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## Students of Color Deserve a Chance, Too! A Single-Topic Case Study of White Female Teachers and Their Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Brian Dawson

Concordia University - Portland, dawbria@gmail.com

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*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE  
CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Brian O’Quin Dawson

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Julie M. McCann, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Corey McKenna, Ph.D., Content Reader

Season Mussey, Ed.D., Content Specialist

Students of Color Deserve a Chance, Too!

A Single-Topic Case Study of White Female Teachers and  
Their Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Brian O'Quin Dawson  
Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Education Administration

Julie M. McCann, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee  
Corey McKenna, Ph.D., Content Specialist  
Season Mussey, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) students of color, on average, perform lower than their White peers. Lived experiences and cultural influences of White educators do not match students of color in today's schools. These differences contribute directly to students of color not experiencing rigorous and high-quality instruction relating to their world. This study used a qualitative single-topic case study research design, utilizing semistructured, individual, face-to-face interviews, and five focus group meetings to gather data. Participating teachers' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching practices and their personal lived experiences framed this study. The conceptual framework of funds of knowledge guided this study based on the understanding all people derive their funds of knowledge from their own lived experiences. Teachers' reflection and response to their reflection on professional practices in serving students of color influenced the constructivist theoretical framework. The gained awareness of the influences of how race and culture influence the academic success for students of color allows teachers to serve students of color best. Teachers must engage in courageous conversations centering on the belief that all students are capable of learning and achieving at high levels. The perpetuation of the discrepancies in academic achievement between students of color and White students will continue without a foundational shift in the design, implementation, and assessment of learning that ensures equitable learning for all students.

*Keywords:* students of color, culture, culturally responsive teaching, constructivism, funds of knowledge

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Amy, who reminded me I was capable and never let me quit, no matter what.

## **Acknowledgments**

A journey walked alone is not as joyous as a journey shared. I have been so humbled and empowered through the many supports I have received, and the encouragement given throughout this journey of mine. Without God, my Father, I know I would not be equipped to succeed. Mom and Dad, you always pushed me to reach for my dreams and to never let someone tell me no. Though I am the first in our family to achieve this level, you never let me use that as an excuse to not pursue my education. Amy, you were my backbone and support throughout all of this. You picked up the slack in so many ways to allow me to pursue this dream. You always served as my calming force. Matthew, you were always so selfless in asking about my progress and schooling. Thank you for always caring and sharing this experience with me. Dr. McCann, as my committee chair, you helped me grow so much as a scholar. Though you gave very truthful feedback, you were always supportive and encouraging. Dr. McKenna, as my critical reader, your feedback proved to be very helpful in guiding me in representing this topic accurately. Dr. Mussey, your consistently kind words and cheerleading served to be very impactful when I faced self-doubt. You have truly guided me in this process in a way no one else could. Cassandra, Maria and Paula, without your encouragement and shoulders to lean on, this would not be possible.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

“When all is said and done, what matters most for students’ learning are the commitments and capacities of their teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 293). According to Lozenski (2017) and Reardon (2014), on average students of color perform lower academically than their White peers. A key factor contributing to this are the many differences between the majority group of teachers (White, female, and middle-class) and the students of color they serve (Lozenski, 2017; Reardon, 2014). The term *students of color* is used throughout this study to refer to non-White students (i.e., Black, Latino, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native). In a recent survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 82% of public-school teachers identified as White (2016b).

According to Frankenberg (2012) and his study of school racial and ethnic makeup, the majority of teachers serving in public school classrooms in the United States are White, middle class, female, and monolingual English speaking. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) supported this by stating that 45% of the student population was made up of students of color; however, in sharp contrast, only 17.4% of teachers were of color (NCES, 2013). The lived experiences and cultural influences of this majority group of teachers often do not match the continued diversification of the student population in classrooms. Race, culture, and class directly influence the variances in academic success between White students and students of color (Anderson & Cowart, 2012). Race is a reference to the grouping of people into groups based on hereditary characteristics and visible attributes (Garcia et al., 2011). Culture derives from values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors learned from others, often family members (Garcia et al., 2011). With the significant differences in culture and race between the majority group of teachers and the students of color they serve, there is a significant need for teachers to develop and apply culturally



responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Teachers' use of culturally responsive teaching practices serving to amplify all students' ability to learn (especially marginalized students of color and subgroups of students) has never been as meaningful as it is today (Hammond, 2015).

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Today's classrooms are increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2014), yet there is a large body of literature documenting the significance of the disparity in academic achievement (as noted through comparison scores from state standardized assessments) between Black and Latino students and White students. As student demographics become even more diverse, White teachers perceive themselves as ill-equipped to serve students of color in their classrooms (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012).

While working with students of color whose cultural and language backgrounds differ significantly from their own, White teachers struggle to make meaningful connections to the instructional resources utilized by the teacher and to student learning (Holoien & Shelton, 2012). Though teachers intend to guide all students in experiencing success, their expectations of student actions and choices often match what would be appropriate in the White middle-class teacher's social or academic setting, which often differs vastly from the experiences of students of color (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Pollack, 2013). Through these mismatched expectations, teachers are unknowingly perpetuating the continued variances in academic progress shown between White students and students of color (Pollack, 2013). Educators need to engage in appropriate and effective curriculum and teaching practice to respond to the diverse needs today's students bring with them into schools (Pollack, 2013). Academic success for students of color is dependent on the commitment schools make to utilizing well-researched teaching practices that support their learning (Hammond, 2015).

Teachers are instrumental in the success of all learners (Gay, 2013). When students of color feel understood and recognized for their unique or diverse perspectives, they are more likely to share out and engage more in the learning experiences of their classrooms. A direct correlation is seen between the ability of a classroom teacher to understand students' learning, students' culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the academic successes the students experience in the classroom (Fuglei, 2014). Cultural competency is a direct driver of the ability of a teacher to successfully create a classroom setting leading to positive academic progress for students of color (Milner, 2011). Cultural competence is a teacher's ability to serve the diverse cultural and linguistic needs within their classroom (Gay, 2013).

All schools best serve students of color when they acknowledge and embrace the rapid change in the racial, ethnic, and socio-cultural makeup of the student population in today's public-school classrooms. It is essential for systems of schools and teachers to engage in discourse around culturally responsive teaching practices and redefine instruction. Systems of schools, school leaders, and teachers must pay close attention to how their decisions, actions, and interactions regarding the education of students of color directly impact the educational outcomes of students of color. Specifically, teachers need to develop and apply culturally responsive teaching practices to leverage cultural diversity in their classrooms (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Researchers have indicated when teachers learn how to use the cultural differences of students and unique characteristics all learners bring to the classroom as a platform to support relevant and purposeful teaching and instructional practices, all students show high academic achievement (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). To improve the academic success of students of color, teachers need to acquire the proficiencies,

knowledge, attitudes, and mindsets to effectively work with a diverse student body (Bales & Saffold, 2011; Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Hammond (2015) noted in her research on culturally responsive teaching and her direct interactions with teachers; many teachers conveyed they began their careers with the intent to serve all their students. They shared they perceived they came out of their preparation programs adequately prepared to teach all students. Gay (2013) noted that insufficient preparation of teachers to serve diverse groups of students could create a cultural gap between teachers and students. She goes on to state that these gaps could limit the ability of teachers to teach in a culturally responsive manner effectively. Teachers who successfully implement culturally responsive teaching practices embrace the notion they will impact success in learning for their students through ensuring they:

1. Keep a focus on serving the whole child rather than just focusing on the content being taught—tying learning experiences to a student's funds of knowledge;
2. Have a clear understanding of brain research and how learning is a personal experience inclusive of personal experiences, influenced by the world around them, and is driven by combining the two;
3. Help students learn about their own learning and the power of reflection in learning; and
4. Design learning experiences allowing for inclusivity, interaction, and student voice to take place. (Scarino, 2014)

The conceptual framework of funds of knowledge guides this study. The researcher utilized this conceptual framework based on the understanding all people derive their funds of knowledge from their own lived experiences. When people interact with others, they rely on their funds of knowledge to help interpret their interactions and the world around them (Hammond, 2015). The

term *culturally responsive teaching* is rooted in the constructivist learning theory and contends knowledge is individualized and based on individual perspectives and constructions of culture, diversity, and difference (Ford, 2014). People actively construct their interpretations of self and culture through their own lived experiences. Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to recognize education is socially and culturally bound and inherently value-centered (Howell, 2013). Culturally responsive teaching looks to move toward a shared understanding of how cultural differences impact teaching and learning for students of color.

The constructivist paradigm and adopted principles have formed a theoretical foundation for how culturally responsive teaching is developed and practiced by teachers (Ford, 2014). Culturally responsive teaching is dependent upon a teacher's active initiation and delivery of culturally and linguistically diverse teaching practices. This research study's conceptual framework was used to guide the study, discussions, and interviews with the study participants. In both the pre-focus-group and post-focus-group interviews, the study participants were asked semistructured, open-ended questions allowing them to engage in professional discourse as well as to share their personal experiences and perceptions regarding the responses to these questions. The questions centered around study participants' perceptions of the significance of culturally responsive teaching and their perceived need to adjust their approaches to incorporate a more culturally responsive teaching approach in their classrooms. The literature reviewed aligned with both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study. The literature review also served as a guide throughout the completion of this study.

For this single-topic case study, there were two propositions. The first was White female middle-class teachers wanted to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way. The second proposition was teachers did not have the necessary awareness to seek needed relational and instructional changes in their practice. Yin (2014) explained that researchers need to allow for

rival propositions. The following rival propositions were considered for this case study: White female middle-class teachers did not have the intrinsic drive to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way, and White female middle-class teachers were cognizant of how to best serve students of color but chose not to serve their students of color effectively. Qualitative research on culturally responsive teaching will further the discourse on serving students of color through the inclusion of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Table 1

*Study Propositions and Rival Propositions*

Proposition	Rival Proposition
1. White female middle-class teachers want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.	1. White female middle-class teachers do not want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.
2.. White female middle-class teachers did not have the necessary awareness to seek needed relational and instructional changes in their practice.	2. White female middle-class teachers are cognizant of how to best do so color but chose not to serve their students of color effectively

This study used a qualitative single-case study research design. The researcher utilized a series of five focus group meetings, as well as pre- and post-focus-group individual face-to-face interviews, to gather data for this study. These study methodologies served as the foundation of this research, with the study framed around participating teachers' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching practices and their personal lived experiences. The researcher captured the experiences of the participants accurately by audio-recording all interviews and focus group meetings electronically on an iPhone (Creswell, 2014). The data were analyzed and synthesized through coding using the constructivist learning theory.

The single-case study research methodology used in this study enabled the extension of the discourse on supporting the unique learning needs of students of color. The constructivist learning theory allowed for coding of the data according to the methodology established for the literature review. For this research, participants were all White female teachers, chosen explicitly for these attributes because the majority of teachers serving students of color are White, female, and from a middle-class background (NCES, 2013). This case study explored serving students of color through the use of instructional strategies incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices. To mirror the demographic makeup of teachers serving students of color in classrooms, the study excluded participants not meeting the criteria established: White women teaching in Grades 4 through 9.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Landa and Stevens (2017) conducted research that indicated teachers in public schools are not amply equipped to teach students of color. The majority group of teachers (White, female, and middle-class) struggle to provide equitable learning experiences yielding achievement outcomes comparable to their White peers. Valent and Newark (2017) research showed that students of color, on average when performing on standardized assessments, perform lower than their White counterparts in mathematics and reading, speak English with difficulty, attend high-poverty schools, and live in poverty. Maison (2017) also reported students of color are more likely to not complete school, encounter academic and behavioral problems, and not successfully engage in school.

The race and ethnicity of a student impacts teaching and learning experiences in two ways (Núñez, 2017). The first is in how students interact and respond to the curriculum and instructional approaches happening in the classroom. The second is in how teachers' preexisting assumptions

about students of color and the way they learn can impact the teachers' perceptions of these students' ability to learn (Núñez, 2017; Washington, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

There is current research regarding the use of culturally responsive teaching practices to support and improve equal opportunity for students of color to achieve academic success (Kumar, Zusho, & Bondie, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Landa & Stephens, 2017). However, research is scarce on teachers' use of personal reflection and professional discourse to learn about their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices. Orosco and O'Connor's (2011) research on curriculum and instructional practices showed the majority of research conducted on teaching practices has primarily included only White middle-class students, while, for the most part excluding linguistically and culturally diverse student characteristics. Therefore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on culturally responsive teaching by exploring by means of reflection and discourse teachers' perceptions of their consciousness of what culturally responsive teaching is and why culturally responsive teaching practices are essential to the success of their students.

This single-case study is intended to inform how teachers can support students in a culturally responsive way. It explored teachers' perceptions of their lived experiences as classroom teachers, their perceptions of changes in their awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices, and any perceptions about changed expectations of students of color in the participant teachers' classrooms. This study also served as a platform for initiating conversations among teachers at the study site and will hopefully initiate critical conversations and future professional learning for teachers and administrators within this school district. This study explored teacher reflection on professional practices and professional discourse as an avenue to more effectively serve the needs of all learners in their classrooms.

## **Research Questions**

In this study, the researcher sought to explore the following questions:

R1: How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?

R2: What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effective in serving students of color?

## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Concern about how White female teachers can support the academic success of students of color in a culturally responsive way prompted this research study.

Teachers' reflection and their response to their reflection on their professional practices concerning a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom are paramount to serving the unique needs of students of color. Teachers' perceptions, personal biases, and beliefs play an influential role in both students' and teachers' behavior (Hammond, 2015). Teachers' personal cultural biases, how they perceive their students' abilities or limitations, and their ability to connect with their students impact their instructional practices in the classroom (Gay, 2010).

## **Definition of Terms**

For this study, the following meanings were used to describe background information, to convey the importance of the research, and to distinguish the concepts under investigation.

*Achievement gap.* The differentiations in academic performance between White students and students of color based on the disparity existing in standardized test scores, grades, college enrollment, dropout rates, and special education enrollment (Erickson, 2010; Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009).

*Case study.* A procedural approach delimited and limited to a single unit of study that is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 2009).



*Culturally and linguistically diverse students.* Culturally and linguistically diverse students identify themselves with funds of knowledge other than White and are exposed to or speak a language other than English, including Vernacular English (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

*Culturally responsive teaching.* A methodology centering around using the unique characteristics and needs of students as a focus for designing learning experiences (Lynch, 2012).

*Culture.* A term that derives from principles, views, outlooks, and behaviors learned from others, often family members (Garcia et al., 2011).

*Diversity.* The term used to differentiate cultural groups (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008).

*Ethnicity.* A person's individuality within a particular community. It is a social concept classifying people based on ancestry, culture, religion, and national/continental connections (Garcia et al., 2011).

*Instruction.* "The engagement, the interaction, the dialectic discourse of students and teachers in the process of teaching and learning" (Gay, 2000, p. 148).

*People of color.* Minority groups in the United States who have historically experienced discrimination and oppression because of unique genetics singling them out for discrimination (Hayes & Juárez, 2012).

*Race.* A categorical concept referring to the categorization of people into groups based on inherited individualities and visible attributes (Garcia et al., 2011).

*Students of color.* Throughout this study students of color is used refer to non-White students (i.e., Black, Latino, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native) (Gay, 1999).

*White.* This term refers to people of European descent (Frey, 2018).

## **Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions**

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the attributes of a study that the researcher can control that provide controlling boundaries for the study (Patton, 2015). Delimitations were implemented to focus the research project and provided boundaries for data collection. This study was bounded by time, the limit of teacher participants, and the instrumentation tools chosen for the research study. A pilot study of all interview and focus group questions allowed the researcher to check for validity, efficiency, and impact of question strategies, and sought-after outcomes. In this study, an iterative process of data collection and member checking was utilized. The constructivist approach allowed the participant teachers to make their interpretations or perceptions. Peer reviews and member checking were also utilized to ensure the accuracy of the collection and interpretation of the data. The study relied on data collection from multiple teachers serving students of color. Observations, field notes, and transcriptions served as multiple sources of data to guide the study process. From a constructivist perspective, the teachers in the study played an integral role in their perceptions of enacting processes and making meaning of the text read, and the topic discussed. Brown and Coles (2012) argued through a constructivist approach, teachers observe patterns over time, bringing awareness of processes and practices impacting student learning. The flexibility needed to engage participant teachers in this way was only possible with a qualitative study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are the aspects of the study the researcher cannot directly control that have the potential of negatively impacting the results of a study (Roberts, 2010). Many potential limitations of this study could have affected the validity and reliability. Yin (2014) noted the possibility of a researcher deducing or inferring findings that may not be accurate. If the researcher was not able to observe the phenomena, firsthand, deduction or inference might have occurred. The case study

approach was useful for understanding the role of multiple factors and situating the outcome of the study within the full context of the setting.

This study may have been limited through the purposive sampling of White female teachers in Texas. The main goal of using purposive sampling was not to use the data to determine generalizations but to focus on particular characteristics of a specific group of interest to the researcher. Participants' willingness to share honestly about their experiences as White female educators working in a diverse school may have limited this study. Interviewee responses based on the interviewee's perception of accuracy had the potential to invalidate the interview data. Explicitly, there was a probability the participants might respond as they perceived the researcher might have wanted them to during the interview process. Turnbull (2002) stated a significant concern the interviewer must battle is the ability to get to the truth in the interview process.

The selection of only 10 participants may have been a limitation of this study. While more teachers may have provided additional data, the case of this select group of only 10 teachers was sufficiently broad to identify various teacher perceptions about culturally responsive teaching. However, the responses and discourse from the teacher participants during the semistructured interviews and focus group meetings may not have consistently reflected what transpired in their various lived experiences.

Numerous studies and literature could be found regarding the topic of culturally responsive teaching practices; however, the literature review could not find any directly linking teacher participation in focus group meetings, professional discourse and reflective practices, and their relationships to implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. This lack of existing research presented a limitation to the study, as well as an opportunity for expanding the discussion.

The issue of generalizability could have been seen as a problem, as this research study focused on a single topic. However, a particular case can yield much information, as readers can

benefit through vivid, explicit narration (Stake, 2010). The researcher was responsible for data collection and analysis. This responsibility had advantages, but the researcher may have lacked training in observing and interviewing, which are critical components of the research process. In the case of the instrument, the face-to-face semistructured interview questions might not have obtained enough reliable answers from the participants. Furthermore, the researcher's pre-understandings, preconceptions, and biases could have potentially hindered the reliability of the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

### **Assumptions**

The principal assumptions in this study involve contributing teachers. It was presumed the contributing teachers chose to participate because they were interested in improving their practice as teachers serving students of color. The researcher functioned from the assumption the study participants did not know the outcomes of the study nor the research process. The researcher also assumed the data compilation was accurate because in-depth information was obtained through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. It was assumed the study participants were honest and trustworthy during the face-to-face interviews, and all participants openly and truthfully identified their ethnicity, educational background, and professional status. Information such as perceptions, awareness, and attitudes of respondents (White female teachers) toward the issue of serving the unique needs of students of color helps explain the differences in the participants' responses.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter 2 explains the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study and presents, analyzes, synthesizes, and finally provides the appropriate literature review on culturally responsive teaching practices. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology chosen to conduct the research study. Chapter 4 shares the findings from this study, and finally Chapter 5 shares the researcher's analysis and recommendations following the study.

## **Summary**

The disparities between teacher and student demographics have significant ramifications for school districts and whole communities. This cultural divide makes it difficult for schools to define appropriate methods of tackling the underachievement of students of color. All people have different biases based on their upbringing, their personal lived experiences, and the ways they perceive the world around them. This study explored culturally responsive teaching practices by capturing the professional discourse between study participants and their perceptions of how their own cultural biases influenced their interactions and instructional approaches with students of color. This study observed how study participants sought knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds and improved their ability and willingness to use culturally responsive teaching practices to serve the unique needs and characteristics of all learners best.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

A review of the current scholarly writing on culturally responsive teaching is presented in Chapter 2. Through Chapter 2, the reader will gain clarity around culturally responsive teaching in order to have a better understanding of the effect culturally responsive teaching can have toward the success of students of color. In the closing part of this section, the researcher presents a synthesis of the literature reviewed for this study. The researcher also presents a critique of previous research, a discussion of what is presently missing in the research, and justification for this single-case research study.

Whether labeled the achievement gap, opportunity gap, or racial gap, data continues to illustrate the educational system is not serving students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Data consistently shows on-average discrepancies in the academic performance between students of color and their White peers (Reardon, 2014). Contributing to this issue are the many differences between the majority White, female, middle-class teachers, and the students of color they serve. The United States Department of Education (2016b) noted most classrooms across the U.S. (82%) have teachers who are White. When comparing student groups, affluent and middle-class White students were significantly achieving at higher levels than students of color (Gay, 2010; Irving, 2014).

According to Garnett (2012) and Herrera, Holmes and Kavimandan (2012) who conducted research on addressing the unique needs of students from diverse backgrounds and teacher preparation teachers perceive themselves as unprepared to teach students coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background. Many teachers adversely impact the academic success of students of color due to their misunderstandings of cultures other than their own (Bennett, Gunn, & Morton, 2015). Through a perceived lack of preparation and knowledge of how to support the needs of students of color, our schools continue to unintentionally withhold equitable access to

culturally responsive educational experiences for our students of color (Leonard & Martin, 2013; Oliver & Oliver, 2013). Creating inclusive learning environments for all learners requires teachers to become familiar with implementing instructional approaches meeting the distinctive needs of all students in their classrooms. Teachers will need to learn how to honor diverse cultural beliefs, values, concepts, and customs held by the diverse student body within their classroom (Bonner, 2014).

When teachers successfully implement culturally responsive teaching practices, students learn best (Hammond, 2015). Thus, students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are more successful in classrooms employing culturally responsive teaching practices (Bennett et al., 2015). Doran (2014) stated students of color better learn academic skills when students see direct correlations in their lived experiences. Through culturally responsive teaching practices, students of color made relevant connections to learning and their peer group. Students of color found the tasks assigned by teachers were more meaningful when teachers designed learning experiences incorporating cultural responsiveness. Bennett et al. (2015) posited when students of color are taught in a classroom where teachers use culturally responsive teaching practices, they achieve at higher rates.

### **Review of Literature**

Though there has been a recent focus on helping teachers and administrators to become more aware of the need to implement culturally responsive teaching practices, it is still not consistently happening (Gay, 2013). Research suggests teachers do not have the proficiencies necessary to serve the unique needs of all students appropriately (Gay, 2013). Many teachers struggle to know how to do the right things to serve students of color (Hammond, 2015). Many teachers believe they are incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices into their classroom instruction but are not. As the numbers of students of color continue to increase, teachers are

challenged in ensuring the education they provide all students is equitable and rigorous, despite a student's socioeconomic status or background (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

It is vital researchers continue exploring how teachers can successfully learn about and implement culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Gonzalez, Pagan, Wendell, & Love, 2011). Many teachers do not fully understand the implications of employing culturally responsive teaching practices (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Teachers have a perceived lack of understanding of what approaches could best address this growing concern (Gonzalez et al., 2011). Continued inequalities are perpetuated when teachers lack the opportunity to learn and gain the capacity to effectively serve students coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2011).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Throughout this literature review, Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings are referred to often. Both Gay and Ladson-Billings were at the forefront of research on culturally responsive teaching. Their initial research created pathways to provide other researchers with an entrance into this topic. Though there are more current researchers on the topic of culturally responsive teaching, the work of Gay and Ladson-Billings continues to influence even the most current studies.

Confidence in the fact all students can learn and are capable of achieving success is the driver for providing appropriate supports and creating the most successful learning environment for all learners. When teachers establish and nurture a productive student-teacher relationship, they will better serve students of color (Hammond, 2015). The instructional practices used by teachers will be more relevant to the lives and previous experiences of students as relationships between the students and teacher are established. Embracing excellence as a complicated and challenging standard, where individual differences among students and their cultural diversity are significant, will assist teachers as they design learning experiences for all their learners (Paris, 2012). The



instructional framework guiding the teaching and learning in a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom must be sustainable over time and be able to withstand changes in education policy, reform, curricular, and other trends (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2014).

Hammond (2015) stated culturally responsive teaching could catalyze learning for students of color. Educators attempt to make cultural responsiveness a sequence of steps to be completed; however, cultural responsiveness is a growth mindset teachers must obtain if they intend to serve all students (Hammond, 2015). Culture is at the heart of learning (Garcia et al., 2011). Culture actively impacts the way people communicate and receive information. Culture also helps to create the lenses through which people see the world around them. The way people perceive or interpret what is happening around them and what they value are also directly influenced by culture. Culture influences how one may think of or see groups and individuals. Culturally responsive teaching is a teaching approach responsive to all learners, intentionally acknowledges the fundamental cultural differences of all learners, and provides equitable access to education for students from all cultures and backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Evidence of culturally responsive teaching includes the following:

- Teachers and schools value parents and families for their contributions and see parents and families as active partners
- Teachers and schools communicate high expectations to all learners
- Teachers and schools believe learning encompasses students being able to make connections to their lived experiences
- Teachers and schools design learning experiences around the interests, needs, and cultural influences of the students
- Teachers and schools embed culturally relevant instructional practices
- Teachers and schools redesign curriculum to make direct connections to all learners

- Teachers and schools engage students in discourse and direct interaction with the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

U.S. schools have traditionally aligned their curriculum and instructional practices with the majority, White middle-class norms (Gilsdorf, 2012). Curriculum and teaching practices are often partial—correlative to the fact the majority of classroom teachers are White, female, and come from a middle-class background (Reardon, 2014). If schools’ environments are serving all students, it is central teachers adapt their teaching methods and curriculum to meet the various needs and cultures of students within their classroom (Hammond, 2015). When teachers employ instructional practices incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices, they use prior frames of reference, knowledge of culture, and prior experiences of all learners to best serve the diverse interests, needs, and characteristics of their students of color (Gay, 2010). Teachers who use culturally responsive teaching practices use the student’s funds of knowledge.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a platform for designing appropriate and relevant learning experiences for students. Just as culturally responsive teachers valued learning how to create an inclusive learning environment for all learners, they also strived to create a learning environment helping all learners to see value in their peers (Ladson-Billings, 2014). To guide students to think beyond their worldviews, while presenting content to students of color, teachers employed culturally responsive teaching practices. Culturally responsive teachers facilitated a learning environment guiding students to understand various points of view and life experiences are a valuable asset to the learning of everyone in the classroom. Perception Institute (2014), noted that conversations facilitated in the classrooms by teachers and students helped reverse negative stereotypes of non-mainstream cultures and languages. Culturally responsive texts (books, images, and movies representing a variety of cultures and languages, not just White culture) also helped reverse negative stereotypes of non-mainstream cultures and languages.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching and Its Significance**

The majority group of teachers serving students of color (White female teachers) continues to struggle with providing learning experiences that are culturally responsive to the needs of all learners in the classroom, even though equitable educational opportunities for learners have been an ongoing challenge in education for a very long time (Flynn, 2012). In the 21st century, school systems have the charge to ensure all students experience success, even though their needs are varied, and the students are linguistically and culturally diverse (Flynn, 2012). However, the problem still exists (Hammond, 2015). Many students of color are still not doing as well in school as their White peers. Teachers still do not perceive they are prepared to serve the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms (Hammond, 2015).

To apply culturally responsive teaching directly guided by students' needs, culturally responsive teachers demonstrate ownership in planning, delivering, and reflecting on instruction. Culturally responsive teachers employ teaching strategies supporting the needs of the diverse student groups being served, through realizing "learning styles are how individuals engage in the process of learning, not their intellectual abilities" (Gay, 2002, p. 113). They see students' differences in learning styles as strengths, not as deficiencies. Teachers dedicated to the educational success of all their students embrace differences and use them as a channel to reach all students. Through a direct focus on celebrating student diversity rather than seeing differences as an impediment to the success of a student, all students can experience academic achievement at high levels (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

This study defines funds of knowledge as the prior learned behaviors, customs, and understandings learners bring with them to their classrooms (Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching collectively creates a learning environment by which a teacher's and learner's funds of knowledge are used to celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of all learners in the

classroom (both adult and student learners). Anderson and Cowart (2012) posited students from all backgrounds and cultures feel more appreciated when their teachers incorporate their backgrounds, language, and cultural celebrations into the curriculum and instruction being provided to the students. Teachers successfully employing culturally responsive teaching practices support, encourage, scaffold, and differentiate to accommodate the needs of all their students. Culturally responsive teachers provide opportunities for students to recognize, develop, and maintain a sense of agency within their educational experiences and empower students to make relevant connections to their own lived experiences. Culturally responsive teachers ensure they are looking beyond their personal biases, assumptions, and displaced blame toward students of color (Milner, 2010). They adapt to the varied needs of students. When teachers gain an understanding the differences in beliefs, biases, skills, and behaviors of all their students are the foundation for designing authentic and meaningful learning experiences, they will see all students experience sustainable success.

### **Invisible White Privilege**

Many people have questioned what invisible White privilege is and are unaware of how privilege benefits White people (Ambrosio, 2014). In his research McIntosh (1989) identified White privilege as:

an invisible package of unearned assets that she could count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (p. 1)

A White person experiencing benefits from White privilege often struggles in becoming aware of White privileges (Leonardo, 2013). White privilege or any topic on race or racism is not easy to talk about, especially for people who are White, as they fear they appear racist (Flynn, 2012).

White racial identities have a direct influence on how White teachers design learning experiences for students of color. White or Eurocentric culture is rooted in the curriculum resources and lessons used by many teachers and provided to students (Ferber, 2012). The majority group of teachers (White, female) influences the creation of curricula the most because they have the most prominent voice (Gay, 2010). White teachers write curricula from their own lived experiences: the lens, or bias, of being a White middle-class person. This bias influences the creation of curricula, resources, and paradigms centered around a Eurocentric conceptual model. These resources serve as a broadly imposed barrier to helping our students of color directly connect to the content studied. Their lived experiences create their worldview at home and with their families (Borrero, Ziauddin & Ahn, 2018). Therefore, students of color often have a different worldview than their White teachers. This difference in worldview directly serves as a barrier to many students coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background (Gay, 2010). Students' worldviews can prevent them from directly connecting to the learning experiences designed for them. Students' backgrounds and lived experiences provide different funds of knowledge than the funds of knowledge possessed by their teachers (Özüdoğru, 2018).

The discrepancies between their funds of knowledge and existing curricular and instructional approaches imposed through state-mandated standardized assessments written by a majority White middle-class group of educators also serve as a barrier to academic achievement for students of color (Delpit, 2012). The many state-mandated standardized assessments, in turn, have direct implications for the way teachers and schools approach teaching and learning for students. Until White teachers are willing to recognize White privilege as a potential roadblock to serving students of color, White privilege will always stand in the way of reaching all students. When teachers gain awareness of their thoughts and ideas about race and cultural issues, of their

held biases and misperceptions, they too become aware of how these can directly impact their professional practice (Pennington, Brock, & Ndura, 2012).

### **Purpose of Study**

This research study examined how White female teachers understood culturally responsive teaching practices and how their acuties of those instructional moves impacted the achievement of their students of color. The researcher also explored study participants' perceptions of students of color as they engaged in this study. The researcher used anecdotal field notes, focus groups, post-surveys, and pre- and post-focus group individual pre-structured open-ended interviews as data sources for this study. The participating teachers participated in five focus group meetings, and collaboratively explored critical pieces of information around culturally responsive teaching shared by Hammond (2015). The researcher's role was to observe and record the focus groups, the professional discourse between the study participants, and the shared lived experiences of the participants. The study participants received discussion question stems to help elicit active participation and dialogue during the focus group meetings.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Conceptual frameworks are constructed rather than discovered (Maxwell, 2013). Constructs create coherence in defining the conceptual framework. A description of a conceptual or theoretical framework contributes to a research report by identifying variables and clarifying relationships among those variables (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Funds of knowledge provided the conceptual framework allowing the researcher to theorize, examine, and challenge how teachers characterize, perceive, and build efficacy through lived experiences in their classrooms, professional practices, and their education and training (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). The conceptual framework of funds of knowledge

brings the intersection of home, school, and community, together with education, lived experiences, and emotional responses. Accumulated knowledge, a form of capital, is created through these people's lived experiences (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

A student's funds of knowledge can inform the instructional practice of teachers so students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are served in a way best allow students of color to achieve academic success (see figure 1). Funds of knowledge present students who come from diverse backgrounds bring with them a significant amount of cultural and cognitive resources.

Research on funds of knowledge has significant potential influences on teacher practice. Through inclusive teaching practices, teachers can draw upon the lived experiences and forms of capital students of color bring with them in order to design learning experiences helping students of color make individual associations to the content and concepts being taught. The potential of capitalizing on learners' funds of knowledge lies in a teacher's willingness and skill to work with what is there and not get distracted by what is perceived as missing. Teachers can do this by interacting with students, rather than relying on assumptions and stereotypes. Just as teachers have funds of knowledge, the students they serve also have their funds of knowledge (Hammond, 2015).

Within a constructivist theoretical framework, teachers can analyze their funds of knowledge to influence their future learning and to influence their instructional moves to best serve the diverse needs of their students through capitalizing on students' own lived experiences to create successful pathways to future student learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Just as students' funds of knowledge are developed in authentic experiences, teachers' funds of knowledge are directly impacted through discourse. Through reflection on personal funds of knowledge, teachers were allowed to share their lived experiences and to explore correlations between what they brought to the learning environment and what their students also brought to the classroom.

The literature review in this study focuses on funds of knowledge in multiple ways. The literature review links funds of knowledge in the following areas: defining culturally responsive teaching and its effect on learning; perceptions of teachers on culturally responsive instructional practices; and the expectations teachers have of students of color related to understanding the funds of knowledge students of color bring to the classroom and their implications for their learning.

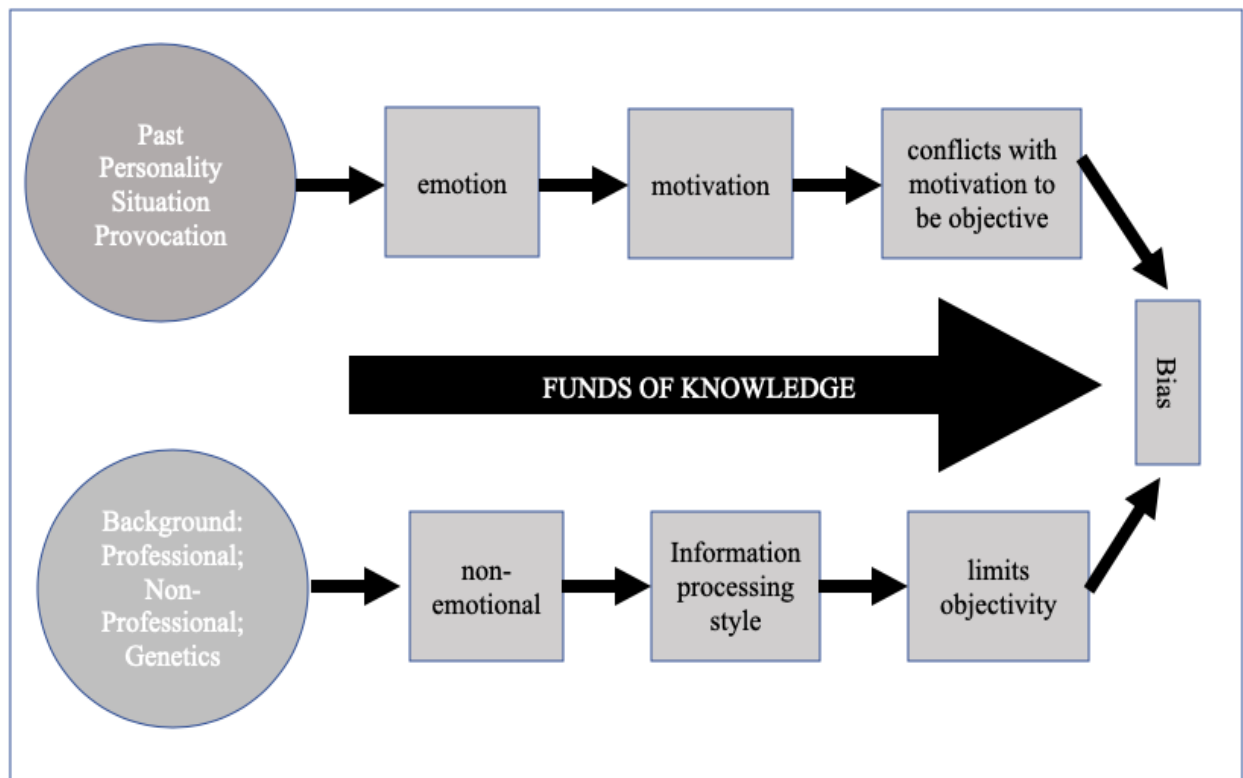


Figure 1. Funds of knowledge conceptual learning model.

### Theoretical Framework

The constructivist learning theory values various constructions of reality and acknowledges and appreciates the multiple perspectives gained from one's funds of knowledge contribute to constructing new funds of knowledge (Gay, 2010). The constructivist theory presents reality is relative to the one experiencing the event, and there is no final truth to discover. As new information is gained and new understandings are made, it is also noted there will not be one



specific way to serve the needs of all learners. The constructivist learning theory guided this study. This study focused on the lived experiences of teachers as they gained more knowledge around culturally responsive teaching and the implications attached to adapting curriculum and instructional moves to support the needs of their learners. The term culturally responsive teaching is rooted in the constructivist learning theory and contends knowledge is individualized and based on individual perspectives, perceptions, and constructions of culture, diversity, and difference (Ford, 2014). People actively construct their interpretations of self and culture. Culturally responsive teaching practices require teachers recognize education is socially and culturally bound and inherently influenced by the beliefs and values of the learner (Howell, 2013). Culturally responsive teaching looks toward a shared understanding of how cultural differences impact teaching and learning for students of color.

The constructivist theoretical framework and adopted principles have formed a theoretical foundation for how culturally responsive teaching is developed and practiced by teachers (Ford, 2014). Lived experiences, personal bias, events, and the demands of the world around them played a role in the growth and changes in independent perspectives of the participants in this study (Yin, 2014). The constructivist theoretical framework served as a framework not only for the study but also for the participant selection process (see Figure 2). The literature guided the theoretical framework and was studied and developed continuously throughout the completion of this study.

Yin (2014) stated returning to the original propositions initially formed serves as an assurance the process for the analysis of the research is viable and serves as a guiding framework for the study report in its final stages. Content analysis (a method of examining literature to draw inferences from concepts or information relating directly to the context of the study topic) guided

the development of the theoretical framework (Krippendorff, 2013).

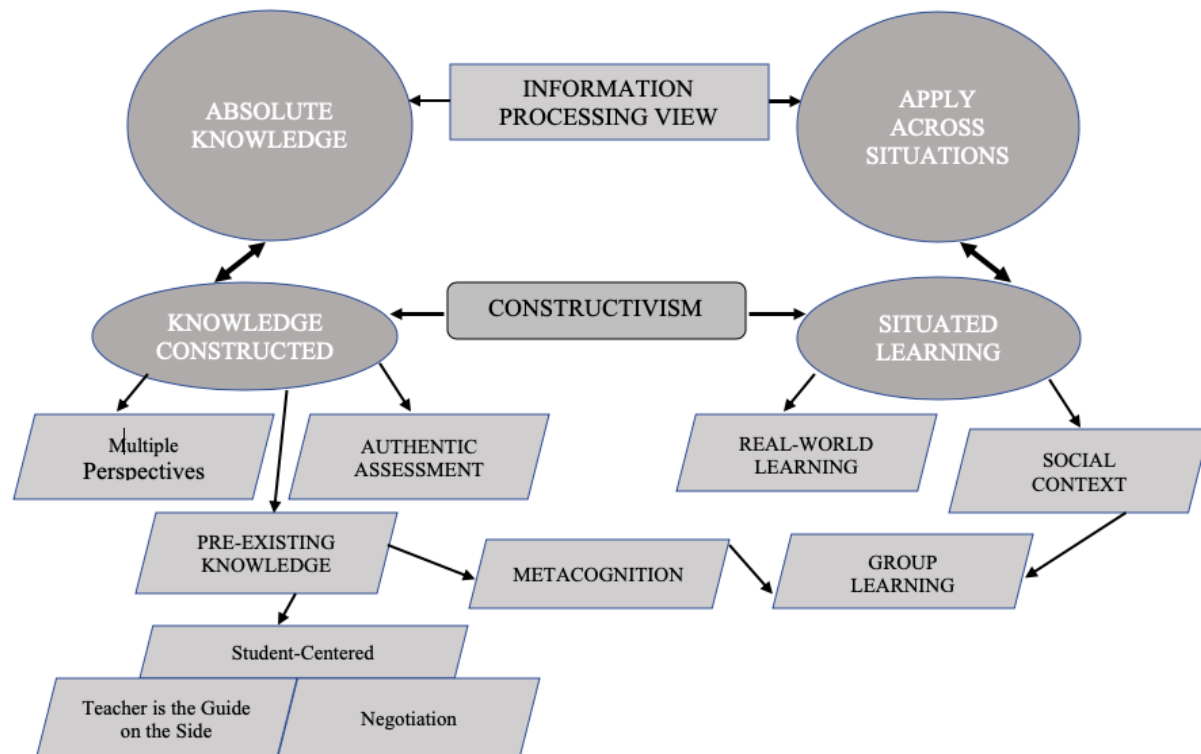


Figure 2. Constructivism theoretical model.

## Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Fulton (2009) conducted a case study in a middle school setting, explicitly focusing on teachers serving students coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background. In this study, the researcher observed lessons being given by the teacher and then followed up with an interview with each teacher. The researcher also conducted small student focus groups. Through these actions, the researcher intended to understand how the teachers and students perceived the culturally responsive teaching practices being used by the teachers and experienced by the students.

Milner (2011) explored the drivers to help teachers gain the necessary attributes to become culturally competent. He examined what lived experiences would help teachers increase the essential awareness to become culturally relevant. Milner studied unstructured learning experiences that built culturally responsive teaching. Milner followed a White male middle school

science teacher selected by the campus principal. Within this urban school setting, the teacher had been serving 3 years. The school mostly served Black (59.8%) students, but also served Latino, White, Asian, and American Indian students.

Observations and interviews directly contributed to the research findings. Milner (2011) also analyzed documents and artifacts. Throughout the study, Milner attended and observed the teacher's class periods, as well as observed various other school-related activities and events. The researcher did many observations and conducted several semistructured interviews, noting the teacher made personal connections with students and successfully provided culturally responsive instruction resulted in a high level of student achievement. Milner pointed out the teacher did this by building strong relationships with the students. These strong relationships were created by listening intently to what the students brought to the classroom and the conversations held in the classroom. Milner also embraced the diversity of all the learners. Milner stated the students knew the teacher was not going to give up on them and perceived the teacher authentically cared about all of them. The students felt the teacher believed they all could learn.

Laughter and Adams (2012) collaborated with a middle school to identify a group of students from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. In this study, the selected students were engaged in discourse related directly to the students' perceptions of how society influenced their daily lived experiences. The researchers utilized an online platform to conduct semistructured interviews and to host discussions with the students. They analyzed the data collected through these approaches. They determined the students they were working with could understand how bias and other influences can change or distort one's perception of what happened. Laughter and Adams noted students were able to take this understanding of bias and its impact on their personal lives and apply it beyond the context of the content taught. The researchers also stated these

students were successful because of the structures of the lessons and direct support provided to students during their learning experience (Laughter & Adams, 2012).

Brown (2015) studied a group of middle school teachers to gain an understanding of how they used culturally responsive teaching practices to support students of color. Specifically, Brown studied how the group of teachers connected the learning experiences being designed and presented to the students' own lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. In this study, Brown showed the teaching practices used by this group of teachers were effective, and students appeared to achieve academic success. Though the teachers did not directly label their instructional practices as culturally responsive teaching strategies, the researcher could link the observed teaching practices to culturally responsive teaching practices. The teachers being observed realized in order to best serve their students of color, they needed to learn about them and seek to understand the students as individuals with individual needs.

A study by Jackson (2015) focused on how culturally responsive teaching practices impacted the academic success of students of color. The researcher wanted to show the correlation between positive teacher perceptions of students of color and the direct impact on student academic success. Jackson noted there was a disconnect between the White student group and students of color within the United States. Though students of color continued to struggle academically, teachers continued to put the culpability of not learning on the students who were not achieving academic success rather than reflecting on their teaching practices. Jackson studied the correlations between specific teacher perceptions, instructional moves, and their impact on student success for students of color. This study illustrated teachers who had more positive academic outcomes with their students of color consistently employed culturally responsive teaching practices within their classrooms.

A study by Choi (2013) focused on an eighth-grade social studies teacher at an alternative high school. This alternative high school served English language learners considered to be newcomers to the United States. Choi noted the students were put in interdisciplinary groups rather than by age or grade level. The school and teacher centered their instruction around thematic units utilizing a project-based instructional model. Rather than grading students through standardized assessments, success was measured based on projects completed by students (Choi, 2013). The researcher used observations, interviews, student artifacts, and learner outcomes to analyze the causal factors toward student success. Choi noted students could connect the topic to their personal lives. Students were interested in the content and felt safe to take risks within the learning environment. Although case studies are not designed to generalize the findings, case studies are often designed to be reproduced and generalized to theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2014). Through only using one study participant, one could argue this study may not be reproducible to find common outcomes due to limited research. Yin (2014) noted due to the nature of the case study approach, there is not a preferred sampling size for the research. He stated the researcher, instead, should focus on getting information on the various aspects of the case. This was accomplished by Choi (2013) through the use of multiple means to gather data.

In Martell's (2013) study, the researcher used his classroom and students to analyze his instructional practices and impact on learning. Martell served on an economically and racially diverse campus. Martell served 49 students of color collectively throughout his daily schedule. His study focused on the design of the curriculum, which directly included aspects of the lived experiences and funds of knowledge held by his students. Surveys were given to the students. Martell also used teacher journal entries, student interviews, and student artifacts, to analyze the impact of the curriculum. Student learning, student identity, and teacher identity were evaluated throughout the study. Martell also studied the implications of student learning, student identity,

and teacher identity for curriculum design. The researcher focused on building students' cultural competence and creating opportunities to cultivate healthy relationships with his students. In this data collection process, he noted many of the students in his class indicated they still felt what they had to contribute to the classroom was not valued. Martell conducted further interviews with his students to understand why they felt this way.

Martell (2013) used this data to continue adapting the instructional practices in his classroom to accommodate the diverse needs of his students. After his study, he noted 87.5% of his students of color indicated they felt the activities in his classroom allowed the students to see history personally connected to their world. In contrast, 71.4% stated they now enjoyed history class and learning about the past. Students of color saw personal value because they could make personal connections to the content taught (Martell, 2013).

Lew's (2010) study investigated the constructivist behaviors of new secondary school science teachers. The group of teachers came from a program that placed a concentration on the theory of constructivism. Lew used the Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES; Taylor, Fraser, & White, 1994), to measure the use of constructivist teaching practices. Along with the CLES, the researcher used information from videotaped lessons and open-ended interviews. The researcher showed teachers often apply constructivist teaching practices with positive results for students. Lew stated the teachers in the study were intentional with their focus on creating a safe, nonjudgmental classroom environment encouraging students to speak.

Lew (2010) noted teachers gave students autonomy by allowing them to design a grading scale used for a class project, and students and their peers considered this activity a success. Lew observed teachers who designed learning experiences fostering student small group discussions, brainstorming, whole-class discussions, summaries, presentations, debates, group projects, and other activities consistently engaged students with other students.

Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, and Ringlaben's (2015) quantitative study examined 80 preservice teachers in an area of northwestern Georgia known as a New Latino Diaspora. The researchers sought to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of their teaching efficacy and their abilities to successfully serve students coming from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. The researchers used a survey, interviews, and observations to collect the data to assist them in their findings. Taylor et al. found most teachers in the study believed they needed better support and preparation on how to best serve students of color. The participants were students pursuing education majors as full-time college students, ages 18 to 36, 85% White, 13% Latino, and 3% other. The teachers welcomed culturally responsive teaching and the challenges coming with teaching students of color to help all students achieve academic success. Taylor et al. suggested to best serve students of color; teachers must be better prepared in their preservice education programs.

Sleeter (2012) described how standardized content and instructional approaches are driven by state-mandated testing has limited practitioners' ability to engage in open dialogue around creating learning environments that are personalized to best serve students of color. In Sleeter's research, he visited a campus directly affiliated with an urban teacher education program. On this campus, Sleeter saw administration and the teachers did not have an understanding culturally responsive teaching practices should be the framework for teaching and learning. Sleeter met with a group of student teachers who explained they received training in culturally responsive teaching. Their preparation relied on using 10 best practices embedding these strategies within the college textbook. Several student teachers reported their perception of culturally responsive teaching was the minimum steps the student teachers took to understand cultural and linguistic diversity in the classrooms. Teachers lacked a clear understanding of what truly is encompassed by teaching in a culturally responsive way. "The tendency to view culturally responsive pedagogy as a cultural

celebration that is disconnected from academic learning seems to be fairly common among educators who have not examined their expectations for the academic learning of historically underachieving students” (Sleeter, 2012, p. 569).

Chu (2012) addressed perspectives in understanding the education and achievement of diverse students. Teachers who find it challenging to consider students as individuals who come to class with individual funds of knowledge and cannot see the diversity of their students as an asset toward learning also find it challenging to embrace culturally responsive teaching as a critical component of serving students of color. Many school systems do not actively ensure they equitably serve all students through culturally responsive teaching practices. Therefore, no unified approach to the critical response to teaching to diversity exists (Gay, 2013).

A study by Benedict (2014) focused on White secondary teachers and their perceptions of how they served students of color. The researcher wanted to understand what this group of teachers supposed were effective instructional practices in meeting the needs of their students of color. Benedict suggested for this group of White teachers in a secondary setting, more experiences working with students of color were necessary to learn more about students of color and to gain a more favorable perception of students of color. Through positive interactions and learning about the diverse group of students they are serving, teachers are challenged to reflect on their attitudes about students coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background. Though students of color have different lived experiences and funds of knowledge, teachers learn to appreciate these differences and begin to learn how to integrate these diversities into learning experiences out of the appreciation they gain for their students of color (Benedict, 2014).

The researcher suggested when teachers are not willing to do this, students of color have a significantly harder time connecting and learning in their classroom. Benedict (2014) found when White teachers in this study took the time to create positive relationships with their students of



color and understand their funds of knowledge, their students performed better. The researcher did not share how teachers can work toward creating better relationships. This study may have been more beneficial had it focused on how teachers can work to support each other in become more effective in creating positive relationships with their students.

Teacher efficacy toward implementing culturally responsive teaching practices was researched by Callaway (2016). A diverse group, including Black, American Indian, Latino, and Southeast Asian students consistently underperformed on the end-of-course exams for both reading and math. At the same time, the White and other Asian-American student groups were significantly outperforming their peer groups. Callaway studied the level of confidence teachers had in serving these students of color, investigating teachers from three different high schools. This study focused on researching correlations between teacher effectiveness and the use of culturally responsive teaching practices; Callaway sought to explore classroom teachers' awareness of teaching practices and the connection to learner engagement. This study found culturally responsive teaching was directly relational to teacher awareness and personal ability to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. The researcher analyzed the survey data to determine the impact of teaching competency on culturally responsive teaching. Callaway could have enhanced this study by engaging teachers in dialogue around what created effective pathways to gaining an broader awareness about their own biases and the impact these biases have on their instructional practices.

A multiple case study conducted by Heidlebaugh-Buskey (2013) researched culturally responsive teaching within a rural area of Western North Carolina. The researcher noted the teachers did not adapt to the diverse needs of their learners by changing their teaching practices. As well, the teacher groups remained predominantly White. The disparity between the student group that became more diverse and the constancy of the group of teachers that remained

predominantly White seemed to be growing, as observed by this study. It was posited by Heidlebaugh-Buskey, due to this disparity and lack of instructional adaptations to serve the diverse needs of learners within their classrooms, the teachers being observed did not have the skills necessary to create a classroom environment adequately inclusive of all students. The researcher noted due to this, students of color were negatively affected, potentially leading to the perpetuation of the achievement gap previously noted. In this study, the researcher illustrated how teacher attitudes and perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching directly influence the academic success of students of color being served by these teachers.

Gillaspy (2015) conducted an action research study focusing on students' experiences in culturally responsive classrooms, specifically the lived experiences of middle school students. The researcher wanted to explore the correlations between curriculum design and student engagement when part of the English Language Arts curriculum used middle school students' interests, lives, and funds of knowledge. This study focused on 11 boys in a seventh-grade single-gender English Language Arts classroom. The researcher was also the students' teacher. As Gillaspy taught his students, he specifically focused on two Black students and their direct responses to the practices and approaches he used. In this study, Gillaspy noted three specific characteristics of how he was being culturally responsive as the teacher:

- The teacher worked to cultivate positive relationships with his students.
- The teacher had a belief all of his students were capable of learning.
- The teacher contemplated his own racial identity and biases.

This revelation by the researcher resulted in a fluid curriculum driven by the researcher's reflection on student responses to the instructional practices in use. Gillaspy (2015) recommended if teachers wanted to employ culturally responsive teaching, they needed to recognize best practice teaching strategies drive culturally responsive teaching. Study findings also noted teachers must

find ways to help students find relevance to their personal lived experiences in the curriculum (Gillaspy, 2015).

Richards (2017) intended to capitalize on exploring the perceptions of teachers and their lived experiences of implementing culturally responsive teaching, as well as their perceptions of whether their students of color had their needs met. Richards conducted a qualitative case study in a racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse community. Eleven teacher volunteers from a high school in a culturally diverse community in New York, all at different stages of their teaching careers, were interviewed by the researcher. The researcher obtained the views and opinions of each teacher regarding the value they saw in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. This study also found many teachers did not feel adequately prepared to implement culturally responsive teaching in their daily instructional practices successfully. Richards suggested school leaders must institute professional learning programs intentionally focusing on engaging all teachers in ongoing learning driven by the needs of all students. The researcher stated teachers must constantly seek to improve their acumen in serving students of color. Richards stated in his study findings the school's natural teaching environment must embed professional learning in context. Study findings showed although many teachers received training in culturally responsive teaching, they must also consistently engage in professional learning in order to prepare them to serve the increasing needs of student groups from diverse backgrounds in classrooms. Herrera et al. (2012) also advocated for training teachers to be effective in teaching students of color by successfully employing culturally responsive teaching practices.

Mmagu (2016) conducted a qualitative research study exploring the cultural views and readiness of current middle school teachers about the incorporation of culturally responsive teaching approaches in their classroom practices. The participants were middle school teachers of various races and backgrounds who had participated in some form of culturally responsive

teaching education. The results of this qualitative study might assist educators in developing teaching practices in which prospective teachers receive more training in culturally responsive teaching to benefit all students regardless of cultural or linguistic diversity. The qualitative study revealed several key findings. The study participants' professional preparation affected their preparedness to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices. The study also stated teachers understood and believed more field experiences and training interacting with diverse student populations could increase their preparedness to teach in a diverse educational arena. Mmagu noted the completion of courses in culturally responsive teaching practices and diversity education might facilitate a change in perceptions and attitudes toward culturally responsive teaching. The study also noted teacher educators should try to prepare middle school teachers to differentiate and diversify instructional methods for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Rose and Potts (2011) analyzed teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards cultural diversity during their student teaching experience in a culturally and linguistically diverse setting. This empirical qualitative study was designed to investigate teacher candidates' perceptions of cultural diversity during their student teaching experience in a multicultural school. Through the use of a survey, interviews, and observations, the study focused on four White middle-class student teachers. The majority of the students in the school were students of color. Rose and Potts stated the lack of cultural understanding in today's classroom could have negative results for learners and their culture. The study's results showed teachers need to examine students' cultural complexity; teachers cannot be proficient in culturally responsive teaching practices if they cannot see and acknowledge the differences culture presents in students (Rose & Potts, 2011). The researchers also suggested teacher preparation and preparedness may have profound effects on students of color; therefore, teacher education programs need to work on preparing educators to instruct and address cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms.

## **Review of Methodological Issues**

This research study used a single-topic case study qualitative methodology. The literature reviewed consisted of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method methodologies. The literature review also included other professional writings linked to the topic of study but were not directly part of any specific research study (see Appendix B). The review of literature that was directly connected to research studies encompassed a wide array of different approaches to analyzing data. Methodology is described by Creswell (2018) as the process the researcher uses for the research process. In the review of the literature, it appeared that all possible types of methodologies have been used to help other researchers gain a better understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

The researcher intentionally included these research studies with differing methodologies and data analysis processes to allow for the discovery of trends pertaining to culturally responsive teaching. The review of the literature provided the researcher an opportunity to review current discussions in order to seek out any trends already present in the research of culturally responsive teaching. The literature reviewed showed no distinctive gap between each other, however if any gap did exist they would have been bridged by the variety and scope of studies and other literature included in this literature review.

Only studying one classroom could have posed a challenge for Martell (2013) in maintaining neutrality. Through using teacher journal entries, student interviews, and student artifacts as multiple sources of data, Martell was able to maintain objectivity (neutrality) and the control of researcher bias. Laughter and Adams (2012) utilized an online platform to conduct semistructured interviews and to host discussions with multiple students. The researchers analyzed the data collected through these interviews and online discussions and determined the students they were working with could understand how bias and other influences can change or distort one's perception of what happened.

Lew (2010) researched the behaviors of new secondary school science teachers from a teaching program directly collaborating with the teachers' school. Lew used a survey to gain qualitative data on the constructivist teaching practices and beliefs of the teachers. The researcher also used classroom observations and interviews to collect data for the study.

Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, and Ringlaben's (2015) quantitative study examined 80 preservice teachers in an area of northwestern Georgia known as a New Latino Diaspora. Through the use of a survey, the researchers sought to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of their teaching efficacy and their abilities to successfully serve students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Fulton (2009) conducted a case study in a middle school setting, explicitly focusing on teachers serving students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. In this study, the researcher observed lessons being given by the teacher and then followed up with an interview with each teacher. The researcher also conducted small student focus groups. Through these actions, the researcher intended to understand how the teachers and students perceived the culturally responsive teaching practices being used by the teachers and experienced by the students.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

A synthesis of the research from the literature review shows that the perpetuation of the achievement gap between students of color and White students will continue to exist and even grow wider if teachers do not implement culturally responsive teaching practices. Many teachers adversely impact the academic success of students of color due to their misunderstandings of cultures other than their own (Bennett, Gunn, & Morton, 2015). Through a perceived lack of preparation and knowledge of how to support the needs of students of color, our schools continue to unintentionally withhold equitable access to culturally responsive educational experiences for

our students of color (Leonard & Martin, 2013; Oliver & Oliver, 2013). It is vital researchers continue exploring how teachers can successfully learn about and implement culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2011).

Review of the literature sources includes studies conducted by researchers that were on campuses as only researchers. There were studies that highlighted teacher's research while serving their students of color. Throughout this literature review, Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings are referred to often. Both Gay and Ladson-Billings were at the forefront of research on culturally responsive teaching. Their initial research created pathways to provide other researchers with an entrance into this topic. Though there are more current researchers on the topic of culturally responsive teaching, the work of Gay and Ladson-Billings continues to influence even the most current studies.

Culture is at the heart of learning (Garcia et al., 2011). Culture actively impacts the way people communicate and receive information. Culture also helps to create the lenses through which people see the world around them. The way people perceive or interpret what is happening around them and what they value are also directly influenced by culture. Culture influences how one may think of or see groups and individuals. Culturally responsive teaching is a teaching approach responsive to all learners, intentionally acknowledges the fundamental cultural differences of all learners, and provides equitable access to education for students from all cultures and backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The research of the literature consistently found that there was no univocal list of things that a teacher could follow in order to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. Educators attempt to make cultural responsiveness a sequence of steps to be completed; however, cultural responsiveness is a growth mindset teachers must obtain if they intend to serve all students (Hammond, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching practices centered around building strong

relationships with students of color in order to adapt instructional practices to meet the needs of all learners.

Funds of knowledge provided the conceptual framework allowing the researcher to theorize, examine, and challenge how teachers characterize, perceive, and build efficacy through lived experiences in their classrooms, professional practices, and their education and training (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). The conceptual framework of funds of knowledge brings the intersection of home, school, and community, together with education, lived experiences, and emotional responses. Accumulated knowledge, a form of capital, is created through these people's lived experiences (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

When teachers take the initiative to get to know students, teachers are seeking to learn about the lived experiences (or their funds of knowledge) that students bring with them to the classroom. This study defines funds of knowledge as the prior learned behaviors, customs, and understandings learners bring with them to their classrooms (Hammond, 2015). Brown studied how a group of teachers connected the learning experiences being designed and presented to the students' own lived experiences and cultural backgrounds (2015). The teachers being observed by Brown realized in order to best serve their students of color, they needed to learn about them and seek to understand the students as individuals with individual needs.

The majority group of teachers (White, female) influences the creation of curricula the most because they have the most prominent voice. White racial identities have a direct influence on how White teachers design learning experiences for students of color (Ferber, 2012). White teachers write curricula from their own lived experiences: the lens, or bias, of being a White middle-class person. Some schools have a standardized curriculum that all teachers must use. However, the same challenge applies because this curriculum is frequently written by the majority group of teachers (White and female). These resources serve as a broadly imposed barrier to



helping our students of color directly connect to the content studied. Students' backgrounds and lived experiences provide different funds of knowledge than the funds of knowledge possessed by their teachers Anderson and Cowart (2012).

Gay (2010) presented by first understanding their own culture White teachers can better understand the culture of their students of color. It was posited by Hollie (2012) personal bias directly influences teachers' perceptions of the students they are serving and of students' ability to learn. These biases link directly to how the funds of knowledge of the teacher and student intersect and directly impact student learning and the teacher's instructional moves (Hollie, 2012). Teachers tend to stereotype urban, lower-class students and their families as lacking values (Flynn, 2012).

This study focused on the lived experiences of teachers as they gained more knowledge around culturally responsive teaching and the implications attached to adapting curriculum and instructional moves to support the needs of their learners. The term culturally responsive teaching contends knowledge is individualized and based on individual perspectives, perceptions, and constructions of culture, diversity, and difference (Ford, 2014).

The constructivist learning theory values various constructions of reality and acknowledges and appreciates the multiple perspectives gained from one's funds of knowledge contribute to constructing new funds of knowledge (Gay, 2010). The constructivist theoretical framework presents reality is relative to the one experiencing the event and there is no final truth to discover. As new information is gained and new understandings are made, it is also noted there will not be one specific way to serve the needs of all learners.

People actively construct their interpretations of self and culture. Culturally responsive teaching practices require teachers recognize education is socially and culturally bound and inherently influenced by the beliefs and values of the learner (Howell, 2013). Culturally responsive

teaching looks toward a shared understanding of how cultural differences impact teaching and learning for students of color.

Culturally responsive teachers ensure they are looking beyond their personal biases, assumptions, and displaced blame toward students of color (Milner, 2010). They adapt to the varied needs of students. When teachers gain an understanding the differences in beliefs, biases, skills, and behaviors of all their students are the foundation for designing authentic and meaningful learning experiences, they will see all students experience sustainable success.

Culturally responsive teachers employ teaching strategies supporting the needs of the diverse student groups being served, through realizing “learning styles are how individuals engage in the process of learning, not their intellectual abilities” (Gay, 2002, p. 113). Through a direct focus on celebrating student diversity rather than seeing differences as an impediment to the success of a student, all students can experience academic achievement at high levels (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Over the last 5 years, researchers’ interest in the sphere of culturally relevant teaching has intensified. The current literature focuses on various applications and implementation techniques for culturally appropriate teaching practice. Research has been conducted to explore the concepts of culturally responsive teaching. Research has also sought to define what culturally responsive teaching is. There is limited research on how teachers use personal reflection on their practice to become more proficient in becoming more culturally responsive. Some studies demonstrate the knowledge teachers must find a way to understand their students better (Benedict, 2014; Chu, 2012).

It is noted teachers lack crucial knowledge and skills to connect with students and their families (Reardon, 2014). Educators who show reluctance to implement culturally responsive

teaching practices in their classrooms may perceive these actions force them to address issues of racism in their courses (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). School systems, educational leaders, and teachers are not equipped to do this alone. All school systems must create a strategic and intentional approach genuinely centering on all learners. Culturally responsive teaching practices must be central to teaching and learning (Gay, 2013).

These studies shared commonalities focused on serving students of color. All studies hit on a fundamental belief teachers must believe all students can learn. These studies also focused on the power of relationships with students. Through strong relationships with students, teachers gain an understanding allowing them to adapt instructional practices to best support the needs of diverse learners. The studies consistently noted the continually changing needs of the students must drive professional learning. The real magic happens in the classrooms. If this magic is to occur, teachers must be prepared and supported so they can effectively help their students of color.

Commonalities within the literature reviewed indicated there were strong relationships between student achievement and the connections students had with their teachers through positive relationships. The studies also connected an increase in student achievement through the intentional delivery of content by finding ways to help students make personal life connections to the material being taught. Students were more likely to experience academic success if they felt safe within the classroom and with the teacher.

In reviewing the multiple studies, researchers predominantly used qualitative means to collect data for their studies. Some studies included mixed methods where qualitative and quantitative means were used for data collection. Most studies reviewed included observations and semistructured interviews. The studies all had in common they sought to explore the direct interactions with students and their teacher(s).

There were other considerations while reviewing the literature. The generalizability of the research was considered. Sleeter (2012) noted much of the research conducted on culturally responsive teaching was limited in its ability to be generalizable due to the constructs of the studies being conducted. Milner (2011), Choi (2013), Martell (2013), Fulton (2009), and Rose and Potts (2011) all conducted studies that were qualitative and included only one teacher participant. Findings from these studies were comprehensive but could be argued as being non-generalizable due to the limited study participants.

Bias in qualitative research is a challenge all researchers must take into consideration (Yin, 2014). Though some of the studies presented used small participant samples or single study sites, through the use of multiple data sources, researchers were able to keep bias from impeding the interpretation of the data (Choi, 2013; Martell, 2013).

Many of the researchers were able to collect data that was not only rich but also generalizable due to the number of multiple interviews and interactions with the study participants. Rose and Potts (2011) analyzed teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards cultural diversity during their student teaching experience in a culturally and linguistically diverse setting. The authors' case study focused on four White middle-class student teachers. The researchers used individual interviews, group interviews, and observations to collect data for their study.

All researchers presented were able to maintain credibility in their studies by using multiple forms of data. The ability to maintain confidence in the findings of the studies presented were also provided through the use of participant review and agreement of transcripts and data collected throughout the studies. Credibility was also notable through the thorough analysis of the data collected in each study presented.

Students of color gain the ability to further their education when school systems consistently and appropriately implement culturally responsive teaching practices (Milner, 2011).

Teachers using culturally responsive teaching practices provide equitable learner outcomes by helping students of color to gain the necessary skills, languages, and perceptions needed to succeed in the learning environment they are engaging with (Fuglei, 2014). According to Gay (2013) and Irvine (2015), teachers play the most significant role in the classroom toward the success of all learners. Gay (2013) and Ladson-Billings (2014) both noted with the increasing diversity within classrooms, teachers must convey high expectations and the belief all students can learn despite their funds of knowledge, cultural backgrounds, or socioeconomic status.

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter offered insight into the current literature on culturally responsive teaching. The literature search showed there is a lack of information on how to effectively engage teachers in personal reflection on their current professional practice, their perceptions of the significance of culturally responsive teaching, and their awareness of the impact it can have on the success of students of color. The literature review served as the basis for researching culturally responsive teaching practices and the personal views of White female teachers to gain a better understanding of how they perceive culturally responsive teaching. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to understand how their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices influenced their perceived expectations of students of color. The design of the research questions for this study intends to explore culturally responsive teaching further.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Across the United States, many students in classrooms come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Cantor, Osher, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2018). Current teaching practices in today's classrooms are not meeting the needs of all students (Reardon, 2014). There is an ongoing disparity in academic accomplishment between White students and students of color. There is a direct need for further research on implementing culturally responsive teaching and how to best support teachers in learning (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). This study was a qualitative single-topic case study on these topics. The researcher's practice and experiences as a middle school principal indicated there was a significant need to support teachers serving the educational needs of students of color.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers in public schools were not sufficiently equipped to teach students of color (Chu, 2011; Jacobs, 2015). The majority teacher group (White, female, and middle-class) struggled to create equitable learning experiences for students of color to what their White peers experienced. Students of color has been used throughout this study to refer to non-White students (i.e., Black, Latino, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native). The majority of White female middle-class teachers were not sufficiently ready to ensure students coming from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds achieved academic success at the same levels as White students. Many culturally and linguistically diverse students performed lower than their White counterparts in mathematics and reading, spoke English with difficulty, attended high-poverty schools, and lived in poverty (Aud & Hannes, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Kaylor and Flores (2007) also reported students of color were more likely not to graduate, encounter academic and behavioral problems, and failed to successfully engage in school when experiencing the traditional models of teaching

and learning structures most schools had in place (Keiser, Sackett, Kuncel, & Brothen, 2016; Saygin, 2019; Newkirk-Turner & Johnson, 2018).

Student and teacher race and ethnicity impacted teaching and learning experiences in two ways (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). The first is the way students interacted and responded to the curriculum and instructional approaches happening in the classroom. The second is how the teachers' pre-existing assumptions about students and the way students of color learned can impact the teachers' perception of students' ability to learn.

### **Research Questions**

This single-topic case study sought to explore the following questions:

R1: How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?

R2: What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effective in serving students of color?

### **Propositions**

Qualitative research disqualifies hypothesis creation. Yin (2014), however, explained case study propositions and stated contradictions create a frame to guide the study. For this single-topic case study, there were two propositions: White female middle-class teachers wanted to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way, and White female middle-class teachers did not have the necessary awareness to seek needed relational and instructional changes in their practice. Yin further explained the study structure needs to allow for rival propositions. The rival propositions for this case study are: White female teachers do not want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way, and White female teachers are cognizant of how to best do so but choose not to serve their students of color efficiently.

Table 2

*Study Propositions and Rival Propositions*

Proposition	Rival Proposition
1. White female middle-class teachers want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.	1. White female middle-class teachers do not want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.
2. White female middle-class teachers did not have the necessary awareness to seek needed relational and instructional changes in their practice.	2. White female middle-class teachers are cognizant of how to best do so color but chose not to serve their students of color effectively

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

**Purpose of the Study**

There was current research regarding the use of culturally responsive teaching practices to support and improve the scholastic accomplishments of students of color (Bonner & Adams, 2012; Hollie, 2012; Schmeichel, 2012). However, the literature on teachers' use of self-reflection and professional discourse to learn about their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices regularly was scarce. The development and implementation of culturally responsive teaching through professional practice in the classroom and reflective practices following these experiences was a needed area of study (Milner, 2011). Therefore, a study exploring teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching and its importance to the success of their students would contribute to the body of knowledge on culturally responsive teaching.

Creswell (2014) explained qualitative research analyzes a specific theme through multiple data sources: interviews, field notes/artifacts, and other data collection instruments. An



understanding of how study participants perceived what instructional practices better served the culturally and linguistically diverse learning needs of students of color was gained. Through the discourse taking place in the focus groups, the researcher observed the insights participants voiced as they engaged in conversations around the work of Hammond (2015) on culturally responsive teaching practices. This research study explored teacher perceptions of their lived experiences as classroom teachers and their perceptions of changes in their awareness and construction of new meaning on culturally responsive teaching practices. These insights served as guides for further in-depth probes, as well as a means to support participants with future interview questions following the focus groups. Through follow-up questions and probes, clarity was gained in areas that might not have been clear about participant perceptions or lived experiences. This study structure allowed for follow-up with participants to seek clarification and validity of the study through member check processes. This single-topic case study was intended to inform how teachers can support students in a culturally responsive way. This study also served as a platform for initiating conversations between teachers at the study site that will hopefully start critical discussions and future professional learning for teachers and administration within this school district.

## **Research Design**

Data sources build evidence for the research, outlined through a developing rather than inflexible design lens. Yin (2014) identified a two-level definition for case studies. First, case studies explore contemporary issues; the issue in this study was the lack of equitable educational services for students of color within a school context. Second, case studies rely on multiple means to gather data; this study used semistructured open-ended face-to-face interviews, focus group meetings, and field notes.

The case study methodology was chosen over other qualitative methods because of the heuristic way case studies provide clarity to the reader regarding the phenomenon under study,

mainly by affording a clear explanation of the influences toward the areas of study and the background of a situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2010; Yin, 2014). The case study design was preferred because of the type of research problem and the questions asked. The results of field-oriented investigations can expound upon the reasons for a problem, details of what caused it, and when it began: all complex social phenomena with many variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2010). The use of a case study design was a suitable means to explore the research study questions. Qualitative research was an appropriate method to focus on gaining insight, discovery, and understanding from views of study participants. This research study allowed for contributions that will increase the knowledge of practices improving the academic efforts of students of color. A case study design provided the opportunity for close interaction with participants during interviews (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). This research methodology examined authentic situations and provided rich and full accounts of the teachers' lived experiences. It can be a challenge to conducting case studies due to the subjectivity of the participants and the researcher. By implementing a single-topic case study method, the study "retain[ed] the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2014, p. 3). This qualitative case study captured data from numerous sources. Research data for the case study were collected using four approaches:

1. pre-focus-group, face-to-face, semistructured, open-ended interview with each participant lasting approximately 1 hour,
2. five hour-long focus group meetings,
3. post-focus-group, face-to-face, semistructured, open-ended interview with each participant lasting approximately 1 hour, and
4. field notes. (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010)

These study methodologies served as the foundation of this research, with the study framed around participating teachers' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding culturally

responsive teaching practices and their personal lived experiences. The research study captured the experiences of the participants accurately by audio recording all interviews and focus group meetings electronically using an iPhone (Creswell, 2014). The data were transcribed completely and then analyzed and synthesized through coding guided by the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

For this research, White female teachers were participants in this study. The participants were chosen explicitly for these attributes due to current research showing the majority of teachers serving students of color are White, female, and from a middle-class background (NCES, 2013). As this single-topic case study sought to investigate the use of culturally responsive teaching practices by classroom teachers in serving students of color with varied backgrounds, the study excluded potential participants not meeting the criteria established: White women who taught in fourth through ninth grades. A single-topic case study allowed for the examination of teachers' perceptions of instructional approaches related to best serving the unique learning requirements of students of color.

The researcher ensured participants felt they were in a safe and non-judgmental environment facilitating professional discourse by all study participants. Throughout the focus group meetings, the Focus Group Conversation Protocols were used. These protocols created structures ensuring all participants were respected, and their contributions were honored for their uniqueness to each participant's lived experiences. This qualitative case study utilized individual interviews prestructured and open-ended, focus groups, and field notes as the primary means of investigation. Additionally, the study examined how White female teachers described the process of designing culturally responsive learning experiences based on their students' lived experiences and their influence on the students' beliefs and actions, while also being responsible for fulfilling the predetermined content. Study participants were asked to reflect on their own lived experiences

and funds of knowledge and whether these affected how they designed learning experiences for students of color in their classrooms.

The constructivist theoretical framework values various constructions of reality and the acknowledgment and appreciation that seeing beyond one's personal lived experiences is an integral aspect of funds of knowledge. This research explored the lived experiences of the study participants through five 1-hour focus group discussions of Hammond's (2015) work and inquired about how these experiences might have affected their perceptions of curriculum and instructional strategies. There was a focus on whether participants saw value in reflecting their students' cultural and linguistic diversity through embedded correlations in curriculum and instruction. Through the ongoing discourse and dialogue about lived experiences, participants shared teaching practices they employed in their classrooms and what they perceived as the most successful uses of teaching practices in serving students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

#### **Target Population**

Qualitative case studies combine multiple data sources central to the study question (Creswell, 2014). Yin (2014) explained multiple people could be included in a single-case study provided the questions remain focused on the central topic. For this research, White women teaching fourth through ninth grades were invited to participate. As stated earlier, the SASS showed 82% of public-school teachers identified as White and female (NCES, 2013). To match the statistical data of teacher demographics serving in classrooms today, this group of study participants was intended to represent the majority group of teachers serving students of color.

#### **Sampling Method**

Qualitative research seeks to extend and add to a field of inquiry. Guetterman (2015) clarified the differences between random and nonrandom sampling methods. First, approval from

Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was requested. The approval through the study site followed the IRB approval. When these two steps were completed, there was an initial email sent out to all White female teachers of fourth through ninth grades in the participating school district. The letter to potential participants explained this research was a qualitative case study exploring culturally responsive teaching. The letter also presented potential dangers and time commitments required of study participants. The letter asked participants for permission to use a recording device during the interviews and shared confidentiality measures taken (Glesne, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The guidelines and established protocols ensured the ethical treatment of all subjects.

For this research, 10 White female teachers that taught Grades 4–9 were chosen as participants through purposive sampling. There were not any preselection criteria regarding teacher experience. Having teachers from all phases of teaching experience benefitted the discourse between the participants during focus group meetings. There was a focus to ensure there were not too many new teachers or too many veteran teachers. There was a focus on ensuring representation from all six grades through purposive sampling. Names were drawn to try and get an even distribution from each grade level, if possible.

The average amount of experience for the participant group was 14 years. The teachers chosen represented all core content areas, fine arts, athletics, interventions, and gifted programs. Six teachers served students at the elementary school level (Grades 4–5). Two teachers served students at the middle school level (Grades 6–8). Two teachers served students at the high school level (Grades 9–10). To ensure confidentiality, participants received labels: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10. Minimal personal information entered the transcripts. Table 3 shows the breakdown of grades, content, and years of experience represented by the group of participants in the study.

Table 3

*Participant Information*

Teacher	Grade level	Content taught	Years of experience
P1	9–10	science and coaching	22
P2	5	all core contents	18
P3	4–5	special education	10
P4	5	math	5
P5	4–5	reading interventions	36
P6	8	English Language Arts	12
P7	9–10	special education	1
P8	4	math and science	17
P9	6–8	fine arts	11
P10	4–5	gifted and talented	20

Over 11,000 students were served by the district selected for this study, located in Texas. Approximately 45% of students within the district were students of color, meaning they were from subpopulation groups other than White. As is typical with many other school districts in the United States, the district in this study continued to see an increase in their diverse student group enrollment. Over the 2014 through 2016 school years, at least 85% of the teaching force at this study site identified as White. Of this 85%, the vast majority were female.

The selection of a small sample size for an in-depth qualitative study does not routinely mean the selection approach should not be random. For many audiences, random sampling, even of small samples, will substantially increase the trustworthiness of the study outcomes. The purpose of a small random sample is trustworthiness, not representativeness. A small, purposive sample does not permit statistical generalizations. Having up to 10 study participants allowed for the collection of substantial data should a candidate self-select to opt-out during the study.

Once the participants were randomly selected, there was an initial meeting to respond to questions. This initial meeting allowed prospective participants the opportunity to get to know each other. Participants were given a copy of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Hammond, 2015), which served as the assigned reading for the focus group meetings. Along with the provided literature, participants received a tentative timeline of events. A schedule for meetings was established through collaboration with study participants using an online scheduling tool, Doodle. Study participants participated in an individual interview within the first three weeks of the focus group meetings. Individual participant interviews were scheduled through the same operational process.

The study utilized what Creswell (2014) referred to as accessible cases because the study participants became subjects based on their disposition to join. Data were collected from the study participants, and then conclusions were drawn about the cases through the data analysis process. Creswell indicated a singular participant, numerous participants, a program, an occurrence, or an attempt could all serve as cases. The research study also used what Yin (2014) called replication of procedures across all study participants to have a foundation for paralleling the various participants' lived experiences for this case study.

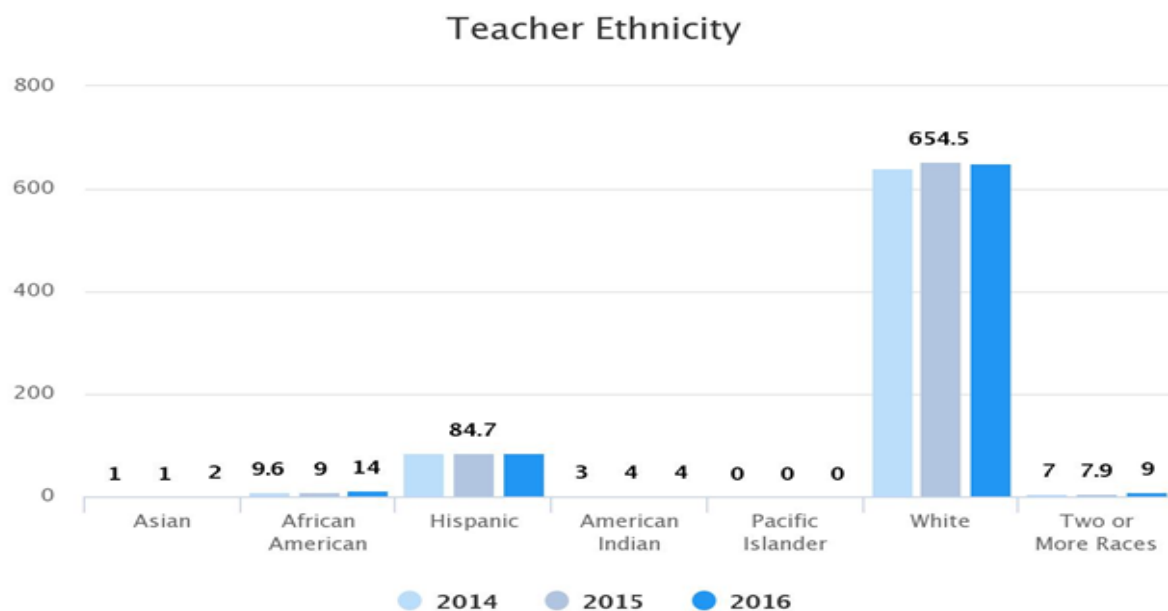
Through designating individuals as a case, this study gathered in-depth data about the views and actions of each study participant to gain clarity around the perceived relationship between culturally responsive teaching and the academic success of students of color served in the classrooms. Each participant had unique lived experiences with their students of color, and these experiences were rich data sources for this study.

The constructivist theoretical framework values many perceptions of representativeness (Lincoln & Guba, 2013), and the acknowledgment and honoring of multiple perceptions are

fundamental facets of serving students of color (Gay, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (2013) noted in accordance with the constructivist theoretical framework, the reality is comparative, meaning there is not a definitive truth discovered through investigation. This notion made individual constructions of reality pertinent, even if various interpretations did not lead to a single approach to meeting the needs of students of color.

### Context of the Study

The school district selected for this study served more than 11,000 students in Texas. Approximately 45% of students within the district were students of color, meaning they were subpopulation groups other than White. In this district, over the 2014 through 2016 school years, at least 85% of the teaching force identified as White, and the vast majority of these White teachers were female. At this study site, only 15% identified as teachers of color, with 11% being Latino and 1.8% being Black (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Ethnicity of teacher population of study district site.

### Instrumentation



## **One-on-One Interviews**

Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryallas, and Nero (2013) explained an interview requires careful analysis and understanding. Unlike a simple conversation, qualitative interviews require the person interviewing to develop questions suitable for the study, as well as show strong listening skills (Yin, 2014). The interview questions guided and led the discussion into the depth required for this case study.

Interviews were suitable and effective means of information gathering of relevant data in case study research in the study conditions (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The data-collection process needed a level of an imposition to gather relevant information to explore the underlying phenomenon yet could not intrude to the extent it inhibited the study participants (Stake, 2010). The researcher met with each participant to conduct a 1-hour semistructured, open-ended interview within the first three weeks of the study. All interviews were guided through interview protocols.

Although questions were replicated throughout each case, elasticity in the flow of the exchanges was present. In the semistructured interviews, conversations with each participant were unique to each study participant. Interviews took place in the public library, as a discreet, self-contained location. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of the five focus group meetings, the participants participated in a second individual face-to-face interview. This second interview allowed participants to share any insight, current wonderings, and perceptions relating to culturally responsive teaching and students of color. These procedures ensured consistency in the format of data collection from all participants (Yin, 2014).

Each participant was assigned a number. The participant number, date of interview, and location of the interview were recorded at the top of the first page of the interview transcript. Steps were taken to ensure the time the interview took place was included to organize transcripts chronologically. The audio recording device used for recording and the transcribed data remained

locked and in possession of the researcher or in the residence of the researcher at all times.

Additionally, these audio recording devices were entry-protected by a password. All data were confidential and accessible only to the doctoral advisor and the researcher during the study.

Transcriptions took place immediately following each interview and focus group meeting. All recordings from study focus groups and interviews were destroyed once all transcriptions were completed.

### **Focus Group Meetings**

Study participants participated in five 1-hour-long focus group meetings. Each participant received a copy of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Hammond, 2015) at the information meeting. Participants read designated sections of the book before each focus group meeting. The focus group discussions were guided by question stems to prompt discourse among the participants. To ensure that the participants felt safe in their participation in the focus group meetings, a focus group conversation protocol was used (see Appendix C). The focus groups allowed data and evidence to be gathered about commonalities and variances among participants' viewpoints (Morgan, 1996, 1997) on the topic of culturally responsive teaching.

The focus groups allowed participants to share how the readings and professional discourse had influenced their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching and its impact on learning for students of color. Through engaging in these focus group meetings, participants were engaged in dialogue about the benefits and drawbacks of culturally responsive teaching practices. Therefore, as noted by Kitzinger (1994), participants had structures in place (Collegial Conversations protocols) to query one another, diverge, misinterpret one another, or possibly sway each other to see their point of view. The study participants' contributions to these shared conversations led to data about the topic of study. The discourse between the participants was audio-recorded and later

transcribed verbatim. To help facilitate the dialogue between the participants question stems were made available to use. These stems were not required to be used but were made available if there was a need to ignite conversation.

### **Field Notes**

Throughout this study, the researcher collected field notes to pair with the audio-recordings of interviews and focus group meetings. For field notes, a template was used to identify the date and time, name of the event. The template was used to document files associated with the field notes and a summary of what occurred in the field notes. All of the notes taken by the researcher during the specified time were also collected on the template. All field notes were taken in Word documents. Field notes were completed with detailed descriptions tied to the dialogue and time stamps. When taking field notes, there was an intentional focus on how the participants in the interviews and focus groups responded, both verbally and in behavior, to the discussions happening. The connection in the notes to specific phrases was documented. Observations were connected to the words being spoken so when listening to the audio later, connections to the field notes and specific phrases in the recording could be made. Notes were taken on what the participants were doing in response to one another, including thick description of sounds, sights, and the researcher's thoughts and reflections.

### **Data Collection and Operationalization of Variables**

Collecting evidence from multiple sources supported qualitative case study research. Yin (2014) explained researchers utilize various tools for data collection, including documents, interviews, observations, and archival records, and a significant asset of the case study design is the chance to use many distinctive sources of data. The data collection methods provided different categorical perspectives for comparison.

Five focus group meetings occurred approximately every two weeks. Observations facilitated data collection during the focus group meetings and face-to-face interviews with participants. During interviews, the interviewer was an attentive listener, as good listening afforded the assimilation of new information without bias. Exact expressions used by each speaker, the speaker's mood, and utterances were captured to aid in understanding the content from the speaker's viewpoint. The interviewer took note of participants' expressions and stressed statements (Yin, 2014). The recorded focus group meetings and individual interview transcriptions formed the basis of the collected data protocol. Data collection also included field notes from the interviews and the observations.

### **Identification of Attributes**

Teachers have a crucial responsibility in developing the curricula, programs, and resources they incorporate into the learning experiences designed for students. Each focus group meeting centered on dialogue around these four attributes and how they related to the work of Hammond (2015) on culturally responsive teaching practices. In this research study, participants reflected on their current practices, participated in professional discourse aligned to Hammond's research findings on culturally responsive teaching, and worked collectively to share their perceptions from their professional discourse about culturally responsive teaching practices.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

#### **Interpretation of Data**

Replication of procedures across all participants (Yin, 2014) was used to have a foundation for comparing the various participants' lived experiences for this case study. Using these accounts of what comprises a case, the projected units of the evaluation were defined as the individual fourth- through ninth-grade White female teachers who participated in the study. Qualitative case studies seek to express why people have thoughts and feelings that might affect the way they

behave (Miles & Huberman, 2009). It was vital to remember while organizing and analyzing the data, there should not be a focus on the attempt to generalize findings from the research over a broad population. Instead, the focus was on seeking insight into the way the study participants felt and perceived their own lived experiences. Safeguarding participant confidentiality was a primary concern in conducting this case study.

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks allowed for the accurate interpretation of the collected data and guided the reader to see the research from different perspectives. Qualitative data analysis worked on the approach that extraneous information should be eliminated while attempting to make sense of multiple forms of data. The data were analyzed to seek out impressions coming to the front to respond to the research questions of the study. This process, in turn, offered a means to provide explanations or interpretations.

Qualitative data analysis characteristically circles the impressions and understandings of the study. The qualitative analysis trusted the researchers' perceptions and paralleled implementation; therefore, it was fundamental the qualitative analysis was systematic, and the study steps and outcomes were reported in a coordinated and precise way. The researcher, while analyzing qualitative data, had to watch spoken word, setting, consistency keenly, and inconsistency of views, frequency and strength of comments, and their specificity as well as developing themes and trends. The qualitative analysis involved multiple readings of the data in their entirety. There was a focus on condensing all information into critical themes and topics shedding light on the research questions in order to start coding the material.

## **Coding**

Coding indicated the documentation of topics, issues, similarities, and differences revealed through the participants' narratives and translated through the data analysis process. Collected data were evaluated and classified according to content and analyzed. The analysis involved putting the

recorded focus group meetings and interviews in different categories according to content, tabulating the frequency of recurrent events, and putting information in chronological order (Yin, 2014). Through this process, the data began to be interpreted from the participants' perspectives.

Coding began once all audio recordings from the focus groups, and individual interviews were transcribed and verified for accuracy through member checking. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, field notes were taken to serve as supporting information to help interpret and remove bias from the data collected. After all of the data were verified, a coding outline was developed, which consisted of a list of codes that could be anticipated. These codes were indexed and divided into descriptive topics. As data were reviewed and evaluated, it was necessary to add additional codes to the list and to merge, split up, or rename codes. Once the data were coded, the abstraction of themes from the codes began.

All codes were reviewed and grouped to represent common, salient, and significant themes. Specific titles or headings were written on small pieces of paper describing a specific code. The individual slips of paper were then laid out on a table and grouped in different ways to find themes. Causal patterns and structures were explored, including differences between types of respondents when analyzed together.

Clusters of codes were then labeled with more interpretative and rudimentary themes. This process was repeated with the basic themes derived from the previous actions. Underlying themes were examined and clustered together into higher-order and more interpretative organizing themes. This process illustrated how descriptive codes were focused on a small number of unique, revealing, and complementary themes used to begin providing clarity to parts of the research questions.

## **Data Synthesis**

A prevalent practice for data synthesis in qualitative research was providing substantiating evidence obtained through multiple methods, like observations, interviews, and documents, to locate major and minor themes. A narrative approach was used to detail data collection, coding, triangulation, and other steps used to classify the data from this study. The narrative account was binding by relying on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study.

After possible themes were identified within the collected data, ways to draw together the research study findings were sought to represent or capture the perceptions and funds of knowledge of the study participants. In this uniquely situated context, the unit of analysis was the school district of the study and the study participants. The researcher used a holistic approach to compare and contrast the themes emerging across all participants in the single-topic case to facilitate thematic analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). Once the participant thematic work was complete, the study notes were reviewed to find convergence and divergence, or attempted triangulation between the sources. This process resulted in a thick, rich set of data fully informing the research questions in unexpected ways related to how teachers recommended the learning and social growth of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

## **Validation**

The validity of a narrative account was essential. Qualitative research extended a scholarly discussion, and thus needed to meet established parameters regarding construction, validity, and reliability. Yin (2014) explained focus on these issues strengthened the overall research. Issues of reliability and validity were addressed and resolved, as they could limit the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). This study was a collaborative effort between the study participants and the researcher. This collective work facilitated validation throughout observations of the five focus

group meetings and in conducting the pre-focus-group and post-focus-group individual interviews. Multiple corroboration techniques such as member checking, triangulation throughout sources of data, and the searching of conflicting evidence were useful in determining the accuracy and trustworthiness of this narrative account (Creswell, 2014).

### **Credibility and Transferability**

Qualitative studies needed to provide a detailed, in-depth evaluation of the data to build the case based on the evidence (Yin, 2014). Presenting logical rival interpretations of the data strengthened the argument. The development of an in-depth analysis further built an analytic frame to ground the study. Bhattacharjee (2012) explained social science differed from natural science within the context of transferability. There was a focus on whether another study could arrive at the same conclusions based on the data collected. Utilizing the conceptual framework of funds of knowledge and the constructivist theoretical framework ensured data collected were grounded in a theory that supported transferability.

In this qualitative research, the researcher consistently engaged in member checking, triangulation, thick description, and peer reviews (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation was used to add credibility to the study. Triangulation was a methodical approach used for sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by disregarding overlapping areas. Through triangulation, the researcher searched for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in the study (Creswell, 2014). Research that included triangulation validated the research by drawing on multiple perspectives. Multiple sources of data were triangulated to increase the accuracy of this study (Creswell, 2014).

Once the focus group meetings and the interviews were fully transcribed, member checking occurred before the initial data-analysis process. Study participants received summaries of the interviews as hard copies as the researcher visited with each participant in a follow-up meeting, in



person, so they could verify transcriptions were accurate. The transcriptions were taken back up upon completion of the meeting. Describing the location and attributes of the study, the participants, and the themes of the qualitative study in rich detail provided more credibility in this study. A constructivist perspective was employed to contextualize the people being studied as a procedure for establishing credibility (Creswell, 2014). The process of writing using thick description provided the reader with greater detail allowing for clarity and contextual understanding of the study. Thick writing guided readers in understanding the credibility of the study, and a thorough explanation allowed them to determine the applicability of the findings to other situations or similar environments.

### **Peer Review**

A peer-review process was utilized to check for the fidelity of the study and to ensure the evaluation of researcher bias. Scholarly peers helped ensure the process was appropriate and valid for the research being conducted (Creswell, 2014). A peer reviewer provided support, challenged the propositions, and challenged assumptions. A peer reviewer also helped ensure methodological fidelity by asking thought-provoking questions about methods and interpretations. Credibility was established by involving someone external to the study. A critical shift in thinking was operating through the cooperation between the outside reviewer and the researcher conducting the qualitative study. To allow for the best peer review, this process was done throughout the entirety of the study.

Table 4

*Trustworthiness Chart*

Trustworthiness Chart	
Strategies	Detailed Explanations
Peer Review	Conducting a peer review beforehand will allow for the scheme and implementation of the research study more efficiently and effectively.
Multiple Sources of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two semistructured individual in-depth interviews</li> <li>• Five focus group meetings</li> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
Multiple Theories	Conceptual Framework: Funds of Knowledge Theoretical Framework: Constructivist Learning Theory
Member Checks	Allow study participants to clarify researcher interpretations of transcriptions.
Reflexivity	Preliminary analysis and reflections when transcribing interviews and discussion of researcher bias and personal views.
Peer Review	Review by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Principal, A</li> <li>• Peer Principal, B</li> </ul>
Thick Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two semistructured individual in-depth interviews</li> <li>• Five focus groups</li> </ul>

Conducting a peer review before the actual case study research allowed the researcher to design and execute the research study more efficiently and effectively. A small group of teachers from the researcher's school reviewed the interview questions, and the question stems used in the focus groups to see if responses would support this case study. The peer-review also explored the effectiveness of the questions. Replication of procedures across all participants (Yin, 2014) laid a foundation for comparing the various participants' lived experiences in this case study. Using these attributes of what comprises a case, the foreseen units of analysis were defined as the individual teachers. Collected data were evaluated and classified according to content and analyzed. The

analysis involved putting the recorded focus group meetings and interviews in different categories according to content, tabulating the frequency of recurrent events, and putting information in chronological order (Yin, 2014). Through this process, the data began to be interpreted from the participants' perspective. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, field notes were taken to serve as supporting information to help interpret and remove bias from the data collected. After the data were examined, a coding outline was established; these codes guided and apportioned the material into descriptive topics.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

#### **Limitations**

Many potential limitations of this study could have affected the validity and reliability. Yin (2014) noted the possibility of a researcher deducing or inferring findings that may not be accurate. If the researcher was not able to observe the phenomena, firsthand, deduction or inference might have occurred. The case study approach was useful for understanding the role of multiple factors and situating the outcome of the study within the full context of the setting.

This study may have been limited through the purposive sample of White female teachers in Texas. Participants' willingness to share honestly about their experiences as White female educators working in a diverse school may have limited this study. Interviewee responses based on the interviewee's perception of accuracy had the potential to invalidate the interview data. Explicitly, there was a probability the participants might respond as they perceived the researcher might have wanted them to during the interview process. Turnbull (2002) stated a significant concern the interviewer must battle is the ability to get to the truth in the interview process.

The selection of only 10 participants may have been a limitation of this study. While other teachers may have been available, the participant teachers in the study were chosen through purposive sampling to gain a broad representation of perspectives from White female teachers.

While more teachers may have provided additional data, the case of this select group of only 10 teachers was sufficiently broad to identify various teacher perceptions about culturally responsive teaching. However, the responses and discourse from the teacher participants during the semistructured interviews and focus group meetings may not have consistently reflected what transpired in their various lived experiences.

Numerous studies and literature could be found regarding the topic of culturally responsive teaching practices; however, the literature review could not find any directly linking teacher participation in focus group meetings, professional discourse and reflective practices, and their relationships to implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. This lack of existing research presented a limitation to the study, as well as an opportunity for expanding the discussion.

The issue of generalizability could have been seen as a problem, as this research study focused on a single topic. However, a particular case can yield much information, as readers can benefit through vivid, explicit narration (Stake, 2010). The researcher was responsible for data collection and analysis. This responsibility had advantages, but the researcher may have lacked training in observing and interviewing, which are critical components of the research process. In the case of the instrument, the face-to-face semistructured interview questions might not have obtained enough reliable answers from the participants. Furthermore, the researcher's pre-understandings, preconceptions, and biases could have potentially hindered the reliability of the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations were implemented to focus the research project and provided boundaries for data collection. This study was bounded by time, the limit of teacher participants, and the instrumentation tools chosen for the research study. A pilot study of all interview and focus group questions allowed the researcher to check for validity, efficiency, and impact of question

strategies, and sought-after outcomes. In this study, an iterative process of data collection and member checking was utilized. The constructivist approach allowed the participant teachers to make their interpretations or perceptions. Peer reviews and member checking were also utilized to ensure the accuracy of the collection and interpretation of the data. The study relied on data collection from multiple teachers serving students of color.

Observations, field notes, and transcriptions served as multiple sources of data to guide the study process. From a constructivist perspective, the teachers in the study played an integral role in their perceptions of enacting processes and making meaning of the text read, and the topic discussed. Brown and Coles (2012) argued through a constructivist approach, teachers observe patterns over time bringing awareness of processes and practices impacting student learning. The flexibility needed to engage participant teachers in this way was only possible with a qualitative study.

### **Dependability**

There were several strategies incorporated into this study to ensure trustworthiness and to ensure the research was conducted ethically. One strategy used in this study was the use of various sources of data: semistructured participant interviews, focus group transcriptions, and field notes. Narratives and reflections were included in the field notes. These narratives and reflections provided thick descriptions of program activities and memories of the experiences shared during the focus group meetings and interviews. Researcher reflexivity was an important component and assisted with maintaining an element of honesty and validity within the study. Reflexivity occurred through self-reflection during the interview and focus group transcription as well as data analysis. Reflexivity also occurred through self-reflection on the potential for researcher bias in this study.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Ethics must be practiced throughout the process of conducting a case study. After the initial IRB approval through Concordia University–Portland, the researcher obtained permission from the appropriate district leadership of the study site. The researcher held a high regard for all aspects of the research site as well as the participants and their time. During data collection, the data were reported honestly, and findings were not altered to satisfy predictions or thoughts related to the research. The study followed all ethical protective measures in the collection of data at the research site and throughout the entire research process.

## **Researcher Bias**

The knowledge and acceptance of researcher bias encouraged the researcher to look past biases to see the true meanings in the focus group and interview data. Member checks were incorporated to ensure data accuracy after transcription of the focus group meetings and interviews. All study participants were asked to review the transcriptions of the focus group meetings and interviews to clarify researcher explanations of statements made. Participant review ensured interpretation accuracy.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability were collectively bound through complex means. This research study viewed validity as the broader, more incorporating term related to the interview protocol, and viewed reliability as the measure of the consistency of the responses. Depending on the individuals' personalities, some participants may have inflated behaviors and responses, which is always a possibility when dealing with human beings (Yin, 2014). Narrative analysis was specific to the study participants' lived experiences in specific times and places. Therefore, generalizations were not used to describe the lived experiences of these teachers. In other words, the participant

told their stories based on personal and social interaction as it related to a particular time (i.e., past, present, future) within a particular time or location.

All qualitative research is interested in how people make meaning of their lives and how they perceive the world around them. This research was qualitative and, therefore, subjective. Particular structures of experience (the White female teachers' perceptions of how culturally responsive teaching practices impacted students of color) were looked at, as well as the perspectives of the participants and the specific interrelationships between the teachers and their environment.

The researcher acted as the instrument of research, listening to what White female teachers believed to be specific issues in their classrooms relating to students of color. Although the study was conducted in a manner following research protocols (Creswell, 2014), the researcher may still have seen results through the eyes of a White administrator looking at diversity. To ask probing questions effectively, the researcher ensured there was a clear understanding of the purpose of the study and stayed aligned with the critical questions. Reflexivity and understanding researcher bias helped to minimize conflict and provide untainted information. A professional relationship was maintained during the interviews, and the researcher refrained from adding personal comments to the questions; this assisted in the elimination of response imitation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Internal Validity**

Internal validity concerns in qualitative case study research fell within the domain of making logical inferences about events not directly observed. Applying strategies of pattern matching, clarification building, addressing competing explanations, and the use of logic representations supported the establishment of external validity (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research is participatory. Transcripts were provided to participants, as well as clarifying questions, if needed,

to ensure the observations of focus group meetings and interviews correctly reflected the views of the participants.

It is not possible to include all aspects that may be relevant to a particular study. One such omission from this study may have been the effect of brain development on children's learning and achievement. Most neuroscientists support a brain-based approach to educating children (Graham, 2011; Hammond, 2015; McCall, 2012). This aspect of educating students was considered but eventually deemed sufficiently profound to warrant an independent investigation (Caine & Caine, 2011).

### **Expected Findings**

It was the expectation through self-reflection, collegial discourse, and personal lived experiences, the participants would gain insight into what culturally responsive teaching was. It was also anticipated the study participants would feel they were actively and successfully implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms or would find they were not genuinely meeting the needs of their students of color. It was expected the teachers participating in this study would see the purpose and value of teaching differently to serve all students equitably. It was also expected through this study, the participants would share their newfound awareness along with newly constructed knowledge and would actively serve as change agents on their campuses and throughout their school district. Ultimately, the researcher expected the study participants would have a positive and sustaining impact on their students of color.

It was predicted the findings would support the notion teachers needed training in how to successfully engage in professional reflection regarding the disparities in educational experiences between White students and students of color (Bickmore & Parker, 2014). Teachers would need direct support from school leadership and their peers to support students of color through culturally



responsive teaching successfully. This collective approach allowed for professional discourse and reflection that would guide professional best practice in serving students of color.

## **Ethical Issues**

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

Creswell (2018) forewarns researchers “to anticipate and plan for potential ethical issues” (p. 42) that may show up at any point of the research study. Conducting ethical studies ensured the results presented a fair and honest interpretation of the data. Before the data collection process began, this case study was presented to Concordia University’s IRB. Furthermore, the researcher’s committee members and chair were consulted throughout the process. Participants completed an informed consent form, as expected by Concordia University’s IRB requirements, clarifying the interview protocol, outlined foreseeable risks, and ensured confidentiality. Participation in this research study was voluntary. In this study, there were no financial interest or substantial benefit for the researcher, the participants or the study site that could impede the fidelity of the study.

Within the parameters of this research topic, foreseeable risks centered on confidentiality. All interview data were kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet. All interview data were cleared from all flash drives and from the virtual cloud that contained any data collected throughout the study. Any field notes and hard copies of documents reviewed during the study were shredded to ensure no connections to the study site or the participants could be made. These actions took place upon completion of all member checking and final review of the methodology and study findings by the researcher’s dissertation committee. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure quotes and opinions presented could not be traced back to them.

### **Positionality and Reflexivity**

Inherently, positions regarding certain things, as well as the influence of these positionalities on one’s response, played a crucial part in this study. This also included the

researcher's positionality and response to the study outcomes. The lived experiences of the researcher as a former classroom teacher, and a principal may have inadvertently impacted the researcher's perceptions. Objectivity was difficult to sustain when lived experiences could easily influence one's perceptions of events and study outcomes. Throughout this study, the researcher was accountable for being aware of self-perceptions and personal experiences as a White educator and balance this with the collected data from the study. This required the researcher to engage in constant self-reflection and self-checking. Positionality was an awareness piece of the study that had to be monitored consistently in order to ensure there was an ethical reinforcer of self-checking during the research process by differentiating subjective from objective views.

### **Confidentiality of Study Participants**

Study participants were referred to by pseudonyms to provide for subject and organization confidentiality. With participant consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure all information collected was accurate. All recordings were transcribed for analysis. All information provided by the participants was considered confidential. Participant names and personal identifying information did not appear in this dissertation; however, with participant consent, anonymous quotations have been used. Even though study findings were presented to colleagues for their feedback, only the researcher committee chair and researcher were able to access the data.

### **Assumptions**

The principal assumption in this single-topic case study involved the participating teachers. It was presumed the participating teachers would choose to participate because they were interested in improving their practice as teachers serving students of color. The researcher functioned from the assumption the study participants did not know the outcomes of the study or the research process. The researcher also assumed the data collection would be accurate because in-depth information was obtained through the interviews, focus groups, and field notes. It was

assumed the study participants were honest and trustworthy during the face-to-face, semistructured interviews, and openly and truthfully identified their ethnicity, educational background, and professional status. Information such as perceptions, awareness, and attitudes of respondents (White female teachers) toward the issue of serving the unique needs of students of color helped explain the differences in the participants' responses.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 served as a framework for understanding the goals and methods of this research study. This chapter identified the research paradigm (i.e., funds of knowledge) and the theoretical framework (i.e., constructivism) grounding the study. The researcher included descriptions contextualizing this study regarding who participated, how the researcher collected and analyzed data, and how the data from the study informed and connected the bodies of literature related to this study's research questions. The researcher determined this study would be a qualitative single-topic case study. This research method directly ensured the implications of gathering data with fidelity were a focus. Findings from this study will provide scholarly resources that will empower teacher leaders and campus/district leadership to support the professional growth of teachers and their instructional practices.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

The demographics of classroom teachers used to mirror those of the students they served. This demographic parallel between teacher and student groups is no longer present; the student population in U.S. classrooms is growing increasingly diverse (Garnett, 2012; Kelly-McHale, 2013). U.S. classrooms today are more often composed of a majority of minority student groups (Crouch & Zakariya, 2012). As the diversity in classrooms continues to increase, the majority group of teachers continues to be White, female, and middle-class (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). These changes have posed many challenges for teachers, and as a result, it has become compelling educators seek and establish a system that empowers all students (regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or language) to receive equitable learning opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

As noted by Creswell (2014), researchers just starting in the field of research should choose topics seen as relevant or of personal significance. Equitable educational opportunity for students of color was a topic relevant to today's schools. Therefore, there was a direct need for further research on implementing culturally responsive teaching practices and how to best support teachers in their learning (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Teachers must be prepared to not only acknowledge the diversity within their classroom but capitalize on student diversity to create a learning environment serving the needs of all learners (Bales & Saffold, 2011; Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Milner & Tenore, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Chapter 4 describes the population sample and demographics, data sources, and research data for this study. Through the data presentation, a detailed review of the data narrative surfaced. This single-topic case study examined a sample of 10 White female teachers (who served students from Grades 4 through 9) to explore how these teachers described culturally responsive teaching. The study also explored what participants identified as effective culturally responsive teaching

practices. Through this study, the researcher investigated how White female teachers' lived experiences informed their perceptions about culturally responsive teaching. With data drawn from two sets of individual interviews, five focus group meetings, and field notes, the researcher provided full description and considerable detail so the reader could determine the extent to which the findings from this single-case may be applicable to the reader's own context. This case study explored two research questions:

R1: How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?

R2: What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effective in serving students of color?

### **Description of the Sample**

#### **Population, Sample, and Demographics**

Following the approval from Concordia University's IRB, consent was obtained from the study site. Next, an initial email was sent to all White female teachers of Grades 4 through 9 in the participating school district, which explained this research was a qualitative single-topic case study to explore culturally responsive teaching. The recipients were informed to express an interest in participating, they should email the researcher directly.

The school district selected for this study served more than 11,000 students in Texas. Like many other school districts in the United States, the district in this study served an increasingly diverse population of students who came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Between the years 2014 and 2016, the Latino student group increased by almost 9% and the Black student group increased by almost 2%. See Table 5 for the student group breakdown of the study site in 2014–2016. Site anonymity was considered by the researcher. What provided this protection was that the demographics of this school district mirrored the demographics of at least 4 other

school district in its vicinity. It also mirrored a large proportion of many suburban school districts in Texas.

Table 5

*Student Group Breakdown of the Study Site, 2014–2016*

Student group	2014	2016
Latino	29.25%	39.65%
American Indian– Alaskan Native	0.14%	0.23%
Asian	0.52%	0.63%
Black	2.72%	4.30%
Native Hawaiian– Pacific Islander	0.08%	0.19%
White	67.29%	55.0%

## **Participants**

In total, 26 teachers expressed an interest in participating in the study. Through purposive sampling, 10 White female teachers who taught Grades 4 through 9 were chosen to participate. There were no pre-selection criteria directly related to years of teaching experience. The researcher felt having teachers from all different teaching experience levels would benefit the discourse between the study participants during focus group meetings. The researcher worked to ensure there was a balance of novice teachers and veteran teachers to allow for a more comprehensive representative discourse.

Participants were randomly drawn until there was representation from all six grades. More candidates at the elementary level expressed an interest in engaging in the study than the middle school and high school levels. Of the 26 teachers who expressed an interest in participating, 16 candidates were from the elementary school level (Grades 4 and 5). Due to the higher density of

potential elementary candidates, even representation from all six grade levels was not possible.

Therefore, the researcher focused on trying to get an even representation of elementary (Grades 4–5) and secondary (Grades 6–9) teachers in the participant pool.

The average amount of teaching experience for the participant group was 14 years; they represented all core content areas, fine arts, athletics, interventions, and gifted programs. Six teachers served students at the elementary school level (Grades 4–5); two served students at the middle school level (Grades 6–8); and two served students at the high school level (Grades 9–10). To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10. Minimal personal information entered the transcripts. All study participants completed their commitment to the study process. See Table 1 for a summary of participant information.

## **Research Methodology and Analysis**

### **Single-Topic Case Study Research**

This study followed a single-topic case study research design. Qualitative case study research supports the development of essential understandings of challenging problems. Sutton and Austin (2015) explained qualitative research allowed participants to express opinions and share personal insight. A single-topic case study focuses on a central theme and aims to extend a scholarly discussion (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The study utilized accessible cases because the participants became subjects based on their willingness to participate (Creswell, 2014). The researcher collected data from the study participants and drew conclusions about the cases through the data analysis process.

An individual, several individuals, a program, an event, or an activity could all serve as cases (Creswell, 2014). The study used replication of procedures across all participants to lay a foundation for comparing the various participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2014). Each participant

had unique lived experiences with students of color providing rich data sources. The case study research methodology enabled the extension of the discourse on supporting the unique educational needs of students of color.

The researcher built a case supporting the study propositions through two sets of individuals semistructured interviews, five 1-hour focus group meetings, and field notes. Each interview consisted of open-ended questions allowing participants to share how they described culturally responsive teaching. Through the interview process, study participants were able to share how they supported students of color by using culturally responsive teaching practices. Each candidate also engaged in professional discourse around culturally responsive teaching to further their own learning through five 1-hour focus group meetings. Participation in the focus group meetings allowed participants to share their personal experiences and perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching. In the focus group meetings, discussion stems were used to probe participants' thoughts about the need to adjust approaches in their instructional practices based upon seeing a need to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices.

The funds of knowledge conceptual framework guided this study. All people derive their funds of knowledge from their own lived experiences. When people interact with others, they rely on their funds of knowledge to interpret their interactions and the world around them (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Culturally responsive teaching is dependent upon a teacher's active initiation and delivery of culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2010). As new lived experiences happen, people construct new knowledge and create new meaning aligned to the new knowledge and lived experiences. Construction of meaning built around new knowledge gained through new lived experiences directly supports this study's theoretical framework of constructivism. The analysis of the collected data was guided by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study.



## **Data Collection and Sources**

All interviews and focus group meetings were audio recorded using an iPhone. Audio recordings were transcribed and then read to obtain an overall sense of the transcribed information. The process of transcribing and reading the transcriptions was iterative and happened many times throughout the research process. The researcher met with each individual participant to review the transcriptions from the interviews and from the focus group meetings. All transcriptions were then provided to the study participants in hard copy for member checking to ensure the validity of transcriptions. Upon completion of the member checking, all hard copies were collected to ensure that all data were secure. Following the transcribing and member checking, data were organized and prepared for analysis. Initial reflections were noted about each interview and focus group meeting. Subsequently, a detailed analysis was undertaken using an open coding process generating codes for each interview and focus group meeting. Finally, analyzing the resulting codes helped to generate emerging subthemes and themes.

Information was organized and presented in a narrative passage along with tables and models helping to clarify and demonstrate the findings. The final step was to construct meaning of the data by providing a summary and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2013). The analysis of the data focused heavily on the emergent themes coming from the voices of the study participants, the literature, and the observations of the focus groups, with a particular emphasis on considering the meaning of the study participants' experiences, the beliefs they expressed, and the attitudes they presented. The interpretations compared the findings to information obtained from the literature review and past research, raised new questions, and presented insight toward possible new recommendations and implications for future consideration (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell and Miller (2000) believed the way researchers check for validity in qualitative work is one of its strengths. The researcher must check for accuracy from the viewpoint of the

researcher, the participants, and other readers of the study. Ideas such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility reinforced this concept (Creswell, 2013). The following strategies validated the findings of this study:

- Triangulation of data by using different data sources—interviews, observations and recordings of focus group meetings, and field notes—to examine and build cohesive rationalizations for the generated themes.
- Member checking when the transcripts were shared with the participants and checked for accuracy.
- Use of rich, thick narrative by using quotes from the participants related to the various themes helping connect the readers to each setting.
- Peer briefing of the study structure and purpose; two principal peers were chosen to review and ask questions about the study so the account would resonate with others beyond the researcher.

Data sources built evidence for the research, outlined through a developing rather than inflexible design lens.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative studies require analysis through careful review and synthesis of the data. Amineh and Asl (2015) explained analyzing qualitative research often follows a constructivist approach; the patterns emerge through careful review. Combined data sources enabled inductive and deductive pattern identification and theme discovery (Schulz, 2012). As recommended by Saldaña (2015) for beginning researchers, the researcher applied open and in vivo codes for research analysis and theme discovery.

Once the data was collected, the researcher employed coding procedures in order to determine subthemes and themes from transcripts and field notes. To move from the multiple

sources of raw data to themes, the researcher used Rubin and Rubin's (2005) steps of data analysis: (a) recognition, (b) examination, (c) coding, (d) sorting, and (e) synthesis. Recognition, examination, and coding involved the preparing of the data. Sorting and synthesis involved analyzing the data. Recognition was the process of reading, reviewing, and studying the transcripts and notes to determine conceptual themes important for understanding the research. Examination involved carefully exploring concepts and themes to clarify meaning and understanding. A color-coding system was used to assist in the retrieval and examination of the conceptual subthemes and themes identified across transcriptions based on:

- The study participants' descriptions of culturally responsive teaching
- Gained awareness and application of culturally responsive teaching
- Participants' lived experiences and influences toward instructional decisions
- Perceived adaptation of instructional practices based on the awareness of students of color and their diverse backgrounds

### **First-Cycle Coding**

By using in vivo coding, the researcher captured teachers' responses to the individual interview questions and focus group meetings. In vivo coding allowed for the individual views shared by the study participants to be accurately represented before new groupings and filtration took place. Each study participant was asked to respond to a series of semistructured questions. The responses to the interview questions were as diverse as the lived experiences of the participants. Many individual participant responses were very similar amid the individual differences of the teachers. The initial analysis of the transcripts revealed how participants described their personal experiences with teaching students of color.

Ultimately, the initial findings indicated teachers had limited knowledge regarding culturally responsive teaching practices at the onset of the study. The researcher observed through

professional reflection and discourse, teacher awareness and construction of new knowledge influenced teachers to more intentionally employ culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms. The participant responses in the individual interviews taking place before the focus group meetings were compared to the responses following the focus group meetings. The second set of responses showed participants gained clarity in their descriptions of what culturally responsive teaching meant to them.

For example, P10 initially described culturally responsive teaching as follows: “I do not really know. I would guess it means being aware of cultural backgrounds and differences.” In the post-focus-group interview, P10 defined culturally responsive teaching in this way:

Culturally responsive teaching is being able to relate to each kid no matter what their gender, ethnicity, race, background, if they speak English or not speak English, being able to relate to them. Being able to get the student to think and act on a different level than someone who is just teaching to every student. It’s like getting individualized education to each student no matter what they look like, no matter who their parents are, or who their grandparents are, or who their great-great-grandparents are.

Participants also gained capacity in articulating what instructional practices could be implemented to reinforce culturally responsive teaching. P7 described how instructional practices could directly influence the academic success of students of color:

By having ways to monitor my students through an ongoing manner, I was able to monitor their ability to understand the instructions, processes and content. This allows all my students [to] have the opportunity to be successful. By ensuring my actions are informed by the needs of my students, then I can also ensure students know I believe in them. Rather than just moving on, I give my students feedback that Zaretta Hammond calls actionable feedback. What this means is I ensure that if I am going to give feedback to my students, I

need to make sure what I share with them truly leads to their increased learning. If not, then what is the point?

## Second-Cycle Coding

To analyze the data while maintaining integrity, the researcher utilized a second-cycle axial coding method, specifically designed to summarize the data gathered from the first-cycle coding process (in vivo coding process). The principal objective of second-cycle coding is to gather distinct responses (subthemes) from the first cycle and merge them, forming one common theme (Saldaña, 2015). The researcher chose to use the second-cycle axial code matrix, displayed in Figure 4, because it allowed for the development of a cohesive fusion of the data collected in the first-cycle coding process, which were then organized according to themes.

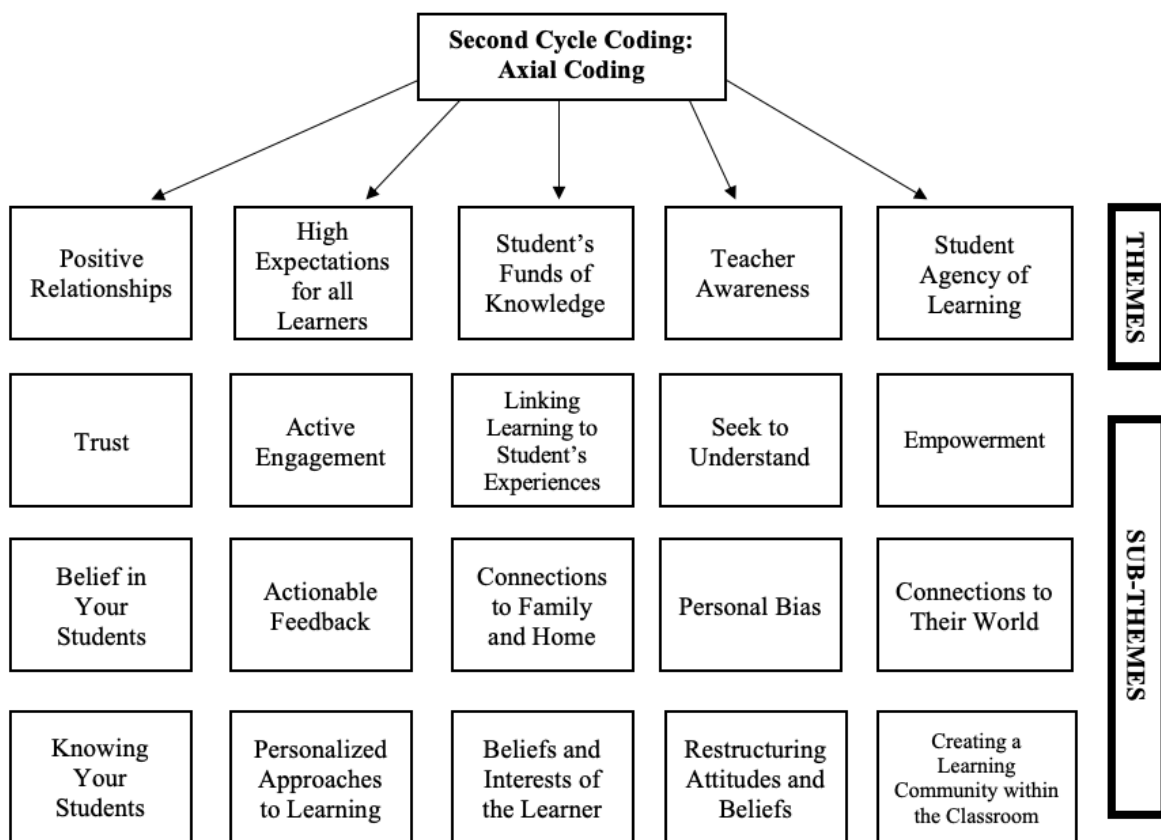


Figure 4. Second-cycle coding.

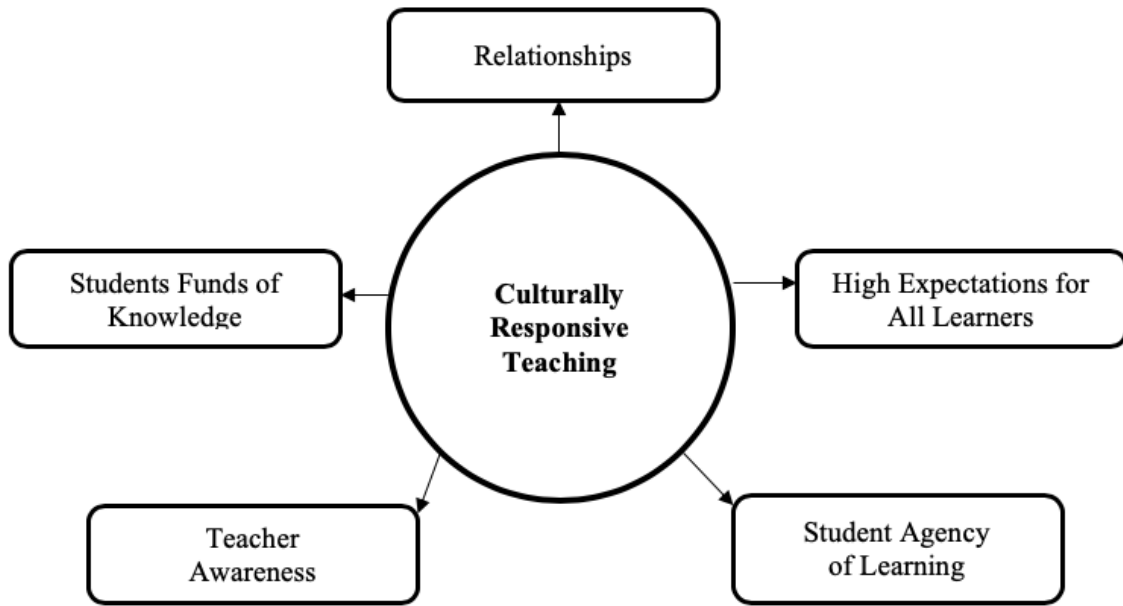
The ultimate goal of the axial coding method was to organize the data initially isolated during the first coding process (Saldaña, 2015). Axial coding allowed for identifying relationships between collected data and then reassembling them via renaming based on the most common findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Codes and themes were manually recorded using the data collected from the focus group and interview transcriptions. Throughout this process, transcriptions were reviewed multiple times to capture all pertinent information deemed valuable to this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

Individual interviews, focus group meetings, and field notes throughout the research served to inform the discussions and conclusions in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In all, the 20 interviews (10 pre-focus-group and 10 post-focus-group) and five focus group meetings involved transcription and note-taking for approximately 25 hours of talking. Beyond the initial interviews and documentation, there were an estimated 12 hours of conversation around member checking of the transcripts in person and by phone.

### **Emerging Themes**

The analysis revealed themes consistently discussed among all participants. This section provides a detailed discussion of the study findings based on the five common themes: (a) positive relationships; (b) high expectations for all learners; (c) students' funds of knowledge; (d) teacher awareness; and (e) student agency of learning. Figure 5 shows these themes.



*Figure 5.* Identified themes.

### **Emerging Subthemes**

The researcher organized the findings of this study around the five main themes that arose from the evaluation and linking of the subthemes. Refer to Table 6 to see the subthemes to create the identified themes of this study.

Table 6

*Subtheme Consolidation to Form Themes*

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Trust - Belief in Your Students - Knowing Your Students Positive Relationships
Active Engagement - Actionable Feedback - Personalized Approaches to Learning High Expectations for All Learners
Linking Learning to Student Experiences - Connections to Family and Home - Beliefs and Interests of the Learner Students' Funds of Knowledge
Seek to Understand - Personal Bias - Restructuring Attitudes and Beliefs Teacher Awareness
Empowerment - Connections to Their World - Creating a Learning Community Within the Classroom Student Agency of Learning

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**Positive Relationships**

The theme of positive relationships was an overarching focus for all participants from this study. Each participant shared several different ways in which they worked with students in order to develop a relationship of respect. Participants expressed respect was crucial for diverse students to trust them, to want to learn from them, and to be successful in school. Participants shared it was not easy finding ways to help their students gain trust in their teachers. All participants' responses centered around how relationships directly impacted or impeded the ability to connect and build trust needed to facilitate learning for all students they served, but especially for students of color.

The following participant responses illustrated the theme of positive relationships:

P2: I cannot help my students if I do not know what makes them feel safe. Trust cannot be built if they cannot feel safe with me, either.

P3: A teacher's relationship with students impacts every aspect of the student's learning.

P4: I think relationships are the key to working with all students, but especially students who may look different than their teacher.



P5: The more you know and understand what motivates a student, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what kind of support system they have, the better able you are to create an educational plan for the child to meet their needs. Understanding a child's culture/family system and building a relationship of mutual respect with the family is helpful in reaching a child. If a child feels liked and accepted, they are more likely to put forth effort especially in areas of difficulty.

P6: I think part of it has to do with trust, so knowing they can trust us to value their work/beliefs/opinions is huge.

P9: Just as my appearance affects their assumptions about me, their appearance can affect my assumptions about them. I need to know more about them, and they need to know me as a person instead of a figure at the front of the room. They need to know I care; they need to trust me, trust I am not judging or criticizing, or I will never get a sound out of them.

P10: If students realize we are working together to help them succeed, I think they are more willing to put in the effort.

### **High Expectations for All Learners**

One of the core principles of culturally responsive teaching is the belief all students can learn (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). Overall, the majority of participants were consistent in their belief high expectations for all learners were an essential part of their students' success. P3 posed a poignant question: "If teachers hesitate to present a bar that is raised, aren't we merely lowering it, and therefore widening, or at least maintaining, the gap?"

Students, when offered authentic opportunities, will rise to meet challenges placed before them in creative and effective ways (Hammond, 2015). Study participants consistently stated in order to adequately support the needs of all students, culturally responsive teachers approached students at the levels they brought to the classroom. From there, the teachers sought to design

learning experiences directly aligned with interests and world events linking students of color to the content being taught. Participant responses listed below illustrated how participants felt high expectations for all learners were critical.

P1: Students must understand the expected academic and social behaviors for their classroom to experience the most from the class.

P3: We must always provide challenging and interesting work allowing disadvantaged students to be motivated by the learning experience. We must be careful to avoid “lowering our expectations” on the assumption this closes gaps, when, conversely, it widens them.

P4: The first step of lesson design is to know what you want students to learn and think about who your ‘who’ are—what are their interests, what motivates them, what is important to them, what activities do they prefer?

P5: Understanding all students are different also helps me to remember expectations should not get lowered for certain students, but the time I expect students to learn may differ, as well I am responsible for approaching learning like my students . . . differently for each student.

P7: By ensuring my actions are informed by the needs of my students, then I can also ensure students know I believe in them. If I am going to give feedback to my students, I need to make sure what I share with them truly leads to their increased learning.

### **Students’ Funds of Knowledge**

Culturally responsive teaching happens in individual classrooms with teachers scaffolding their curriculum with students’ funds of knowledge and acting as warm demanders with high expectations of all students (Gay, 2010). Warm demanders are teachers holding students to high levels of accountability but do so in a warm and supportive way (Delpit, 2006). When the participants were asked to share what they felt was important for teachers serving students of

color, they conveyed in their individual responses the overarching message that it was important to celebrate and embrace their unique qualities and help the students feel the lived experiences of students of color are valuable capital toward the learning of all students. Getting to know the students' background is essential in order to teach diverse groups of students successfully. Knowing about their students' lived experiences, interests, home, and family allows teachers to make crucial connections to their students of color and the curriculum. Listed below are participant responses relating to the theme of student funds of knowledge.

P1: Scaffolding knowledge through students' experiences and the content in order to allow students to achieve at high levels will help students connect to the curriculum being taught and also allows students to see their own beliefs and experiences can be honored in their learning experiences.

P2: Encourag[ing] students to offer examples of their home life and family to illustrate points or to answer questions helps students learn better by connecting to the learning better.

P4: If we use culturally responsive teaching techniques and strategies to connect to students, we have created some influence with the scholar.

P5: If you do not understand where that student is coming from, then you are making believe they are all the same, and they are not. If you are going to be effective in the classroom, you have to be able to know where that student comes from.

P8: Showing the value of students' cultural and linguistic resources and viewing this knowledge as capital to build on rather than as a barrier to learning helps me ensure I can hold myself accountable to bring all my students along. My students love to see how their culture fits into their learning.

P10: Not feeling welcomed or accepted could lead to struggling in school. Another reason [for not feeling welcomed] could be because education is not valued in their culture. I think it is important to note the reason for the struggle is different in each student; however, I believe it would be extremely helpful for teachers to understand the reason for each student's struggle, but sometimes these topics are really difficult to bring up or talk about.

### **Teacher Awareness**

Researchers suggested teachers' awareness and perceptions of working with students of color often determined how successful students of color were in school (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Participants shared participating in discourse with other educators around culturally responsive teaching helped them to understand more about serving students of color. Kong (2014) shared through interactive dialogue around learning, construction of meaningful knowledge is heightened. Participants shared their awareness around how their own actions prevented them from reaching their students of color would not have been developed without the honest conversations held. Participants shared their interactive conversations around culturally responsive teaching allowed them to become more mindful of the role culture can have on how students learn. The gained clarity around culture and its impact on learning assisted participants in making sense of their daily experiences in the classroom.

Participants consistently shared their lack of awareness about personal bias (linked to their own funds of knowledge) prevented them from reaching all of their students. In the post-focus-group interviews, most participants shared though their intentions were good, they inadvertently contributed to the failure of their students by not adapting instructional approaches to incorporate sufficient connections to the content for learners. Curricula used by public schools often lack opportunities for students of color to connect to the content being taught (Gay, 2002). Below are examples of participant responses related to the theme of teacher awareness.

P1: Since being a participant in this study, I have become really cognizant, or more aware, I should say, of comments teachers and staff are making at [my] school, and some of them are really inappropriate and almost disrespectful to students.

P3: Bias is exacerbated in many ways—generationally, regionally, based on media reports both real and inflated. In my opinion, the only way to combat bias is to have positive personal experiences with people different than oneself. That takes intention and open-mindedness.

P6: I ask for and receive feedback from the students as well, but I also look at their knowledge throughout the year. Are they learning? If some are not, what do I need to do? Collaboration with teachers about how to teach certain [learning standards] is helpful.

P7: All life experiences have the potential to create bias in people unless there is someone to guide you through it and teach you what a negative impact it can have on your life. Beliefs are clear and we are sure of them, but our biases are often subconscious thoughts many people do not realize they carry, nor the consequences that can come from them.

P8: To be honest, awareness of all students and the differences they bring to the classroom is not something I have seen done or expected of teachers to do, at each campus I've worked at, enough.

P10: Having low income is one thing, but the stressors brought on by their circumstance, coupled with the unknowns and conversations they overhear, is the perfect recipe for an achievement gap. It doesn't take much to help a student overcome these obstacles and jump over the hurdle towards success. I have seen it done. Sadly, many teachers want to help students succeed, but are not truly aware of [what] really is going on in the lives of their students.

## **Student Agency of Learning**

Student agency of learning directly correlates with students actively engaging in and having a voice in their own learning experiences (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001). Culturally responsive instruction thrives in a classroom climate of collaborative learning, social-emotional support, and mutual respect among students and between students and the teacher. In addition, a culturally responsive classroom climate includes a culture of high expectations for all, and activities supporting social and emotional safety, cooperative and collaborative learning, and student voice (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). Collectively, participants shared they felt it was critical to actively engage their students in the ownership of their learning. In the focus groups, it often came back to the fact when students felt they were dependent on the teacher for all the information or thinking, then students (no matter who they were) experienced limited learning. When that was coupled with limited connections to students' lived experiences and backgrounds, learned helplessness became a coping mechanism for many students. Participants shared when students had active agency and engagement in the learning, they were empowered to not only participate in the classroom learning experiences but take learning beyond the classroom or school. The researcher used the below statements to help identify the theme of student agency of learning.

P1: My classroom environment can be an important element in culturally responsive teaching by providing [students] a voice and by providing [students] opportunities to 'rewrite' their brains to be active participants in their learning.

P2: We have to help our students to understand they do not have to relive what their parents may have experienced in school.

P3: Removing ourselves as the 'keeper of knowledge' is difficult for a lot of teachers, but I do think it is key in being able to give over the driver's seat of education to the student.

P4: Helping kids shift their thinking from feeling like they are stuck to understanding they have power over their future helps actually to level the playing field.

P5: Creating an environment that allows students to participate in their learning environment actively allows my students to discover their own abilities to learn. Through showing students how they are honestly doing in my class, but also helping them understand how close they are to success encourages them to try even harder rather than give up.

P8: To create an environment where students know they are focusing on their own learning, and mistakes are part of learning, requires I help my students understand what success looks like. I cannot expect them to reach success if they are not able to understand what it looks like.

P9: The classroom environment is important in culturally responsive teaching because it is either going to be a place where students feel accepted and safe, or it's going to be a place of mistrust and fear. Creating an environment of acceptance, safety, and open-mindedness is vital to the academic success of students from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

### **Presentation of Data and Results**

The researcher used two individual interviews with each participant and five focus group meetings to gather data to explore the research questions. The researcher explored how participant experiences in professional discourse around culturally responsive teaching practices affected participants' description of culturally responsive teaching. This study also explored what participants identified as effective culturally responsive instructional practices following their participation in the focus group meetings.

There was an evident change, through gaining personal awareness, in each participant's description of culturally responsive teaching and how they perceived culturally responsive

teaching in the classroom. Refer to Table 7 to see the participant responses before and after participating in the focus group meetings. Participants attributed the change in how they defined culturally responsive teaching to their new meaning-making and construction of new understandings around how to best serve students of color gained through participating in the focus group meetings.



Table 7

*Participant Responses Before and After Focus Group Meetings*

How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?		
	Before focus group meetings	After focus group meetings
P1	The recognition that students from differing backgrounds bring with them different motivations and understandings.	Culturally responsive teaching involves the skills and permission to build processes that are scientifically valid for scaffolding ALL students to appropriate states of cognition for learning. It is an understanding of the role that culture plays in the wiring of student behavior.
P2	Culturally responsive teaching is meeting all students' needs.	It means using the students' background knowledge and experiences that their particular cultural heritage has given them to better meet their educational needs.
P3	Culturally responsive teaching is known to me as a concept of being intentional to the cultural differences that exist between us as a tool to be more engaging or authentic to students.	Culturally responsive teaching is meeting the needs of the students and trying to produce the best, most conducive environment for learning. You have to know their needs to meet their needs, but it's a process. Young people are dealing with so many things at once, and I don't mean just at home, I mean within themselves because they are growing, that it's hard for them to realize quickly what is in front of them that is right, and what they are supposed to be doing and what is the right thing to be doing. It takes time.
P4	To me, culturally responsive teaching means that the teacher is not "blind to" each student's ethnicity and culture, but rather embraces and tries to understand who each student is and how their ethnicity and culture impacts their beliefs/thoughts/actions. I remember people saying things like, "I don't see color"—but I think to be a culturally responsive teacher, you need to get to know each student and their background and realize how their ethnicity and culture can impact them in the classroom.	To me, it [culturally responsive teaching] is breaking down barriers, judgements, fears, and concerns that students and even their families have experienced. It is important to allow students to ask questions, as well as being celebrated for their unique background. The students can share their story with one another and learn about different cultures in order to form meaningful relationships with each other. So, we have to learn about our culture from where we are from, and we have to learn about the culture from here where we live . . . and most importantly, we must learn about the cultures of all the students in our classroom and help them learn about mine and the cultures of

How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?		
Before focus group meetings		all the other students in the classroom. If we are a community of learners, then we must
After focus group meetings		
P4		understand that all the people in the community contribute and have different experiences that impact the way that we think, believe and act.
P5	It [culturally responsive teaching] means making the classroom as positive as it can be so students from all different backgrounds can feel comfortable learning—taking away as many barriers based in their culture as I can that might impact their education negatively.	Culturally responsive teaching means seeing the whole child and understanding how their culture and family system impact the way they see and react to the world. It is important to try to accept and embrace their customs and norms and include them in classroom discussions while helping the child to understand the customs and norms of the society in which they are living.
P6	When you consider the design work of [study site], it is critical that teachers respond to the needs of the students whether culturally or otherwise. To me, teachers should be willing to answer their students' questions, even if it means doing some research in order to respond in a culturally appropriate way, through positive relationships with families and student-centered instruction.	Everything we do, how we think, and our family rituals are based in our cultures. We have to think about our values and our morals and where those come from.
P7	To me it [culturally responsive teaching] means teaching all of your students in a respectful manner and embracing the cultures that are within your classroom. As an educator it is my obligation to make sure that everyone represented in my classroom is treated fairly and without bias.	Culturally responsive teaching means understanding the different cultures that are among the students and be able to know that there's a difference and understand that the same doesn't apply to this child as it does to this child. We must let them know that everybody's different. And that although we have different experiences and different ideas, it doesn't mean that we're that different anyway.
P8	To be culturally responsive means to be aware and sensitive to where students come from, what they bring with them when they come to school—background, pressures, and other things that they live with.	Understanding everybody's culture and understanding what they bring to the group is important. So that is really important in understanding how each kid works so you get the best out of them. And in my many years, some teachers still come in with that old-school

How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?	
Before focus group meetings	After focus group meetings
P9	<p>It means learning who your students are on many levels in order to teach them most effectively.</p> <p>“this is how we went; it was good enough for us; it’s good enough for you,” and that just doesn’t work.</p> <p>Culturally responsive teaching is understanding where they [students] come from, and that’s racially, their ethnicity, socioeconomics, their town where they are sitting. It all makes up that person, so in order for me to teach them and meet them where they’re at, I need to understand how all those things are combined with that person taking place in my classroom. I embrace the tenets of Capturing Kids’ Hearts because of how much a handshake or high-five at the door teaches me about a student, and how much I learn from the Good Things they share.</p>
P10	<p>I don’t really know. I would guess it means being aware of cultural backgrounds and differences.</p> <p>Culturally responsive teaching is being able to relate to each kid no matter what their gender, ethnicity, race, background, if they speak English or not speak English, being able to relate to them. Being able to get the student to think and act on a different level than someone who is just teaching to every student. It’s like getting individualized education to each student no matter what they look like, no matter who their parents are, or who their grandparents are, or who their great-great-grandparents are.</p>

Each participant was interviewed individually to elicit responses that would reflect what instructional practices they identified as effective in serving students of color. The individual responses to the interview questions and the group discourse among the teachers during the five focus group meetings were coetaneous in identifying patterns or themes in how participants perceived effective culturally responsive teaching practices. See Table 8 for teacher responses that share their perceptions of these effective practices.

Table 8

*Teacher Description of Effective Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices*

What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effectively serving students of color?				
Themes				
Positive relationships	High expectations for all learners	Students' funds of knowledge	Teacher awareness	Student agency of learning
Subthemes				
trust	active engagement	linking learning to student experiences	seek to understand	empowerment
belief in your students	actionable feedback personalized approaches to learning	connections to family and home	personal bias	connections to their world
knowing your students		beliefs and interests of the learner	restructuring attitudes and beliefs	creating a learning community within the classroom
				Provide students with high expectations and acknowledge their success and area for growth.
Common instructional practices				
Welcoming students by name as they enter the classroom.	Commitment to every student's success.	Scaffolding learning and chunking into manageable parts allows students to access their past knowledge to construct new meaning and knowledge.	Teachers need training.	Acknowledge all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions.
Arranging the classroom to accommodate discussion.	Fundamental belief that all students can learn.		Recognize the value in teachers knowing the cultural backgrounds represented in their classrooms.	Use "wait time" to give students time to think before they respond to your question.
	Learning is a continuous process.			
	Learning does not look the same for every student.			Students engaged in talking about their own learning.

Common instructional practices				
Respect for cultural differences.	Students must understand the expected behaviors for their classroom to experience the most of the class.	Affiliation—students learn more when they know that what they bring to the classroom contributes to the learning for all the students in the class.	Knowing what students are doing in the classroom and familiarities of student culture and background are both essential when preparing lessons.	Maintain a balance between teacher-assigned and student-selected tasks.
Importance of building positive relationships with their students.	Instill and create a community of belief in students' success.			Empowering students to be their own learners.
Creating caring, respectful, and inclusive classroom.	Set high expectations for all students. Scaffold knowledge through students' experiences and the content in order to allow students to achieve at high levels.	Utilize students' cultural knowledge and experiences.	Knowledge of students' home and community life.	Create an environment that allows students to participate in their learning environment actively.
Ability to effectively communicate with their students played a significant role in their students' academic success.	Use class building and team building. Activities to promote peer support for academic achievement.	Connecting to their past lived experiences, culture, and community. Take the time to meet the different needs of their diverse students through working with them based on their needs.	Teacher knowledge and beliefs. Using body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important.	Provide an equal and substantial education for all students to use as a vehicle of self-empowerment. Guide students to learn more than they knew—to take them from where they were to new learning.
Students work hard when they trust the teacher and believe that the teacher is being honest with them. We acknowledge their success and area for growth.	Structuring heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning. Giving students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance.	Learn from students.	Ensuring bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect	Guide students to further than they have ever been. Create an environment where students know that they are focusing on their own learning and that mistakes are part of learning.

Common instructional practices				
Not every student will pass, but they should all be making progress. Develop a relationship of respect with them.	Using multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content.	Be mindful to apply curriculum to real-life circumstances.	students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.	Cultivate a community of learners and that helps each other learn.
By understanding the students' culture, the teacher connects to the student in a way that trust and relationships can be cultivated.	Asking higher-order questions equitably of high- and low-achieving students.	Encourage students to offer examples of their home life and family to illustrate points or answer questions. Using students' real-life.	Seeking multiple perspectives. Asking students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction.	Acknowledge that there are multiple ways to acquire and demonstrate knowledge.
	Providing individual help to high- and low-achieving students.	Experiences to connect school learning to students' lives.		Tie curriculum to family connections.
	Clarify key concepts and generalizations.			Be inclusive of all students' experiential knowledge.
There to support students with any needs, whether academic or personal.	Use assessment as a teaching tool.	Show value of students' cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build on rather than as a barrier to learning.		Teach students to be metacognitive.
Building relationships with the families also connects to building	Provide students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion.			Explaining and modeling positive self-talk.
				Maintain a student-centered environment.
				Provide multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard.
				Use probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer.

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Common instructional practices	
relationships with the students in the classroom.	Identify students' current knowledge before instruction.

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### Summary

Researchers noted there has been a significant amount of discussion around the lack of academic progress made by students of color (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015). Students do not struggle because of their cultural background or because they come from poverty. Students are not succeeding at the rates of achievement they should because the school systems are not ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students (Hammond, 2015; Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Reardon, 2014). Teachers are not providing students of color the same opportunities in the classroom to learn as White students (Reardon, 2014).

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the findings of the two research questions posed by this research study.

R1: How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?

R2: What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effective in serving students of color?

Qualitative data were used to interpret and explore the relationship between White female teachers' personal descriptions of culturally responsive teaching practices and how these perceptions affected their instructional practices in serving students of color. Although the collected data revealed the individual experiences, understandings, perceptions, and beliefs of participants, five themes emerged from the findings: (a) positive relationships; (b) high

expectations for all learners; (c) students' funds of knowledge; (d) teacher awareness; and (e) student agency of learning.

In the final chapter, the findings of this study are placed within the broader context of education today. The researcher discusses the limitations, offers suggestions for next steps, and summarizes this research study for the reader.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This single-topic case study was intended to inform how teachers supported students of color in a culturally responsive way. This research study explored teacher perceptions of their lived experiences as classroom teachers, their description and definition of culturally responsive teaching practices, and what culturally responsive teaching practices were perceived as effective in serving students of color. Through this study, the researcher gained information to further studies in culturally responsive teaching. Chapters 1 and 2 defined and described culturally responsive teaching and how the use of culturally responsive teaching practices can best serve the needs of students of color. Chapter 2 identified the position of the dissertation within the framework of previous scholarly work on the topic. Within this chapter, scholarly writing already critiqued was used as a base of evidence to identify the conceptual and theoretical frameworks providing perimeters for this study. The literature review provided framing for the qualitative methodology used in the gathering of data and the analysis of participant responses throughout the study. Chapter 3 explained the methodology for the current study, and Chapter 4 detailed the study results. This chapter summarized and discussed the findings relative to the literature review presented in Chapter 2, as well as relevant, updated literature. The limitations associated with this study were also examined. The chapter concluded with an examination of the implications of the study results for practice, policy, and theory, along with recommendations for further research. Two questions guided the research:

R1: How do White female teachers describe culturally responsive teaching practices?

R2: What instructional practices do White female teachers identify as effective in serving students of color?

## **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative single-topic case study research design. The researcher utilized semistructured, individual, face-to-face interviews, and a series of five focus group meetings to gather data for this study. These methodologies served as the foundation of this research. The study was framed around participating teachers' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching practices. The study also considered how the participant's personal lived experiences influenced instructional decision making. The researcher captured the experiences of the participants accurately by audio recording all interviews and focus group meetings on an iPhone (Creswell, 2014). The data were analyzed and synthesized through coding using the constructivist learning theory. The study relied on inductive strategies for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to develop themes from the coding of the data.

Throughout this study, data were collected around how each participant had different experiences, perceptions, and new learning guided by their funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge are the prior learned behaviors, customs, and understandings people bring to the current experience (Hammond, 2015; Reardon, 2014). The study relied on an iterative and interactive process relying on participants engaging in the discourse around their construction of new learning. The new learning was bridged with the participant's prior knowledge. Their past experiences and positionality guided participants' construction of their new knowledge. The researcher focused on collecting adequate data to discern and document how participants' constructed knowledge guided their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. The constructivist theory is guided by the premise learning is an ongoing process of establishing a direct link between newly constructed knowledge by participants with their already existing knowledge (Bryant, Kastrup, Udo, Hislop, Shefner, & Mallow, 2013).

## **Significance**

Culturally responsive teaching is often viewed as a series of actions teachers take creating an equitable classroom. This study assumes culturally responsive teaching is much more than just using a checklist of teaching strategies for instructional delivery. The researcher examined how self-reflection added to participants' understanding of effective teaching practices for students of color. The majority of teachers serving students of color continue to be White women who have different lived experiences, perceive the world differently and have expectations not matching the lived experiences and expectations held by students of color (Reardon, 2014). Addressing the unique needs of students of color continues to be a significant challenge schools face today (Au, 2009; Cummins, 2007). In multiple studies, teachers expressed their concern they are inadequately prepared to serve the unique needs of students of color (Au, 2009; Cummins, 2007). This single-topic case study provided results illustrating the significance of teacher self-reflection and collegial conversations around their practice in serving students of color. This research supported the proposition White female teachers wanted to serve the unique needs of students of color but did not have the necessary awareness to truly understand the implications of their beliefs, understandings, and actions.

Participants engaged in focus group meetings having a specific focused discussion topic around culturally responsive teaching. Participants were encouraged to share their own opinions in the focus group meetings. They were also encouraged to respond to other participant's comments. Through participating in the focus group meetings, participants realized that while they believed they were intentional in serving students of color appropriately, they were not providing equitable learning opportunities for all students. The open and reflective conversations between the participants surfaced realizations around instructional practices being implemented, but yet did not yield culturally responsive learning environments. Before students could be served effectively,

participants needed to understand the meaning of culturally responsive teaching. Participants also needed to understand how their funds of knowledge and constructions of meaning could either enhance or impede the learning of students they were serving. Through reflective dialogue, participants learned practices and points of view they previously did not hold. Participants constructed new knowledge directly related to implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. The constructed knowledge was gained through open dialogue eliciting shared lived experiences of all study participants. Through this newly constructed knowledge, participants noted more intentionality in getting to know about their students of color. Getting to know more about their students influenced how participants adapted instructional practices to meet the unique needs of their students of color. Participants noted as they constructed new knowledge around serving students of color, their discourse also changed. The more they learned about culturally responsive teaching, the more participants engaged in more in-depth conversations around understanding each student.

This study contributes to research by sharing teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. Through its findings, this study also highlights the participants' construction of new knowledge around culturally responsive teaching through ongoing discourse and self-reflection. The discourse focused on culturally responsive teaching and its impact on learning for students of color. This study explored the participant perceptions of culturally responsive teaching and the newly constructed meaning around culturally responsive teaching. This study also explored the impact of participant discourse on their professional practice in serving students of color. This research showed the importance and impact of continued dialogue around culturally responsive teaching in contrast to isolated professional development experiences. In continued participant discussions around professional practice and designing learning experiences for students of color, this study may be instructive for other educators, educational leaders, and researchers in moving

theoretical and conceptual philosophies into practice. This study contributes to scholarly research on teacher self-reflection and personal and professional growth through ongoing discourse around their lived experiences in serving students of color.

### **Summary of the Results**

Today's classrooms are increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2014), yet with these increases in student diversity, there is a continued disparity in academic achievement between students of color and White students (Reardon, 2014). Race, culture, and class directly influenced the differences in academic success between White students and students of color (Anderson & Cowart, 2012). The racial and ethnic makeup of classroom teachers, as well as their personal lived experiences, did not match the continued variation of the student representations in classrooms. These cultural and background differences contributed to the challenges participants, as female White teachers, faced in creating learning experiences directly linked to the unique needs of students of color.

Culture derives from values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors learned from others, often family members (Garcia et al., 2011). With the differences in culture and race between the majority White female teachers and the students of color they served, there was a notable need for teachers to develop and apply culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2010). Teachers' use of practices serving to amplify all students' ability to learn (especially marginalized students of color) has never been as meaningful as today (Garcia et al., 2011; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2015).

A direct connection was seen between the ability of participants, as White female teachers, to understand students' learning, their ability to connect to culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the academic successes the students experienced in the classroom (Fuglei, 2014). Throughout the study, participants indicated their biases had to be explored in order to serve students of color best. Through this awareness, participants became cognizant of the fact they, as

White female teachers, may construct knowledge and expect outcomes differently than students of color. In the post-focus-group interviews, participants consistently shared they were able to better serve their students of color by seeking to understand the lived experiences of their students. In these post-focus-group interviews, participants stated they had a better understanding of their students' lived experiences and how these lived experiences influenced the construction of knowledge. Participants gained clarity around how direct interactions students had with teachers, content, and peers impacted learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Participants discussed the power of collaborative discourse around serving students through collective ownership of the success of all students. Participants acknowledged professional learning embedded within practice became organic through participating in frequent discourse around their instructional practices. The shared discourse around student learning took away participant excuses and blame centered on student deficits. The newly acquired clarity enhanced their ability to see students' learning as an individual experience. P1 shared, "If you know what to teach, but you don't know how to reach your students, then learning will not happen."

Discourse among the study participants led to clarity around how their own lived experiences could negatively impact the academic success of their students of color. Participants' and learners' funds of knowledge were discussed by participants in the focus group meetings. With this gained awareness, participants began to dialogue about how students' lived experiences varied from their own, and directly contributed to expressions of learning differing from what participants would expect of students of color. It was acknowledged participants, being White and female, expected responses that would assimilate to their lived experiences, rather than the lived experiences of students of color. The discourse around funds of knowledge contributed to the construction of knowledge contributing to the participants' understanding of their students beyond academic performance. Rather than seeing the lack of academic success as a student deficit,

participants began questioning what could be teacher-, content-, or school-imposed barriers standing in the way of student achievement. The dialogue was rich as teachers focused on their definition and understanding of culturally responsive teaching.

Participants' new understanding of funds of knowledge allowed participants to see they were contributing to the academic failure of their students rather than the academic success of their students. Participants began to understand they did not know enough about their students to best serve their unique needs, through capitalizing on their students' funds of knowledge. Through the knowledge of students' cultural influences such as past experiences, beliefs, and interpretations of constructed knowledge, participants were able to create learning experiences more relevant and effectively bridged students' prior knowledge to the new content being presented (Gay, 2010). Students were able to connect to the content and saw value in what they were learning. Participants explored adaptations of instructional practices that accommodated and scaffolded content to help all learners succeed.

Participants evaluated their perceptions of their students and actively worked to change their thinking around what strengths and needs their students had. Through building stronger relationships with their students of color, participants were able to design more personalized approaches to teaching and learning. Examples of these adaptations were:

- small group instruction
- one-to-one instruction
- station rotations
- use of digital resources
- partner work

Participants designed and adapted learning experiences helping students of color better connect the content to their diverse cultures, lived experiences, and learning needs. These actions allowed

participants to successfully implement culturally responsive teaching practices within the classroom.

Participants became aware of how curriculum and content resources were not aligned to the lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs of their students. Participant dialogue expanded as they discussed how curriculum and content could have embedded microaggressive statements. Microaggressions are daily talk, nonverbal communications, and civic affronts, rejections, or slurs, either implicit or deliberate, projecting adverse, deprecating, or deleterious statements derived from stereotypes associated with traditionally marginalized groups (Sue, 2010). Through the discourse in the focus group meetings, participants realized implicit biases held by those who wrote the curriculum allowed for unintentional microaggressive statements to be shared in the participants' teaching.

Participants noted the disconnect between relevant content and learning experiences perpetuated the wide disparity in academic achievement between White students and students of color (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Research showed curriculum, content, and instructional practices used by today's schools were primarily written around the lived experiences of White middle-class educators (Orosco, 2010; Orosco & O'Connor, 2011). Participants discovered how important it was to review the curriculum and ensure relevant connections to their students were embedded into the curriculum. As participants learned the importance of helping students connect their lived experiences to the new content being taught, they adapted their approach to teaching. Participants used the information they knew about their students to scaffold the curriculum and content to help students of color experience success in their learning.

Participants did not come out of their teacher preparation programs readily prepared to implement culturally responsive teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). No matter how prepared they felt they were to serve the unique needs of students of color,



participants learned there was no one suitable way to serve all students best. All students are different, and their strengths, needs, and funds of knowledge were different as well. Ongoing participation in self-reflection was critical for participants to serve the needs of their students of color best. Participants, as White female teachers, often had lived experiences differing from their students of color. Through confronting personal biases, participants openly discussed how their instructional moves were about teacher comfort and familiarity rather than student needs. The discourse was driven by reflection linking current experiences to previous learning, causing shifts in prior understandings of culturally responsive teaching. Reflection on practice caused participants to have personal accountability toward ensuring the needs of all learners were considered. Participants gained a broader lens to evaluate the impact of their teaching on the learning of students of color. Participants saw personal responsibility in ensuring every student had equitable opportunities to experience engaging and challenging learning.

### **Discussion of the Results**

Teachers have not been prepared to think beyond their own lived experiences (Gay, 2013). Participants discovered expectations they thought were equitable for all students were not equitable for their students of color. Teachers' expectations for students of color were not appropriate, because their expectations matched the outcomes typically influenced by the funds of knowledge White female teachers traditionally brought with them to the classroom. The mismatched expectations often differed tremendously from the experiences of students of color (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Pollack, 2013). When students of color felt understood and recognized for their unique or diverse perspectives, they were more likely to share and participate in the learning experiences of their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Teachers needed to develop and apply culturally responsive teaching practices to leverage cultural diversity in their classrooms (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

## **R1: How Do White Female Teachers Describe Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices?**

Equitable education for students of color has been the topic of many studies (Allington, 2011; Briggs, Perkins, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2010; Duke, 2011; Duke & Block, 2012; Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). However, there was limited research on how teachers' self-reflection on professional practice and active engagement in collegial professional discourse allowed for an evolved understanding of what culturally responsive teaching practices meant. Through focusing on culturally responsive teaching practices and their impact on student learning, participants gained a new awareness around how important it was to take each student's unique needs into account when planning. Having honest conversations around whether the learning experiences reached all students empowered participants to have honest conversations around student needs rather than student deficits.

Through this study, participants' self-reflection and lived experiences directly influenced how culturally responsive teaching practices were perceived and described by participants. Findings from this study indicated when participants were allowed to engage in discourse around their professional practice and shared personal experiences, participants gained conceptual understanding and constructed new meaning around culturally responsive teaching. Participants discovered often, teacher practice was driven by what students failed rather than on what student supports were needed to move student learning forward. This discovery initiated a shift in the participants' motivation toward inquiry-based conversations around teaching and learning. Participants began to seek understanding around why their past instructional practices were not impacting students of color as they had anticipated they would. Without teachers having a deeper understanding of how to best serve students of color, the continual gap between the achievement of White students and students of color will continue to grow (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nieto, 2013).

Multiple participants shared their original perceptions of culturally responsive teaching linked directly to specific strategies and activities used by the teacher. Through participating in the study, participants constructed new knowledge allowing them to see that instructional practices were valid only when teachers could link these practices to the needs and cultures of the students served. Culturally responsive teaching was now seen by participants as more of a process rather than an array of strategies implemented off a checklist. Below, four common misconceptions linked to interpreting the meaning of culturally responsive teaching are listed:

1. Multiculturalism and social justice education are the same as culturally responsive teaching.
2. Culturally responsive teachers must first address implicit bias.
3. Culturally responsive teaching is built on relationships and student efficacy.
4. Culturally responsive teaching is about having the right teaching strategies in place.

(Hammond, 2015)

All of the statements above were critical components to be considered when attempting to create a culturally responsive learning environment. However, these were not isolated definitions of culturally responsive teaching. A key finding the research showed was culturally responsive teaching was derived through intentional practices that directly bridged the cultural mismatch existing between students of color and the participants, their White female teachers. At the beginning of the study, many participants shared a description of culturally responsive teaching focusing on teacher actions rather than a conceptual understanding of what culturally responsive teaching was. Many participants perceived if a teacher did a specific action or held a particular belief, they were a culturally responsive teacher.

Culturally responsive teaching was not the same as focusing on multiculturalism or social justice education (Hammond, 2015). The focus on celebrating diversity by recognizing culturally

specific holidays or foods did not equate to culturally responsive teaching. Participants noted many cultures began to be clustered together through this mindset. Rather than honoring the multiple cultures represented within the school community, different cultures became marginalized. The initial discourse in focus group meetings confirmed this misconception. There was a discussion about making sure certain holidays or pictures honoring individual heritages were visible in the classroom. P10 stated, “During Hispanic Heritage Month students are encouraged to bring different types of food representing the Hispanic heritage.” P8 joined in and contributed “students like to hear music they are used to listening to.”

Though these statements might have been accurate, they were generalizing cultures that often did not have direct similarities. Learning about cultures was essential and enhanced the learning environment. Learning about student cultures did not directly enhance student learning. Instead, this new knowledge empowered teachers to appropriately design learning experiences enhancing student learning through linking to students’ culture. Culturally responsive teaching practices used the lived experiences of all the learners in the classroom to help design learning experiences building a common approach to learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nieto, 2013). Learning was best when all students contributed to the community of learning. Individual students’ funds of knowledge directly influenced how each student experienced education and how students identified learning within their own lives (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nieto, 2013).

Many participants linked culturally responsive teaching with social justice education (Hammond, 2015). Social justice education focused on equity in education. Through focusing on the design of culturally responsive learning experiences, participants were able to provide equitable learning opportunities for students of color. Equitable learning opportunities allowed all students to learn at high levels. The participants were critical to ensuring equitable learning opportunities happened for all learners. Through participating in this study, participants discovered

many culturally responsive teaching strategies helped to cultivate this type of learning environment. Social justice was an essential lever to instructional excellence. Instructional excellence was not about knowing all the content. Participants realized content knowledge alone could not serve the needs of all students. Participants became aware content knowledge had to be blended with students' funds of knowledge, which facilitated the opportunity for learners to link past learning experiences with the new content and concepts being experienced. Participants discovered this could only happen when learning experiences were designed around the individual students within the classroom rather than just the content being presented. Culturally responsive teaching focused on collectively implementing structures and strategies to build the capacity in all students to learn at high levels. P2 shared, "It [culturally responsive teaching] means using the students' background knowledge and experiences their particular cultural heritage has given them to meet their educational needs better."

Through their active participation in the focus group meetings, participants' descriptions of culturally responsive teaching evolved into a more student-centric focus. Incorporating many attributes to meet all students where they were academically and socially was deemed critical by study participants. In order to do this, participants had to use their students' unique lived experiences, cultures, and beliefs to drive future learning. P10 shared:

Culturally responsive teaching is being able to relate to each kid no matter what their gender, ethnicity, race, background, if they speak English or not speak English, being able to relate to them. Being able to get the student to think and act on a different level than someone who is just teaching to every student. It is like getting individualized education to each student no matter what they look like, no matter who their parents are, or who their grandparents are, or who their great-great-grandparents are.

A second misconception about culturally responsive teaching was in order to be a culturally responsive teacher, a teacher had to first identify and address implicit bias (Hammond, 2015). Understanding what bias each participant held was critical to increasing the impact on learning for students of color. It was noted participants must first be willing to change the way they taught in order to be open to exploring why certain instructional approaches were successful in supporting the needs of all learners. Though understanding and reflection on implicit bias were critical, instructional practices were often the first critical move (Hammond, 2015). Participants felt they had to be willing, first, to explore the implementation of different instructional strategies. The willingness to shift instructional moves then allowed the participants to see potential impacts on student learning. As biases were explored further, participants became aware of how adapting instructional practices aligned with the needs of students of color directly.

Participants felt they held high expectations for all their learners and actively believed all students could learn. However, they felt ill-equipped in knowing what instructional moves would best serve the needs of students of color. P8 shared:

I think teachers reflect on their students all the time. I am always thinking of ways to reach, teach, and connect to my students, ways of challenging and pushing them to be their best. I just am not sure how to best do so. I need more training in serving my students, especially as our student demographics continue to become more diverse.

Participating in the focus groups led to participants challenging their fundamental understanding or description of culturally responsive teaching (Frederick, Cave, & Perencevich, 2010). P10 initially stated she did not know what culturally responsive teaching was. Upon completion of the focus groups, P10 was able to articulate this definition of culturally responsive teaching:

Being able to get the student to think and act on a different level than someone who is just teaching to every student. It is like getting individualized education to each student no

matter what they look like, no matter who their parents are, or who their grandparents are, or who their great-great-grandparents are.

Building strong relationships was a critical component in creating a thriving learning environment for all students. Helping students build self-efficacy was also a critical factor in student learning. These isolated steps were not culturally responsive teaching, but instead instructional moves directly contributing to creating a culturally responsive teaching environment. Culturally responsive teaching practices directly linked multiple facets of teaching and learning in order to bring all learners to high levels of cognitive capacity. Through culturally responsive teaching practices, students were empowered to have agency in their learning. Students gained agency in many ways. As seen in Table 9, students began to gain an understanding and agency of their own pathways in learning rather than depending on the teacher to control their learning journey.

Table 9

*Evolving Mindsets of Students*

The learner	Traditional classroom <i>Performance driven</i>	Culturally responsive classroom <i>Learner driven</i>
On entering a task asks . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I do it?</li> <li>• Will I look smart?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I do it?</li> <li>• What do I need to learn?</li> </ul>
Focuses on . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The outcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process to an outcome</li> </ul>
Believes that errors . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate failure or personal limitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are a natural and useful source of feedback</li> </ul>
Finds uncertainty . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threatening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging</li> </ul>
Believes that the optimal task . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximizes how smart s/he looks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximizes his/her learning (becoming smarter)</li> </ul>

Agency was gained in their learning by understanding how their lived experiences directly linked to the content being taught. When students felt safe and valued, their engagement in the

work of the classroom increased. Students were more willing to take risks and trusted the teacher in helping them learn rather than fearing the teacher or the grade. Being a part of a classroom learning community directly contributed to creating a learning environment allowing culturally responsive teaching practices to take place. P4 described culturally responsive teaching as follows:

breaking down barriers, judgments, fears, and concerns students and even their families have experienced. It is essential to allow students to ask questions, as well as being celebrated for their unique background. The students can share their story with one another and learn about different cultures in order to form meaningful relationships with each other. So, we have to learn about our culture from where we are from, and we have to learn about the culture from here where we live . . . and most importantly, we must learn about the cultures of all the students in our classroom and help them learn about mine and the cultures of all the other students in the classroom. If we are a community of learners, then we must understand all the people in the community contribute and have different experiences that impact the way we think, believe, and act.

In her research, Hammond found many educators believed culturally responsive teaching was all about choosing the right teaching strategy to reach students of color (2015). However, culturally responsive teaching was more like being the conductor of a large orchestra. When the orchestra is learning a piece of music, the conductor must know about each instrumentalist, the instruments being played, the strengths and weaknesses of the instrumentalists, what musical experiences they had before joining this orchestra, and what techniques they learned. A classroom teacher who strives to be culturally responsive must seek to learn about their students, the content, and all the implications, similar to the conductor of an orchestra. Participants discovered learning about their students meant more than just learning about what a student liked or did not like. Learning about students meant participants had to learn about students' past lived experiences,



their beliefs, and what directly influenced these beliefs. The teacher must use this critical information to construct and instruct in the classroom to create a beautiful symphony or community of learners. P5 shared:

Culturally responsive teaching means seeing the whole child and understanding how their culture and family system impact the way they see and react to the world. It is essential to try to accept and embrace their customs and norms and include them in classroom discussions while helping the child to understand the customs and norms of the society in which they are living.

What a culturally responsive teacher must do is know the student, the content, and the instructional moves and then orchestrate all of these in such a way the students are the focus. This orchestration permits the teacher to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. P1 shared:

Culturally responsive teaching involves the skills and permission to build processes that are scientifically valid for scaffolding ALL students to appropriate states of cognition for learning. It is an understanding of the role culture plays in the wiring of student behavior.

**Awareness through self-reflection and professional discourse.** Through participation in active discourse with other participants, they gained awareness about how their instructional moves could be considered culturally responsive or conversely impede the academic success of students of color. By participating in the focus groups, participants engaged in self-reflection that directly heightened their clarity around culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, Renaud, & McMillan, 2014).

Many times, throughout the focus group meetings, participants stated they received isolated training on serving students of color. In these trainings, participants shared the focus was on certain student groups. This focus on only certain focus groups inferred many cultures had the same needs. Participants needed more training on how to work with all students without having

their district generalize attributes about one culture to all other cultures being served in the classroom (Pelayo, Mateo, Mendoza, & Ragusa, 2012). Participants felt very strongly all students came to the classroom with different lived experiences and these experiences directly influenced how students experienced learning. As students engaged in learning experiences, participants felt learning was enhanced through bridging their funds of knowledge with the new content (Schneider, Huss-Lederman, & Sherlock, 2012). Bridging funds of knowledge might look as simple as building connections with their students and their families. What makes using students' funds of knowledge so impactful was it was culturally relevant to students. Including a student's funds of knowledge could be as easy as sharing a custom linking to many of the students' lived experiences and bridging this custom to the new content being presented. Opportunities empowering students to share about their own lives within the classroom setting also allowed all other students in the classroom to see from multiple perspectives and bridged their own lived experiences to the funds of knowledge shared by this student.

Through participating in the focus group meetings, participants added onto their existing knowledge. Their new knowledge was gained through discourse and through hearing other participants' lived experiences. This interaction between participants directly supported the constructivist theoretical framework. As the participants became aware of other participants' experiences in serving students of color, new knowledge was constructed, adding to their existing knowledge. Through this awareness, participants acknowledged their intentionality and focus on instructional moves changed. Motivated through this new knowledge, participants' actions were influenced through their increased awareness of effective practices in working with students of color. Through participation in the focus group meetings, participants acknowledged their beliefs directly influenced how they taught students of color. Though they felt they were making

concerted efforts to serve students of color appropriately, they became aware of how their own biases impeded their effectiveness in serving students of color (Shestok, 2013).

Through learning about themselves and sharing this gained knowledge with others, participants became aware of the importance of learning about their students (Nieto, 2013). Participants acknowledged the only way to understand best their students was by understanding how the lived experiences of the participants might impact their students. Participants became more aware of how their own beliefs and biases needed to be taken into consideration. Taking these biases and beliefs into account allowed the participants to adapt instructional moves to serve students of color (Nieto, 2013) best. Participating in ongoing discourse with other participants allowed for ongoing and self-directed learning directly driven by participant interest and willingness to construct new knowledge (Shestok, 2013). Through this construction of new knowledge, culturally responsive teaching was directly enhanced (Bacon, 2014; Charteris & Smardon, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Talbert, 2010).

Self-reflection and the opportunity to share their construction of knowledge helped participants gain awareness about their learning and how it related to their students' learning (Schneider et al., 2012). Through participating in self-reflection while learning from their peers, participants better understood the new knowledge constructed and how to apply this learning in serving students of color (Klein & Riordan, 2011). Constructivism centers on the personal construction of new knowledge directly influenced by an individual's funds of knowledge and beliefs. Constructivism aligns with the lived experiences participants bring with them, the professional discourse, and the construction of new knowledge and awareness (Nieto, 2013; Pitsoe & Maila, 2012).

As participants became aware of their own biases and beliefs, their beliefs and funds of knowledge intersected with the students' funds of knowledge and beliefs. Self-reflection became a

natural practice for implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom (Shestok, 2013). Participants shared self-reflection and active participation in the focus groups provided for a safe and open environment. This open environment allowed participants to analyze their instructional practices. They realized how their instructional practices directly enhanced or impeded the academic success of students of color (Nieto, 2013; Shestok, 2013). Participants acknowledged through participating in the focus groups, they constructed new knowledge about designing learning experiences. When participants incorporated discourse and self-reflection into learning experiences, students constructed new knowledge and awareness about different cultures in their classroom learning community (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Nieto, 2013). As students were constructing new knowledge, participants felt it was critical to remember culturally responsive teaching was not about using specific teaching strategies. Culturally responsive teaching was more about understanding the students, their past experiences, and how the construction of knowledge drives a fluid adaptation of instructional practices. These adapted instructional practices supported students of color through culturally responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally responsive teaching was directly linked to teacher and student relationships, lived experiences, and construction of new knowledge. As seen in Table 10, participants' gained awareness allowed for them to evolve in their mindsets to a more culturally responsive mindset.

Table 10

*Evolving Mindsets of Study Participants*

The participant	Traditional mindset <i>Performance driven</i>	Culturally responsive mindset <i>Learner driven</i>
On assigning task . ..	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can he/she do it?</li> <li>• Does the student have the skills?</li> <li>• Same expectations for all</li> <li>• Student compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I help him/her learn how to do it?</li> <li>• What supports does the learner need to learn?</li> <li>• Learning outcomes driven by each student</li> <li>• Student agency of learning</li> </ul>

The participant	Traditional mindset <i>Performance driven</i>	Culturally responsive mindset <i>Learner driven</i>
Focuses on . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The product, outcome, or grade</li> <li>• Globalized approach to teaching</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• White backgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The approach or process the student takes to get to a product or an outcome</li> <li>• Personalized instructional practices to support all students</li> <li>• Bridging content to student interests, experiences, and culture</li> <li>• Affirms culture, heritage, learning style of students</li> </ul>
Believes that errors . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicates a learner deficit, failure or personal limitations</li> <li>• Blames students for failing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are an approach to informing instructional practice and a source of feedback in learning about the student</li> <li>• Explores curriculum and instructional strategies for ways to better meet student needs</li> </ul>
Finds uncertainty . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimidating or chaotic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driver to designing learning to meet student needs</li> </ul>
Believes that the optimal task . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the smartest students</li> <li>• Teacher designed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates the best learning opportunities for all students</li> <li>• Co-created with student and teacher input</li> </ul>

## **R2: What Instructional Practices Do White Female Teachers Identify as Effective in Serving Students of Color?**

The analysis of the data revealed five common themes consistently discussed among all participants: (a) positive relationships; (b) high expectations for all learners; (c) students' funds of knowledge; (d) teacher awareness; and (e) student agency of learning. Participants shared instructional practices aligned to these five themes. This section presents the key themes identified in the data and describes how participants shared instructional practices they perceived as effective in serving students of color. The five themes identified came from participant responses in both interviews and focus group discourse. The five themes were directly driven by participant perceptions regarding successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Figure 4 from Chapter 4 shows the subthemes identified through data analysis used to identify the themes.

Culturally responsive teaching was not about incorporating a list of instructional strategies. Participants discovered culturally responsive teaching was the culmination of specific teacher professional behaviors allowing for the appropriate selection of instructional practices allowing culturally responsive learning environments to be established (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Teachers must learn who their students are, where they came from, what funds of knowledge they brought with them, and the culture of their homes (Gao & Wang, 2016). P6 shared:

Knowing about students' lived experiences kind of gives me a background; it all depends on what is going on at home. I have seen that it affects their learning and the kind of relationship they have with their parents. Students' situations and their home life play a huge role. It is what motivates them.

**Positive relationships.** Each participant shared multiple ways in which they worked with students in order to develop positive relationships. Participants expressed mutual respect was crucial for students of color to trust them. For students to have a desire to learn from their teachers and experience success in school, teachers had to be willing to share about their own lived experiences. P6 shared, "Relationships are my main source of reflection. I make sure to communicate with all involved in each student's life, as well as listen to feedback regarding the way in which I serve my students." P5 shared:

Building a relationship is important for any student. The more you know and understand what motivates a student, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what kind of support system they have, the better able you are to create an educational plan for the child to meet their needs. Understanding a child's culture/family system and building a

relationship of mutual respect with the family helps reach a child. If a child feels liked and accepted, they are more likely to put forth the effort, especially in areas of difficulty.

Participants shared building strong relationships with students was driven by establishing trust. Through an intentional focus on building relationships, mutual trust between the teacher and students was cultivated. Participants were able to provide a more personalized learning experience. These personalized learning experiences positively impacted student learning. When students felt safe, they were more likely to take chances and engage in learning experiences or tasks (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015). P4 shared: “Individual relationships where trust is established, frequent check-ins, building relationships with the student, their guardian, and those who are a part of their team at school.”

Through knowing their students, participants learned what motivated students and what challenged students. Participants learned to convey to students they believed in the ability of all their students to learn. Often, participants did not know enough about their students to support their learning appropriately. Though they often did not intend to limit student success, participants lacked awareness about whom they were serving. Participants also lacked understanding of the implications attached to their teacher behaviors. This lack of understanding inadvertently perpetuated the cycle of school systems not providing equitable educational experiences for students of color (Gay, 2010). P9 shared:

I need to know more about them, and they need to know me as a person instead of a figure at the front of the room. They need to know I care; they need to trust me, trust I am not judging or criticizing, or I will never get a sound out of them.

**High expectations for all learners.** Students were likely to perform better when they perceived their teachers believed they could learn at high levels (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). When participants held high expectations for all of their students, teacher behaviors also changed. Rather

than focusing on a deficit model, participants focused on a design mindset (Gay, 2010).

Participants shared blame was removed from the equation when high expectations were held for all students. They worked to adapt the content or instructional practices to accommodate the needs of all learners in the classroom. P10 shared:

Culturally responsive teaching is being able to relate to each kid no matter what their gender, ethnicity, race, background, if they speak English or not speak English, being able to relate to them. Being able to get the student to think and act on a different level than someone who is just teaching to every student. It is like getting individualized education to each student no matter what they look like, no matter who their parents are, or who their grandparents are, or who their great-great-grandparents are.

Students tried harder and achieved more when supported appropriately in an environment where they knew the participant was there to help the student in their learning.

**Students' funds of knowledge.** As participants learned about their students and focused on building strong relationships with their students, they were able to design more meaningful learning experiences for their students. These learning experiences were built around the students' funds of knowledge—their values, beliefs, and relationships—as resources to enhance learning. Funds of knowledge helped students to shift their lived experiences past just being memories and toward serving as a bridge to connect to their new learning (Gay, 2013).

In order to build relationships with students, participants found they needed to also seek ways to connect to their students and to the different cultures students brought with them to class. By connecting to students, participants successfully supported their students of color academically, socially, and behaviorally. Using students' funds of knowledge and lived experiences allowed participants to scaffold content in a more meaningful way (Smagorinsky, 2011). Participants realized students of color often lacked background knowledge that would help them link to new



content. What was often deemed as skills deficits, participants now saw as directly related to students' inability to link to the new content. When participants linked students' personal lived experiences directly to the content, students of color found meaning in learning. When participants linked learning experiences to a student's prior lived experience, students were provided clarity. When students gained clarity around learning, retention of the learning was enhanced. Participants noted when students saw a relationship between the content and their personal lives, students felt their own lived experiences were affirmed. Instructional practices participants used to incorporate a student's funds of knowledge included actions such as:

- engaging students in discourse around what students did while at home
- linking current events to content presented
- allowing guests from the community to share their lived experiences
- bringing in multiple resources that allowed students to experience multiple perspectives

Through culturally responsive learning experiences, students learned how their experiences and perspectives directly connected to the content. The bridging of the content to a student's own lived experiences allowed for students to see the validation of the content. This validation increased the likelihood of success for students of color. Paramount in including culturally responsive teaching practices was embracing all students had different beliefs, customs, and lived experiences guiding the way they interpreted the content they were learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally responsive teaching capitalized on students' funds of knowledge as a high-impact action that could leverage learning for all students (Gay, 2010).

**Teacher awareness.** Researchers have proposed teachers' awareness and perceptions of working with students of color often determined how successful students of color were in school (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014). As participants gained more knowledge and understanding about their students, they were more likely to connect the content to the different ways students

learned, and the values students held. Students engaged in the learning experience actively.

Participants articulated through planning, they created learning structures and supports that helped students of color translate their existing knowledge. Students constructed new knowledge and determined how they correlated to their own lives.

When confronted with advantages or White privilege, White people often take offense or become defensive regarding this concept due to a feeling of condemnation (Ferber, 2012). The avoidance of these topics leads to significant denial or resistance, often out of misunderstanding or a sense of guilt (Hastie & Rimmington, 2014). This inability or reluctance of White people to acknowledge the privileges they have is to their advantage, and students of color are at a disadvantage due to the inequitable access to the privileges held by White people (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). This unwillingness to acknowledge White privilege, in turn, continues to serve as a barrier to talking about the topic of White privilege or disadvantages faced by many others who are not White. Even though our schools serve an increased group of diverse students, the unwillingness to acknowledge and attempt to provide equitable supports to students of color leads to the continued marginalization of students of color.

As part of the consequences of being unaware of the privileges and different lived experiences of White people, many White teachers perceive students of color as having deficits because students of color may see things differently or respond to things differently from White teachers due to different lived experiences (Delpit, 2012). Students of color respond differently, making different connections to the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom, or no connections at all. White teachers begin to perceive students of color do not respond to them in the way they expect, since White teachers often function from an awareness of only their own funds of knowledge. Often, students of color speak differently, and their background knowledge is not parallel to their White teachers. Thus, White teachers treat students of color as if their differences

are the cause of their lack of success in educational efforts—as if these differences are a deficit (Delpit, 2012).

In actuality, students of color enter classrooms expecting their teachers to accept them for who they are and see what they bring with them to the classroom as a strength and not a barrier to experiencing academic success. Students of color quickly experience learning environments marginalizing or publicly criticize their differing actions due to the diversity they bring to the classroom (Delpit, 2012). Most likely, White teachers are not intentional in facilitating this, but they are not aware of their biases, and they do not understand the need to approach educational practice differently for different groups of students.

Participants' biases were directly derived from their own attitudes and beliefs. These biases impacted their actions, understandings of experiences, and implicit decisions regarding instructional practices (Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Jackson, 2016). Participants sought to understand how their own culture impacted the way they interpreted content and presented it to students of color. Understanding how their own biases impeded their ability to present content permitted the participants to discover new approaches effectively connecting to all students (Epstein, Mayorga, & Nelson, 2011).

Participants improved their ability to provide equitable learning opportunities for students of color through engaging in self-reflective behaviors. Self-reflection helped participants identify implicit biases they held. This awareness helped participants understand the implications of their teaching. Participants sought to counter these biases in order to enhance learning experiences for students of color. Participants understood if they continued to function from their limited understandings about students of color and their diverse backgrounds, students of color would continue to experience inequitable educational opportunities (Gay, 2013).

Multiple times throughout the study, participants relayed in order for them to successfully implement culturally responsive teaching practices, participants had first to evaluate their own beliefs and attitudes towards all students. Participants acknowledged they needed to hold attitudes directly reflecting the belief all students were capable of learning. These attitudes were reflected through the behaviors and actions of the participants (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Participants gained an understanding of why adapting their approaches to supporting students of color was paramount. Participants focused on developing clarity around their thinking in order to evaluate whether their personal beliefs and attitudes negatively impacted the effectiveness of learning experiences for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2014). They gained this knowledge through understanding how participants' own beliefs and behaviors impacted the learning of students of color.

**Student agency of learning.** Student agency of learning directly linked to students actively engaging in and having a voice in their own learning experiences. Participants helped to build confidence in their students by creating an opportunity for their students to have an active voice in their learning. Other examples given by participants included structures such as group station rotations driven by student interests and past learning experiences, personalized learning supports through computer-based adaptive digital resources, peer tutoring, and collaborative activities. Through the incorporation of activities such as these, students gained more confidence, took more risks, and learned the value all students brought to the learning experience.

Participants noted culturally responsive instruction thrived in a classroom climate of collaborative learning, social-emotional support, and mutual respect between students and the participants (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). A culturally responsive classroom climate included a culture of high expectations for all and activities supporting social and emotional safety. Cooperative and collaborative learning and student voice also contributed to creating a culturally responsive classroom environment (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). Participants created student-driven

learning experiences encouraging students to be active participants in the teaching and learning process. When students had voice and choice in their learning, they had agency and were likely to become more motivated in their learning.

As participants engaged in the focus groups, they realized how valuable designing learning experiences similar to what they were participating in would be beneficial to students of color. Finding ways to allow students to interact with their world and the content they were learning not only motivated students but also helped them to construct new meaning with the content. Through designing learning experiences empowering students of color to have voice and choice in the learning process, students of color were supported in understanding the perspectives of others. Students of color gained a new respect for differing perspectives held by their peers.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

It should not be the goal of any educational system to help students of color cope with or acclimate to the dominant culture represented in the school. The goal should be to create school systems embracing diversity through learning experiences reflecting the cultures embodied in the school (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). The significance of implementing culturally responsive teaching practices to the success of students of color has been noted by many researchers (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gay, 2010, 2002; Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012).

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Students of color relied on their teachers for academic supports more than White students (Reardon, 2014). There were multiple reasons for this, but what was critical to know was the teacher was the most important component in ensuring students were successful in their classrooms. A student's teacher was noted to have more impact on a student's academic success than any other influence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers' positive perceptions of

students and their abilities had a direct positive connection to the academic achievement of students of color (Irvine, 2003).

When students felt their teachers had confidence in their ability to succeed and there were strong relationships between the participants and students, students were more likely to experience academic success (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015). When participants built strong connections with their students, they were more likely to gain an understanding of what previous knowledge students brought with them to their classrooms. Students' funds of knowledge became more apparent when teachers took the time to interact and build relationships having mutual opportunities for talk and collaboration (Garmon, 2004). Participants gained a better understanding of their students' beliefs, values, and lived experiences by interacting with their students often (Villegas et al., 2012).

Participants successfully served students of color through learning about their students' lived experiences, cultural influences, and prior learning (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Villegas et al., 2012). Through this knowledge came an understanding of the needs their students brought with them. To serve students best, participants reflected not only about their practices but also about the content taught. Knowledge of their students allowed participants to adapt the curriculum. Participants scaffolded instructional moves directly connecting the content to their students (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

### **Funds of Knowledge**

The funds of knowledge conceptual framework worked with the underlying supposition families and communities were valuable educational resources that could directly enhance learning for students of color (Zipin et al., 2012). Students of color could have different lived experiences than their White teachers, and these unique lived experiences facilitated the construction of different knowledge (Zipin et al., 2012). When participants had clarity around the students they

were serving—their backgrounds, cultural influences, and home life dynamics—participants could better support students of color through valuing their backgrounds. Rather than approaching their unique learning needs as a deficit, participants saw their students' learning needs as a call for an adaptation to instructional practice.

Flynn (2012) noted teachers must acknowledge their own bias toward students of color. Using funds of knowledge, participants gained a positive perception of the diverse lived experiences held by their students. Participants acknowledged these unique lived experiences as a resource to use in supporting the design of relevant and engaging learning experiences. When learning experiences were designed around students' lived experiences and unique perspectives, students experienced a more equitable education (Gay, 2010). When participants prioritized learning about their students and understanding their students' worldview, they could create learning experiences helping to meet the academic needs of students of color more effectively (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). When participants employed culturally responsive teaching practices, they demonstrated their value for students of color and the diverse backgrounds they brought to the classroom (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

### **Learner-Centered Teaching**

Students in a culturally responsive learning environment gained clarity about their values, other students' values, and the significance of their collective efforts toward learning (De Jesus, 2012). Participants learned how to recognize individualism and collectivism served as vehicles of empowerment for students of color to reach their personal and maximum potential. The funds of knowledge for both the participants and students grew to become more inclusive of varied experiences and perspectives (Weimer, 2013).

The theoretical framework aligned with a constructivist approach, where learners were the center of instruction. The qualities of constructivist learners were intrinsic motivation, high energy,

and commitment (Moore, 2011). Addressing the varied learning needs of students with diverse backgrounds was the most significant challenge for participants (De Jesus, 2012). When participants used constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, they provided students with opportunities to build meaning in what they were learning, which lead to academic success (Weimer, 2013). Participants discovered the significance of students' lived experiences and how these experiences influenced how students thought and acted. Constructivist approaches used by participants included:

- students collaborating together
- students hearing their peers' points of views
- students actively engaging in the learning
- students having input
- students actively discussing and developing ideas

Participants provided learning experiences supporting constructivism through the use of word banks, sentence stems, anchor charts, concrete materials, and questioning approaches. Participants provided multiple ways of allowing students to experience the content. As students constructed new knowledge, participants were able to remove some of the initial supports and scaffolds.

Focusing on how students learned helped increase students' interest in academic content. Mvududu and Thiel-Burgess (2012) stated many studies have shown constructivist teaching and learning were powerful in various content areas and addressed diversity, including students' race, varying ability levels, and socioeconomic status. When participants met students where they were academically, and their education was personalized, students' learning was more successful. Participants found culturally responsive teaching practices engaging students through relevant content and multiple approaches to teaching and learning were appropriate and useful for all



students (Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012; Tomlinson, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching practices provided students the opportunity to become active, responsible individuals who could learn at their own pace and based on their individual ability level and provided remedial and extension opportunities to all learners.

### **Positive Outcomes Resulting from Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Researchers have noted the importance of culturally responsive teaching as a bridge to reaching all learners (Irvine, 2015). Culturally responsive teaching engaged students intellectually, socially, culturally, emotionally, and politically by incorporating attributes linking directly to the lives of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2014). When participants had positive relationships and high expectations directly influenced their actions in serving students of color, there was an improvement in the learning experiences provided to students of color (Gay, 2002). To successfully meet the unique needs of students of color, participants had to be adequately equipped to serve all students (Gay, 2013). For participants to meet the needs of all learners, they realized teaching was about consistently adapting practices to meet the changing needs of all learners (Irvine, 2015). The ongoing adaptation of teaching practices driven by the needs of all learners allowed the academic achievement of all learners to increase. Through implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, the levels of academic achievement were equalized between students of color and White students.

### **Restructuring Attitudes and Beliefs**

Teachers' personal biases directly influenced their perceptions about the students they were serving and those students' ability to learn (Hollie, 2012). These biases linked to how the funds of knowledge of the participants and the students interconnected and directly impacted student learning and the participants' instructional moves (Flynn, 2012; Hollie, 2012). To effectively serve students of color, participants not only acknowledged their own biases but also understood the

implications attached to those biases. All people have biases due to their funds of knowledge. Participants understood they must try to eliminate bias in order to cultivate a culturally responsive classroom setting (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). By familiarizing themselves with the techniques and skills involved in culturally responsive teaching, participants felt they could actively champion culturally responsive teaching and the impact it could have on student learning. To familiarize themselves with culturally responsive teaching and its potential impact first required participants to restructure the perceptions they held regarding students of color. Perceptions reflected on and addressed included implicit bias and deficient attitudes. Through honestly addressing bias and attitudes held by participants, they were able to construct more realistic and progressive opinions of students of color.

### **Having High Expectations for All Learners**

Participants needed to understand in order for all learners to meet high expectations, there must be connections to the content and curriculum and teaching must be learner-centered for all students (Flynn, 2012). Research shows academic success of students of color was positively impacted by connecting the content to their lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and previous learning (Flynn, 2012; Gay, 2010; Hollie, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014). All students were more likely to engage in the learning experience when they could make direct links between the content and their own lives (Hollie, 2012). Participants developed and built on students' prior knowledge. P4 shared how she helped her student progress through new content by connecting past learning to the new concepts being taught. She stated:

By helping my student that was struggling with learning, I had to first figure out what she already knew. I had to help her see how the new learning connected to what she has already learned. Part of this was also dependent on helping my student learn to think about her own

knowing. She was always so ready for me to tell her what to do. Until I realized I had to help her think and build connections, she was never forced to own her own thinking.

### **Giving Students Actionable Feedback That Prompts Improved Performance**

As students were learning, providing feedback allowed students to go back, make corrections, and gain a better understanding of the content. Providing actionable feedback naturally led to increases in student achievement. Students became empowered and gained more confidence in seeking assistance as needed. Students also explored and learned more freely when they were willing to take a risk because they did not fear grades and feedback. Students persevered and sought out to complete the task they were engaged in rather than giving up.

Actionable feedback provided students with ongoing, critical, and timely information regarding their responses, work, and interactions with the content and peers. Actionable feedback provided an avenue for personalized supports allowing each student to achieve at higher levels. Culturally responsive teaching and actionable feedback created a learning environment permitting students to construct new meaning with the new content through appropriate supports and scaffolding of the student's previous learning (McIntyre & Hulan, 2013).

### **Limitations**

Many potential limitations of this study could have affected the validity and reliability. Yin (2014) noted the possibility of a researcher deducing or inferring findings that may not be accurate. If the researcher is not able to observe the phenomena firsthand, deduction or inference might occur. The case study approach was useful for understanding the role of multiple factors and situating the outcome of the study within the full context of the setting.

This study may have been limited through the purposive sample of White female teachers at one study site. Participants' willingness to share honestly about their experiences as White female educators working in a diverse school may also have limited this study. Interviewee

responses based on the interviewee's perception of accuracy had the potential to invalidate the interview data; there was a possibility participants may have responded as they perceived the researcher wanted them to during the interview process. Turnbull (2002) stated a significant concern the interviewer must battle is the ability to get to the truth in the interview process.

The selection of only 10 study participants may have been a limitation of this study. The participants in the study were chosen through purposive sampling to gain a broad representation of perspectives from White female teachers. While multiple teachers may have provided additional data, the case of this select group of 10 teachers was sufficiently broad to identify various teacher perceptions about culturally responsive teaching. However, the responses and discourse from the teacher participants during the semistructured interviews and focus group meetings may not have consistently reflected what transpired in their various lived experiences.

Numerous studies were found regarding the topic of culturally responsive teaching practices. However, the literature review could not find research directly linking teacher participation in focus group meetings, professional discourse, and reflective practices to implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. This lack of existing research presented a limitation to the study, as well as an opportunity for expanding the discussion.

The issue of generalizability could be seen as a problem, as this research study focused on a single topic. However, a particular case can yield much information, as readers can benefit through vivid, explicit narration (Stake, 2010). The researcher was responsible for data collection and analysis. This responsibility had advantages, but the researcher may have lacked training in observing and interviewing, which were critical components of the research process. In the case of the instrument, the face-to-face semistructured interview questions might not have obtained enough reliable answers from the participants. Furthermore, the researcher's pre-understandings,

preconceptions, and biases could have hindered the reliability of the research findings (Creswell, 2014).

One methodological limitation was the lack of data from students. This study only looked at teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices. No data were collected about student experiences or perceptions of teachers using culturally responsive teaching practices. Conducting classroom observations and interviews with students could have provided more information to guide this study. Teachers' perceptions of how culturally responsive teaching practices impacted student learning may differ from the perceptions of students.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations were implemented to focus the research study and provided boundaries for data collection. This study was bounded by time, the limit of teacher participants, and the instrumentation tools chosen for the research study. A pilot study of all interview questions and focus group conversation prompts allowed the researcher to check for validity, efficiency, and impact of question strategies and sought-after outcomes. In this study, an iterative process of data collection and member checking was utilized. The constructivist approach allowed the participants to make their interpretations or perceptions. Peer reviews and member checking were also utilized to ensure the accuracy of the collection and interpretation of the data. The study relied on data collection from multiple teachers serving students of color.

Observations, field notes, and transcriptions were the sources of data obtained to guide the study process. From a constructivist perspective, the teachers in the study played an integral role in their perceptions of enacting processes and making meaning of the text read, and the topic discussed. Brown and Coles (2012) argued through a constructivist approach, teachers observe patterns over time bringing awareness of processes and practices that impact student learning.

## **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The results of this study provided the researcher with insight into how teachers perceived culturally responsive teaching. This study also explored what teachers perceived as being effective, culturally responsive teaching practices. Throughout the study, teachers engaged in professional discourse around culturally responsive teaching practices and their impact on student learning. Teacher descriptions of culturally responsive teaching shifted through engaging in collaborative dialogue around their work and lived experiences. The interpretations of the data from this study provide information that can directly inform teacher practice, professional learning structures, and educational leadership.

### **Practice**

Teachers must have more than a surface-level understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Principals and districts cannot mandate teachers employ culturally responsive teaching practices and then expect them to do this on their own. Teachers must have the opportunity to gain a conceptual understanding of what culturally responsive teaching is and is not (Brown, 2015). Construction of knowledge should be ongoing. Therefore, teachers should frequently engage in embedded professional development and professional dialogue around their practice. Teachers should consistently review student achievement data, their teaching practices, and the defined expected outcomes to ensure equitable opportunity to achieve at high levels.

As meaning was constructed, participants understood each student had their funds of knowledge and the design of learning experiences needed to be adapted to capitalize on the funds of knowledge constructed by students. As the researcher continued to explore and understand more about culturally responsive teaching, it became more evident there is no definitive way one can approach teaching to meet the needs of every student. Just as every student has unique funds of knowledge, the construction of knowledge must be bridged through considering how people

construct new meaning is significantly influenced by their funds of knowledge. There is not a formula that can be followed by teachers to attend to the needs of students of color.

What participants began to understand is with the unique needs of students, the curriculum and content must be presented in such a way funds of knowledge are interwoven to allow students of color to connect to existing funds of knowledge as they are constructing new meanings. Students feel valued when connections are made between the content and how students experience life in their home and community (Gay, 2000). When teachers used their gained awareness of their biases and students' funds of knowledge, a higher student engagement in the learning was noted by participants.

Teachers should be supported in learning how to engage in self-reflection to guide their teaching. Teachers should be given a regularly scheduled time for collaboration encompassing reflection and dialogue around their professional practice in serving students of color (Howard, 2003). This study confirmed when teachers engaged in focused, frequent professional development built around self-reflection on teaching practices, perceptions of their students, and their perceived impact on learning, students were directly and positively impacted.

**Campus focus.** Schools must seek ways to validate students' cultural backgrounds and funds of knowledge through classroom practices, instructional resources, and the school building itself. Validation can happen through reflecting student cultures in books, bulletin boards, communications, projects, and assignments. Students begin to feel more included when they can connect their cultural background to the instructional practices and content delivery at school (Gay, 2010).

Schools should intentionally find ways to help students learn about the world and its diversity around them. Students should interact with others who are different from them. Learning about the world around them and the diversity within their classrooms, students learn how to gain

skills in positively relating to each other, even when differences exist. Just as students learn about the contributions of White men and women in history, all students should learn about the contributions of men and women of color throughout history. Students will gain an appreciation of other cultures and begin to understand all people and groups of people have value and contribute to society.

Schools should design ways to assess students' academic progress and needs in a logical and culturally responsive way. Assessments must be evaluated to ensure they assess all students accurately. When students are appropriately assessed, then curricula and learning experiences can be authentically designed around the needs of the learners. Just as the students and their needs and strengths are different, so should the assessments be different. There should not be an overreliance on assessment tools of one kind. Students are unique, and they should be given many ways to show their knowledge and understanding of the content and skills being assessed.

Schools must actively seek to cultivate positive relationships with families and the community. There must be a concerted effort to value all students through including resources in the community and students' homes. This connection allows for an inclusive culture at the school allowing students to feel they are valued, and their culture is honored. School leaders must create these structures and systems through culturally responsive teaching. In order to facilitate this, school leaders must find ways to engage teachers and staff in the process of critical self-reflection (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

**Professional development.** Many teachers have participated in professional development reinforcing the need to adapt instructional practices to serve students of color. However, the research on what high-leverage instructional moves teachers can utilize to serve students of color is limited. Before students can be served in the way they deserve, teachers must not only



understand what culturally responsive teaching is but understand how their funds of knowledge and constructions of meaning can either enhance or impede the learning of the students.

This research illustrates the importance and power of frequent and continued collegial discourse around culturally responsive teaching rather than isolated professional development experiences. Personal and professional growth driven by self-reflection can have a significant impact on teacher clarity around instructional moves, as well as a gained urgency in serving the needs of students of color. In this study, teachers shared their perceptions of the value of ongoing, embedded professional development as opposed to isolated professional development opportunities. The study also showed the impact of teacher active engagement in discourse with the autonomy to guide their discussion with other teachers. Rather than being constrained to only respond to a prescribed set of questions, participants in this study were given the freedom to ask questions of each other and to seek clarification of other teachers' experiences in serving students of color. This study affirmed the notion a one-time professional development session cannot adequately prepare a teacher to employ culturally responsive teaching practices appropriately.

## **Policy**

School systems across our country face the challenge of adequately serving students of color. Educators are morally and ethically bound to provide all students with an equitable opportunity to receive a quality education containing a viable and rigorous curriculum. The federal government has implemented safeguards such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to ensure all students receive equitable opportunities for quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Each state is given the autonomy to define how equitable education is provided for students in their state. What is mandated, though, is all students are provided a learning experience in a safe, secure environment that seeks to prepare them for college, career, and military readiness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

There needs to be a direct focus on professional development going beyond the surface level and compliance-driven teacher practices. Through appropriate guidance, a framework around the implementation of culturally responsive teaching can be designed to ensure teachers are adequately equipped to serve the needs of students of color. This could directly impact the credentialing or certification requirements of all teachers. States are focusing on what they feel is best to support the needs of all learners. However, there is no direct language requiring states to provide educational opportunities to students in a culturally responsive way. It is implied, but there are no direct outlined definitions of culturally responsive teaching practices all states must employ. Many states are still developing standardized assessments that do not equitably assess students of color. These assessments are driven by curriculum and standards not aligned to the funds of knowledge held by students of color. State and federal policy should be written to include a shared understanding of what culturally responsive teaching is and a curriculum directly incorporating culturally responsive standards and assessments.

**Advocacy.** Students want acceptance for who they are and what they have to bring to the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is more effective when teachers serving students of color show high regard for the students they help and feel well equipped to support the academic needs of students (Maison, 2017; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Teaching and learning must be an organic process working to honor and validate the different needs and values of all learners in the classroom. High expectations for all learners are paramount. Teachers actively engaging in professional development around serving the diverse needs of all learners are empowered to create an inclusive classroom that allows all students to feel like they belong.

When teachers critically analyze the biases existing in the instructional resources they are using, they can make appropriate changes in their classroom. Through an awareness of their own biases, teachers can help model and teach their students how to “be discerning consumers of and

resistors to ethnic information disseminated through the societal curriculum” (Gay, 2002, p. 109).

Culturally responsive teachers include instructional materials and resources representative of the diversity existing within and across cultural groups and connect to the funds of knowledge (the prior learned behaviors, customs, and understandings learners bring with them to their classrooms) of all students in their classroom (Hammond, 2015).

## **Theory**

**Funds of knowledge.** The funds of knowledge conceptual framework worked with the underlying supposition families and communities were valuable educational resources that could directly enhance learning for students of color (Zipin et al., 2012). When participants had clarity around the students they were serving—their backgrounds, cultural influences, and home life dynamics—participants could better support students of color through valuing their backgrounds. Rather than approaching their unique learning needs as a deficit, participants saw their students’ learning needs as a call for an adaptation to instructional practice.

Teachers must acknowledge their own bias toward students of color. Using funds of knowledge, participants gained a positive perception of the diverse lived experiences held by their students. Through teachers acknowledging the unique lived experiences as a resource to use in supporting the design of relevant and engaging learning experiences, all students will be afforded the opportunity to connect to the learning. Students will experience a more equitable education when teachers design learning experiences around students’ lived experiences and unique perspectives. Through employing culturally responsive teaching practices, teachers demonstrate their value for students of color and the diverse backgrounds brought to the classroom (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

Students of color often have a different worldview than their White teachers. This difference in worldview directly serves as a barrier to many students coming from a culturally or

linguistically diverse background. Students' worldviews can prevent them from directly connecting to the learning experiences designed for them. Students' backgrounds and lived experiences provide different funds of knowledge than the funds of knowledge possessed by their teachers. When White teachers gain awareness of their thoughts and ideas about race and cultural issues, of their held biases and misperceptions, they become aware of how these can directly impact their practices as a teacher. Through inclusive teaching practices, teachers can draw upon the lived experiences and forms of capital students of color bring with them in order to design learning experiences helping students of color make individual associations to the content and concepts being taught. The potential of capitalizing on learners' funds of knowledge lies in a teacher's willingness and skill to work with what is there and not get distracted by what is perceived as missing.

**Constructivism.** Within a constructivist theoretical framework, teachers can analyze their funds of knowledge to influence their future learning and to influence their instructional moves to best serve the diverse needs of their students through using students' funds of knowledge to design future learning experience. Just as students' funds of knowledge are developed in authentic experiences, teachers' funds of knowledge are directly impacted through discourse. Through reflection on personal funds of knowledge, teachers were allowed to share their lived experiences and to explore correlations between what they brought to the learning environment and what their students also brought to the classroom. Through these experiences, teachers and students both constructed new knowledge that contributed to their fluid funds of knowledge. The constructivist theoretical framework presents reality is relative to the one experiencing the event and there is no final truth to discover. As new information is gained and new understandings are made, it is also noted there will not be one specific way to serve the needs of all learners. Therefore, it is critical

that educators consistently seek to reflect on their professional practices and the impact on student learning.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study have implications for future research. This study provided insights into how teachers perceived and described culturally responsive teaching. This study also shared what instructional strategies teachers felt were most effective in serving students of color. This study involved one research site; it could be advanced by including multiple study sites to help determine if this study was limited in its results by the single site.

Though multiple grade levels were included, only 10 participants were involved. This study could be developed more by including a larger group of study participants. As well, only Grades 4 through 10 were included. Data may lead to findings differing from this study when all grade levels are included. The study solely focused on teachers and their implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices; the findings only connect to teacher perceptions and descriptions of culturally responsive teaching. The study might have been more informed if students were involved. Interviews of students could provide more insight into the perceived impact on learning from the student's perspective.

The study engaged teachers in five focus group meetings, which allowed them to engage in discourse around culturally responsive teaching. However, the data may be limited due to having only five focus groups. Further studies could facilitate more focus group meetings over a more extended period to more accurately record teacher perceptions around their implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Implementing more focus group meetings would also allow the study to take place over an extended amount of time instead of being bound by a short amount of time. This could prove to be beneficial in evaluating the impact of professional

discourse and job-embedded professional development on the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Further research could include evaluation of curriculum and reflection on how teachers adapt the curriculum to provide relevant learning experiences. The study specifically focused on employing culturally responsive teaching practices. It would be beneficial to see the correlation between adapting curriculum and employing culturally responsive teaching practices. Success in serving the needs of students of color relies directly on ensuring the discussions and study around culturally responsive teaching do not end. Any study on culturally responsive teaching practices could complement this study. The critical factor in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices is ensuring teachers and educational leaders have a clear understanding of what culturally responsive teaching is and the implications attached to serving students of color. A future study of teacher preparation programs focusing on training pre-service teachers in employing culturally responsive teaching practices versus job-embedded professional development would be beneficial to future planning around both teacher preparation programs and school-level professional development practices.

To take this current study further, the researcher would seek to observe teachers in their classrooms. Though useful data were gained from the interviews and focus group meetings, classroom observations could provide even richer data. The researcher could incorporate a study of lesson design and delivery and student-teacher interactions within the classroom. A longitudinal study designed to explore the impact on student learning over a more extended period would be beneficial to researching culturally responsive teaching practices. There could be a focus on teacher training, analysis, and supports for teacher implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices.

## **Conclusion**

Culture is central to teaching and learning. Without being consciously aware of it, people's thoughts, beliefs, and behavior are determined through culture, thus affecting how people teach and learn (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching is not a checklist or a set of rules, and it cannot be achieved through superficial celebrations of heroes and holidays; it is a mindset and a philosophy (Gay, 2010). Teachers must individually understand what culturally responsive teaching is and is not. For teachers to effectively employ culturally responsive teaching practices, teaching and learning must be learner-driven. To establish and provide high-quality educational opportunities to all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic status or cultural or linguistic background, teachers must be adequately prepared (Gay, 2013; Kozleski, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Culturally responsive teachers acknowledge students from diverse backgrounds bring their cultural influences to the mix of the classroom; are cognizant of student differences related to race, ethnicity, culture, and language; and use this knowledge to maximize their teaching competencies to enhance students' academic achievement (Irvine & Hawley, 2011). Teachers must establish positive student-teacher relationships, and regard excellence as an intricate and complicated standard where individual differences among students can be used to achieve success. When teachers cultivate positive relationships with students, students are more open to learning.

This study showed through self-reflection, collegial discourse, and personal lived experiences, participants gained insight into what culturally responsive teaching was. Study participants initially felt they were actively and successfully implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms. However, through self-reflection and participating in the focus group meetings, teachers discovered they were not genuinely meeting the needs of their students of color.

Through participating in this study, teachers gained clarity around the purpose and value of teaching differently to serve all students equitably.

The findings of this study support the opinion teachers need training in how to successfully engage in professional self-reflection regarding the disparities in educational experiences between White students and students of color (Bickmore & Parker, 2014). Teachers need direct support from school leadership and their peers to successfully support students of color through culturally responsive teaching. This collective approach would allow for professional discourse and reflection that would guide professional best practice in serving students of color.

Culturally responsive teaching is dependent upon a teacher's ownership of personal responsibility to attend to the unique needs of all students and the intentional delivery of culturally responsive teaching practices. According to Gay (2013), this ownership is the deliberate action one produces in response to a given problem and has four core properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection. This ownership or personal agency is built around intentional instructional moves by the teacher. To apply culturally responsive teaching explicitly for students' needs, a teacher must demonstrate agency in planning, delivering, and reflecting on instruction. This agency is the manifestation of thoughts into culturally responsive teaching practices.

Gollnick and Chinn (2017) presented students do not learn in the same way because "their cultures and experiences influence the way they learn and interact with their teachers and peers" (p. 18). All students deserve a chance to learn at high levels. When exploring the causes behind the disparities in academic achievement between White students and students of color, researchers have found students of color are often not allowed to experience rigorous and high-quality instruction directly relating to their world (Gay, 2010). These disparities are perpetuated when students are promoted to the next grade level without mastering the curriculum required to navigate future learning adequately (Hammond, 2015). The identified disparities between White



student achievement and the achievement of students of color will not be eradicated through the mindset of interventions driven by a perceived deficit in students of color. There must be a foundational shift in the design, implementation, and assessment of learning for all students to ensure opportunities for learning are equitable and genuinely focused on supporting the cultures of all students. To facilitate this shift, teachers, educational leaders, and critical stakeholders must engage in courageous conversations centering on the belief all students (regardless of culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status) are capable of learning and achieving at high levels.

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## **Appendix A: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.



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Digital Signature

Brian O'Quin Dawson

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Name (Typed)

September 20, 2019

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Date

## Appendix B: Chapter 3: Methodological Process

Single Case Study Rationale				
Yin (2014): The single case study is an appropriate design under several circumstances and 5 single case rationales that is, having a critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal case are given below. a single case study is analogous to a single experiment, and many of the same conditions that justified a single experiment can also justify a single case study (p. 51).				
1st: Are propositions correct?	2nd: Is the case extreme or unusual?	3rd: Is the situation common and does this study provide lessons?	4th: Is this case revelatory?	5th: Is this case longitudinal?
	Unique	Yes	Yes	No
Study Bounds	15-week time frame White female teachers teaching fourth through ninth grades 2 individual interviews that will each last approximately 45 – 60 minutes 5 hour-long focus group meetings			
Setting	Texas, Suburban School District			
Actors	Committee, teachers, researcher, peer group			
Events	Research, case-study, observations of focus groups, interviews			
Processes	Interviews, Focus Groups, Field Notes			
Ethical Considerations	Respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)			
Research Question	What do White female teachers perceive as being culturally responsive teaching practices?			
Research Question	How do the perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices of White female teachers affect their instructional practices in serving students of color?			
<b>Potential Propositions</b>	<b>Source</b>			
White female teachers want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.	Professional experience and Literature: Georgetown Independent School District and participating teachers from district site campuses.			

White female teachers do not have the necessary awareness to seek these changes in their practice.		Professional experience and Literature: Same as Above		
Rival Propositions		Source		
White female teachers do not want to serve their students of color in a culturally responsive way.		Professional experience and Literature: Same as Above		
White female teachers are cognizant of how to best do so but choose not to serve their students of color efficiently.		Professional experience and Literature: Same as Above		
Unit of Analysis:		Teachers’ lived experiences Teachers’ perceptions Social Interactions Group of Teachers discourse during focus group meetings		
Students of Color and Academic Gaps	Instructional best practices to serve the needs of all learners	Teacher Awareness through Discourse	Educational Equity through Culturally Responsive Teaching	
Logic Linking Study to Proposition:		Funds of Knowledge Conceptual Framework		
All teachers have unique lived experiences that influence how they perceive the world around them.	All students have unique lived experiences that influence how they perceive the world around them.	Individual lived experiences of teachers may influence the expectations they have for students of color.	Individual lived experiences of students may influence their responses to the learning environment and instructional approaches used by the teachers.	There is a direct influence of one’s funds of knowledge and how people interact and respond to each other.
Logic Linking Study to Proposition		Constructivist Theoretical Framework		
As people are exposed to new concepts	As people experience new lived	Students build knowledge based	The learner creates the answer as	Learners begin with existing knowledge as the starting point,

their awareness of other concepts and learning happen.	experiences, they construct new learning that influences their funds of knowledge.	upon prior knowledge.	they see it. Therefore, meaning is constructed as learning is constructed.	teachers are less like dispensers of information and more like learning guides that allow learners to make their own conclusions.
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## **Appendix C: Focus Group Conversation Protocols**

Norms for engaging in conversations about racism and privilege are not the same norms used when you are meeting to discuss budget or other general organizational issues. These norms are designed to intentionally counter some of the norms of dominant white culture. When norms are not explicitly talked about, they favor those who are best versed in the dominant culture. When setting up the norms for any meeting you are telling participants what is to be expected, in some cases, what are “normal” experiences they are likely to have. Norms are essential for setting the tone and letting people know what to expect in themselves and of one another.

### **Stay Engaged**

- It’s important that you try to stay present in the room. Pay attention to when you are shutting down. Discomfort and anxiety are normal parts of courageous conversations.
- If you find yourself needing to stand up, please do so. If you find yourself drifting, use strategies that will help you stay present.
- Stay with the topic. When you feel discomfort it’s easy to take the conversation someplace different. Resist the urge to change the topic to another ism. One reason it’s hard to stay on the topic of racism is because it can bring up issues of guilt, shame and anger. However difficult it may become, we want you to stay engaged in the race conversation.
- Checking out of the conversation when it becomes uncomfortable is one form of privilege protection.

### **Speak Your Truth**

- The purpose of having these conversations is to be able to speak our truths about our experiences. If not here, where? If not now, when?
- We often avoid speaking our truth for fear of what others might say. It’s important that we create an environment where everyone is free to speak openly so that learning can occur.
- Keep in mind that people are in different places in this work. In order for us to grow, it’s important people are able to share their thoughts in a way that’s comfortable for them.
- When we share our thoughts, it often creates an emotional reaction from others. Being able to speak your truth does not mean that people will not respond emotionally. Be prepared to experience the discomfort that race conversations bring.
- Speaking our truth does not mean stomping on each other’s heads. Before speaking, think about what it is that you want others to know. How can they best hear you? Whose interests are being served? When speaking are you creating enemies or allies? When you speak, are you speaking to put others down or put them in their place, or are you speaking so that new learning can occur for others in the room?
- Remember that everyone does not communicate in the same way that you do. If someone gets loud in the room, it doesn’t mean they are angry. If they are angry, it doesn’t necessarily mean they are angry with you. If they are angry with something you said, it doesn’t mean that that person no longer has a relationship with you. Often times these conversations bring up a lot of emotions from past and present experiences. Try and allow others to experience their emotions without your shutting down.

- One of the characteristics of dominance is to speak as if you represent all people's perspectives, rather than your own. We call this the "universal you" as in, "You know how we enjoy chocolate?" The universal 'you' also allows you to say something without taking personal ownership of your opinions. Try to avoid the universal you and instead speak for yourself by making "I" vs. "We" statements.

### **No Fixing**

- It is human nature to want to fix other people's pain and discomfort, particularly when they are crying or are clearly distressed. However, it's important that we let each person in the room experience their own discomfort and not fix it for them. This is a part of their learning.
- Sometimes people will want to "fix" each other by reassuring them about their lack of stereotypes or racism. This is often the case when they share that identity with the person who is acknowledging their biases. For example, a white woman telling another white woman she's not prejudice. If you find yourself wanting to fix someone, explore what might be coming up about your own identity.
- If you find yourself wanting to "fix" a situation or make someone feel better, pause for a moment and reflect on what is going on in you.

### **Experience Discomfort**

- One way to think about this is, learn to become comfortable with the discomfort. In other words, being uncomfortable is to be expected.
- If you are not feeling any sense of discomfort in the dialogue, ask yourself are you fully engaged? Are you giving of yourself fully and taking risks?
- Many people confuse safety and comfort. You can have perfectly safe conversations where people are very uncomfortable.
- Often, people who are experiencing oppression will be blamed for making members of the dominant culture uncomfortable. You may hear, "Race wasn't an issue before these workshops created all the problems." Avoiding conversations for the sake of comfort serves to reinforce white privilege.

### **Take Risks**

- The more you are willing to risk, the more potential you have to learn.
- By staying silent out of the fear of saying something wrong, avoiding conflict, or making someone else uncomfortable, you miss the opportunity to authentically engage with one another. You also miss out on the opportunity to grow in your understanding.

### **Listen for Understanding**

- Try and understand where another person is coming from as best you can.
- Be careful not to compare your experiences with another person's. For example, saying gender oppression is the same as racial oppression. This often invalidates or minimizes a person's experiences.
- Listen without thinking about how you are going to respond.
- Stay present in their pain and your discomfort as you listen.
- If someone is pointing out how what you said left them feeling, try not to explain or rationalize what you said or why you said it. For example, sometimes it's necessary to



just say, “I didn’t realize what I said was inappropriate,” or, “I didn’t mean to hurt you, I’m sorry.”

- Think about your comments before saying them. Resist the need to explain. Sometimes positive intent is not enough (intent vs. impact). Be careful not to lose the opportunity to just listen. Don’t put the focus back on you.

### **Expect and Accept Non-closure**

- In our society today, we often want to feel some sense of closure, regardless of the issue. There will be fortunate situations where you will be able to resolve something between you and another person but more times than not it will feel unfinished. Sometimes you will have to circle back around at another time reconcile differences and other times you will have to sit with non-closure.
- Engaging in race conversations means there will be times of no closure. This is on-going work that does not necessarily leave one walking away feeling like everything turned out the way you hoped. Be willing to take risks and accept that much of this is about changing yourself, not others.
- White cultural norms focus on the product, rather than the process. These are process conversations where greater awareness leads to future changes.

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## Appendix D: Invitation for Participation

Dear Teacher,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation in the Education Leadership doctoral program at Concordia University–Portland. You have been identified as a potential participant in this study based on your current grade level and professional attributes that match the study criteria. Below is more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part. In this study, the researcher will seek to explore the following questions:

1. What do White female teachers perceive as being culturally responsive teaching practices?
2. How do the perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices of White female teachers affect their instructional practices in serving students of color?

Ten participants will be randomly chosen from the teachers that express an interest in participating in this study. Teachers that are chosen and agree to participate in this study will participate in the following:

- Pre-study interview - approximately 45–60 minutes
- Five, one-hour focus group meetings that will be planned around participant schedules
- Post study interview - approximately 45–60 minutes

I am excited to engage in this exciting study. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so choose. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time by informing me. The interviews and focus group meetings will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in the final dissertation resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. At the completion of all transcriptions, all audio recordings will be destroyed. Even though I may present the study findings to colleagues for their feedback, only my committee chair and I will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at [redacted]. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Julie McCann at [jmccann@cu-portland.edu](mailto:jmccann@cu-portland.edu).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Concordia University–Portland. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact me at [redacted]

If interested in participating in this research, please contact me at [redacted]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,



Brian Dawson, M. Ed.  
Doctoral Student,  
Concordia University–Portland