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CRT: Empowering Students through Inclusive Education

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CRT: Empowering Students through Inclusive Education

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Master of Arts in Educational Leadership

ED 590: Research & Complete Capstone Cohort 384

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this capstone paper to those who have shaped, supported, and inspired me. To my parents, Maria and Raul Caballero, your unwavering dedication to hard work and resilience has been my guiding light. Your sacrifices to build a new life in a foreign land, armed only with determination, instilled in me the courage to face any challenge. I am forever grateful for the opportunities you've provided and the sacrifices you've made for me and my siblings. Your example fuels my determination to succeed. To my siblings, Vicky, Jose, David, and Raul Jr, your love and support have been a constant source of strength. Your journeys inspire me, reminding me of the importance of perseverance and ambition. To my nephews, David Jr, Ayden, Adrian, and Alonzo, I aspire to be a source of hope and encouragement for your future. Though I have missed many milestones, I am cheering you on as you navigate life's choices. Remember, the sky is the limit. Furthermore, to my beloved partner, Callie, your unwavering love and support have been my greatest blessing. You have been my rock, guiding me through every triumph and challenge. I appreciate you, my sweetheart, as a token of my love and appreciation. You complete me in every way, and I am endlessly grateful for your presence in my life.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....6

Chapter One: Introduction.....7

 Scope of Research.....8

 Importance of Research.....9

 Research Questions.....10

 Definition of Terms.....10

 Summary.....10

Chapter 2: Literature Review.....12

 Introduction.....12

 Transformation of Culturally Relevant Teaching.....13

 American Educator’s Perspective on Culturally Relevant Teaching.....15

 Legislative Influences on CRT.....16

 Closing the Achievement Gap Using Culturally Relevant Teaching.....19

 Assessing Teacher Preparation Programs for Culturally Relevant Teaching.....19

 Professional Development in Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies.....22

 Resistance to Culturally Relevant Teaching Among Educators.....24

 The Importance of Culturally Relevant Teaching in Student Success.....26

 Academic Benefits.....26

 Social Benefits.....28

 Review of the Proposed Problem.....29

 Review of the Importance of Topic.....30

 Summary of Findings.....30

Conclusion.....31

Chapter 3: Implications for Practice.....32

 Introduction.....32

 Insights Gained from the Research.....32

 Application.....34

 Future Studies.....36

 Conclusion.....38

References.....40

Appendix: Tracking Matrix.....46

Abstract

Culturally Relevant Teaching has emerged as a notable teaching approach in the evolving educational landscape, aiming to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process for a more inclusive classroom environment. Unlike superficial gestures, CRT addresses systemic issues within education by fostering cultural consciousness and appreciation. By affirming cultural identities and promoting mutual respect among students and teachers, CRT strengthens the classroom fabric, enhancing student learning experiences. Understanding the pivotal role of cultural competence in shaping the school climate and equipping educators with the tools and resources necessary to implement CRT effectively is essential. Through targeted training initiatives and comprehensive teacher preparation programs, CRT underscores a commitment to fostering diversity and inclusivity within the educational sphere. By embracing CRT, educators strive to create learning environments that celebrate cultural diversity and promote respect for all individuals.

Keywords: Culturally Relevant Teaching, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Learning Community,

CRT: Empowering Students through Inclusive Education

Chapter One: Introduction

Adolescents in the United States journey through their K-12 schooling, cherishing the names of beloved teachers who enriched their classroom experiences. Whether these educators infused joy into their teachings or held high standards that students came to admire, adolescents often find solace in the thought of educators who went the extra mile for their growth. Ladson-Billings et al. (2022) describe this as the “Rumpelstiltskin pedagogy- where teachers spin straw into gold despite little or no resources and support but are still able to deliver first-rate classroom experiences.” Nevertheless, some students traverse their educational journey feeling disconnected despite their teachers' care and support.

The demographic landscape of educators in the United States is predominantly Caucasian, contrasting with the diverse cultural backgrounds of many students. While countless teachers, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, significantly contribute to student growth, a disconnect persists for students who need to see themselves reflected in the authority figures they encounter daily. Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and other students are more likely to excel when they witness representation in positions of influence, such as educators and administrators. Hernandez et al. (2022) describe achievement gaps among different student groups as being reduced if ongoing efforts are made toward creating Culturally Relevant Teaching practices to be integrated into all facets of the school system. This includes teachers who represent the students' cultural identities and a curriculum that embraces and acknowledges all students' cultural identities. Representation holds profound importance for young minds grappling with daily challenges, offering them glimpses of individuals who share their

backgrounds and have achieved success in the field of education, thus inspiring them to do the same.

Although ongoing efforts to enhance cultural representation within school environments are crucial, there should be more than one as the sole strategy. Hernandez et al. (2022) explain that students exhibit heightened engagement when classroom curricula acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of their cultural heritage. The traditional American public-school curriculum often delivers a monotonous narrative, frequently showcasing limited facets of various cultural groups' successes. An inclusive approach to education aims for equitable experiences throughout students' K-12 journeys in the United States. Gloria Ladson-Billings, the originator of Culturally Relevant Teaching, defines it as “a threefold approach to ensuring that all children are successful. It requires focusing on students’ learning to develop cultural competence and increase sociopolitical or critical consciousness. You’ve got to do all three things (The 74, Personal communication, December 30th, 2019). Incorporating Culturally Relevant Teaching proves beneficial in fostering students' social-emotional development by demonstrating that their identities and experiences hold significance within the educational realm. It also promotes equitable best practices for K-12 students when it is incorporated into the educational system.

Scope of Research

The research aims to explore the significance of Culturally Relevant Teaching in providing students with representation in both their teachers and the curriculum they engage with. It is essential to focus on implementing strands during research that will promote CRT. Quantitative studies by Egalite et al., (2015); and Hernandez et al., (2022) investigate the role of teacher representation and the impact of having teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds on

students' sense of belonging and academic success. Research indicates that students benefit from seeing teachers who share their cultural backgrounds, as it fosters a sense of belonging and validates their identities. By investigating this aspect, the quantitative studies seek to understand how teacher representation influences students' academic experiences and outcomes.

Cultural representation in curriculum content that reflects students' cultural identities and experiences can enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Curriculum content plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of themselves and their world. By examining the impact of culturally relevant curriculum on student engagement and achievement, the study aims to highlight the significance of incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into educational materials.

Qualitative research will explore the intersectionality of teacher and curriculum representation by exploring the positive effects of CRT in teacher representation and curriculum content on students' academic and socio-emotional development. While teacher representation and curriculum content independently contribute to students' experiences, their combined effect is likely more significant. Chang et al., (2022) explore the intersectionality of CRT in both aspects of education by aiming to amplify the positive impact of representation on students' holistic development.

The chosen strands are integral to understanding the multifaceted nature of CRT and its implications for student learning and well-being. The research aims to provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to create more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments by focusing on these specific dimensions for better equitable practices for K-12 students.

Importance of the Research

This review will explore qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research studies that examine the implementation of CRT in K-12 education settings. CRT promotes cultural competence as it encompasses the essential skills for students to respectfully acknowledge and appreciate their cultural background while also developing proficiency in at least one additional culture, enabling them to engage effectively in diverse social environments. Second, critical consciousness equips students with the capability to analyze and address real-world challenges, particularly those entrenched in societal disparities. Third, it promotes students' intellectual progression alongside their problem-solving and logical reasoning abilities. Educators can empower students to navigate complex global dynamics with insight and sensitivity, fostering personal development and societal progress. Lastly, implementing CRT in our K-12 education systems will provide an equitable experience for students and staff as CRT will unravel old methods of the education system and provide a learning experience for all.

Research Questions

In light of what is known about pedagogy in the contemporary educational setting, how shall educators lead equitably and inclusively to positively impact student development and learning? How can educational policymakers, administrators, and educators integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the classroom to enhance student engagement and investment in learning by ensuring students feel seen and valued? All students in their learning community will benefit from CRT. The benefits of CRT are that it allows educational leaders to lead for all students, not just a few. With intentional policies that promote CRT, school leaders, students, and the community will see positive impacts in the school community.

Definition of Terms

Culturally Relevant Teaching describes ethnically diverse students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Applied Coaching for Projects, et al., 2024).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is an outlook toward one's approach to teaching that focuses on students' rigor curriculum and learning is affirmed in their identities and experiences to develop the knowledge and skills to engage in the world (Teach for America, et al., 2019).

Learning Community is an environment that connects the stakeholders of a learning journey, including students, teachers, and parents. In an influential learning community, each group works toward and is accountable for common goals (Desire2Learn, et al., 2022).

Summary

Culturally Relevant Teaching is crucial in addressing the disconnection experienced by some students in the US K-12 education system due to a lack of representation in both teachers and curriculum. The essential role of diverse teacher representation and culturally inclusive curriculum content can significantly benefit students in the learning community and foster an equitable environment for all. Educational leaders must address the systematic issues in place to serve all students.

The review of qualitative and quantitative literature in Chapter Two will provide insight into student benefits when CRT is implemented within the learning environment. Chapter Two will examine the impact of teacher representation on students' sense of belonging and academic success. Existing research suggests that students benefit from encountering teachers who share their cultural backgrounds, as it fosters a sense of belonging and validates their identities. This section aims to delve deeper into how teacher representation shapes students' academic

experiences and outcomes. Also, Chapter Two will respond to the research question and summarize it by incorporating qualitative and quantitative research.

Chapter Three will highlight the importance of CRT in the learning community for educational leaders, students, and community members while also addressing the ongoing challenges in education. This chapter will include the issues that hinder CRT in the learning community and how education leaders can seek to change the system when problems arise.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The overview of the qualitative and quantitative research utilized in this literature review provides pertinent information regarding the value of Culturally Relevant Teaching. It emphasizes that implementing Culturally Relevant Teaching can improve students' academic achievement and cultural competence among students of different cultural backgrounds.

The qualitative research presented in this literature review focuses on the impact on students when methods of Culturally Relevant Teaching are incorporated into classroom curriculum. It also looks into the role that teachers of color play in their student's academic achievement when students have a teacher of a different cultural background. Lastly, the qualitative research focuses on how American educators define Culturally Relevant Teaching, as there often needs to be more clarity about what this word means. Because of this, it has morphed into different variations of the term and, up until the last decade, has shifted toward different terms such as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy, Culturally Expansive Pedagogy, and Culturally Validating Teaching to describe the education system should do more for students in American classrooms that just the bare minimum of cultural inclusion. Additionally, qualitative research will expand on challenges toward implementing

Culturally Relevant Teaching that addresses teacher preparedness, resistance and bias, resource limitations, and educational policy constraints.

Blending qualitative insights with quantitative research can provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Through surveys and standardized assessments, researchers measure enhancements in cultural competence among students and teachers, providing data on how these practices foster a greater understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. Tools like classroom climate surveys and student-teacher relationship scales allow for statistical analysis of improvements in the overall classroom environment, offering empirical evidence of the positive effects of culturally relevant teaching. Long-term studies that track educational and social outcomes over time can further demonstrate the benefits for students who have experienced Culturally Relevant Teaching, such as higher academic achievement and increased social cohesion.

Incorporating quantitative methods with qualitative observations and interviews enriches the data, allowing for a nuanced analysis that captures measurable impacts and personal experiences. This literature review focuses on quantitative studies involving surveys, observations, and interviews with students and educators in the U.S., including research on academic achievement among students of different cultural backgrounds. It highlights how representation in the classroom can improve educational outcomes. Additionally, studies on teachers of various cultural backgrounds and long-term observations show that increasing the number of teachers of color can lead to better academic results. Combining these quantitative insights with qualitative data provides a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of Culturally Relevant Teaching.

Transformation of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Cultural competence among students and teachers is the commonality between different perspectives on this topic and educators in the United States. No matter how Culturally Relevant Teaching is defined, the focus is on including cultures by validating students of different cultural backgrounds in education and teaching about topics that impact members of these communities. Since Ladson-Billings et al. (1995) first conceptualized Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, scholars have revised the terminology to meet students' needs and cultural identities. Scholars have begun to coin the terms Culturally Relevant Teaching, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy, Culturally Expansive Pedagogy, and Culturally Validating Teaching (Lacey et al., 2021) to describe that educators need to rethink how educational practices can go beyond the simple notion of having cultural inclusion in a classroom environment. For example, while Culturally Relevant Pedagogy focuses on building cultural competence in the classroom for students and educators, Gay et al. (2000) describe Culturally Responsive Teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. While ways to describe Culturally Relevant Pedagogy have grown since Ladson-Billings et al. (1994), it is valid to look at the rationale for the creation of different terms to ensure that Cultural Pedagogy meets the needs of all students when it comes to topics of cultural competence.

While pedagogy is constantly changing around Culturally Relevant Teaching, the work provided a positive approach to education for all students. Despite this, legislative efforts have been made to limit educators' approach toward an inclusive classroom environment. Lawmakers and members within local school communities argue that culturally relevant curricula are divided in schools and indoctrinate students rather than fully educate them. According to the National Education Association (2022), sixteen states have adopted laws to ban divisive instruction in the

classroom by limiting concepts regarding race and antiracism being taught and banning books that highlight students from various backgrounds. The legality of the situation has become a focal point in the public eye, and educators may need to be more open to implementing culturally relevant teaching practices in their classrooms. Rowe et al. (2021) explored educators' reluctance about culturally relevant teaching, sharing that:

“Teachers are hesitant to implement culturally relevant teaching (CRT) or engage in discussions about race and politics, viewing CRT as promoting a specific political or social agenda. Some see it as a threat to their established teaching practices and beliefs, fearing that including topics like slavery and civil rights undermines their traditional narratives. Additionally, there is a concern among white teachers about potential backlash and accusations of racism, which inhibits open conversations and perpetuates misunderstandings. (p. 60)

While culturally relevant teaching provides a positive approach to education for all students, the legal and social pushback contributes to educators' hesitancy in implementing it. They fear it may threaten their established practices and invite accusations of promoting a political agenda.

American Educator's Perspective on Culturally Relevant Teaching

Ask any American educator how they would define Culturally Relevant Teaching, and you will get many responses that seek to explain it. Many educators have never heard of Culturally Relevant Teaching, let alone can give an accurate definition of what it is. Educators often have a general idea of what it is but will usually mix up terminology or forget the crucial components of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Pappamihiel et al. (2011), as cited in Hernandez et

al. (2022), state that Culturally Relevant Teaching can help educators promote social justice as well as an understanding and raise awareness of how Culturally Relevant Teaching strategies require educators to become more aware of their students' cultural diversity to help students achieve their highest academic potential by incorporating culture into the classroom environment. Ladson-Billings et al. (1994), as cited in Aronson et al. (2016), defined Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Using the research provided, scholars have identified that Culturally Relevant Teaching can be interpreted differently.

Even so, their basis for this is rooted in what the average American teacher believes is Culturally Relevant Teaching. Hernandez et al. (2022, p. 11) state that participants' perceptions of Culturally Relevant Teaching vary. More importantly, their thoughts about Culturally Relevant Teaching differ; they must share a standard definition or offer a concrete definition of the CRT approach. Conversely, every participant has a way of defining and perceiving culturally relevant teaching. However, all participants agreed that this approach relates to their students' cultural backgrounds (Hernandez et al., 2022).

Legislative Influences on CRT

The U.S. Department of Education plays a significant role in ensuring that all students in the United States receive fair and equitable access to educational opportunities. This role is primarily focused on meeting students' academic needs through legislation and regulation of educational policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While these policies address educational equity by aiming to close the achievement gap and support disadvantaged students, they do not mandate the inclusion of culturally relevant content. This leaves significant room for

interpretation at the state and local levels, allowing them to decide how best to incorporate culturally relevant teaching. Consequently, the Department of Education's role is limited, with most educational policy decisions left to state and local authorities to determine what is best for the students they serve (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

Culturally relevant teaching has become polarizing in education over the past few years, resulting in legislative action to ban educators from teaching it in public schools. According to Natanson, Tierney, and Morse (2024), “Three-fourths of the nation’s school-age students are now educated under state-level measures that either require more teaching on issues like race, racism, history, sex, and gender, or which sharply limit or fully forbid such lessons.” Additionally, the rhetoric surrounding culturally relevant teaching is primarily fueled by misunderstandings of the concept and allows it to be interpreted differently. According to Ray and Gibbons (2021), “Opponents fear that culturally relevant teaching admonishes all white people for being oppressors while classifying all people of color as hopelessly oppressed victims.” Misconceptions about culturally relevant teaching have created a partisan educational divide, leaving school leaders to navigate the complexities. School leaders understand what is best for students and how to implement elements of culturally relevant teaching in their classrooms and school buildings. However, they often find themselves stuck between the pressure of doing what suits kids and the public perception of what is ideal.

Educational policy is left to state leaders and policymakers to decide what is best for their students who reside within their borders. States that have restrictive laws on education focus on barring sex and race concepts in their classroom. In Georgia, lawmakers introduced House Bill 1084 (2022), also known as the Divise Concepts law, which forbids teaching that “an individual, solely by virtue of their race, bears individual responsibility for actions committed in the past by

other individuals of the same race. Similarly, Florida lawmakers signed House Bill 7 (2022), also known as the Stop Woke Act, which prohibits classroom instruction and curricula from indoctrinating or persuading students in a manner inconsistent with certain principles or state academic standards.

While states have pursued restrictive measures toward education that focused on culturally relevant teaching, other states have broadened their opportunities for educators and other stakeholders to invest in the boundless possibilities that exist. States have expanded educational and legislative policies that promote race, sex, and gender. California lawmakers passed the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful Education Act (2012), which required public schools to provide representations of diverse ethnic and cultural populations in the K-12 grade social sciences curriculum. Additionally, states that have adopted expansive policies focusing on culturally relevant teaching have amended state standards to align with practices focused on students. California became the first state to require all students to complete a semester of ethnic studies course to earn a high school diploma. Fensterwald (2021) states, “An Ethnic studies curriculum encourages schools to include discussions on the ethnic heritage and the legacies of students in their communities and specifically not to promote bias, bigotry or discrimination.” Other states have taken notice and begun legislative work to reframe their state educational standards to align with culturally relevant teaching practices. Minnesota lawmakers and educational leaders worked together to revamp the social studies curriculum, which focuses on adding an ethnic studies course but not as a state-wide graduation requirement (Credits, 2023). While educational policy surrounding culturally relevant teaching has become increasingly polarizing, school leaders will continue to guide their students as best they can, navigating the obstacles one policy at a time.

Closing the Achievement Gap Using Culturally Relevant Teaching

American educators are implementing Culturally Relevant Teaching to close the achievement gap between students from different cultural backgrounds and white students. Hernandez et al. (2022) explain that by using strategies such as taking your student's everyday lived cultural experiences and making appropriate classroom connections, students demonstrate success within the classroom. Implementing Culturally Relevant Teaching requires more thought and consideration within the school. It can only be done with complete understanding by the educator about their students and the work that should be done. Hernandez et al. (2022, p. 5) state that “Out-of-school elements that negatively impact a student’s general well-being, personal health, academic achievement, and competence cannot be controlled by educators” (Public Impact et al., 2018). While factors, as described, are out of the teacher's control, what is in control is how we mitigate these systemic issues in our controlled environment to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be successful. It is essential to examine the role of teacher preparation programs in developing the skills necessary for culturally relevant teaching.

Assessing Teacher Preparation Programs for Culturally Relevant Teaching

Within the teacher education literature, there are calls to prepare teachers to confront the increasing inequities and injustices facing K-12 students (Cochran-Smith, 2004; McDonald, 2005, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002, as cited in Jacobs, 2023). With increasing classroom diversity, teachers must effectively integrate students' cultural backgrounds into their instructional practices. Working toward equity in education involves recognizing, responding to, and addressing policies, practices, and structures that inherently create and maintain inequity (Milner, 2010, p. 27). This calls for thoroughly evaluating teacher preparation programs and their efficacy in equipping future educators with CRT skills and knowledge. Teacher educators are

often thrust into their roles without sufficient preparation and induction, requiring them to learn "on the job" (Goodwin et al., 2014; Stillman & Beltramo, 2019; Zeichner, 2014).

Examining these programs' effectiveness in fostering cultural competence allows us to assess whether they adequately prepare teachers to address their students' diverse needs. Most teacher preparation programs prepare future teachers with pedagogical knowledge about the development of adolescents in an educational setting. Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, as cited in Jacobs, 2023, state that not all teachers receive enough preparation within their certification programs or through in-service professional learning to be able to center equity within their practice. While there is no perfect method for most universities to implement culturally relevant teaching into their teacher preparation programs, effort must be made to prepare future educators to understand culturally relevant teaching practices. According to Thomas, Tancock, Zygmunt, & Sutter (2020), they implement a "Community Engaged Teaching Preparation Program that is part of a university initiative to increase the extent to which students were immersed in the community, seeking solutions to real-life issues in partnership with local expertise. The program removes preservice teachers from campus and immerses them in a community setting for an entire semester's coursework".

Opportunities for pre-service teachers to become involved in different learning experiences add value to their professional development before teaching in their classroom. While teacher preparation programs incorporate multicultural education for teacher candidates, they often need to provide future educators with the necessary knowledge. Teacher education preparation programs are beginning to incorporate culturally relevant teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy throughout the curriculum, which is a positive step forward. Despite that, the lack of expertise across faculty creates varying interpretations of culturally relevant teaching and

pedagogy, further confusing students (Young & Young, 2023). A mixed-method approach by Goodwin et al. (2014) focused on current teacher educators' knowledge base and preparation and delved into the specifics regarding their practices and needs. They conducted interviews and surveys at different phases of their research to evaluate other teachers' preparedness for Culturally Relevant Teaching. Their results indicated that participants had a better understanding of applying theory, theoretical knowledge, research familiarity, and reflection, while a commonality among participants was that they rated their preparation in multicultural education the lowest among the categories. (Goodwin et al., 2014).

Teacher preparation programs must provide sufficient programs that allow teacher candidates to learn and apply the pedagogy. A quantitative study by King and Butler (2015) focused on identifying the number of teacher-educator preparation programs that offered undergraduate courses on diversity and multiculturalism to indicate the level of cultural exposure. Their study focused on 14 public institutions in the southeastern United States, varying in size from small to large and located in rural, urban, and suburban settings, during the 2011-2012 school year. Their findings for Table 2 reveal that of the 14 PIs examined, only four required their undergraduate education majors to have 20% or more of their courses in a class with an explicit diversity/multiculturalism component (King et al., p. 49, 2015). It is worth noting that the study did not include information from teacher educators or administrators in the teacher education programs; therefore, the information gathered is based mainly on course descriptions from each institution. Despite this limitation, the lack of multicultural education in programs for future teachers remains a significant issue. Suppose teacher preparation programs need to equip their students with the proper skill set to address the increasing cultural needs in public schools. In that case, the best-qualified educators are only being sent to work with some

students. Calls for preparing equity-centered teacher candidates must be accompanied by calls for preparing teacher educators to develop an equity-centered teacher education pedagogy (A. L. Goodwin & Darity, 2019; Jacobs & Perez, 2023; Loughran, 2006, as cited in Jacobs, 2023).

Professional Development in Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies

Professional development is crucial in providing current educators with the resources they need to incorporate culturally relevant teaching strategies in their educational setting properly. Professional development programs for K-12 educators vary widely in format and duration, encompassing conferences, online webinars, in-school sessions, and after-school training initiatives at national, state, and local levels. Over the last decade, there have been many articles on teacher learning and development (Borko, 2004; Kelly, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000, as cited in Lakhwani, 2019), including teacher learning and development that integrate technology (Mouza, 2009; Schlager & Fusco, 2003, and mentioned in Lakhwani, 2019) and incorporate authentic assessment (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000, as mentioned in Lakhwani, 2019).

In recent years, professional development for teachers has increasingly emphasized cultural competence and culturally relevant teaching practices in K-12 districts. Although most teacher preparation programs must adequately equip educators with the necessary knowledge during their training, the urgency for these skills has become a pressing necessity. Continuous professional development is crucial to address the evolving cultural dynamics in classrooms, ensuring teachers are prepared to effectively meet their students' diverse needs (Cegielski, Maida, Morales, & Mendez, 2023; Brown, Boda, Lemmi, & Monroe, 2019; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper; 2011). With the increasingly diverse student body, teachers' awareness of this diversity

is essential. The diversity of students can lead to challenges for new teachers, especially those unfamiliar with culturally relevant teaching (Ball & Cohen, 1999, as cited in Lakhwani, 2019).

In a qualitative study, Lakhwani et al. (2019) used a pretest-post-test survey to evaluate teachers' knowledge and the effectiveness of a mandated professional development session for new teachers. The survey was conducted in a large majority-minority urban school district in the southeastern United States and aimed to assess. The study provided insights into participants' skills and knowledge related to culturally responsive teaching practices following professional development training. The survey evaluated ten areas of skills and knowledge related to culturally responsive pedagogy, which included increasing intrinsic motivation, differentiating instruction, characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, multicultural literature and resources, the district's current equity data, utilizing authentic assessment, learning within the context of culture, culturally relevant pedagogical strategies, varied instructional activities for classroom use, and community resources (Lakhwani et al. 2019). Focusing on the work of (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), professional development allowed teachers to learn best practices related to culturally relevant teaching. Ultimately, teachers who participated in the professional development rated their skills and knowledge as having increased after the session. The most significant increases were seen in equity data, multicultural literature and resources, and characteristics of culturally responsive teaching (Lakhwani et al., 2019).

The importance of ongoing professional development in enhancing teachers' skills and knowledge in culturally responsive teaching is dire. The significant increases in competencies, particularly in equity data, multicultural literature, and culturally responsive teaching practices, illustrate the effectiveness of targeted professional development sessions. However, gaps still need to be addressed, especially in the initial preparation of educators, as many programs need to

equip teachers with the necessary cultural competence adequately. This indicates the need for a more integrated approach within teacher preparation programs and continuous professional development to address the evolving cultural dynamics in classrooms. Bridging these gaps is essential to ensure all educators are prepared to meet the diverse needs of their students, fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment.

Resistance to Culturally Relevant Teaching Among Educators

Resistance to culturally relevant teaching among educators presents a significant challenge in the quest for equitable and inclusive education. While the benefits of culturally relevant teaching are well-documented, including improved academic performance and enhanced social-emotional well-being for students from diverse backgrounds, its implementation often encounters resistance (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Clark, 2023; Gay, 2013). This resistance can stem from insufficient awareness, training, entrenched biases, and institutional constraints. Understanding the nature of this resistance and addressing it is crucial for fostering an educational environment where all students can thrive.

Ladson-Billings et al. (1995) explains that teachers often feel uncomfortable acknowledging student diversity, particularly racial diversity. They suggest that teachers tend to believe they must provide the same instruction for all students to ensure equality. This perpetuates the belief that shifting towards culturally diverse education causes problems, leading teachers to hesitate in implementing culturally relevant teaching practices in their classrooms, even when they have had professional learning opportunities. Many teachers use a colorblind approach and maintain that “we are all alike under the skin, aren’t we?” (Landsmand, 2009, p. xi) This narrative presents a negative balance in K-12 education and creates division within the school environment.

Rose and Potts (2011) conducted a qualitative case study on how student teachers interpret and respond to diverse students' cultural identities, which is critical to students' success. They interviewed one candidate to gain a deeper understanding of the candidate's cultural perspective and discuss how their teacher preparation program equipped teacher candidates for a diverse classroom environment. Gerson & Horowitz (2002, p. 210) and Rose et al. (2011) describe that qualitative research of this type relies on the underlying relationship between the interviewer and the participant when a conversation happens between two people.

In the initial interview, the participant described themselves as resistant to the idea that responding to students' cultural identities was relevant (Rose et al., 2011). Furthermore, the interviewee explained their disagreement with their university's emphasis on diversity. Rose et al. (2011) described the interviewee's response:

“I look at the students, and they don't seem different from each other. They are different from other students I have been with because of the area; I feel that is their defining cultural background. I don't feel like they are different because they are Black and White, and I have never been able to understand what the professors talk about when they say, “Oh, you need to make all of these modifications for diversity because your students are Black or culturally Asian.” I would say, “That doesn't make any sense to me because that is not who they are.” Their skin color doesn't tell me anything about their personality and what they need.” (p. 7)

Rose et al. (2011) explained that the interviewee resisted the value of recognizing students' diversity by insisting that all students were the same and that race did not matter in a

classroom setting. This resistant narrative is a growing trend in K-12 education and further divides educators who work toward cultural competence and equity through diversity (Green & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Irvine, 2003; Rose et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Rose et al. (2011) described the study's limitations as only one narrative in the teaching field and only representing some teacher candidates. As the demand for culturally relevant teaching practices intensifies in K-12 schools, teacher preparation programs, professional development initiatives, and teacher reflection on the importance of these practices for students will become a significant focus for educators.

The Importance of Culturally Relevant Teaching in Student Success

“As our country continues to grow as a multicultural nation, it is imperative that our classrooms embrace this rich diversity and provide experiences that affirm all students, families, and communities” (Bennett, 2018). Culturally relevant teaching promotes student success in diverse educational settings that meet the growing and diverse world. By integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, culturally relevant teaching creates a more inclusive and engaging learning environment, enhances academic outcomes, increases student social engagement, and boost motivation (Egalite et al., 2015; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 2014). Furthermore, culturally relevant teaching prepares students to navigate and appreciate a multicultural world, equipping them with essential skills for success beyond the classroom. Therefore, incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies is crucial for educators striving to address the diverse needs of their students and advance educational equity (Jacobs et al., 2023).

Academic Benefits

(Ingersoll et al., 2011, Kirby et al., 1999, Villegas et al., 2012) Egalite et al. (2015) cited that minority teachers are underrepresented in American public schools. Because of this, students from different cultural backgrounds have a difficult time in an educational environment because of the lack of representation in their teachers. Members of the education community claim that minority student's minority teachers are uniquely positioned to improve the performance of minority students directly or indirectly by serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators for those students (Egalite et al., 2015).

A quantitative study by Egalite et al. (2015) examined the effects of student math and reading achievement when paired with a white teacher compared to a minority teacher with students from grades 3-10. The study compared the test data from different cultural groups, as noted in Table 4. Effects of teacher race/ethnicity matching on student math and reading achievement by race that black and Asian/Pacific Islander students saw a significant increase in their overall math test scores. The reading scores by both groups also saw increases, though less substantial than the math scores. (Egalite et al., p. 6, 2015). It is also worth noting that Hispanic students did not see the same results as their reading and math showed a decrease in their overall performance under the same circumstances as black and Asian/Pacific Islander students. Egalite et al. (2015) stated that data limitations weakened their ability to accurately measure Hispanic students because there are broad categories of identity, as Hispanics often consider themselves Caribbean, South American, and Central American. (Egalite et al., 2015). Because of this, the researchers could not match students from different cultural backgrounds with Hispanic teachers who fit the students' cultural identities. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrated that academic achievement could improve for students of cultural backgrounds when matched with teachers who look just like them.

Social Benefits

Cultural competence in educational settings provides students with critical thinking skills and an understanding of different perspectives from people of various cultural backgrounds. Gay et al. (2013) asserts that a change in course curriculum is not enough for students and that teachers must take responsibility for their learning to provide a diverse educational environment effectively. Ladson-Billings et al. (2014) explain that adopting methods of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and the pedagogical framework needed to teach students must include global identities through art, literature, music, athletics, and film.

The goal of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, initially and what it has transformed into, is to broaden our understanding of race in our classroom. While curriculum plays a role, educators must go beyond the bare minimum of simply having posters of different cultural icons and recognizing cultural holidays. While these are good starting points and can create a positive cultural outlook, more is needed—implementing Culturally Relevant Teaching in classrooms across the United States provides students with social and emotional awareness of other people and their cultural identity.

An analysis by Martell et al. (2018) identifies the beneficial impact of Culturally Relevant Teaching in a Multicultural Urban High School. The researcher examined 3 U.S. History Teachers with different social and cultural backgrounds and how they incorporated elements of Culturally Relevant Teaching into their classroom. Over the school year, the researcher identified how the teachers and students felt about teaching and learning about U.S. History and navigating historical events surrounded by racial issues. In their findings, they describe the impact of Culturally Relevant Teaching on students through a survey where they noted that. Martell et al. (2018) described the study further:

96% of all students in U.S. History classes believed the class helped them understand how people of color experienced the past, 81% of students reported a better understanding of cultural perspectives of the past, and 78% of students felt they could recall more information from this history class as compared with history classes. (p. 73)

Choi et al. (2013), as described in Aronson et al. (2016), identified an 8th-grade social studies teacher as a Korean American who displayed exemplary skills in working with English language learners. The teacher shifted the standard class curriculum to allow them to gain global perspectives and multicultural citizenship to address the needs of their students. The researcher concluded that the classroom curriculum emotionally appealed to students, enhanced their academic achievement, and provided a safe space to openly critique official knowledge (Aronson et al., 2016).

The social-emotional component of culturally relevant teaching plays a pivotal role in a classroom setting if the teacher can implement strategies that focus on students' cultural backgrounds and involve multiple student perspectives within the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2012; Martell, 2018; Aronson, 2016).

Review of Proposed Problem

There must be a significantly smaller gap in integrating culturally relevant teaching practices within K-12 education. Despite the growing diversity in student populations, many teacher preparation programs must adequately equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to address these cultural dynamics effectively (Cochran-Smith, 2004; McDonald, 2005, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002, as cited in Jacobs et al. 2023). This extends to professional

development programs, which, although increasingly emphasizing cultural competence, often need more depth and consistency to instill these practices in everyday teaching (Lakhwani, 2019). Resistance among educators to adopt culturally relevant teaching further exacerbates the issue, usually stemming from discomfort with recognizing student diversity and a misconception that uniform instruction equates to equality (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Clark, 2023; Gay, 2013; Rose, 2011). This problem underscores the urgent need for comprehensive training and continuous professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy to ensure all students receive an equitable and inclusive education.

Review of the Importance of Topic

The importance of culturally relevant teaching in K-12 education highlights its critical role in fostering student success. Culturally relevant teaching practices are essential for addressing the diverse needs of an increasingly varied student body, promoting both academic achievement and social-emotional development (Pappahmihiel et al. 2011; Hernandez et al. 2022; Bennett et al. 2018; Egalite et al. 2015; Jacobs et al. 2023). The growing call for culturally relevant teaching underscores the need for robust training and reflective practices that equip educators to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. All students' desire to be seen, understood, and valued in their educational experience is vital for their success and well-being (Ladson-Billings et al. 1995; Ladson-Billings et al. 2014). Despite the growing polarization surrounding pedagogy focused on equity and diversity initiatives in schools, which includes the shift toward culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy, educational leaders must continue to advocate for all students despite the challenges presented.

Summary of findings

This review's qualitative and quantitative data highlight the positive impact of culturally relevant teaching on K-12 students. These findings indicate significant improvements in students' social-emotional learning, academic achievement, and sense of belonging when educators prioritize culturally pertinent approaches in their classrooms. By valuing students' cultural identities and implementing relevant strategies, educators play a crucial role in enhancing the educational experience.

Furthermore, the increasing advocacy for these practices underscores the necessity of preparing educators through comprehensive teacher preparation programs, effective professional development, and continuous reflection. Studies showed that educators who embrace culturally relevant teaching strategies are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students, ultimately fostering more equitable educational outcomes. As student demographics continue diversifying, acknowledging and respecting this diversity is paramount for promoting academic success and social-emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Research underscores the critical importance of culturally relevant teaching in K-12 education, highlighting its positive impact on student outcomes. By integrating culturally responsive practices, educators enhance academic achievement, promote social-emotional learning, and foster a sense of belonging among students. This emphasis on incorporating students' cultural identities into teaching creates more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Chapter three will explore practical applications for educators aiming to integrate curriculum and teaching practices rooted in culturally relevant pedagogy, addressing the research question on equitable and inclusive leadership in contemporary educational settings to enhance student development and learning.

Chapter 3: Implications for Practice

Introduction

Research has highlighted numerous insights into the advantages and efficacy of culturally relevant teaching tools and strategies in enhancing teacher and student self-efficacy. These findings have prompted the creation of additional applications utilizing the synthesized insights from these studies. To further understand the link between teaching methods and the development of self-efficacy, additional research has been identified to examine the factors influencing self-efficacy and to improve the implementation of previously investigated instructional approaches. This chapter aims to explore the practical applications of insights from existing research, identify the connections between culturally relevant teaching strategies and self-efficacy development, and suggest directions for future studies to refine and broaden the application of these methods.

Insights Gained from Research

The insights gained from this research underscore the critical importance of CRT in K-12 education. CRT integrates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, creating a more inclusive classroom environment and addressing systemic issues within education. By fostering cultural consciousness and appreciation, CRT affirms cultural identities, promotes mutual respect, and strengthens the classroom fabric, thereby enhancing student learning experiences (Ladson-Billings et al., 1994; Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Lacey et al., 2021; Gay et al., 2000; Aronson et al., 2016). Understanding the role of cultural competence in shaping school climate and equipping educators through targeted training and comprehensive teacher preparation is essential. Embracing CRT fosters diversity and inclusivity and enriches the educational experience, preparing students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

The research findings indicate that culturally relevant teaching practices significantly enhance students' academic performance and social-emotional development (Hernandez et al., 2022; Egalite et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2013; Aronson et al., 2016). When educators incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching strategies, students feel more engaged and understood, which fosters a more positive and effective learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2012; Martell, 2018; Aronson, 2016). To realize these benefits, teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives must offer comprehensive training in culturally responsive pedagogy (Cegielski, Maida, Morales, & Mendez, 2023; Brown, Boda, Lemmi, & Monroe, 2019; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Training should focus on building cultural competence among educators, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to address the diverse cultural dynamics present in modern classrooms. California and Minnesota have initiated educational policy changes to promote cultural competency through professional development and curriculum revisions. These reforms emphasize transformative practices integrating cultural awareness and understanding into educational strategies (Natanson et al., 2024; Fensterwald et al., 2021; Credits et al., 2023).

Resistance to adopting culturally relevant teaching practices persists among educators, community members, and policymakers in K-12 education, posing a significant barrier to the widespread implementation of CRT in schools nationwide (Landsmand et al., 2009; Rose et al., 2011; Green & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Irvine, 2003). Educators who are hesitant to engage in training that enhances their awareness of CRT risk inadequately serving students from diverse learning communities. As demands for CRT increase across districts nationwide, educational leaders must proactively address this challenge to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. Continued professional development is increasingly integrated into state standards for

educator licensure. Yet, persistent legislative measures may hinder the full implementation of CRT within the learning community, potentially limiting its intended impact. Policymakers are tasked with determining educational policies that cater to their student populations, with some states, like Georgia with House Bill 1084 (2022), implementing the Divisive Concepts law, and Florida, signing House Bill 7 (2022), known as the Stop Woke Act, aimed at restricting the teaching of race-related concepts in classrooms, highlighting the divisive nature surrounding these legislative measures. However, CRT's principles support all students, necessitating educational leaders to seek opportunities to bridge political divides to ensure equitable education for all students in the learning community.

Teachers can create more inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive by valuing and integrating students' cultural identities into the educational experience. This approach helps bridge the gap between different student demographics, ensuring every student receives a fair chance of success. The ongoing commitment to culturally relevant teaching will pave the way for a more just and effective educational system. As student populations become increasingly diverse, educational practices must evolve to meet these changing needs. Educators can better support their students and contribute to a more equitable educational landscape by continuously refining and implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Applications

The research on CRT underscores its significant positive impact on student outcomes, making its integration into K-12 education essential. To apply these findings, educational institutions must prioritize comprehensive teacher training programs emphasizing cultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. Teacher preparation programs should be restructured to include courses and practical experiences that equip future educators

with the skills to recognize and value student diversity (Milner et al., 2010; Jacobs et al., 2023). This foundational training ensures new teachers enter the classroom ready to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Restructuring the requirements for teacher educators in higher institutions will also provide stability in the courses that work toward equitable cultural competency. College educator professors must invest in the courses by rethinking what they know about diversity and cultural competency and provide new educators with this insight.

In addition to initial teacher preparation, ongoing professional development is crucial for current educators. Schools and districts should implement regular training sessions focused on CRT, providing educators with the latest strategies and resources to meet their students' diverse needs. Professional development should also include reflective practice components, allowing teachers to assess their methods and make necessary adjustments continually (Cegielski, Maida, Morales, & Mendez, 2023; Brown, Boda, Lemmi, & Monroe, 2019; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, educators can stay responsive to the evolving cultural dynamics within their classrooms, ensuring that all students feel seen, understood, and valued.

However, some educators may face resistance to implementing CRT practices. This resistance often stems from discomfort with recognizing student diversity and a misconception that uniform instruction equates to equality. Professional development programs must address these concerns by creating a safe space for dialogue and reflection. Facilitators should provide evidence-based research highlighting the benefits of CRT and offer practical strategies for integrating these practices into everyday teaching (Ball & Cohen, 1999, as cited in Lakhwani, 2019). By acknowledging and addressing the fears and misconceptions that resistant teachers may have, professional development can help shift mindsets and encourage adopting culturally

relevant practices. Mentoring and coaching are also essential to support teachers who may resist CRT further. Pairing resistant teachers with more experienced colleagues who successfully implement CRT can offer real-life examples and hands-on assistance. This peer support system can help reluctant teachers see the tangible benefits of CRT in action and build their confidence in applying these strategies. Additionally, school leaders must continuously communicate the importance of CRT and recognize and celebrate the progress and successes of educators who embrace these practices.

Institutional support and policy implementation are vital in successfully applying CRT practices. School leaders and administrators must advocate for policies that promote equity and inclusion, creating a school-wide commitment to culturally relevant teaching (Fensterwald et al., 2021). This stems from changes in legislation, which include allocating resources for training, providing access to multicultural literature and materials, and establishing support systems for teachers who implement these practices (Credits, 2023). Moreover, involving the community in the educational process can enhance the relevance and impact of CRT. Engaging families and local organizations help create a culturally rich educational environment beyond the classroom.

Lastly, the most critical application for implementing CRT in K-12 education is the retention and recruiting of teachers of color. Ingersoll et al., 2011; Kirby et al., 1999; Villegas et al., 2012; Egalite et al. (2015) explained that minority teachers are highly underrepresented in K-12 education. This lack of representation severely impacts students' social, emotional, and academic abilities in the learning community. Educational leaders must work toward recruiting and retaining teachers from diverse backgrounds that match their growing diverse student populations.

Future Studies

Despite the existing research underscoring the importance of K-12 education, several critical areas require further exploration. One such area is the long-term impact of CRT on students. While current studies highlight immediate academic and social benefits, there is a need for longitudinal research that tracks the outcomes of students exposed to CRT throughout their K-12 education. This would involve examining how these students perform in higher education and their career trajectories compared to those who did not receive culturally relevant instruction, providing a more comprehensive understanding of CRT's lasting effects.

The efficacy of teacher training programs focused on CRT warrants further investigation. Comprehensive evaluations of various models of teacher preparation and professional development programs are needed to identify the most effective training methods. This includes understanding how these programs impact teacher attitudes, instructional practices, and student outcomes. Moreover, gathering more in-depth insights from students about their experiences with CRT can provide valuable perspectives on how culturally relevant teaching influences their learning, engagement, and sense of belonging. Understanding students' perceptions can help refine and improve CRT practices.

Additionally, research is needed to understand the perspectives of diverse teachers in K-12 learning communities who do not observe positive results when CRT and teacher representation are present. This includes examining these teachers' challenges and why they may perceive CRT as ineffective or divisive. Understanding the resistance from some diverse educators towards CRT implementation is crucial, as it can shed light on the complexities and nuances of integrating culturally relevant practices in diverse educational settings. Addressing these concerns through targeted research can help develop strategies to overcome resistance and ensure that all educators implement and embrace CRT effectively.

Finally, researching the implementation and impact of CRT across various educational settings, such as urban, suburban, and rural schools, is necessary. Understanding how context-specific factors influence the success of CRT practices can help tailor approaches to different environments. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges of CRT, ultimately leading to more effective and equitable educational practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research underscores the necessity of culturally relevant teaching in fostering student success and promoting educational equity. Educators can ensure that all students benefit from an inclusive and supportive learning environment by integrating culturally responsive practices into teacher preparation and professional development. This ongoing commitment to cultural relevance in education is vital for addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and creating a more just and effective educational system.

Implementing culturally relevant teaching practices has significantly enhanced students' academic and social-emotional outcomes. When students see their cultural identities reflected in the curriculum and teaching methods, they are more likely to feel valued and understood, which boosts their engagement and motivation. This approach bridges achievement gaps and fosters a stronger sense of community and belonging within the classroom, contributing to a positive and affirming educational experience.

To sustain these benefits, educational leaders must continuously advocate for and invest in comprehensive professional development programs emphasizing cultural competence. Educators must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to adapt their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. This involves ongoing training, reflective practices, and

a commitment to challenging and overcoming biases within the educational system. By prioritizing culturally relevant teaching, educators can play a pivotal role in cultivating an equitable and inclusive environment where all students can thrive.

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Appendix

Articles: Author(s) name and year of publication	Method	Theme 1 Defining CRT for educators	Theme 2 CRT benefits in education	Theme 3 Roadblocks toward incorporating CRT
Egalite, A.J., Kisida, B., Winters, M. A., (2015)	Quantitative & Qualitative		X	
Byrd, C. M. (2016)	Quantitative		X	
Martell, C. C. (2018)	Qualitative	X	X	
Hernandez, A. (2022)	Qualitative & Quantitative	X	X	
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995)	Qualitative	X		
Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016)	Qualitative	X		
Goodwin, L., Smith, L., Souto-Manning, M., Cheruvu, R., Tan, M. Y., Reed, R., & Taveras, L. (2014)	Mixed-Method	X	X	X
King, E., & Butler, B. R. (2015)	Quantitative		X	X
Rowe, L. (2021)	Qualitative		X	X
Zeichner, K., & Conklin, H. G. (2008)	Qualitative			X
Thomas, C. L., Tancock, S. M., Zygmunt, E. M., & Sutter, N. (2020)	Qualitative			X
Cegielski, O., Maida, K., Morales, D. L., & Mendez, S. L. (2023)	Qualitative			X
Lakhwani, M. (2019)	Quantitative & Qualitative		X	X
Rose, D. G., & Potts, A. D. (2011)	Qualitative	X		X
Jacobs, J. (2023)	Qualitative		X	X