unaddressed burnout and bias among medical practitioners is lethal for Black people. Similarly, these conclusions could be applied to concerns related to burnout among teachers.

Investigating educational injustices often results in directed critique and evaluation of classroom teachers (Cross, 2005). The teaching profession is at the bedrock of American schooling, but teachers exist within a larger system. Unfortunately, the system in which their profession is housed, fails to address the limited resources available to ensure teachers are able to perform their duties (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016). Equally troubling is that power (Delpit, 2006) and the American racial hierarchy (Stevenson, 2008) are embedded in the classroom. Schooling is designed to imply that teachers have power or control over students and students must engage in Eurocentric ways of being to gain access to power (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In contrast, literature on effective teaching suggests control is not the goal, but rather a positive relationship between students and teachers that includes warmth (Sandilos et al., 2017) and trust (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Racial stress and reaction to racial conflicts has a significant impact on the climate of classrooms (Stevenson, 2014). National data reveal the vast majority of teachers are White women, while the student population is currently and continues to become far more racially diverse (NCES, 2021). This racial and cultural mismatch between the teaching workforce and their students raises the potential for racial conflicts and stress in educational spaces. Teachers who are aware of their racial stress, and are efficacious in managing such stress, may be able to build more trusting relationships with students (Bentley-Edward et al., 2020). Establishing a racially just educational atmosphere requires acknowledgement of cultural power dynamics which are present in the United States (Weinstein et al., 2003). Moreover, effective classroom management cannot be culture neutral (Caldera et al., 2020) but rather culturally affirming.

Culturally Responsive Education

With the emergence of widespread standardized testing and nationwide examinations of trends in student performance, education researchers have concluded that students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including Black students, academically underperform (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Influenced by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sociologist James Coleman researched how well schools were providing educational opportunities to students across the nation. The resulting report titled *Equality of Educational Opportunities* (1966) was used to investigate outcome of desegregation and its implications related to race. Coleman's report was the first to nationally compare students to one another on factors such as race, ethnicity, and geographic location (Coleman et al., 1966). As a result of this report, Coleman et al, suggested schools did not have a significant impact on the educational performance of children, but rather social factors such as home, neighborhood and peer environment had a greater influence. The racial gaps in academic performance were established and the construct of the "achievement gap" was introduced to the educational community. The term "achievement gap" was first used in academic literature by Gwartney (1970) in a study which compared White students to "nonwhite" students. As decades have passed since the introduction of comparing all students to White children began, it continues to be a general practice in educational research.

Black educators and scholars have since pushed back on the notion of using White children as the comparative norm for all other learners and that an "achievement gap" truly exists (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The trouble with the concept of the "achievement gap" is the implied narrative that the goal of school is achieving whiteness

(Kirkland, 2010). From its origin, the achievement gap developed from a critique of desegregating schools and suggests there are pervasive and persistent academic differences between White and Black students (Kirkland, 2010), suggesting Black children were incapable. More recently, many psychologists and educators have shifted the focus away from achievement to ways in which schools can foster learning growth among students (Gay, 2006; Gregory et al., 2010). Scholars moved toward understanding the disparities in learning opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Flores, 2018) as the major force behind differences in performance on academic measures. One well-researched barrier to education is the overemphasis on Eurocentric curricula or ways of being (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The discourse surrounding racial educational disparities uncovered a lack of awareness of culture's role in teaching and learning (Gay 2000, 2006; Weinstein et al., 2004).

Prior to unpacking the need for culturally responsive practices in education, it is important to raise attention to the deep societal injustice at play. As previously noted in this paper, American schooling creates and sustains racist structural norms resulting in damaging disparities. While utilizing culturally responsive practices in schools will improve educational outcomes for all learners, it does not alter the societal conditions which produce injustice on a broad scale. Although effective classroom management is a needed call for action, it must be reiterated that Black students' behavior is not the source of the racial discipline gap. Black students are disciplined even when their behavior is appropriate for their age, not disruptive to the environment, or would be acceptable if displayed by a non-Black student (Sevon et al., 2021). Importantly, teachers who are

aware of the relationship between racial stress and their perception of their students are better able to cultivate nurturing classrooms (Bentley-Edward et al., 2020).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Effective education requires an acknowledgement that schooling and culture are linked. However, it is only more recently that U.S. schools have begun to infuse culture into curriculum. Early in American history, schools forced Indigenous children to assimilate to European American culture (Gay, 2000) – an unfortunate example of how schooling was weaponized against communities. Ladson-Billings (1995) noted that U.S. schools typically attempt to insert culture into education, rather than embedding education into the culture of the learners in the classroom. A hailed solution to the present injustice of American schooling is culturally responsive teaching (CRT; Gay, 2000), an ideology which expands from the notion that children’s social experiences are valid and significant to the process of learning (Bernstein 1985; Gay, 2006). Establishing an effective learning environment requires that cultural awareness be infused into the ways that teachers care for students, cultivate a positive classroom climate, and engage in effective communication. In particular, culturally responsive teaching should be connected to classroom and behavior management approaches (Gay, 2006).

The “Achievement gap” continues to be well researched in academia regardless of the deficit focus of the theory (i.e., focus on the students themselves rather than the systems that perpetuate injustice). An equally problematic racial gap exists in the ways schools respond to students’ behaviors (Gregory et al., 2010). Unfortunately, the two problems are highly related and intertwined, as the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline contributes to the existing disparities in educational attainment. Simply put,

Black students being removed from educational spaces make them unavailable for instruction, diminishing their opportunities to adequate education (Gregory et al., 2010). The misuse of disciplinary responses to students is based, in part, on educators' lack of understanding of the role culture plays in the teaching and learning process (Gay, 2000) as well as in students' classroom behaviors (Gay, 2006; Siwatu et al., 2017). Educational scholars recognize Black students often feel ostracized, and even punished by peers and adults for displaying cultural practices. These feelings lead to schools being a place in which students cannot be their authentic selves and, consequently, becoming a hostile environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

In an effort to eradicate the discipline gap, scholars have explored developing models for more effective and affirming behavior management practices based on the foundation of culturally responsive education (Gay, 2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Siwatu et al., 2017; Weinstein et al., 2003). Culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) requires an understanding that schools are microcosms that reflect the faulty and oppressive societal structures present in the larger society (Weinstein et al., 2003). Additionally, knowledge of equity and justice within education is paramount to cultivating an inclusive learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2000). With this foundational knowledge in place, CRCM serves as a broad framework for thinking about the educational environment, rather than simply a list of strategies and techniques (Milner & Tenore, 2010).

A closer investigation of the discipline gap reveals the overuse of the punitive practices in response to student behaviors. The source of these punitive practices stems

from an emphasis on controlling students and exerting power in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Working from this paradigm, compliance is deemed the key to educational success (Graham, 2020). Culturally responsive classroom management challenges the notion of power over students and their behaviors, and empowers learners to be active in their society and learning (Delpit, 1995; Milner & Tenore, 2010). This model is contrary to the “no excuse” framework frequently used in public charter schools in communities with large minoritized populations. No excuse classroom management is restrictive and emphasizes compliance to institutional authority and, in turn, does not foster supportive environments for academic achievement (Graham, 2020). Effective, inclusive, and nurturing classroom management aligns with the theory of *warm demander teaching* (Kleinfeld, 1975), which includes personal warmth and demanding intellectual rigor. Warm demander research challenges the ethnocentric and ineffective teaching style that mistakes passive sympathy for warmth. Effective teaching is based on a climate of personalized relationship and demanding high quality work (Kleinfeld, 1975). CRCM calls for a combination of high-quality instruction and a nurturing and inclusive classroom climate (Gay, 2006). Creating such an environment requires acknowledging everyone is a cultural being and cultural differences do exist. While cultures differ, all expressions are valid, and none are more appropriate to the learning environment compared to another. Building on these foundational understandings, culturally responsive teachers are to reflectively, and with humility, critique their practice and its impact on their learners (Weinstein et al., 2003).

Similar to previous scholars, Siwatu (2017) described culturally responsive classroom management as an effective method to reduce the racial disparities present in

school discipline. Siwatu developed the Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Self-Efficacy scale, which is based on a conceptual framework that combines social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) as the foundation of self-efficacy with the principles of culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2003). This combination includes recognition of one's ethnocentrism, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, understanding of the broader societal context, commitment to building a caring environment, and an ability to utilize culturally responsive classroom management (Siwatu, 2017). Siwatu suggests that the following characteristics reflect a teacher's engagement in culturally responsive classroom management: (1) Developing and maintaining a meaningful relationship with students; (2) Understanding the importance of a warm classroom environment of genuine respect of cultures present; (3) Understanding that student's behavior in the classroom may be a reflection of cultural norms; (4) Knowing how to communicate with parents; (5) Designing classrooms that allow students to visualize themselves in the space; (6) Establishing clear expectations and consequences; (7) Assessing whether behavioral concerns are truly unacceptable in the classroom; (8) Setting high behavioral expectations (Siwatu et al., 2017).

Development of a culturally responsive classroom which fosters a warm and demanding environment requires a balance of high discipline and high care (Ford & Sassi, 2014). Unfortunately, research has revealed the pattern of high discipline and very little care when it comes to educating Black children (Gilliam et al., 2016; Kozol, 2005; Morris & Perry, 2017). These experiences inside of the classroom mirror the ways Black people are treated outside of the classroom.

Study Overview

Early literature on the pandemic raised awareness to its exacerbating impact on the two preexisting educational crises of teacher stress and school discipline. Educational literature has highlighted the long-standing problem of emotional exhaustion among teachers and its impact on student experience. For example, teacher stress is associated with increased use of exclusionary discipline (Eddy et al., 2020), poor academic performance (Hagenauer et al., 2015), and harmful student/teacher relationships (Spilt et al., 2011). Contextual models of occupational stress reveal teacher self-efficacy as a promising resource to buffer the impact of high job demand and its potential to elevate stress (Dicke et al., 2018; Pas et al., 2012). In addition, increased self-efficacy leads to improved educational experiences for students, yet unfortunately, equitable access to education has not yet been achieved. A potential solution to the inequities presents in education is culturally responsive education (Gay, 2006). Currently, the literature has not yet connected the relationship between teacher well-being and self-efficacy in culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management which is a gap this dissertation study addressed.

Furthermore, this study focused on early childhood education due to the disturbing trends related to early childhood teacher stress (Maslach & Pine, 1997; Whitaker et al., 2013) and ineffective discipline practices used with young children (Lopez, 2020; Loomis et al., 2021; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Black preschool and early elementary students experience an overwhelming rate of exclusionary discipline (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). The disparities exist well into students' kindergarten year and beyond (Sevon et al., 2021). Unjust early childhood school discipline practices have devastating

implications for Black children and their communities and are a significant contributor to poor health outcomes in adulthood (Carone, 2019; Skiba et al., 2011). Nicholson-Crotty et al., (2009) investigated later life outcomes and found increased rates of exposure to racialized violence. Largely, when students experience the harmful practices of harsh exclusionary school discipline, they face adverse outcomes later in life (Gilliam et al., 2016; Wun, 2016). Student early exposure to learning environments set the stage for their future academic success (Gunn et al., 2021), therefore it is critical that solutions to ineffective early childhood education are identified (Sevon, 2022).

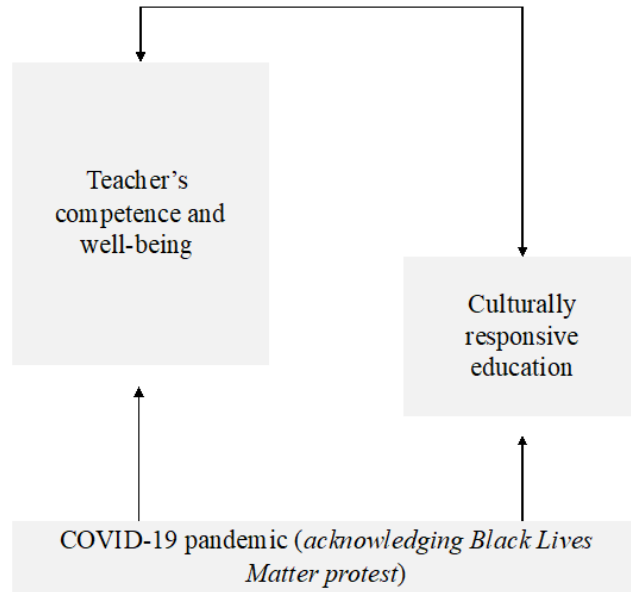
This study examined the intersection of three crises and their impact on the American schooling structure by exploring the relationship between teacher well-being and equitable educational practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 2:2). Equitable education is conceptualized as practices reflecting culturally responsive education, in particular, culturally responsive teaching and classroom management (CRT-CRCM). In this mixed methods study, insights from the qualitative and quantitative data provided implications for enhancing early childhood teachers' efficacy in culturally responsive instructional practices as a means of reducing stress and ultimately reducing institutional violence toward young minoritized students.

The study included two research questions with the first being a qualitative inquiry and the second being quantitative in nature. The following research questions are derived from the study's purpose:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe their approach to culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management (CRT-CRCM) during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' feelings of competence in CRT-CRCM and their self-reported well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Figure 2:2 *Teacher Well-being and Culturally Responsive Education in the Context of the Pandemic*



CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY

The present study examined secondary data, using mixed methods, from the PRESS (Pandemic Response and Equitable School Systems) For Teacher Support Project. I, Mawule Sevon, served as a core member of the research team for this project. The PRESS project utilized mixed method data collection (i.e., surveys and interviews) on topics of teacher well-being and educational practice. Teachers who taught preschool through 12th grade and were employed full-time in either public, charter, or private schools in the U.S. were invited to take the survey. The survey was completed anonymously through the secure online survey platform, Qualtrics. A total of 217 teachers completed the survey. Once teachers completed the survey, they were invited to complete a second brief survey completely disconnected to the first survey that inquired about their interest in also completing a phone interview. Interviews were gathered from 27 teachers from preschool through secondary settings. For this dissertation study, participants included a total of 88 early childhood teachers and a subsample of 11 teachers complete the phone interviews.

Research Design

This dissertation study used a mixed methods approach with the intent to examine the relationship between teacher well-being and equitable educational practices during a global crisis, COVID-19. A convergent parallel mixed methods design, a type of design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in parallel and analyzed separately, was used (Morse, 1991; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The first research question, “How do early childhood teachers describe their approach to culturally responsive teaching and classroom management during the COVID-19 pandemic?”, was

addressed with the qualitative data. Interviews were coded to examine the ways in which early childhood teachers described culturally responsive teaching during a global disaster. Quantitative data addressed the second research question, “What is the relationship between early childhood teachers’ feelings of competence in culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management and their self-reported well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?” Survey data were analyzed to examine the relationship between early childhood teachers’ feelings of competence in culturally responsive teaching and classroom management and their self-reported well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. In my discussion of findings, I elaborate on the ways in which early childhood teachers’ self-reported experiences in interviews extend, refute, or illuminate the survey findings about early childhood teachers’ feelings of competence in CRT-CRCM during the COVID-19 pandemic.

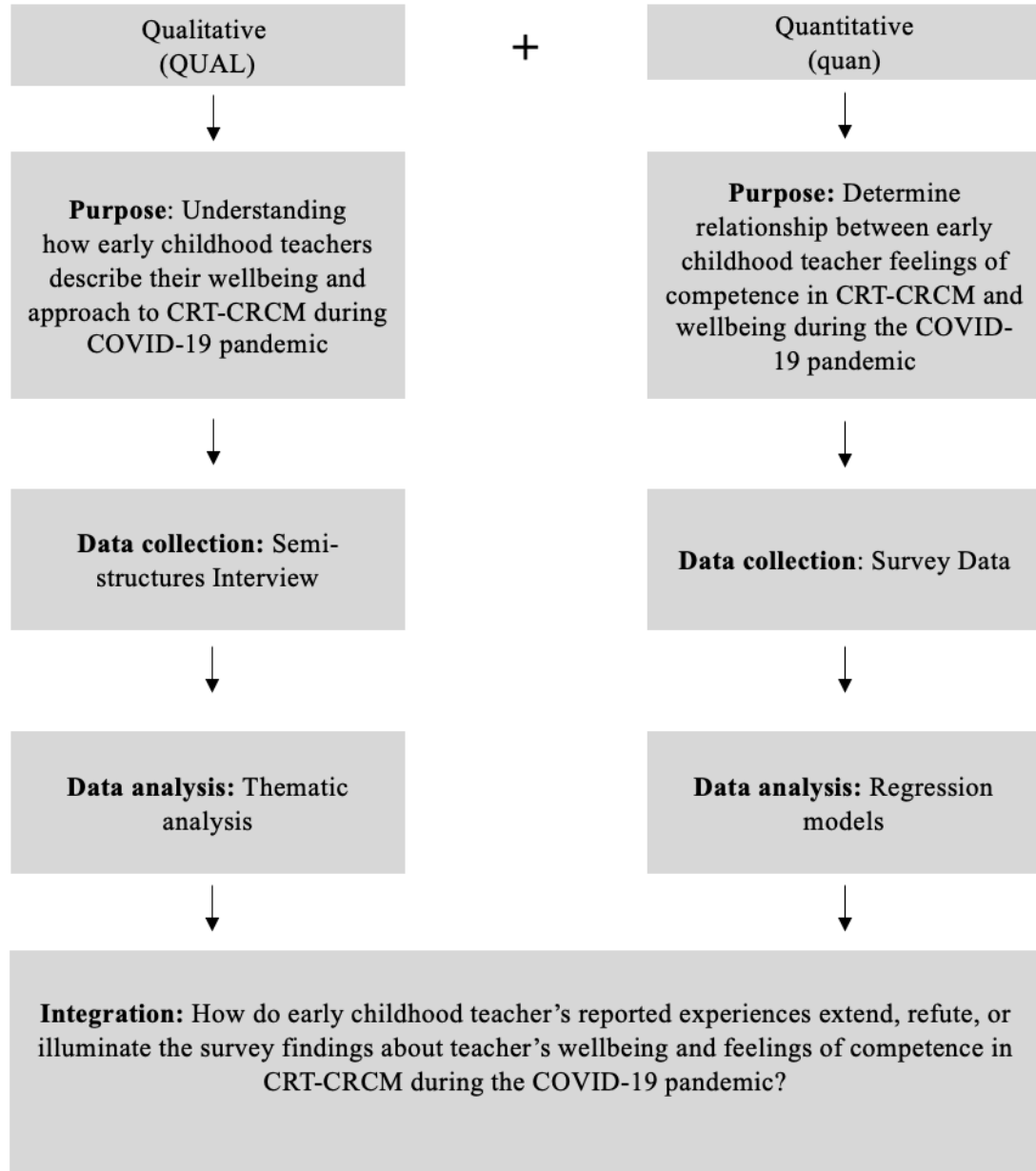
The convergent parallel design assumes both qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information, yet yield shared results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and provide opportunities to explore an inquiry more completely (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The Procedural Diagram (Figure 3.1) depicts the procedures, integration, and the ways in which key variables of interest were investigated.

The rationale for selecting a mixed methods approach for this study centers the desire to elevate the voices of front-line educators while also obtaining quantifiable data for comparative purposes. Traditionally, many school psychology studies lean toward quantitative research, while the broader field of education has expanded to be more inclusive of qualitative methodology (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Considering the history of harm the field of psychology has inflicted on Black and Indigenous children,

maintaining the status quo via methodology is untenable. Moreover, critical theorists have called for an increased inclusion of stories and truths to capture the realities of those so often left out of data sets. Qualitative research methods support discovery of the meanings that people give to their experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Research rooted in social justice pulls from Black and Indigenous traditions and the recognition that stories are not separate from theory but an essential component of theory (Blalock, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Wilson, 2008). This framework recognizes that stories and narratives are real and legitimate sources of data and therefore acknowledges the variations that exist among people (Aguilar, 2022; Brayboy, 2005). Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods shined light on whether the findings from different data sources converge or diverge.

This mixed methods study utilizes a qualitative core, enhanced with supplemental components gathered via quantitative data (Morse & Nienaus, 2009) employing a pragmatic philosophical worldview. A pragmatic view appears the most appropriate for the aim of this study as it focuses on the outcome of the investigation (Creswell, 2007) by recognizing the research question is as important as the methods (Mertens, 2020). The overarching objective of this study was to identify potential solutions to counteract the racial ailments flowing through American schools, while also recognizing that addressing the present injustices in education is both critical and complex. The combination of methods invites a deep exploration of the relationship between teacher well-being and their culturally responsive practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Figure 3:1: *Mixed Methods Procedural Diagram of Research (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016)*



Participants and Study Procedures

In order to recruit teachers for the initial survey, a total of 3,014 publicly available email addresses from public, charter, and private school websites were gathered by the

research team at Temple University. The team gathered teacher emails from the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, and Western regions of the country by systematically conducting online searches for schools and districts in those regions and compiling a database of freely available teacher email addresses. In addition, the survey recruitment flyer was sent to two teacher listservs. Despite having the opportunity to obtain a \$10 gift card for survey completion, the survey response rate was low (approximately 3.3%). The surveys and interviews were completed between February and July 2021 and included teachers who instructed in early childhood through high school grades across the United States. A total of 217 teachers working during the 2020-2021 academic school year completed the survey. Additional qualitative data was gathered from a subsample of teachers ($n=27$) via phone interviews about their professional experiences during the pandemic.

Teachers who completed the survey accessed it online through Qualtrics secure survey software and were provided with information about the purpose of the study and confidentiality prior to completing the survey items. Following survey completion, participants had the option to sign up for a semi-structured phone interview. To protect their anonymity, teachers were informed that their survey data would not be linked to their interview responses. If they indicated agreement to participate in the interview, they were presented with an online interview consent form. The research team then used the interview sign-up form to reach out via email to teachers who consented to an interview and schedule a phone call. The phone interviews were audio recorded, and ranged from 25-45 minutes, depending on the length of teachers' responses to various questions. All interview were formally transcribed by a transcription company, Ubiquis.

Interview Participant Subsample Selection

The original study investigated the experiences of 217 classroom teachers in pre-k through 12th grade settings. Recent studies have found concerning rates of poor teacher well-being among early education teachers (Maslach & Pine, 1997; Whitaker et al., 2013). Equally alarming are the racial disparities in exclusionary school discipline among young children (Loomis et., 2021; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Given these challenges in early childhood settings, the qualitative and quantitative analyses focused on the experiences of early childhood educators (i.e., participants teaching preschool to third grade). This pre-k through third grade conceptualization of “early childhood” teaching is consistent with U.S. teacher training programs (NAEYC, 2021). Focusing on this subsample yielded a total of 11 interviewees (See Table 3.1).

Table 3:1: *Overview of Interview Participants*

ID #	Pseudonym	Current grade(s) taught	Race/ ethnicity	Year(s) of experience	Education level
102	Ms. Smith	3rd grade	White	10 years	Masters
111	Mx. Weiss	Kindergarten		1 year	
119	Mx. Williams	2nd grade		7 years	
120	Mx. Jackson	Kindergarten		9 years	
122	Ms. Mohammed	Kindergarten	White	10 years	Masters
123	Ms. Brown	Kindergarten	White	15 years	Bachelors
124	Ms. Solomon	PreK 3-4	Hispanic/ Latina	19 years	Masters
125	Ms. Mensah	Kindergarten		27 years	
126	Mx. Washington	Preschool		30 years	
127	Ms. Ritter	Preschool	White	8 years	Masters
128	Ms. Clark	Preschool	White	8 years	Bachelors

Note. Demographic data were not available for all teachers in the interview subsample.

Survey Participant Sample

Out of the 217 teachers who completed the survey, 88 of those respondents were early childhood educators (i.e., participants teaching in preschool through third grade). Of

those 88 early childhood teachers, 97% were women, 15% were Black, and they had an average of 12 years of teaching experience. The majority of teachers taught in public school settings and in prekindergarten grades (see Table 3.2).

Table 3:2: *Overview of Survey Participants*

Background Characteristic	Percent
Identifies as a woman	97.7%
Racially identifies as Black	15.8%
Teaches in a public school	55.1%
Teaches in a prekindergarten classroom	58%
Years of teaching experiences ranging from 1-42 years (mean=12)	

Measures

The teacher survey was created using a combination of existing measures and items developed by the research team to address current events. The research team used a modified version of the Measure of Stressors and Supports for Teachers (MOST; Sandilos & DiPerna, 2022) survey to measure teachers' well-being. The MOST is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure constructs related to teachers' working conditions, relationships with other school stakeholders, and emotional state. The larger measure included eight subscales (parents, school leaders, colleagues, school belonging, time pressure, access to professional development, safety, and emotional state) using a 4-point Likert scale (1=*never*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*often*, or 4=*almost always*). Two remaining subscales (classroom students and students with disabilities) also used a 4-point Likert scale, but with different descriptors, (1=*very few* to 4=*almost all*) and agreement (1=*strongly disagree* to 4=*strongly agree*). The factor structure of the MOST was previously validated with a large sample of teachers in K-12 settings (Sandilos &

DiPerna, 2022). For the PRESS project, the safety subscale of the MOST was modified to reflect feelings of safety at school during COVID-19. For the present dissertation study, I examined this COVID-19 safety subscale (e.g., I worked in a classroom(s) in which my class size is reduced for safety) along with emotional state (e.g., I feel happy when I prepare for the school day) and access to professional development (e.g., professional development within my school/district is responsive to my professional needs).

A subset of items from the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy and Outcome Expectancy Beliefs scales (CRTSE; Siwatu, 2007) and the Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Self-Efficacy Scale (CRCMSE; Siwatu et al., 2017) were also included in the larger survey. The survey consisted of 28 items examining teachers' culturally responsive teaching beliefs, confidence in classroom management, and self-rated ability to be culturally responsive. Beliefs in culturally responsive teaching practices was assessed using 10 items in which teachers rated the probability that behaviors would lead to specified outcomes (e.g., Revising instructional material to include a better representation of the students' cultural group will foster positive self-images; 0 = *extremely unlikely*, 100 = *extremely likely*). To examine confidence in culturally responsive classroom management, participants completed 12 items indicating how confident they were in their ability to perform specific classroom management tasks (e.g., Redirect students' behavior without use of coercive means, i.e., consequences or verbal reprimand; 0 = *no confidence at all* to 100 = *completely confident*). Respondents were also asked to rate six items inquiring about their perceived ability to be culturally responsive in their classrooms (e.g., Use my students' cultural background to make learning meaningful; 0 = *least able* to 100 = *extremely able*). Previous research (Siwatu,

2007; Siwatu et al., 2017) found high internal consistency reliability for CRTSE (.96) and CRCMSE (.97).

The interview protocol was developed collaboratively by the PRESS research team, which consisted of one university faculty member and four graduate students. Interview questions were created to align with the survey items and were informed by the work of Siwatu (2007, 2017) as well as extant research on teacher well-being (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). The full interview protocol is included in Appendix D. For this dissertation, coding focused on interview questions related to culturally responsive teaching and classroom management. Questions related to culturally responsive teaching included, “Tell me about your beliefs related to culturally responsive education” and “Tell me about your ability to engage in culturally responsive education.” Teachers were also asked whether their approaches changed during the pandemic. Additional questions regarding classroom management included, “How would you describe your approach to classroom management?” and “What strategies have you utilized during the pandemic?”

Analytic Approach

For the present dissertation, interview data were qualitatively coded to identify themes regarding early childhood teachers’ culturally responsive teaching experience during the pandemic. The survey data was quantitatively analyzed to examine the association between culturally responsive teaching and teacher well-being.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A total of 11 early childhood teachers (PreK – third grade) engaged in semi-structured interviews about their experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews ranged from 25-45 minutes and were completed by six members of the PRESS research team (i.e., five school psychology graduate students and a school psychology faculty member who served as the principal investigator). For this dissertation, the qualitative coders were both doctoral students in the school psychology program at Temple University with knowledge of equitable educational practices. The primary coder (Sevon) utilized a secondary coder to reduce the impact of individual bias on the analysis of data. Initially a deductive approach was utilized by using the available literature on culturally responsive teaching and classroom management to inform the data analysis. An inductive approach was also used by allowing the data to inform the research (Morse & Niehaus, 2016). An inductive approach is particularly relevant to the extraordinary nature of the COVID-19 crisis; the long-term effects of this global crisis are unconfirmed and its impact on teaching and students' educational experience is still largely unknown.

To analyze the interview transcripts, the coding team worked together to determine themes. A codebook was developed through an iterative process using the interview protocol, a first review of interview transcripts, and relevant literature (See Table 3.2 Initial Data Codes). Coders began with analyzing questions related to culturally responsive education and classroom management. After reviewing those specific questions, the coders analyzed the entire interview transcript to determine if additional themes were present. The primary coder applied the initial codes to a subset of transcripts, and both coders reviewed the transcribed interviews and revised codes to reflect patterns in the data. Subsequently interview transcripts were reviewed and coded bases on themes related to CRT & CRCM. After each round of coding, the coders met to

discuss patterns, similarities, and any discrepancies. In total, three rounds of coding were completed to identify themes in early childhood educators' use of culturally responsive practices.

Table 3:3: *Data Codes Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Term/ Code	Definition	Sample quote
Cultural humility	Continued reflection and critique of teaching practice from a lens of culture (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).	I feel really strongly about it. However, I feel like I haven't had the proper training to successfully kind of like deliver it to my students. I try to like do what I can. I did have quite a few students with an Indian background this year, so we did, like we talked about different holidays, and we talked about like different Indian holidays. But I mean beyond sort of like superficial things like that I am not like well-versed in kind of knowing how to deliver that kind of instruction and I would love more training on that.
Sociopolitical consciousness	One's ability to analyze the political, economic, and social forces shaping society and one's status in it (Seider et al., 2018).	I am an educator because I see education as a form of social justice. I think that our children of color do not receive appropriate resources or opportunities. I've always felt that way.
School as microcosm of society	Awareness that schools reflect the faulty and oppressive societal structures present in the larger society (Weinstein et al., 2003).	I think that one thing that has become a lot stronger for me is just understanding the deep roots that white supremacy has within our education system as a whole and within the charter network in which I teach. I think that the pandemic has shown me that I need to lean into that even more and continue to fight against the colonization of education, the way that our children are treated, the cultural expectations that are

placed on them, the focus on compliance and how toxic that is.

Cultural awareness	Acknowledgement of culture, that everyone is a cultural being, and cultural differences do exist (Weinstein et al., 2003)	<p>At my school, the demographics are mostly African American. The next is Hispanic. We have a small handful of students who are biracial. I don't recall us having any Caucasian students or Oriental students. Their culture is their connection with their background knowledge in order for them to learn.</p> <p>I strongly feel like the kids' cultures should be included with their academic education. I also feel like some material, you have to think about your demographics when you choose it because it could be completely over their head, and they never make a connection with it. Definitely vocabulary. They have no clue what it is.</p>
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Table 3:4: *Data Codes Culturally Responsive Classroom Management*

Term/ Code	Definition	Sample quote
Meaningful relationships	Developing and maintaining a meaningful relationship with students (Siwatu et al., 2017)	So, one of my you know goals in classroom management was just to bring them joy and bring one another joy. So, you know to develop a classroom community we spend some time you know really talking to one another in small groups.
Home/school collaboration	Knowing how to communicate with parents (Siwatu et al., 2017)	The kids in my classroom can see their classmates who are at home. That was one of my rules too. You need to be on task and have all the appropriate clothes and have your materials. Do not tell me you have to go potty. I'm not trying to control

Effective behavioral practices	Establishing clear expectations and consequences. General classroom management best practices (Siwatu et al., 2017)	your household. Just go and come back. I won't be upset. That's just basically how it was. I had my rules for virtual. I had my rules for face to face. You know, I really think that the job of a teacher is to teach students — to teach kids to become adults and what that means, and self-management. So, certainly in the younger years, I try to give them a little bit more structure to work within. But I generally, really try to give my students the chance to make their own bad decisions about their behavior and to have to live through the consequences of those decisions.
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Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analyses included the descriptive statistics (e.g., Cronbach’s alphas, means, standard deviations, percentages, correlations) of key variables of interest (i.e., teachers’ ratings of their emotional state, teachers’ ratings of CRT-CRCM) and of teacher background characteristics and contextual covariates. Pearson correlation coefficients among the three CRT-CRCM variables (i.e., CRT self-reported ability, CRT beliefs, and culturally responsive classroom management [CRCM]) ranged from .61 to .76. Given the relatively high correlations among the CRT-CRCM variables, individual regressions were estimated with each CRT-CRCM variable as a unique predictor in the model in order to avoid multicollinearity. Thus, for each model, ordinary least squares regression was conducted with teachers’ emotional state as the outcome regressed on one CRT-CRCM variable and a set of teacher background characteristics (i.e., race [1=Black, 0 = All other races], school type [1=public, 0=private or charter], years of teaching experience). In addition to teacher background characteristics, I also explored two

contextual variables that have been shown to relate to culturally responsive instruction and/or teacher well-being. These variables were teachers' feelings of safety in the COVID-19 pandemic and their access to general professional development resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Diliberti et al., 2021; Soncini et al., 2021).

A total of 11% of the survey sample were missing emotional state outcome data. Thus, missing data patterns on the emotional state variable were examined prior to running regression analyses. Specifically, chi-square analyses were run for each of the categorical background variables (race, grade level, and school type) to determine whether teachers with certain background characteristics were more likely to be missing emotional state outcome data. From these analyses, race and school type did not display significant missing data patterns. However, grade level did display significant missing data patterns with more PreK teachers missing data for the emotional state variable. To account for this missing data pattern, PreK (1,0) was controlled for in the regression analyses. The cut off for statistical significance was $\alpha = .05$ and all quantitative analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS statistics software platform.

Protection of Human Subjects

In accordance with federal regulations and guidelines of Temple University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), consent forms were provided to participants electronically prior to the start of the survey as well as when they signed up for the interview. Participants could also download copies of the consent forms for their records. Participants included their contact information at the end of the survey (disconnected from their survey responses) to receive an electronic \$10 Amazon gift card. They were compensated with another \$10 gift card for completing the interview. In order to protect

participants and what they shared; pseudonyms were used in place of their actual names. Data were always stored securely on an encrypted and password-protected cloud-based storage. Only the IRB-approved research team, led by a university faculty member, had access to interviews, transcriptions, and datasets used for analysis.

Positionality Statement

As noted previously, it is necessary to capture the narratives and experiences of others (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and the discovery of meanings from those stories is an essential component of research (Aguilar, 2022). Furthermore, the analysis and interpretation of those forms of data are impacted by the experiences and position of the researcher(s). The qualitative data were coded by two researchers, both doctoral students in Temple University's school psychology program with minimal experience with qualitative research. The primary researcher is a Black woman who grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her childhood in Philadelphia led to her interest in investigating the sources of the racial inequity highly visible in large cities around the United States and how these disparities are present in and out of schools. Interest in racial justice in schools led to a career as an educator, and a decade-long investigation of how school discipline practices impact Black children. The noted dedication to justice in education was initially very present during the coding process.

Equally present was the primary researcher's knowledge of culturally responsive education. The researcher was formally introduced to the concept of culturally responsive education while obtaining her specialist degree in school psychology at Bowie State University, resulting in copious opportunities since 2009 to explore and expand her knowledge and understanding of the topic. While analyzing participants description of

CRT, the primary coder approached the data from a binary stance, whether the response aligned with the literature related to culturally responsive practices or not. This preliminary review highlighted the impact of the investigator's perspective which has been significantly shaped by the literature on educational liberation, justice, and cultural responsiveness.

The second coder brought an additional perspective to provide a more robust interpretation of the data. The second coder is a Chinese American and has similar geographic work experience to the primary coder. Through these experiences, she gained a keen understanding of the role that structural racism, sexism, ableism, and other systems of oppression play in students' well-being, education broadly, and beyond. However, this coder had limited knowledge of CRT. Working collaboratively with varying levels of knowledge of CRT required discussion between the coders to reach a consensus on assigned codes. The primary coder applied the initial codes to a subset of transcripts, and both coders reviewed the transcribed interviews and revised codes to reflect patterns in the data. During the coding process, each researcher separately coded the participant responses based upon the established coding scheme. Once individually completed, the researchers reconvened to discuss assigned codes and determine agreement when codes differed. This process led to the development of the themes as described in the qualitative findings section which were formed by different world views.

CHAPTER 4 : FINDINGS

Qualitative Findings

A vital component of effective education is the relationship between teachers and their students. Specifically, a relationship which includes genuine respect and warmth (Sandilos et al., 2017; Siwatu et al., 2017). As early childhood teachers described their experience teaching during a global crisis a significant theme arose. Overall, early childhood teachers revealed a dedication to their students and those students' development and learning. When asked about the best part of their job, the majority of the participants described their work and relationships with children as the highlight of their profession. Mx. Jackson, a kindergarten teacher commented:

The best part of my job is the students, hands down. They make every day enjoyable and exciting and worthwhile.

As well as Mx. Weiss, a kindergarten teacher:

Um, just getting to know the students. Yeah, like, building relationships with them and seeing how much they're able to learn.

And Ms. Ritter, a preschool teacher:

The best part of my job, I think just being with the kids, getting to know them, and seeing them grow and develop.'

While valuing students and a desire to establish meaningful relationships with learners is a foundation area of teaching, this reflects only a portion of effective and equitable teaching practices. Moreover, while the participants reported having positive interactions with children, the literature around schooling of Black children indicate a discrepancy between how they are treated by educational personnel and their non-Black peers (Sevon, 2022). Thus, an in-depth examination of the ways early childhood teachers conceptualize

culturally responsive educational practice was conducted to better understand the ways teachers reduce racial disparities in their classrooms.

Research question 1: *How do early childhood teachers describe their approach to culturally responsive teaching and classroom management during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

During the interview, the participants were explicitly asked their thoughts on culturally responsive teaching and more broadly classroom management. Very few of the participating early childhood teachers expressed an expansive understanding of culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive classroom management. Their responses illustrated a surface level awareness of culture's impact on educational experiences. Findings are organized to illustrate the ways teachers described their approach to both culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

In this study, the elements of culturally responsive teaching that were deductively coded in teachers' responses were: (1) cultural awareness, (2) sociopolitical consciousness, (3) school as a microcosm of society, and (4) cultural humility.

Cultural Awareness

It is well documented that the teaching profession does not mirror the social demographics of students. It is also predicted the student populations will continue to grow more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse while the rate of diversity among teachers is not growing at the same rate (NCES, 2021). Considering this apparent cultural mismatch, it is imperative teachers recognize the impact of culture in the classroom

setting (Bentley-Edwards et al., 2020). It is important to acknowledge that cultural differences do exist, and such differences and expressions are valid (Bernstein 1985; Gay, 2006), countering the implied eurocentrism present in schools (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Mx. Williams, a second-grade teacher describes the cultural diversity among their students.

At my school, the demographics are mostly African American. The next is Hispanic. We have a small handful of students who are biracial. I don't recall us having any Caucasian students or Oriental students. Their culture is their connection with their background knowledge in order for them to learn. I strongly feel like the kids' cultures should be included with their academic education. I also feel like some material, you have to think about your demographics when you choose it because it could be completely over their head, and they never make a connection with it. Definitely vocabulary. They have no clue what it is.

Mx. Williams endorsed the importance of cultural awareness and appears to agree cultural differences exist. Yet their response shows a misconception of culturally responsive teaching being specifically for minoritized students by labeling the various racial groups present in their school building. The mentioned practice is bound in the practice of using Whiteness as the baseline and minoritizing all other racial demographics (Coleman, 1966; Gwartney, 1970). They also used racial descriptors that are out of date (e.g., "Oriental students") suggesting they may not be active in the communities of their students. Mx. Williams's response captures an additional misconception that culture simply aligns only with one's assumed salient racial or ethnic identity. Additionally, Mx. Williams statement, "it could be completely over their head, and they never make a connection with it," provides an explain of why cultural awareness falls short of creating an affirming learning experiences. Culturally responsive education focuses on recognizing the strengths of students and using those to leverage new skills. The

highlighted phrase in the previously mentioned quote captured a deficit framework that is often mistaken as cultural responsiveness.

Ms. Smith's description of CRT is also informed by a similar Eurocentric lens of inferring CRT is most appropriate for racially and culturally marginalized students rather than for all learners.

I think it's crucial to make sure you're aware of the backgrounds of your children. Like I said, I have all of the ESL students for third grade, so I try really hard to make sure I'm incorporating books that - we recently just did different folk tales and we had a Cuban folk tale, and we had a Puerto Rican folk tale, so we had folk tales that originated from countries that they are potentially from.

And we've done just different things, stories that generate from different areas around the globe where they could have that connection. I feel like kids learn a lot stronger when they feel a connection to what they're reading or learning, in general. So, the social studies component, we do a whole Hispanic Heritage Month, we do a whole unit on and talk about all 22 countries where they speak Spanish as their primary language. So, incorporating those things makes the kids feel they have a connection and they can go, "Oh, I've seen that."

I have a student who came from Guatemala last year, so he is a fresh, new person to the country. And so, for him, when we talk about Spanish countries, he heavily relates to that and does much better on those stories. Also, integrating texts that potentially are dual language are a big one, as well.

During the early periods of racial integration of schools, researchers compared all learners to White students (Coleman 1966). Such data analysis style welcomed a common practice in education of “othering” (Spivak, 1985) minoritized children. “Othering” supports stereotyping and racialization and is defined as the “process of distinguishing between an ‘us’ and ‘the others’ during which the ‘us’ allocates itself an identity, homogenizes “the others” and positions them as not belonging to ‘us’” (Schmitt & Witte, 2018, p. 1353). Ms. Smith demonstrated the practice of establishing who is in a social power position and who is outside of this group (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011).

She further demonstrates this phenomenon by clustering a large and complex ethnic group when assuming all students from Spanish speaking nations shared an experience and respond to a lesson in the same manner. When suggesting the folk tales “originated from countries that they are potentially from,” Ms. Smith highlighted assumptions she made about the background of their students, families, and communities.

Both participants reserved CRT to the content of *what* is being taught rather than the *way* teaching and learning occurs. A richer understanding of culture’s impact on teaching would require teachers to acknowledge themselves as cultural beings which impact how they facilitate learning among their students. Additionally, this response illustrates a need to understand students beyond surface level demographic characteristics (Gay, 2000, 2006). Consequentially, culture is seen as something students bring to the classroom. In addition to curriculum, cultural awareness should inform the ways teachers care for students, cultivate positive classroom climate, and engage in effective communication (Gay, 2006)

Cultural awareness is often mistaken as synonymous with cultural responsiveness. However, cultural awareness, the acknowledgement that everyone is a cultural being and cultural differences exist, is a component of cultural responsiveness. Alone it does not go far enough to recognize societal structures which contribute to social disparities. The initial review of the data reveals, few teachers expanded their understanding of CRT beyond cultural awareness. Following additional reflection and review of the literature, the primary coder acknowledged their position on the topic and its impact on the coding process and discussed these reflections with the secondary coder. A subsequent review

was completed recognizing equitable educational practices is not binary (i.e., present, or not present), but rather a paradigm for which knowledge falls on a spectrum.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

Culturally responsive educators must be aware of the sociopolitical systems that are present in the United States. An awareness of the sociohistorical processes related to racism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of bigotry lead teachers to critically examine the lives students and their communities' experience outside of the classroom. Ms.

Mohammed demonstrated a deeper consciousness of the impact of her work in student's lives and potential future outcomes and a commitment to social justice through education.

I am an educator because I see education as a form of social justice. I think that our children of color do not receive appropriate resources or opportunities. I've always felt that way.

The disturbing deaths of Black people at the hands of law enforcement in 2020 created one of the large social movements in the 21st Century (Buchanan et al., 2020). Black people around the nation and across disciplines forced Americans to face the systems of violence engrained in the United States. A needed discussion on the impact of racism on students was occurring while interviewing teachers. Ms. Brown mentioned how the Black Lives Matter protest of 2020 increased her sociopolitical consciousness.

Seeing some of the struggles, definitely the pandemic, puts a light a lot of systemic racism problems within our system, access, availability. Along with that I mean it wasn't just the pandemic, but the fact of all the social injustice that was happening within our country at the same time I think just kind of coincided. And how do we support the families that are really struggling and how can we reach out or how do we... How much of this lies within my own bias and experiences and things?

School As A Microcosm Of Society

While teachers should be aware of injustices and power dynamics outside of schools, there is a need for awareness that such dynamics are mirrored within schools. A lengthy history of social injustices in education have led to a call for a paradigm shift. Essentially, CRT grows from the recognition of America's tether to Anti-Black racism and how such ideals run through educational spaces and birth racial educational disparities. A culturally responsive teacher recognizes that American schooling sustains racist structural norms (Weinstein et al., 2003). A teacher who is aware of the relationship between racial stress and their perception of students is better able to create nurturing classrooms (Bentley-Edward et al., 2020). With the exception of Ms. Mohammed, teachers' responses were not explicitly connected to racists structural norms in society and how they shape schools and classrooms. Ms. Mohammed captures the presence of these structures and white supremacy in education in her comments.

I think that one thing that has become a lot stronger for me is just understanding the deep roots that white supremacy has within our education system as a whole and within the charter network in which I teach. I think that the pandemic has shown me that I need to lean into that even more and continue to fight against the colonization of education, the way that our children are treated, the cultural expectations that are placed on them, the focus on compliance and how toxic that is.

In her statement, Ms. Mohammed described her awareness of the underlying presence of the problematic cultural power dynamic of white supremacy, which emerges from a sociopolitical consciousness.

Cultural Humility

The coders continued the coding process focusing more on CRT being an ideology rather than steps one must accomplish (Milner & Tenor, 2022). Responses from

teachers and the established scholarship on CRT demonstrate a continuous process of growth and development toward cultural responsiveness. Rather than viewing cultural competence as a desired outcome, it is better conceptualized as an ongoing learning process throughout the lifetime. Further, cultural humility, a lifelong commitment to self-reflection and self-critique (Tervalon & Murray-Gracia, 1998), captures the nature of continued professional growth. Ms. Ritter, a preschool teacher, described instilling humility among her students.

They just have to kind of all remember that every culture is valuable and we all have our ways that we do things. And sometimes it's like, wow, that's pretty cool. I hadn't thought about doing it like that. So, you can learn a lot from other people.

This reply, however, fell short of recognizing her own continued learning.

Ms. Smith, a third-grade teacher, discussed evolving and lifelong learning.

So sometimes I get a little bigger than my britches, but I can bring it down, and try to hone it in, and say, okay, we can attack it in this fashion, or whatever, to really try to make sure that I'm constantly evolving myself, as well. Because I also try to stress that with all of them [students], too, that I'm learning the whole time, too. I don't ever stop learning and try to kind of also instill that idea of lifelong learning in them.

Examination of the ways teachers define culturally responsive teaching signaled a gap in knowledge of the scholarship and best practice. For example, Ms. Mohammed, a kindergarten teacher, expressed a desire to engage in culturally responsive teaching yet identified a lack of proper training.

I feel really strongly about it. However, I feel like I haven't had the proper training to successfully kind of like deliver it to my students. I try to like do what I can. I did have quite a few students with an Indian background this year, so we did, like we talked about different holidays and we talked about like different Indian holidays. But I mean beyond sort of like superficial things like that, I am not like

well-versed in kind of knowing how to deliver that kind of instruction and I would love more training on that.

Teachers are dedicated to the education of their students yet are often ill-equipped to provide what is needed to ensure the best outcomes. Professional development in CRT is a resource teacher are not sufficiently provided. A critique in the application of equitable educational practices moves to a recognition of the limited training educators have on culturally responsive practices.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Culturally responsive classroom management emerges as an effective and affirming behavior management model based on the foundation of culturally responsive education (Gay, 2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Siwatu et al., 2017; Weinstein et al., 2003). Classroom management is a critical component of teaching as it sets the climate and the environment which either fosters or diminishes learning. Currently, the ways Black students are perceived and treated in schools across the educational continuum have been described as harsh and exclusionary (Graham, 2020; Lopez, 2020; Loomis et al., 2021; Meek & Gilliam, 2016; Sevon, 2022). Considering how critical classroom management is to the effectiveness of teaching (Gay, 2006; Jennings & Greenburg, 2009) and how its misuse creates marginalizing educational outcomes (Gregory et al., 2010), it is an important factor of schooling to investigate. Participating early childhood teachers were asked to describe their approach to classroom management. The question did not specify culturally responsive classroom management to discover which elements of CRCM are present in teachers' general approach to designing the climate of their classrooms. Responses were coded using the identified components of CRCM from *The Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Self-Efficacy Scale* (Siwatu et al., 2017).

In this study, the elements of culturally responsive classroom management that emerged in teachers' responses were: (1) meaningful relationships, (2) home/school collaboration, and (3) effective behavioral practices.

Meaningful Relationships

Fundamentally, a culturally responsive classroom requires a balance of high-quality instruction and high care (Ford & Sassi, 2014; Gay, 2006). This type of classroom is often described as warm and demanding (Kleinfeld, 1975). Participants portray creating classroom climates which are warm, nurturing, and attempt to meet the unique needs of young children. Ms. Mensah notes this mission as her goal for classroom management:

So, one of my you know goals in classroom management was just to bring them joy and bring one another joy. So, you know to develop a classroom community we spend some time you know really talking to one another in small groups.

Strategies for creating meaningful relationships took a different shape as educators navigated virtual learning as a result of the pandemic. Ms. Mensah describes how she created community and warmth during virtual learning:

So, I never did a group of students more than six to eight, because I felt like the most meaningful time on Zoom was a time where they could look and interact with one another. So, we spent, we spent a long time in the beginning of the year on thinking of questions that we wanted to ask our friends and then putting it in like survey format or making a graph out of it. I tried to change-up the format so that they could, you know, verbally talk to their friends, find out the responses, and then organize it in a way that they could see who is similar and who is different and why. So, we would do physical similarities, you know preferences and opinions kind of similarities and differences. So, when you say "classroom management" I strive to build a classroom community and I feel like the only way that we can really do that is learning about one another.

Home/School Collaboration

During the pandemic, instances of harmful responses to students' behaviors were continuing to occur (Chavez, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021). Virtual School added an additional need for teachers to reimagine home/school collaboration, since schooling was occurring in children's homes. Ms. Mensah discussed how being in children's homes virtually contributed to the sense of community she was building.

So pretty soon they knew like each other's siblings' names, because the siblings would popup in the Zoom screen and they were like just as excited to see each other too. We learned their family's pet's names and the pets became celebrities on Zoom, so yeah.

Teachers were also attempting to manage behaviors while recognizing there are limits to directing children while they were in their personal homes. Mx. Williams reported a desire to not control student's households, while also aiming to provide behavioral expectations:

The kids in my classroom can see their classmates who are at home. That was one of my rules too. You need to be on task and have all the appropriate clothes and have your materials. Do not tell me you have to go potty. I'm not trying to control your household. Just go and come back. I won't be upset. That's just basically how it was. I had my rules for virtual. I had my rules for face to face.

Teachers did not talk much about collaborating with families, except for Mx. Williams's mention of direct communication with parents.

I have some kids who would click on the buttons on the screen. They'd get bored and I'd be sharing my screen and the next thing I know; they're sharing their screen. Or they'd be acting like they're shooting a rap video in the middle of class. Sometimes after I've given at least two warnings, I would have to put a virtual student completely out for that day, and I would always communicate with the parent why that child was put out because it can't interrupt.

Teachers' practices in the virtual learning environment reflected limited direct engagement with families and punitive management strategies. Although students'

parents were often in the same physical space with students, early childhood teachers' responses did not reflect attempts to directly connect with parents to develop collaborative relationships to support their child's learning. Mx. Williams, for instance, described a model of classroom management which relied on a more punitive and exclusionary approach. The removal of students "for that day" depicts the connection between exclusionary discipline and its contribution to the poor educational attainment (Gregory et al., 2010)

Effective Behavioral Practices

In the same vein as CRT, CRCM is bound to expanding beyond cultural awareness toward humility and recognition of the societal structures represent in schools (Siwatu et al., 2017). More specifically, CRCM challenges the notion of power over students and does not focus on compliance as the measure to educational success (Delpit, 2006). In the present study, teachers described a preventative approach to behavior management. For example, Ms. Ritter stated,

My biggest thing is prevention. So, I would rather not deal with challenging behaviors, I don't think anybody wants to. But you can't always get away from them. But you can try to set everyone up for success. And that's kind of where I try to concentrate just from making the classroom – I try to keep it orderly. But it's not always, but it's not a big mess because I know that bothers some kids. It's not loud, I just try to have different environmental features, be more calming, and more just organized. Like their routines are organized, they know what's going to happen every day. So, like structure environment, routines, and then trying to just watch them engage when they're losing interest or behaviors are starting to come out and then changing something so that they can come back on track instead of like stop it, don't.

Ms. Brown also strived to establish expectations early:

Well, my being 4K a play-based model is my grounding and foundation. So as far as classroom management goes it a lot of tied into a community that works together that builds the foundation that builds the expectations, the accountability, you know it's – we're intended to try and do that together as much as possible. At least that's what I strive to and I know it can be a little tricky being little kids and mostly that just means me as the adult I need to step out of the way, get out of my head and trust in the little ones a little bit more.

Mx. Weiss set high expectations for their students, and gave them tools to monitor themselves:

You know, I really think that the job of a teacher is to teach students — to teach kids to become adults and what that means, and self-management. So, certainly in the younger years, I try to give them a little bit more structure to work within. But I generally, really try to give my students the chance to make their own bad decisions about their behavior and to have to live through the consequences of those decisions.

Qualitative Summary

The qualitative coding shed light on early childhood teachers' thoughts and strategies regarding culturally responsive teaching and classroom management. The data were deductively coded using the following culturally responsive teaching themes: (1) cultural awareness, (2) sociopolitical consciousness, (3) school as a microcosm of society, and (4) cultural humility. Likewise, the following culturally responsive classroom management themes emerged from previous literature: (1) meaningful relationships, (2) home/school collaboration, and (3) effective behavioral practices. The findings revealed a gap in knowledge which suggests a limited understanding of culturally responsive practice. Generally, early childhood teachers valued CRT-CRCM and expressed a desire to engage in such practices. However, their knowledge did not extend beyond an acknowledgement of culture among some of their students. The

responses also illuminated the spectrum of beliefs and understanding of equitable educational practices among teaching staff.

As a next step, I used quantitative data to examine associations between teachers' self-reported culturally responsive beliefs, ability, and classroom management practices and their own feelings of professional well-being (as measured by their self-reported emotional state).

Research question 2: *What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' feelings of competence in culturally responsive classroom management and their self-reported well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Quantitative Findings

The descriptive statistics for emotional state, CRT-CRCM variables, and school context variables are reported in Table 4.1. In contrast to the findings from the qualitative data coding, early childhood teachers' average ratings of their CRT-CRCM were high; on a scale of 0-100, early childhood teachers' mean ratings across the three variables fell between 76 and 84. Similarly, on average, teachers reported relatively high well-being with responses on the emotional state subscale falling between *often* and *almost always*. Internal consistency for all subscales was sufficient, with alphas ranging from .695-.938. A correlation matrix is provided in Table 4.2. A significant, but modest correlation was found between emotional state and self-reported ability in culturally responsive teaching ($r = .244, p = .033$). A significant correlation between emotional state and classroom management as well as emotional state and belief was not found.

Table 4:1 *Descriptive Statistics of emotional state, CRT, and school context variables*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Alpha
Emotional State	80	3.6562	0.81654	-0.812	0.102	.906
CRT Beliefs	81	84.5370	15.17310	-2.226	7.228	.909
CRCM	62	76.2661	15.29168	-0.879	0.925	.830
CRT Self-Rated Ability	77	78.0249	16.87233	-1.210	1.388	.938
Access to PD	70	3.0367	0.83925	-0.126	0.102	.896
COVID-19 Safety	63	3.5810	0.68506	-0.215	-0.126	.695

Table 4:2 *Correlations among CRT-CRCM Variables and Emotional State*

	Emotional State	CRT Belief	CRCM	CRT Self-Rated Ability
Emotional State	--			
CRT Beliefs	.015	--		
CRT Classroom Management	.220	.614**	--	
CRT Self-Rated Ability	.244*	.631**	.761**	--

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Findings from the three regression models examining the influence of early childhood teachers' CRT-CRCM (i.e., beliefs, ability, and classroom management) on their emotional state are reported in Tables 4.3, 4.4 & 4.5. Contrary to my hypotheses, across the three models, CRT-CRCM variables were not statistically significantly predictive of early childhood teachers' emotional state, after controlling for teacher background and school context variables. However, teachers' access to professional development on educational practices was both significantly and positively related to emotional state in each regression model. In other words, early childhood teachers who experienced greater access to effective professional development reported more positive emotional states.

Table 4:3 *Regression Models Examining Self-Rated Ability in Culturally Responsive Teaching Predicting Teachers' Emotional Well-being*

Predictors	Emotional Well-being	
	B	SE
CRT Self-Rated Ability	.083	.006
Teacher race (Black)	.048	.352
School type (Public)	.042	.197
Access to PD	.424**	.147
COVID-19 Safety	.159	.161
Teaching experience	.248	.011
Grade level (PreK)	.146	.228

Note. β = standardized beta weight. SE= standard error. Key CRT-CM variable is indicated in bold.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4:4 *Regression Models Examining Self-Rated Ability in Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Predicting Teachers' Emotional Well-being*

Predictors	Emotional Well-being	
	B	SE
CRCM	-.079	.009
Teacher race (Black)	.030	.366
School type (Public)	.113	.227
Access to PD	.482**	.154
COVID-19 Safety	.247	.180
Teaching experience	.146	.016
Grade level (PreK)	.103	.249

Note. β = standardized beta weight. SE= standard error. Key CRT-CM variable is indicated in bold.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4:5 *Regression Models Examining Self-Rated Beliefs in Culturally Responsive Teaching Predicting Teachers' Emotional Well-being*

Predictors	Emotional Well-being	
	B	SE
CRT Beliefs	-.152	.008
Teacher race (Black)	.014	.348

School type (Public)	.051	.190
Access to PD	.489**	.137
COVID-19 Safety	.167	.154
Teaching experience	.239	.011
Grade level (PreK)	.143	.214

Note. β = standardized beta weight. SE= standard error. Key CRT-CM variable is indicated in bold.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Quantitative Summary

Survey data were used to examine the relationship between early childhood teachers' feeling of competence in CRT-CRCM and their emotional well-being. At the time of the survey, Spring of 2021, teachers reported relatively high levels of well-being. Teachers also reported elevated self-efficacy in CRT-CRCM. The regression models indicated that self-efficacy in CRT-CRCM was not a predictor of teachers' emotional state, however access professional development was a significant predictor. Notably, the professional development subscale is a broad measure and not specific to equitable educational practice. These findings were not congruent with the researcher's hypothesized theories.

CHAPTER 5 : DISCUSSION

Equity in education has been long investigated and resolutions have been proposed by generations of scholars. However, many of the initial uncovered concerns, such as the overuse of exclusionary discipline, continue to persist. For Black students in particular, schools continued to be a source of racial violence in the ways curriculum is designed, instruction is provided, and discipline is executed. Overarchingly, this dissertation aimed to contribute to the discourse around equitable education leading to improved outcomes for Black students. The study examined the three current crises occurring in schools across the United States. The first crisis being the racial disparities related to exclusionary school discipline and its lasting implication on Black students (Sevon, 2022). The second, the progressing crisis of teacher well-being and the mounting teacher shortage (Friedman, 2006; Czachor, 2022). The final noted crisis being the unforeseen global COVID-19 pandemic which has led to a worsening of the two previously mentioned catastrophes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Hamilton & Ercikan, 2022). The pandemic not only created new problems within the classroom setting, but it also expanded and exposed critical flaws in schools (USDOE, 2022). Given these three concurrent crises, a mixed method approach was used to investigate the relationship between teacher well-being and culturally responsive educational practice in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the study was completed and this dissertation was written, the state of education has continued to progress on a troubling decline. The educator shortage is at crisis level and solutions to the concerning trend have been ineffective in reducing the problem (Chesley, 2022; Czachor, 2022). While this study focused on early childhood

teachers, the shortage includes all teachers, related services providers (Czachor, 2022), bus drivers (Kaplan, 2022), and school psychologists (NASP, 2021). Following this grim pattern in education, these shortages disproportionately impact students who already experience inadequate educational services, such as those with educational disabilities (Jones, 2022) and those living in communities that have been systemically and historically disadvantaged and harmed (USDOE, 2022). Therefore, the state of educator retention is an issue of educational equity and justice.

Summary of Findings

The study explored two research questions via a convergent parallel mixed methods design resulting in the qualitative and quantitative data being analyzed separately yet merged to inform an understanding of the relationship between educational justice and teacher well-being. The qualitative data explored how early childhood teachers make sense of culturally responsive teaching and classroom management (CRT-CRCM). As noted in the methods section, qualitative data provides a glimpse of the reality of those interviewed. Coding of qualitative interview data indicated that, overall, participants recognized the relevance and importance of culturally responsive educational practices; however, their description of such practices was superficial. For example, participants endorsed the value and importance of engaging in educational practices with an awareness of culture. However, the majority of the participants demonstrated an understanding that stopped at recognizing that culture is present in classrooms. A deeper understanding of the complexity of culture and how it impacts teaching and learning was largely missing from teachers' responses. Furthermore, participants demonstrated a restrictive grasp of CRT. One restriction was the designation of the application of CRT-

CRCM exclusively to minoritized students. For example, Ms. Smith shared a focus on obtaining culturally relevant content for her Latine students. Mx. Williams also mentioned considering the race or ethnicity of students when selecting materials for instruction to ensure the lesson does not “go over their head”. Another restriction was the use of CRT to content and curriculum and rather than extending this to the general classroom environment and interactions with students, families, and communities. Overall, the participants appeared to lack recognition of the critical components of CRT-CRCM; an understanding of which is essential for cultivating effective teachers.

A truly culturally responsive and racially just educational environment has been portrayed in educational literature across decades. At its core CRT-CRCM is a paradigm which centers analyzing the political and economic forces shaping the social structure of the United States (Seider et al., 2018) and how that composition is mirrored in education (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Weinstein et al., 2003). Awareness of the relationship between how racism normalizes the uneven exertion of power and how punitive school discipline seeks control over students leads educators to imagine ways to develop inclusive classrooms void of power and control (Delpit, 1995). Such awareness also increases realization of the danger of punitive school discipline practices. Scholars suggest that deeper understanding and implementation of culturally responsive practice should reflect a warm yet rigorous/demanding teaching style (Gay, 2006; Kleinfeld, 1975).

Development of the aforementioned style requires early childhood teachers to continuously engage in reflection and critique of their teaching practices from a lens of culture (Weinstein et al., 2003; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Effective classroom

management cannot be culture neutral (Caldera et al., 2020) but rather culturally affirming.

For this particular data set, the climate of the world around the participating teachers must be considered when interpreting their narratives. For example, it is important to acknowledge that the Black Lives Matter protest during the summer of 2020 created what is often described as a racial reckoning leading to sociopolitical awareness and systemic changes around the world. This shift in a national climate around race and ethnicity could potentially have impacted the ways participants responded to questions explicitly about culture and equity. Among the early childhood teachers interviewed, only one teacher demonstrated knowledge of the impact of her work and a commitment to social justice. Another teacher mentioned the impact of the racial reckoning and how it led to her questioning her work as an educator, yet noted having limited knowledge of CRT-CRCM. Despite the increasing diversity in the demographics of school-age students and a racial reckoning occurring on a national scale, these interview data highlight a considerable gap in teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive practices.

The mixed method study also included quantitative data gathered via a survey completed by early childhood teachers. The quantitative data examined the association between teachers' feelings of efficacy in culturally responsive instruction and classroom management and their emotional state as it relates to their profession. On average, teachers reported high ratings of their CRT-CRCM self-efficacy and of their own emotional states. Although these higher ratings of CRT-CRCM appear to be a positive finding, they may reflect a misunderstanding of the strength of their skill set, as evidenced by the qualitative data. Extant research on self-efficacy tends to infer that

increased self-efficacy results in increased ability. However, Moore (2019) theorized that topics related to culture may result in over-reporting among teachers due to taking a *color-blind* approach – insisting they are good teachers that treat all students well. (Larson, 2015; Mason et al., 1996). Furthermore, on topics of culture and race, literature suggests high self-efficacy may not translate to high usage of culturally responsive strategies in schools (Larson, 2015). This finding is especially present in the ways teachers respond to student behaviors. Larson (2015) used survey and observational data to examine the associations among CRT self-efficacy and the use of culturally responsive practices. Their study found that teacher-reported CRT self-efficacy was not associated with their use of culturally responsive practices in the classroom. The study also found that while the use of culturally responsive practice was strongly associated with improved classroom management, CRT self-efficacy was not associated with effective classroom management. Additionally, Siwatu (2011) completed a mixed method study which examined CRT self-efficacy and training experiences among preservice teachers. While participants expressed high confidence in their ability to deliver culturally responsive education, their training experiences lacked many of the components needed to effectively create culturally responsive teachers. Specifically, the preservice teachers in the study reported no opportunities to practice or observe aspects of CRT (Siwatu, 2011). These findings also indicate that teachers may be overly confident in their CRT-CRCM knowledge and skills. Evidence of these shortcomings in education are present in the data related to Black children’s experiences in schools (Holloway, 2013; Meek & Gilliam, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017). Scholars suggest successful implementation of CRT-CRCM would produce a positive impact on educational experiences (Cruz, 2020; Gay,

2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Siwatu et al., 2017; Weinstein et al., 2003). However, there is minimal extant research showing successful implementation and improved student outcomes.

The quantitative data also examined the association between early childhood teachers' confidence in CRT-CRCM and their emotional state. Contrary to my hypotheses, CRT-CRCM variables were not significantly predictive of teachers' emotional state. This finding suggests that teachers' perceived skills in CRT-CRCM did not meaningfully contribute to their positive emotions about their job. This result is not necessarily surprising given that teachers did not appear to highly prioritize this skill in their interviews. Teachers often viewed CRT-CRCM as an encouraged supplement to their instruction specifically for student with minoritized ethnicities. Fundamentally, CRT requires an acknowledgement that school and culture are inextricably linked (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Interview data revealed teachers do not yet recognize that establishing an effective learning environment requires that CRT-CRCM is infused into the ways that teachers care for students, cultivate a positive classroom climate, and engage in effective communication (Gay, 2006). Thus, the lack of association between CRT-CRCM and teachers' emotional well-being may be due to the fact that culturally responsive teaching is not perceived as an essential aspect of their jobs. Importantly, a lack of effective teaching practices, which includes culturally responsive methods, results in poor student-teacher interactions and unhealthy classroom climate. The Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenburg, 2009; see Figure 2:1) suggests classrooms lacking healthy student-teacher interactions and climate are led by more emotionally exhausted teachers. It is possible an association was not found because while participants

reported confidence in CRT-CRCM, they are likely not practicing in such a manner. Therefore, it is possible that unhealthy classrooms are led by emotionally exhausted teachers who still report confidence in CRT-CRCM.

Notably, the quantitative results revealed that teachers' access to professional development was associated with more positive ratings of emotional state. It is possible the professional development variable functioned as a proxy for teachers experiencing a higher level of support and accessing beneficial resources in their schools, resulting in an improved working experience. This finding is aligned with existing research linking teachers' well-being to their access to resources (Bakker et al., 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001). This association also suggests a potential avenue for infusing more CRT-CRCM training into teachers' professional development as a means of addressing inequitable educational practices *and* the teacher well-being crisis. Qualitative interviews indicated a gap in knowledge of CRT-CRCM, but a desire to learn. Thus, embedding high quality CRT-CRCM training as in-service professional development (PD) could lead to improved well-being among teachers and improve learning outcomes for students.

Implications for Practice

Findings indicate that teachers aim to be culturally responsive in their approach, yet they are ill-equipped in this area. Participating teachers describe a dedication to supporting the development of their students, but also highlighted a gap in their training on equitable education practices. Additionally, teachers generally provided a narrow description of culturally responsive teaching which is misaligned with the current literature on the topic and presents a misunderstanding of best practice. For example, the data highlighted a trend of educators acknowledging students as cultural beings, but only

among minoritized students and solely based on their perceived salient identity. Overall, teachers' beliefs and efficacy in culturally responsive teaching and classroom management indicate a need for administrators and school psychologists to consider in-service training approaches that would enhance teachers' capacity in these areas. Unfortunately, limited research has been published to determine the most effective ways to improve culturally responsive practices among teachers (Bottiani et al., 2018). However, there is literature highlighting aspects of CRT-CRCM on which teachers reported having the least training. Cruz et al. (2020) studied practicing and preservice teachers' delivery of CRT. Their research found teachers were more confident in the ability to build trust and relationships with students, but they lacked specific knowledge about infusing culture in education. For example, the authors found that teachers reported limited knowledge of using cultural elements in the curriculum and using CRT techniques. Additionally, when evaluating levels of teacher experience, preservice teachers reported less knowledge of how to deliver CRT-CRCM compared to more experienced teachers (Cruz et al., 2020). Siwatu (2011) produced findings which aligned with Cruz et al. (2020) when examining the learning experiences of preservice teachers. Participants reported opportunities to observe and practice relationship building, establishing connections with home and school, and helping students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Yet, they reported less knowledge of implementing strategies that connect students' home culture and school culture and leveraging the strengths of students from multilingual homes (Siwatu, 2011). Professional development that addresses these gaps in teachers' reported skill set would be a promising start to making needed changes in education.

The valuable work of Black educational scholars provides literature to illustrate next steps for educational justice, and Black activists have worked tirelessly to bring global attention to the severe need for a paradigm shift. Looking to the important work of these Black scholars and activists, the field of education needs to reevaluate the ways new teachers are prepared for the field. Literature suggests that preservice teachers do not feel confident applying CRT-CRCM practices (Cruz, 2020) and do not receive adequate preparation in their teacher education programs (Larson, 2015; Siwatu, 2011).

Unfortunately, limited research has been established on the most effective ways to improve CRT-CRCM practices among both in-service and pre-service teachers (Bottiani et al., 2018). In a systematic review of in-service interventions, Bottiani et al. (2018) found only 10 studies examining interventions aimed to improve culturally responsive practices. Of the 10 studies, none had been replicated or shared the same measures. Future directions for improving use of CRT-CRCM require more robust intervention studies on the topics of efficacy, effectiveness, and readiness for dissemination (Bottiani et al., 2018; Larson 2015; Moore, 2019). Secondly, future professional development should aim to utilize approaches such as guided practice with feedback to improve pre-service and in-service teachers' delivery of equitable educational practices (Larson, 2015; Siwatu, 2011).

Limitation and Direction for Future Research

Four notable limitations were identified as affecting the findings of the current study. The first limitation to the study included variables related to the participant sample. Foremost, the study was limited by a notable lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the participants. Among those in the qualitative data sample that indicated their

race and gender, 75% identified as White and 97% identified as women. However, obtained demographics included in the study reflect the problematic lack of diverse identities across the teaching field. Nationally, 76% of the teaching profession is female and only 7% identify as Black, 9% Latine, 2 % Asian and 1% native to the Americas (NCES, 2021). While we did obtain participate demographic data, we did not obtain data on school demographics. Obtaining these data is an important future direction to provide more information about the contexts in which teachers work.

In addition, the survey was lengthy, consisting of 133 questions, and the interview spanned 25-45 minutes. The time commitment may have contributed to a fairly low response rate (3.3%) and likely resulted in a somewhat biased sample, specifically teachers who were less stressed and had the bandwidth to participant in a research study. These factors may account for the higher level of reported well-being. To avoid such a limitation, future studies should establish ways to obtain a larger and more diverse participant sample. Research-practice partnerships in which researchers work alongside districts or schools could facilitate participation from those less likely to volunteer for a study.

Yet another limitation is associated with a possible shift in attitudes the summer before the study began. To reiterate a previously mentioned point, the impact of the Black Lives Matter protest of 2020 is difficult to measure or define. That summer is often described as a racial reckoning leading to sociopolitical awareness and systemic changes around the world. While it still remains debatable the impact of the protest of 2020, most would acknowledge there was a social dialogue (Taylor 2021). This shift in a national climate around race and ethnicity could potentially have impacted the way participants

responded to survey questions explicitly about culture and equity. Social desirability, the tendency for people to present themselves on a self-reported measure in a generally favorable fashion (Holden & Passey, 2009), was not assessed. Larson (2015) found social desirability was strongly associated with CRT self-efficacy among teachers, yet self-efficacy did not indicate presence of equitable practice. Future research that includes self-reported measures of attitudes toward equity and educational justice should include a measure for social desirability (Holden & Passey, 2009).

The final noteworthy limitations are related to the design of the original study. The study was designed during the strictest phases of the pandemic lock down and the data were gathered when significant uncertainty surrounded schools. The study aimed to respect the limited time teachers had during the pandemic and the constraints related to social distancing. As such, the interview questions included in the original study simply asked teachers for their beliefs and did not include follow up questions for a more in-depth, lengthy description of CRT-CRCM. Future research completed via interviews should include more robust questions about CRT-CRCM, such as asking for examples of ways teacher utilize culturally responsive practices. Further, interview questions should be developed based on the recent literature on CRT-CRCM and equitable educational practices. Cruz et al. (2020) parsed out CRT self-efficacy in more detail by identifying teachers' recognized gaps in knowledge to inform future in-service training. Thus, interview questions specifically inquiring about gaps in teachers' knowledge may be a valuable direction for future research.

The study also relied heavily on the self-reporting to obtain insight on teachers' skill set. Future studies could include varying ways of measuring (i.e., observations)

teachers' competence in the CRT-CRCM. Larson (2015) used observations to measure teachers' knowledge of CRT-CRCM, unpacking a disconnect between self-efficacy and ability. To better measure how culturally responsive practices reduces the educational harm directed toward Black students, future research should include observations of interactions between early childhood teachers and Black children.

Conclusion

The state of education is facing multiple intersecting crises, and this study focused on two long-lasting problems. One being the emotional well-being of teachers and its impact on students. The second being a school discipline crisis that disproportionately impacts Black children who are often excluded from effective formal education and harmed in school buildings throughout the nation. The study also included a crisis that was novel at the time of study, however had an unmeasurable bearing on education, the COVID-19 pandemic. The final chapter of the current dissertation discussed the findings of the study in the context of extant literature and proposed future directions for practice and research. Three major conclusions can be offered from this mixed methods study.

The first inference is that early childhood teachers' self-reported confidence in applying CRT-CRCM may not be an accurate reflection of their actual knowledge and skillset. Potential reasons for misalignment could be the influence of social desirability and, even more importantly, a lack training in CRT-CRCM. Scholars continuously note that culturally responsive practices are complex and cannot be outlined in precise steps or script (Gunn et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Milner & Tenore, 2010). Rather, CRT-CRCM is a way of thinking, connecting with communities and creating a space for inclusive learning and development. Like the strengthening of any physical muscle, CRT-

CRCM requires continued work in learning the national or global socio-political climate, how that is present in schools, and how one sits in the present structure.

Related to the first point, the second conclusion drawn from this study is the critical need for increased professional development for educators on culturally responsive teaching and classroom management. As the student population continues to hold a wide range of diverse experiences, it is vital for teacher preparation programs to reimagine how to create culturally responsive educators. Also, our students are evolving as the world we all live in changes, shifts, and learns to be inclusive. This ongoing process toward global social justice brings changes in the way equity is imagined, therefore continued, on-going professional development is needed for in-service teachers as well. The final call for action that emerged from this study is a need for future research to better determine ways to increase educators' capacity in equitable education practices. It is clear there is a significant need for increased development and staff support, however clear insights on how to effectively teach these skills are missing from education literature. School psychologists have the potential of being highly influential in increasing these skills among teacher via consultation and in-service professional development. In full, this research suggests that a great deal of work is needed to truly reach educational justice for young Black children, and minoritized youth more broadly, and the path forward has been outlined by Black educators and scholars of culturally responsive education.

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APPENDIX A: PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL SYSTEMS
(PRESS) TEACHER SURVEY

Primary variables

Teacher Emotional State

I feel...

Satisfied when working with my students

Positive about being a teacher

Happy when I get up in the morning on a school day

Pleased with ability to keep up with the demands of my job

My work-life balance is healthy

My outlook on the profession of teaching is positive

I adequately cope with job related stress

If I were to choose my job again, I would still become a teacher

Culturally Responsive Beliefs

Developing a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse culturally backgrounds will promote positive interactions between students

Acknowledging the ways that the school culture is different from my students' home culture will minimize the likelihood of discipline problems.

Revising instructional material to include better representation of the students' cultural group will foster positive self-images

Conveying the message that parents of the classroom will increase parent participations

Students-teacher misunderstanding decrease when my students' cultural background is understood

A positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students.

Students' self-esteem can be enhanced when their cultural background is valued by the teacher

Students' academic achievement will increase when they are provided with unbiased access to the necessary learning resources

Using culturally familiar examples will making learning new concepts easier.

When students see themselves in pictures that are displayed in instructional context, they develop a positive self-identity

Culturally Responsiveness (self-rated ability)

Adapt my instruction to meet the needs of my students.

Identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my student's home culture and the school culture.

Assess student learning using various types of assessments (in-person or online)

Obtain information about my students' home life.

Use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful

Build a sense of trust in my students.

Teach students about their cultures' contributions to the subject matter of the classes

Identify ways that standardized tests may be biased toward culturally and linguistically diverse students

Revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups

Critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes

Explain new concepts using examples from my students' everyday lives.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (self-rated ability)

Critically assess whether a particular behavior constitutes misbehavior

Use strategies that will hold students accountable for producing high quality work

Redirect students' behavior without the use of coercive means (i.e., consequences or verbal reprimand)

Prevent disruptions by recognizing possible causes for misbehavior

Develop a partnership with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic background

Communicate with students' parents whose primary language is not English

Note. Emotional State item responses scored on a range of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Almost Always*). Belief item responses were scored on a range of 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) and 100 (*Extremely Likely*) that the behavior will lead to specified outcomes. Self-rated ability

item responses were scored on a range of 1 (*Least Able*) and 100 (*Extremely Able*) that the behavior will lead to specified outcomes.

APPENDIX B: PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOL SYSTEMS
(PRESS) TEACHER SURVEY

Covariates

COVID Safety⁺

I have worked in classroom(s) in which ...

Students sit six feet apart

I stay six feet away from my students

I am provided with Personal Protective Equipment (masks, shield, etc.).

Students are expected to wear masks

The classroom is professionally cleaned

My class size is reduced for safety.

Students stay within their “cohort”

Students participate in a health screening before entry

There is adequate air filtration

Students have their own school supplies (i.e., they do not share materials).

Professional development

Professional development within my school/district

Is responsive to my professional needs

Improves my ability to address the academic needs of my students.

Improves my ability to address the social emotional needs of my students.

Is appropriate in frequency/intensity.

Is responsive to my needs related to virtual instruction

Has provided training on technology needed to engage students in virtual instruction.

Note. ⁺Items added or adapted to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety and professional development item responses scored on a range of 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Almost Always*).

APPENDIX C: FULL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PRESS Teacher Interviews			
<p>Prior to the Interview: *Prior to starting the interview, <u>make sure you have the interviewees' first name and corresponding ID available.</u></p> <p>Before audio recording: <i>Hello! May I please speak with [teacher name]? This is _____ from the PRESS for Teacher Support Project at Temple University. Thank you again for your willingness to speak with me to day about your teaching experiences during the pandemic. Is this still a good time for me to ask you a few questions?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, then say: <i>Wonderful, thank you again. I do have a couple of guidelines that I wanted to review before we begin our discussion. First guideline— this interview is confidential and for research purposes only. Your responses will be coded using a numeric ID and information from this specific interview will only be shared with members of the research team. Second guideline—if there are any questions that would prefer not to respond to, you can just say “pass”. Also, if you decide that you don’t want to participate, you can stop at any time. Lastly, I’d like to audio record our conversation so that I can listen to it again and make sure I don’t miss anything important when writing notes. Is that okay with you? [If teacher does not want to be recorded, the interviewer will <u>only</u> take notes.]</i> • If not a good time, then you can try to identify a different time to talk or offer reach out with new times via email. <p>*Turn on audio recording. Prior to beginning interview questions, state the following on the audio recording: 1) Date and time 2) Your [interviewer] name 3) Participant ID of the participant you are interviewing <i>Ex: Today is [Day of the week] [Month/Day/Year]. It is [time] am/pm. My name is ___ and I am interviewing [participant #]</i></p>			
#	Interview Question	Interviewer Notes	Time (Approx.)
<i>To begin, we will just talk about your general experiences as a classroom teacher.</i>			
	Primary Questions:	Interviewers follow-questions (and space for notes):	Time

1	<p>What age/grade range do you teach? How many years have you been in the field?</p> <p>What is the best part of your job?</p> <p>What is the hardest part of your job?</p>		~1-2 min
2	Can you describe the culture/climate of your school?		~1-2 min
3	Do you feel valued by your school?		~1-2 min
<i>Next, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experiences teaching in the pandemic.</i>			
4	Schools have used a variety of instructional formats this year, including virtual, hybrid, and in-person instruction. What formats have you used as a teacher this year?		<1 min
5	Do you agree with your school's decisions about these learning formats this year? Why or why not?		1 min
6	What have been the biggest challenges of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic?		~1-2 min
7	What have been the most helpful supports provided to you as a teacher during this crisis?		~1-2 min
8	How has your relationship with the parents of your students been affected by the pandemic?	What resources are available to support families and students in engaging in online learning? Are there additional	~1-2 min

		resources you wish were available?	
9	How have your relationships with colleagues been impacted by the pandemic?		~1-2 min
10	How have your relationships with school leaders been impacted by the pandemic?		~1-2 min
8-10 (abbrev)	<p>If running out of time, could modify/combine questions 8-10 in the following way:</p> <p>Have your relationships with adults involved in the school, such as parents, colleagues, or school leaders, been affected at all by the pandemic?</p>		
<i>I have some additional questions about your instructional needs, beliefs about teaching, and the needs of your students.</i>			
11	How would you describe your approach to classroom management?	What strategies have you utilized during the pandemic?	~1-2 min
12	Do you teach any students with disabilities? (If yes): What has your experience been like supporting students with disabilities in your class this year?		~1-2 min
13	Tell me about your beliefs related to culturally responsive education.	Has that changed during the pandemic? If so, how?	~1-2 min
14	<p>Tell me about your ability to engage in culturally responsive education.</p> <p>(Note. It is possible a teacher may answer this question within their response above. If so, you can skip).</p>	Has that changed during the pandemic? If so, how?	~1-2 min

15	Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience as a teacher during the pandemic?		1 min
<p><i>That concludes the interview. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. As a reminder, we will be emailing you another \$10 gift card to thank you for your time. Take care!</i></p>			
<p>Note. Our priority is to get through questions 1-15 in ~20-25 min. If you need a bit more time, you can say <i>I just have a couple more questions, do you have a few more minutes to chat?</i> Also, if running very low on time, you can skip the follow-up questions in the second column.</p>			