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CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PEDAGOGY

By

Tracy R. Norman

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Doctor of Education

at

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Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum, Doctor of Education

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Bettie J. Norman, my beloved cousin, Julia Mae Edwards, my wife Pamela Norman, my son Nicholas Norman, my twin daughters Lauren and Leah Norman, and each of my siblings Kim, James, and Kenneth. Love all of you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the New Jersey Army National Guard for investing the faith, support, confidence, and necessary resources to complete this dissertation. I also want to acknowledge all the professors in the Educational Doctorate Program at Rowan University who imparted knowledge along my journey of becoming a doctor. I especially want to thank my dissertation committee for your guidance and feedback. I look forward to applying my skills and knowledge to the field of education and the New Jersey Army National Guard in pursuit of excellence and a better tomorrow.

Abstract

Tracy R. Norman
CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PEDAGOGY

2019-2020

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The purpose of this study was to infuse culturally responsive teaching practices into the traditional curriculum to meet the needs of all students. Through this action research study, a professional learning community analyzed the current curriculum in the third and fourth grades at Lanier Elementary School, and they revised the curriculum to include culturally responsive practices. The use of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) allowed the principal and 3rd & 4th grade teachers to reflect on current practices in a nonthreatening environment. It also allowed the PLC to analyze current pedagogy, study new practices, and make immediate changes to participants' teaching. Culturally responsive teaching practices are inclusive of all students' backgrounds and learning styles.

The data gathered and analyzed through this action research study showed that culturally responsive teaching practices engaged all students in learning. Additionally, culturally responsive practices enhanced teacher capacity and self-awareness. Teachers moved from teaching a Eurocentric perspective to a multicultural perspective. The research can be used in helping educators learn the cultural backgrounds of their students and create a classroom environment where students learned from each other. Furthermore, it led to educators identifying and revising Eurocentric lessons and valuing the use of multicultural curricula.

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Chapter One

Introduction

For decades, scholars have written about the poor academic achievement among students of color in public schools throughout America. Research suggests that no single factor is responsible for poor performance among disadvantaged students; instead, there are multiple factors. Some theorists have explored how the daily experiences of discrimination and racial prejudice affect disadvantaged students (Hunter, 1980; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992), with Lerman (1996) suggesting that these negative experiences create a belief among students that working hard in school is irrelevant. Han (2008) posited that “schools serve as another important influence by being children’s first connection to the external macro-environment and the place where they spend the majority of their day” (p 71). Other than family or community members, schools are typically the first place where pre-K and kindergarten-aged children have intense, daily contact with adults. What children perceive and learn about their identities and abilities at this stage can stay with them their whole lives; thus, the school setting can have a profound impact on a child’s lifelong well-being and development (Han, 2008). Children who encounter negative experiences or develop poor skills during this period will be subject to significant academic challenges as they continue through grade school. According to the International Institute for Advocacy for School Children (1993), equal access to instructional content is a challenge. When teachers present lessons to students with different experiences, knowledge and skills, this can become an equity issue. Students with lesser skills will not be able to access the lesson content because they lack the necessary skills to

comprehend and learn the material. Such practices may appear to provide children with access; however, they are abusive, superficial interactions that may be discriminatory (International Institute for Advocacy for School Children, 1993). Beyond the academic skills of lower-performing students, researchers suggest there are other factors involved. Researchers who are interested in schools assert that the transition to middle school is also a period where declines in achievement and motivation occur (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993), due to lowered teacher expectations (Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1970; Eccles, Lord, & Buchanan, 1996; Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1997). Other researchers interested in personality development and child characteristics report that student achievement has links to children's mental health and emotions (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Knitzer, 1999; Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999; Roeser, Eccles, & Strobel, 1998). It would be useful to explore research involving children's school experiences to provide meaningful knowledge to those responsible for teaching in today's cultural context. The U.S. Government often analyzes important issues such as race, ethnicity, and culture, and it can serve as a great source of information for state and local education agencies.

The U.S. Education Department's analysis of the country's 9,700 public schools found a pattern of inequality on a number of fronts, with race as a dividing factor (Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001). Racial minorities are more likely than White students to face suspension from school, have less access to rigorous math and science classes, and have lower-paid teachers with less experience, according to comprehensive data from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (Jacobson et al., 2001). Across the United States, two-thirds of minority students still

attend schools that are predominantly minority; most of them located in central cities and funded well below those in neighboring suburban districts (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Recent analyses of data for school finance cases in Alabama, New Jersey, New York, Louisiana, and Texas have found that on every tangible measure—from qualified teachers to curriculum offerings—schools serving greater numbers of students of color had significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly White students. Additionally, schools with large Black populations may be in unsafe neighborhoods, and consequently, they may adopt tighter disciplinary policies (e.g., zero tolerance), enforcing rules with metal detectors, hallway cameras, and security guards (Loveless, 2017). According to Loveless (2017), racial bias or stereotyping exists when schools develop and implement rules. Loveless suggested that Black students are more likely to come from family backgrounds that have had school behavior problems and that stereotyping is always possible during the implementation of school rules. When it comes to school discipline, African American students are more likely than Asian and White students to report targeting and unfair treatment. Over an extended period, students who encounter factors such as high suspension rates, unqualified teachers, and limited curriculum offerings experience educational achievement gaps.

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), many scholars have offered a wide variety of explanations for why there is a gap in equality in traditional curricula. To get a better understanding of the achievement gap, researchers have used the Coleman Report of 1966, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al., 1966). According to the report, educational proficiency had the strongest influence on individual achievement for Black and White students. The report also indicated that increased numbers of non-

White students within schools had a positive effect on African American students, decreasing the achievement gap by nearly half (Coleman et al., 1966). Banks (2003) and Gay and Howard (2001) focused their research on the cultural discrepancies in education that have resulted in the gap in student achievement. According to Banks (1995), many immigrants are entering America's school system each year and changing the characteristics of classrooms. Banks (1995) called for education reform to support student achievement for all children.

Curriculum theorist Popkewitz (1998) and sociologist Noguera (2008) concentrated on the role of curriculum, culture, and schooling as the origin of the achievement gap. However, teacher educators such as Sleeter (2001), Cochran-Smith (2004) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 2006), focused on the practices of teachers as contributors to either widening or narrowing the gap. The common thread among each of the scholars' suggested causes for the gap is the school's curriculum and how teachers teach it. Considering that most students within the American public school system are non-White (Frey, 2019), an acknowledgment and understanding of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students as well as a desire to use their cultural experiences in the curriculum is paramount. Attempts to address the issue of inequality include, but are not limited to, Title 1 funding, taxation to redistribute state funding, the No Child Left Behind Act, and legislation from court cases. Typically, the most common approach involves increasing funding or redistributing existing funds through legislation at various levels of government. Perhaps more emphasis should be placed on understanding why inequality and achievement gaps exist in the public school system and what type of preventive measures may help be implemented.

Generally, educators would agree that mastery of pedagogical skills and content knowledge are requirements of effective teaching. However, G. R. Howard (1999) highlighted the challenge of effective teaching when he stated, “We can’t teach what we don’t know.” G. R. Howard’s statement referred to both subject matter and the diverse student populations. Gay (2002) asserted that effective modern educators must espouse skills and traits that demonstrate a basic understanding of urban school demographics and the ability to think critically about behaviors, attitudes, and possible stereotypes that could potentially impact their ability to create a culturally tolerant classroom. While this may be true, too many teachers are still unprepared to teach and address the needs of ethnically diverse students. This unpreparedness is due in part to some professional programs that either equivocate about including multicultural education or do not include it at all. The equivocation involves an appropriate place for multicultural education and also a face for it. According to Gay and Howard (2001), preparing for culturally responsive teaching involves explicit knowledge about cultural diversity, which is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students. This knowledge includes understanding the contributions of different ethnic groups and their cultural characteristics (Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994; J. E. King, Hollins, & Hayman, 1997; Pai, 1990; Smith, 1998). In addition to developing democracy, Gay (2002) posited that multicultural education is one avenue for preparing teachers and also for improving the academic success of students from diverse backgrounds.

The Need for Multicultural Education

The National Association for Multicultural Education suggested that several state curricula and public schools operate contrary to multiculturalism, primarily emphasizing

European values over those of other cultures. In the realm of public education, it is unjust and inequitable to marginalize or erase some students from the curriculum.

Curwood, Schliesman, and Horning (2009) suggested that schools and educators condone social injustices by failing to include a diverse range of literature in the curriculum.

McLean (1997) developed this point by highlighting that when the literature in the curriculum ignores or denies the existence of a specific group, it invalidates the self-identity and experience of that group. The invalidation not only affects the members of the specific group, but also all other groups in society as well.

Because many public schools in the United States are culturally diverse, the curricula should reflect the student population. Burke (1997) described this well when she asserted, “A curriculum can be described as inclusive when everything that happens in that school reflects and responds to the experiences, needs, rights, and contributions of all learners” (p. 361). Based on Burke’s assertion, the curriculum is an equalizer and educators should design and implement it taking account of the various ethnicities of the community members, and more specifically, they should address the needs of the community.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017), Burke’s research is even more relevant today, given that the majority of students representing the U.S. public and private school system are predominantly students of color. For the sake of educational equality and inclusiveness, states within the American public system should include legislation and best practices that facilitate a multicultural curriculum throughout local school systems. The curriculum should address racism at every grade level, and schools must strive to promote languages and cultures every day. The typical

multicultural dress-up day or international food celebration is not enough. As Gallagher (2008) suggested, a more appropriate starting point to implementing a culturally inclusive curriculum “is to involve all members of the school’s community in the life of the school so as to acknowledge value and included in the school’s curriculum the experiences, knowledge and needs of all its learners” (p. 77).

As a result of the need for multiculturalism, the National Association for Multicultural Education Criteria for Evaluating State Curriculum Standards established guidelines that address five key areas: inclusiveness, diverse perspectives, accommodating alternative epistemologies/social construction of knowledge, self-knowledge, and social justice (National Association for Multicultural Education, n.d.). The guidelines promote adding breadth to state curricula by encouraging multiple constituencies and various points of view in the United States. They encourage students to entertain competing understandings of social and historical phenomena of the United States. The guidelines suggest that school curricula should provide students with analytic tools to evaluate the causes and effects of traditional and alternative belief systems of the United States through multiple lenses. School curricula should also equip students with structures that allow them to evaluate their own cultural ethnic identities and to study the origins and consequences of their behaviors and attitudes towards other groups. Gallagher (2008) and the National Association for Multicultural Education are correct in suggesting curriculum breadth and involving members of the community as focal points for implementing an inclusive curriculum; however, there is another equally important component. Multicultural curricula must also combine with culturally responsive teachers who understand and embrace the five key areas of the National Association for

Multicultural Education. These teachers must also have the training and pedagogical skills to implement language, customs, and cultural values over a sustainable period.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Classrooms

Culturally responsive teaching is a method of teaching that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in the curriculum and in all facets of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more relevant to them" (p. 31). Culturally responsive teaching "simultaneously develops academic achievement, social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring" (Gay, 2000, p. 43). When teachers utilize a multicultural curriculum and multicultural experiences in the classroom, students make rich connections and feel they are part of the classroom community. However, there is very little about multicultural experiences in the standardized, traditional curriculum (Delpit, 2006). With the implementation of Common Core, the standardization of education has made it nearly impossible for students of different races and cultures to receive respect, as states are adopting teacher-proof curricula in response to low test scores. Even though the idea of the standards-based movement is that it allows all children to learn, and that it increases the achievement of marginalized students, it homogenizes children of all achievement levels (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

According to Ladson-Billings (2009), the benefits include developing self-esteem for all elementary students in the classroom, forcing students to work collaboratively as

experts to teach each other while learning to respect each other, and developing a community of students who are willing to learn. Teachers who use culturally responsive teaching see culture as a strength in the classroom that they can use to enhance academic and social achievement (Bassey, 2016). According to Bassey (2016), teachers use culturally responsive teaching to motivate, inspire, and nourish racial pride and the need for equity in the classroom and society. Culturally responsive teaching can help students to understand their roles as change agents in the world.

In a culturally responsive classroom, teachers are proactive in dealing with stereotypes. Nieto (2004) posited that the most important goal in a culturally responsive classroom is to build a learning environment without stereotypes. A culturally responsive classroom teaches and nurtures awareness, respect, and mutual understanding in each learning activity. It encourages students to accept and tolerate each other's differences (Rasool & Curtis, 2000). According to Hammond (2015), culturally responsive teaching directly impacts the brain. Hammond (2015) suggested that culture is software to the brain's hardware. Hammond asserted that human beings organize information in our brains through a cultural lens. We see some cultures and ethnic groups as safe and others as threats. Our brain develops bias in an effort to understand our surroundings. Since the brain builds connections, a culturally responsive classroom provides opportunities for students to build positive connections within their own cultures and with the cultures of others. On a larger scale, the American public school system has the potential to serve as the perfect conduit to embrace the assertions of Hammond and culturally responsive teaching. Many see America's two largest cities, New York and Los Angeles, as melting pots that offer a plethora of opportunities for cultural connections. Based on the data

from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), this is not going to change anytime soon.

Problem Statement

The demographics in the United States have changed as it now has a more ethnically diverse population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), between fall 2013 and fall 2025, the number of White students will continue to decrease from 50% to 46% and students who are Black will decrease from 16% to 15%; however, the percentages of students who are Hispanic are likely to increase from 25% to 29%. To promote academic and social success for all students, a culturally responsive approach to teaching is necessary.

According to Gay (2000; cf. Ladson-Billings, 2009), students should explore knowledge in depth through culturally responsive teaching, including multiethnic cultural frames of reference. The U.S. public school system has students of diverse backgrounds, and teachers who have a great understanding of content must mine the knowledge of such students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teacher-proof curricula can give students knowledge with minimal opportunities for deep exploration or understanding.

From 1996 to 2016, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in U.S. schools doubled from 8.8 to 17.9 million (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). This rate of growth is significant, and it presents several challenges for the American public school system and the United States in general. These challenges include addressing language, cultural barriers, and the staffing of public schools in which teachers and administrators reign supreme. Despite the 20-year trend of the Hispanic population representing more than half the population growth in the United States, school curricula and the demographics of

public school teachers and administrators are predominantly Caucasian, and this has not changed during this period. Between 1996 and 2018, approximately 80% of K-12 public school teachers in America identified as Caucasian and faced the difficult task of educating a diverse population of students. Given the history of this ethnic disparity between public school teachers and students, local school districts face challenges to develop and retain professional teachers while implementing an inclusive curriculum.

Merryfield (1991) found that preservice teachers are unprepared for teaching from a global perspective given traditional teacher-training programs. One reason is the lack of agreement among global education scholars on either a cohesive curriculum or effective pedagogical practices within global education (Hicks, 2003; Kirkwood, 2001; LeRoux, 2001). According to Merryfield (1991), another reason is the lack of professional development for teachers to be effective in understanding the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students. In culturally responsive teaching, a teacher needs an understanding that school structures, practices, and norms do not create equal achievement opportunities for all students. Teachers' limited knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds can severely impact their ability to use students' cultural and linguistic strengths and to nurture student identities of achievement). The *Teacher Effectiveness Movement* encourages the use of observation tools such as the Danielson (2013) Framework for Teaching, but it does not address the critical role of teachers in being socioculturally conscious to be effective in reaching all their students. A non-cohesive curriculum and a lack of professional development for teachers results in teachers entering the teaching force as unprepared as existing veteran teachers to meet the needs of today's students.

Other researchers in the field, such as Flores (2007) and Sleeter (2012), added additional perspectives to the challenges of creating a culturally responsive classroom and curriculum by highlighting factors such as test scores and time. Sleeter highlighted that teachers have little time to research and develop a curriculum that is inclusive of all their students. Their focus has been on raising test scores and the development of tested subjects such as English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Flores found that newly hired teachers faced pressure to use standardization rather than responsiveness to raise the achievement of their diverse student population.

When schools and educators prioritize concepts such as social justice and fairness, the curriculum and texts they use matter. Throughout the school environment, programs such as positive behavior intervention supports and character education focus on creating a fair and just environment for all students. Curriculum and texts must support all students by giving them an opportunity to see themselves and their heritage. This, in turn, helps students to develop an identity that is varied and rich in nature. When educators focus on a Eurocentric perspective in the school curriculum, the only students benefiting from this identity development are Caucasian students. Others in the classroom internalize an “us and them” perspective that infiltrates beliefs, self-esteem, and motivation for learning and actions. Additional funding and resources may be necessary to diversify the school’s existing curriculum, making it more multicultural, inclusive, and indicative of the whole community. This means that educators need to establish a set of guidelines to look at any curriculum and to diversify it based on the racial and cultural makeup of their classes each year. There are typically three kinds of curricula that allow for opportunities to teach cultural diversity: *formal plans* for

instruction approved by the policy and governing bodies of educational systems; the *symbolic curriculum*, which includes mottoes, symbols, celebrations, and other artifacts used to teach skills, morals and values (Gay, 2010); and what Cortés (as cited in Gay & Howard, 2001), called the *societal curriculum*. The societal curriculum covers the ideas, knowledge, and perceptions of ethnic groups the mass media present through television programs, newspapers, magazines, and movies. Through professional learning community (PLC) work, teachers need to learn how to convert each of these curricula into culturally responsive instructional strategies and curriculum designs.

The first guideline for creating a culturally responsive classroom and curriculum is allowing time for teachers to develop their own sociocultural consciousness.

According to Krasnoff (2016), sociocultural consciousness is when a teacher reflects and understands that his or her own way of thinking and behaving directly impacts the classroom and curriculum he or she is developing and teaching. Teachers must have time during PLC meetings, conference days, or grade-level meetings to examine their own sociocultural identities and biases critically in a nonthreatening way. This examination should take place to develop a greater awareness of their own beliefs about race, ethnicity, social class, and language. They must recognize any discrimination based on ethnicity, social class, and/or race and they must examine any negative attitudes or beliefs they might have toward diverse student groups.

The second guideline is creating an equitable classroom climate through caring and community building. Having a culturally responsive curriculum is vitally important, but it will not have the same impact if students are learning in inequitable environments. According to Krasnoff (2016), instructional practices are as important as, if not *more*

important than multicultural curriculum designs in implementing culturally responsive teaching. In creating an equitable, culturally responsive classroom, teachers must know how to use cultural scaffolding in teaching diverse student populations.

The third guideline is reshaping the current curriculum using a culturally responsive lens. Once teachers have examined their own beliefs and viewpoints, they can revise and rework curricula to include a variety of cultures and perspectives. Teachers can do this work by creating project-based learning models so that students of any cultural or ethnic background can research and learn about their own cultural identities. Through collaborative group work, teachers can encourage students to think critically and encourage them to entertain competing constructions and understandings of social, historical, and natural phenomena (National Association for Multicultural Education, n.d.). Additionally, teachers can encourage students to recognize that alternative cultural constructions entail distinct ways of thinking. Teachers can provide the analytic tools students need to evaluate both the causes and the effects of traditional and alternative belief systems. Through the revision of the current curriculum to a project-based curriculum, teachers will set up a structure that allows students to investigate their own cultural and ethnic identities and to examine the origins and consequences of their attitudes and behaviors toward other groups.

By applying these three guidelines, classrooms, teaching practices, and schools will transform into culturally responsive, equitable learning organizations. When teachers use these guidelines, they will find that culturally responsive teaching practices go beyond a unit of study. It is a belief system and a classroom practice that teachers can apply throughout the school day.

Context of the Problem

For the purposes of this study, the terms “*Lanier Elementary School* and *King Central School District*” will be used as pseudonyms to respect the privacy of the involved school and school district. This study took place at Lanier Elementary School of the King Central School District in Soho, NY where the administrators and teachers experienced challenges in implementing an inclusive curriculum for their student population. King Central School District is located within Westchester County, which is one of the wealthiest counties in America. This K-12 school district boasts over 5,800 students housed in five elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. Consistent with the New York State Report Card data, 70.7% of King students were Caucasian, 19.8% were Hispanic, and 6.7% were African American (New York State Education Department, 2017). The King district community mainly comprised Caucasian, middle-to-upper income families (\$85,000 to \$200,000), and teachers who represented these same percentages. While King’s demographics indicated that 14% of students received free and reduced lunch and 26% of students were students of color, Lanier Elementary comprised 43% students of color with 26% of the total student population receiving free and reduced lunch (New York State Education Department, 2016). Between July 2002 and January 2020, the faculty and staff of Lanier Elementary averaged 93% Caucasian, and the Hispanic student population grew steadily, while the Caucasian student population slowly declined. This shift in student demographics was parallel with the growing students of color populations in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). According to Frey (2018), minority racial populations in the United States will grow 74% between 2018 and 2060, while the White population will only see a

modest gain as a consequence of more deaths and fewer births. In the King Central School District, all elementary schools follow the Putnam/Northern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) ELA/social studies curriculum. Teachers throughout Westchester County designed this curriculum by deciding the knowledge to impart to students and the values to uphold. The Northern Westchester BOCES of Westchester County mainly comprises teachers and curriculum chairs who are European, White, middle-class women. S. H. King (1993) submitted that if the curriculum writing committee were made up of a diverse group, diverse opinions would be present when designing the curriculum.

An analysis of Lanier's social studies curriculum indicated that the weaknesses were not in the rigor or the alignment to New York State standards; the curriculum was weak in what it required teachers to teach. Members of the dominant culture developed the curriculum; therefore, it represented the values of the dominant culture. At Lanier Elementary, the current K-5 social studies curriculum incorporates values such as patriotism, competition, and capitalism, and students learn about the history of European immigrants and a democratic government. According to Flinders and Thornton (2013), if European American scholars working within a European American perspective are the primary writers of a curriculum, the curriculum will conceptualize everyone within an immigrant paradigm. This viewpoint ignores perspectives from nonimmigrant historical experiences.

The curriculum at Lanier Elementary School only focused on the dominant culture, and it did not match the school's evolving population of students. One example was a Grade 4 unit of the New York State BOCES social studies curriculum that

explained how Dewitt Clinton opened the Erie Canal with his men. What the unit failed to mention is that African Americans helped to make the region the most prosperous in the New World (Levine, 2017). Within the King Central School District, the assistant superintendent of instruction was responsible for curriculum, and all elementary schools followed the same BOCES curriculum, despite differing student demographics. As a result, the ELA/social studies curriculum at Lanier Elementary was standardized, and it marginalized certain races of students as well as multicultural experiences in general (Delpit, 2006). With the implementation of the Common Core Standards, along with pressure to raise New York State test scores, the school's curriculum became what Delpit (2006) considered teacher-proof, making it nearly impossible to acknowledge and represent the different races of Lanier students culturally.

The demographic shift in student enrollment had significant implications for the Lanier school community. There was an increase in enrollment of minority students and a decrease in enrollment of Caucasian students. Since 2002, Lanier's Hispanic and African American student population has scored lowest on all state assessments and experienced the highest percentages of out-of-school suspensions among elementary schools in the district. Based on past demographic trends and Frey's (2018) assertion, within 10 years of this study Lanier Elementary is likely to have students of color as the majority of its student population with a 20-year history of academic failure. It is necessary to explore, understand, and address this growing trend of academic failure among students of color. Ladson-Billings (2012) referred to this type of failure as *classroom death*. According to Apple (1993; cf. Ladson-Billings, 2012), "classroom death refers to teachers who stop trying to reach each and every student, or teachers who

succumb to rules and regulations that are dehumanizing and result in deskilling” (p. 77). Many teachers at Lanier Elementary School lacked the understanding or awareness that they were participating in classroom death. Consistent with Ladson-Billings’s perspective, the teachers of these students became functionaries of the school system and they were not able to prepare students of color to be active participants in a democracy. At Lanier Elementary, the failing student population, the efficacy of the teachers, and the curriculum and resources received immediate attention.

Culturally responsive teachers seek to create a sociopolitical consciousness in their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This consciousness creates opportunities for students to recognize and understand current social and political inequities. Undisrupted, the cycle of classroom death would have left Lanier’s students of color population on the path of the unemployed and underemployed. To disrupt this cycle, Ladson-Billings (2012) asserted that the pedagogical practices and school curriculum must evolve to address the complexities of social inequalities. The aim of this study was to disrupt the cycle of death by addressing the issue of Lanier Elementary School’s lack of culturally responsive teaching and curriculum.

Purpose of Study

To promote academic and social success for all the students at Lanier Elementary, a culturally responsive approach to teaching was necessary. Consistent with the research and theory of Ladson-Billings (2009), it was necessary to explore knowledge in depth through culturally responsive teaching provided by multiethnic cultural frames of reference. Lanier had many students from diverse backgrounds, and teachers needed a greater understanding of curriculum content to mine the knowledge of their students

(Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The teachers at Lanier Elementary lacked the training and efficacy to explore the school's curriculum deeply in search of knowledge and understanding. Specifically, the study involved the development of a PLC in which teachers learned about multicultural education and developed culturally responsive teaching practices. The study helped teachers to become aware of their own biases towards teaching diverse learners, and it transformed the way they thought about planning for a diverse classroom in both curriculum and environment.

During this action research study I worked collaboratively with teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching practices by applying three of Krasnoff's (2016) guidelines. I used a qualitative methodology, in tandem with action research, to focus on culturally responsive teaching to make the third-grade science and fourth-grade social studies curriculum more inclusive for students at Lanier Elementary. Since third-grade students are developmentally enthusiastic, adapt to change quickly, enjoy large group friendships, and support justice and fairness (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2011), the third-grade teachers thought it was valuable to analyze the science curriculum through the lenses of equity and culturally responsive teaching. In addition, during the time of the study, fourth-graders were starting an important year in their social studies learning and in their understanding of the world. Students would begin to take a closer look at U.S. history and the laws of their home states as well as the land. Fourth-graders would also start to learn the basics of democracy, starting with local, state, and national governments as they explored the rationale for rules and laws. In addition, they began learning about early U.S. history, building the foundation for more in-depth study in future grades (Great Schools, 2015).

Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, and Gloria Ladson-Billings have developed instructional practices and strategies to reach racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students (Krasnoff, 2016). Three of these guidelines were at the heart of this research study. They were developing awareness, creating a culturally responsive classroom, and reshaping the standardized curriculum to include diverse perspectives. According to Gay (2002), the educational achievement of diverse students will improve if teachers are prepared with culturally responsive knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Through PLC work, grade-level meetings, and team planning, teachers engaged in the process of reflection and action. As I have observed at Lanier Elementary School, teachers initially did little to develop the skills and strategies to teach a diverse student population and the overall student achievement of the school suffered as a result. Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) stated that effective teachers provide more than content area instruction. Being culturally responsive to diverse student populations is the key to being an effective teacher in an ever-changing school system.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. What are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students?
2. How can teachers and administrators of Lanier Elementary School develop an awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact classrooms and teaching practices?
3. What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum?

4. How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices?

Significance of the Study

Given that the enrollment of students of color increased by 64% over the 10-year period from 1992-1993 to 2002-2003 (Fry, 2006), it has become increasingly important for educational institutions to support teachers in educating this growing population effectively.

Creating a curriculum that is equitable improves the U.S. educational system, and it is necessary for the implementation of the United States' democratic ideals, which are basic human rights, social justice, and equal opportunity (Bennett, 1999). A multicultural education allows students to understand the world from multiple perspectives and to develop into global citizens. According to Irvine and Armento (2001), the process of reflection is necessary to adapt the knowledge and repertoire of strategies researchers gain from teacher effectiveness research to meet the needs of students of color. T. Howard (2003) asserted that the problem U.S. schools are facing is that many teachers who educate students of color have not received adequate preparation to teach such diverse student populations. The objective of this study was to explore effective culturally responsive teaching practices that made student learning both inclusive and engaging for all students. By exploring such practices through action research, teachers eventually developed the necessary skills to assess deficits in learning and achievement of their students properly and ultimately to implement culturally responsive and relevant strategies that addressed the deficits continuously (Sleeter, 2001).

Conclusion

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), many scholars have offered a wide variety of explanations for why there is a gap in equality in traditional curricula. The research of Christine Sleeter (2001), Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004), Sonia Nieto (1999), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2004, 2005, 2006), focused on the practices of teachers as contributors to the gap, whereas curriculum theorist Thomas Popkewitz (1998) and sociologist Pedro Noguero (2008) suggested the role of curriculum, culture and schooling as factors. The common thread among each of the scholars' suggested causes for the gap in the school curriculum and the way teachers teach it.

In the U.S. public school system, many current curriculum standards are Eurocentric rather than reflective of the existing multicultural composition of students. The ELA/social studies curriculum at Lanier Elementary served as an example of this. The curriculum was standardized, and it marginalized certain races of students as well as multicultural experiences in general (Delpit, 2006). With the implementation of the Common Core Standards, along with pressure to raise New York State test scores, the school's curriculum became what Delpit (2006) considered teacher-proof, making it nearly impossible to acknowledge and represent the different races of Lanier students culturally. To promote academic and social success for all the students at Lanier Elementary, a culturally responsive approach to teaching was necessary. This study imparted the necessary skills to teachers and administrators at Lanier Elementary, and it allowed students to understand and appreciate their own cultural heritage, while also respecting the cultural heritage of other ethnicities in American society.

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction and purpose for this study, and it has also contextualized the problem. Chapter 2 offers a critical review of related literature, theories, and issues concerning how state and federal mandates and a Eurocentric perspective influence traditional curricula, and how these issues have impacted the curriculum, teaching practices, pedagogy, and student achievement. Chapter 3 highlights the use of action research as the methodology and design, and it explains the analysis of the data from this study. Chapter 4 provides a brief summary of why action research was the methodology of choice and it gives the findings relating to each cycle of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings, answers to the research questions, recommendations for future research, and a reflection on leadership and teaching practices.

Chapter Two

Related Literature

Introduction

Decades of American public schools falling short of implementing a multicultural curriculum along with teacher unpreparedness have led to racial achievement gaps among students (Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002). Although these racial achievement gaps have received publicity in reports and studies, solutions have emphasized offering all students the same curriculum, taught in the same way, regardless of the fact that they are based on the language, worldview, and experiences of White English speakers. Students should have the opportunity to explore and learn through their cultural traditions. Gay (2000) asserted that teachers who understand students' prior experiences and use their cultural knowledge and experiences to ensure learning are engaging in culturally responsive teaching. Other pertinent scholars who have studied culturally responsive teaching such as Ladson-Billings (1995) posited that this method of teaching is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically [because it uses] cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p.159).

It is very important for teachers to think about how students' cultural characteristics impact their learning styles (Hammond, Dupoux, & Ingalls, 2004). When a teacher addresses a student's cultural traditions in his or her teaching practice, the student's learning process and self-efficacy improve (Bandura, 1977). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally responsive teachers think about culture as a strength, and they use culture to boost academic and social achievement. Teachers who use

culturally responsive teaching practices connect the curriculum to students' background, develop connections with families, understand students' experiences, create connections with local organizations, create a classroom community in which everyone feels valued, and recognize differences in culture as a strength. Culturally responsive teachers inspire, create engagement, develop core values and knowledge, and nurture pride in individual cultures. Therefore, based on years of scholarly research, culturally responsive teaching can give all students an equal chance at academic success (Irvine, 1990; Nieto, 2002; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on instructional practices and strategies to reach racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students. This review of the literature defines and highlights the theme of culturally responsive teaching relating to developing awareness, creating a culturally responsive classroom, and reshaping the standardized curriculum to include diverse perspectives.

Critical Race Theory and the Classroom

One theory that takes a closer look at the impact of race in dominant cultures is critical race theory (CRT). Solorzano and Yosso (2000) defined CRT in education as “A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of (Black and Latino) students” (p. 70). CRT scholars try to understand how cultural beliefs and perspectives on race affect those who suffer from systemic racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT has five tenets: (a) racialized power, (b) the permanence or centrality of race, (c) counter storytelling as a legitimate critique of the master narrative, (d) interest convergence, and

(e) critique of liberalism (Brown-Jeffery & Cooper, 2011). CRT scholars value the lived experiences of marginalized groups, and they use such experiences to understand and make meaning of the world.

In a perfect world, equal opportunity in education would ensure that students from marginalized groups have access to the same curriculum, instruction, funding, and facilities as White students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Unfortunately, the world we live in is not perfect. Race and racism are prevalent throughout the K-12 continuum. CRT, according to Ledesma and Calderon (2015), provides educators with tools to identify these issues in the curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling, policy, school finance, and community engagement. However, in the classroom, CRT is not as easy for many educators to use. In essence, the master narrative that those in power have written, communicated, and accepted is not the only voice of truth (Stanley, 2007). Every person has an ethnic-cultural background, and this background influences each person's view of the world (McGoldrick, 2005).

Educating a Diverse Student Population

Banks (2001) asserted that the United States is facing its largest influx of immigrants along with U.S. born ethnic minorities, and that educators must be prepared to make the necessary adjustments for the changing ethnic texture of the citizens. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), approximately 80% of K-12 public school teachers in America are Caucasian, creating an ethnic disparity between public school teachers and students. The 2014-2015 school year in the United States marked the first time the majority of students in American public schools were not White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This demographic shift of

increasing ethnic minorities places public school teachers, who are majority White, at an experiential disadvantage (Corona et al., 2017). According to Aydın et al. (2017), the shift also presents challenges to an educational system that has historically struggled with educating students who are non-White, who come from a background of poverty, or for whom English is not the native language. This is significant given the challenges school districts face in professionally developing teachers, as well as the long history of biased textbooks in American public schools.

According to Loewen (1996), much of the history in history textbooks is inaccurate, and it provides students and teachers with misinformation. Teachers themselves are often unaware of accurate historical events. Loewen reflects on why authors promote stereotypes and omit information, asserting that the omissions and errors can hardly be accidental. Loewen suggested that authors purposely omit details to make certain historical figures agreeable to as many people as possible. In addition, Loewen exposed some of the complexities of this problem, positing that teachers are misinformed and unaware of many of the inaccuracies in social studies materials. This would then suggest that a combination of educating teachers and revising the current curriculum is necessary to provide an accurate view of history that includes all cultures. Florin and Hall (2008) added to Loewen's perspective by submitting that student learners of today's world are diverse and that schools must implement comprehensive programs that include guidance and counseling, character education, on-campus medical and social services, a full-time social worker, and multicultural education. Florin and Hall further asserted that schools must implement a differentiated curriculum that includes programs that address the social and emotional needs of diverse student learners as well as their academic

needs. Unfortunately, traditional instruction is no longer effective for today's diverse learners.

Ambe (2006) stated that to change traditional curricula to reflect the diversity in classrooms throughout the United States today, teachers need to be prepared and curriculum revision is necessary. Schools today represent students from diverse racial, linguistic, and other cultural backgrounds, and teacher-preparation institutions have the responsibility of providing prospective teachers with the skills necessary to meet the intellectual, social, and personal needs of these diverse learners. In addition to revising traditional curricula, teachers must learn to embrace diverse perspectives in content, methods, and assessment tools across all disciplines. Universities have the responsibility to create positive environments in which multicultural initiatives can thrive. Such transformative approaches will nurture multicultural appreciation in preservice teachers and provide them with the skills necessary to meet the challenges of the changing school demographics effectively.

Multicultural Education

Over the past four decades, researchers such as Banks (1979), Banks and McGee (2001), Gay (2000), Grant and Sleeter (2003), and Nieto (1996) have sought to understand diverse populations better by defining the cultural difference paradigm in terms of developing classroom interventions to support the learning of students of color. Despite the decades of research, there remain multiple definitions and explanations of multiculturalism and multicultural education with no agreed definition among scholars and practitioners. While Ogbu (1992) suggested that scholars have yet to define multicultural education, Banks (1993) provided a popular definition that many in the field

of education have accepted. Banks (1993) asserted that multicultural education began with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s within the United States. Based on a wealth of research and interest by a wide range of scholars (Banks, 1993, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2007; Banks & Banks, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2003, 2006; Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Sleeter, 2001, 2005, 2009; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005), Banks and Banks (2001) defined multicultural education as

An idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (p. 1)

Banks is a pioneer of multicultural education, and Banks believed that to create a multicultural school environment, it is necessary to transform multiple aspects of education. Banks (2001) identified these aspects as the way teachers assess students, the school's instructional materials and teaching methods, and the attitudes of the teachers. Banks further asserted that teachers and researchers become involved in multicultural education through the following five areas: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture.

Content integration involves including a variety of cultures, values, concepts, and materials in teaching. Content integration is an important area of multicultural education, and knowledge construction can aid it. Banks (2001) suggested that knowledge creation takes place in the minds of people and it is a critical part of multicultural education. Such

knowledge is subject to challenge, and teachers must alter their own perceptions of greater society before they can teach multiculturally. When teachers are successful in managing their personal biases in terms of how they perceive the world, they are then able to support content integration by including a variety of cultures, values, and concepts in their teaching. Teachers must also be cognizant of students' biases as well. Banks described prejudice reduction as teachers teaching students to be tolerant of race, ethnicity, sexual preference, disabilities, and various religions. Equity pedagogy occurs when teachers allow for students' cultural differences by modifying methods of instruction. Banks stated that when schools empower students from all backgrounds and identify things that hinder learning, this empowers the school culture.

According to Olneck (1995), student resistance is a response to teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication, while teaching that is responsive prompts student involvement. Effective multicultural classrooms involve teachers relating subject matter content to the backgrounds of their students. Ogbu (1992) submitted that engaging diverse students requires a holistic approach in which the *what*, *why*, and *how* of teaching is meaningful and unified. McIntyre, Rosebery, and González (2001) suggested that for teachers to do this effectively, they must first learn about the cultural distinctiveness of their student ethnic groups and then transform any associated sensitivities into effective classroom practices. Over the past 20 years, researchers have consistently shown that for better learning opportunities to occur, teachers need to know more about the worlds of the children they teach (Graybill, 1997; Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003), yet in traditional schooling, either such experiences are absent or teachers ignore them (Nieto, 2002). Having knowledge of how to teach diverse learners is as

important as knowing content areas. Researchers developed culturally responsive teaching to address the need for teachers to be responsive to all learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, litigation involving school desegregation resulted in research studies that explored how to teach diverse students effectively. According to Brown-Jeffrey and Cooper (2011) and Sleeter (2012), academic literature began to define concepts such as *culturally appropriate* (Au & Jordan, 1981), *culturally congruent* (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), *culturally responsive* (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Lee, 1998), and *culturally compatible* (Jordan, 1984). These concepts created a foundation with two primary strands, with the first focusing on teacher practice, as embodied in the work of Gay (2002, 2010) and CRT. The second involved the work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006) and *culturally relevant pedagogy*, which focused on teacher posture and paradigm. While Gay and Ladson-Billings are frequent sources for culturally responsive teaching, other researchers such as Au (Au & Jordan, 1981), Foster (1995), Jordan Irvine (McAllister & Irvine, 2000), Lee (1998), Milner (2013), and Tatum (1997), as well as authors focusing on multicultural education like Banks (2001), Gorski (2006; Gorski & Zenkow, 2014), and Nieto (2004) have contributed as well. The common thread among all the works of these researchers is the foundation of social justice education and the classroom as a site for social change.

The research of Ladson-Billings and Gay has provided scholars and practitioners with a conceptual understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning

encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). Ladson-Billings (2009) posited that culturally responsive teaching starts from the premise that society is not perfect, and it places emphasis on social justice and social change while encouraging students to engage in social justice initiatives. When students become familiar with society’s imperfections, their awareness of society’s injustices surfaces (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching involves teaching students to balance social responsibility with classroom components, and also a commitment to community change (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In essence, the concept and method of culturally responsive teaching are rooted in teaching students to develop a commitment to the ideals of social justice and also to service. Ladson-Billings (1994) emphasized how culture is central to learning, as it can serve as a conduit to receive and communicate information. Culturally responsive teaching includes students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning, and it consists of student-centered instruction, learning within the context of culture, and the teacher as the facilitator.

Student-centered instruction is community orientated and it involves collaboration and cooperative learning. Through student-centered instruction, students work with other students on research projects and assignments that are socially and culturally relevant to them. According to Thompkins (2005), more than 25% of the student population is non-European (as cited in Moore & Hansen, 2012). As a result of the increasing diversity in America, there are more cultures represented in classrooms and more foreign languages spoken in schools than ever before (Moore & Hansen, 2012). The steady growth in diversity among public school students can serve as a conduit to student-centered instruction and learning within the context of culture. According to Banks (2001),

learning within the context of culture involves teachers gaining knowledge from the various cultures of students and using this knowledge to communicate effectively with students and to modify lessons accordingly. Under the auspices of culturally responsive teaching, this is important, because some students have home environments in which the language, culture, and values do not always correspond with those of the school. The teacher should serve as the facilitator to ensure the learning environment is reflective of the students' diverse backgrounds and also relevant to their social, cultural, and linguistic experiences (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Many teachers are eager to bridge the cultural gap among their students, yet their efforts tend to fall short. This can be the result of teachers' understanding of the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* and what it looks like in diverse classrooms. Gay has received credit for coining the term culturally responsive pedagogy through her research and her book entitled *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Gay (2018) asserted that culturally responsive teachers legitimize what students already know by connecting their prior experiences, cultural knowledge, and performance styles to their academic knowledge. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1994) defined a culturally relevant pedagogy as one "that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 16-17). In the article, "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix" Ladson-Billings (2014) credited herself as initially identifying culturally relevant pedagogy via three major domains: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (2014) referred to *academic success* as the intellectual growth students

experience as a result of classroom instruction and *cultural competence* as the ability to help students to appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of at least one other culture. Also, Ladson-Billings (2014) referred to *sociopolitical consciousness* as “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (p. 75).

Since Ladson-Billings’s initial research on culturally relevant pedagogy, others have contributed to her work, causing change and evolution. Scholars in the field, such as Beauboeuf-Lafontant and Dixson have extended her research to include political conscientiousness (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) and feminist perspectives of teachers (Dixson, 2002). Like scholarship, culture is fluid and ever-evolving, making culturally relevant pedagogy difficult for some teachers to understand and implement. In the world of popular culture and growing technology, Ladson-Billings (2014) posited that change is inevitable; therefore, culturally relevant pedagogy must reflect this fluidity. The changes in culturally relevant pedagogy do not imply that the initial research was flawed or deficient, but rather that culturally relevant pedagogy must continuously evolve to meet the needs of 21st-century students. Paris (2012) emphasized this theory when she introduced the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, and she highlighted culturally relevant pedagogy as

the place where the “beat drops” and then [practitioners must] layer the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects. (p. 76)

This definition suggests that the basis of culturally relevant pedagogy is the belief that teachers and educators should not merely learn *about* students of color, but rather that they should learn *from* students of color.

By prioritizing academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness, rather than school-based tasks that have no beyond-school application, Ladson-Billings (2014) asserted that students both take responsibility for and have a deep interest in their education. In simple terms, the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy is linking principles of learning with a deep appreciation and understanding of culture. Despite decades of evolution, the earlier research of Ladson-Billings (1994), along with the newer concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy of Paris (2012), continues to have the same foundational notion of students as *subjects* rather than *objects*.

CRT and culturally relevant pedagogy have many similarities. They both assume that culture directly impacts the teaching and learning of students. Table 1 outlines the characteristics of CRT and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Table 1

Comparison of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Teaching	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Act of using cultural knowledge of students to make learning relevant for all students. ● Student-centered instruction. ● Teacher is the facilitator. ● Teachers and students make connections between students' cultures and the academics they are studying. ● Communication of high expectations. ● Positive perspectives of parents and families. ● Learning within the context of culture. ● Culturally mediated instruction. ● Reshaping the curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using culture as a basis to share knowledge and to develop skills and attitudes. ● Educators learn about culture from diverse students and they show appreciation of differences. ● Students have an investment in academic success. ● Students are subjects and not objects. ● Legitimizes what students already know by connecting their prior experiences, cultural knowledge, and performance styles to their academic knowledge.

How the Traditional Curriculum Impacts Culturally Responsive Teaching

Sleeter (2012) described how standardized curricula and pedagogy have supplanted approaches to culturally responsive teaching and how neoliberal reforms have risen, which further marginalizes the greater educational discourse. This is due in part to the politics and impact of state standards in public school curricula. State standards undergo influence from a number of factors such as neoliberalism, which, according to Sleeter (2014), ultimately impacts the topics and quality of instruction happening in the classroom. Sleeter (2014) asserted that neoliberalism is a restoration of elite power, which prioritizes education to meet the needs of large corporations to maximize wealth and power for a small global elite. The priority is not culturally responsive teaching, public services, or even the greater good. Sleeter (2011) asserted that neoliberalism

emphasizes individualism and market competition, and it has driven school reform over the past 20 years. Consistent with business management models, Sleeter posits that within the United States, states must set high standards and align curricula to them. Teachers teach to these standards and test student mastery, with the results of these tests bringing severe consequences. Schools with scores that do not rise, like businesses whose profits do not expand, are subject to closure (Sleeter, 2011).

Based on the research and Sleeter's assertions regarding neoliberalism, there is a need to reframe the public debate about teaching in historically underserved communities and a need to educate parents, teachers, and education leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom. Throughout the last two decades, several educational initiatives and teacher education programs have claimed to adopt tenets and practices of CRT, yet the research speaks differently. Ford and Harris (1999) asserted that the mainstream ELA/social studies curricula in states such as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York reinforce stereotypes and misconceptions about different groups of people, students learn to view ethnic groups from a Eurocentric perspective, and the curriculum fails to help students to understand the interconnectedness between the dominant culture and other cultures.

Banks and Banks (2001) stated that the traditional curriculum in the United States has developed around a Eurocentric perspective with minimal, if any, focus on the perspective of other cultures and groups of people that have contributed to the development of America. This misrepresentation is visible in various standards and subject areas like history and social studies. The problem with flawed standards focusing on history through a Eurocentric lens is that they reinforce the belief that White

Europeans colonizing the country were the only people who served the new nation positively. It gives students a false sense of who they are. Berger (2012) posited that much of history goes beyond the state/country in which students live, and that focusing on state/country history is inadequate. History is a resource for students to learn self-identification, and educators should try to expand students' identity resources (Barton, 2012).

As early as the third grade, African American students demonstrate significantly lower academic performance than their White peers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). In a lesson study to examine teaching practices that included three African American general education teachers, all with masters' degrees, West-Olatunji, Behar-Horenstein, Rant, and Cohen-Phillips (2008) found that each teacher automatically taught from a Eurocentric perspective. This is largely because they learned from a Eurocentric curriculum. According to West-Olatunji et al., the teachers did not see their own culture. However, their study also revealed that collaboration with peers empowered the teachers. Collaboration and professional development helped to change their practice to make it culturally responsive (West-Olatunji et al., 2008). In addition to equipping preservice teachers or developing veteran teachers with the skills necessary to teach a diverse student population, educators must understand how to create an environment in which all students feel included and have equal access to education.

Culturally Responsive Classrooms

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), education should be equal and it should level the playing field. All students should have equal access to educational resources such as effective teaching, coursework that is appropriate and challenging, and

safe schools with modern technology. One way to tackle equality in education is to create culturally responsive classrooms with culturally responsive teachers and leaders. Montgomery (2001) stated that a culturally responsive classroom is one in which teachers acknowledge culturally diverse students and nurture their need to make connections with peers and the curriculum. A learning environment that makes all students part of the community and develops relationships sets a foundation for the learning that occurs throughout the year. According to Montgomery, there are five guidelines for teachers when developing a culturally responsive classroom: (a) implement a self-assessment to determine the knowledge of one's own culture and the culture of others, (b) use culturally responsive teaching methods and materials in the classroom, (c) foster a classroom of respect for individuals and their cultures, (d) develop interactive learning environments, and (e) continue to use cultural awareness assessments throughout the year. Educators can use the guidelines to assess their starting point for a culturally responsive classroom.

According to Ladson-Billings (as cited in Jones-Goods, 2015), a culturally responsive classroom empowers students of all races and ethnicities socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Teachers in culturally responsive classrooms believe that students of all cultural backgrounds can succeed. Because of this belief in all students, culturally responsive classrooms make learning relevant by using students' backgrounds and cultural knowledge (Jones-Goods, 2015). In addition, culturally responsive classrooms create communities in which all students have common values, relationships, and behaviors that attend to the learning of all students (Jones-Goods, 2015). Cartledge and Kourea (2008) posited that a culturally responsive classroom offers emotional support and encouragement to all students. The characteristics of a culturally responsive

classroom are empathy, caring, leadership, and development of social relationships (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). For culturally diverse children to make progress in the classroom, these characteristics must be present (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008).

Furthermore, a culturally responsive classroom develops resilience in students. Henderson and Milstein (1996) submitted that resilience develops through caring relationships, having high expectations for academic performance, and providing meaningful lessons in which all students can participate. Culturally responsive classrooms nurture adult-student and student-student relationships, have clear rules that administrators develop with the input of all students, and give students opportunities to connect their own lives to the curriculum (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007).

Culturally responsive classrooms also pay special attention to the development of classroom management and to the visuals and materials in the classroom. Teachers who use culturally responsive classroom management techniques recognize their own biases and values and become aware of how their beliefs impact the classroom environment (New York University, 2008). In a classroom that includes culturally responsive classroom management, the teacher understands that classroom management is a way to serve social justice. Culturally responsive classrooms foster connectedness and community with such things as pictures of individual students on the walls, a map of the world to highlight where everyone comes from, or a welcome banner in different languages (Weinstein et al., 2003). As educators assess their own classroom environment, they need to ask key questions. According to Ford (2010), educators can use questions such as are visuals non-stereotypical and do they include all cultures? Does

the learning environment create a sense of belonging for all students? Does it encourage students to develop an appreciation and support for each other? Do teachers create assignments so that students of different backgrounds can collaborate and work together? For educators to answer these questions without bias, they must first develop cultural awareness by recognizing their own biases and prejudices.

Farinde-Wu, Glover, and Williams (2017) conducted a qualitative research study to gain insight from award-winning culturally responsive teachers in the Butler Independent School District in the southeastern region of the United States. The study consisted of seven teachers who received “Teacher of the Year” awards. The study revealed that all teachers in the study had common practices of implementing respect, acting immediately, communicating, celebrating and encouraging, co-creating with students a family-related classroom culture, creating student-centered classrooms, and including critical multicultural content in their instruction. Evidently, developing cultural awareness through reflection and collaboration creates a solid foundation when preparing to teach diverse learners.

Developing Cultural Awareness

T. Howard (2003) supported the demographic report of the National Center for Education Statistics and submitted that U.S. schools will continue to be learning places where mostly White, middle-class female teachers will come into contact with “primarily students of color, and from low-income backgrounds” (p.195). To provide meaningful knowledge and skills for teaching in today’s cultural context, teachers must be prepared to engage in a rigorous and often painful reflection process about what it means to teach students who come from different racial and cultural backgrounds than their own.

Research suggests that following a standardized or even multicultural curriculum will not be enough to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Brandon (2003) stated that teachers continue to carry deeply embedded ideas of deficit thinking that pervade pedagogy and the curriculum despite having a multicultural standard. These deeply rooted biases transfer to the schoolwide culture and in classrooms. Teachers may think they are practicing equity when, in fact, they are simply unaware of their own bias. Brandon stated that organizations need to take a more profound approach to change the attitudes of mostly White teachers and professors. Changing the curriculum alone without changing the attitudes of teachers will make little impact in helping students to develop values of acceptance and social justice. Powell (2001) posited that teachers can ignore issues of power when focusing only on a multicultural curriculum. In addition, Powell added that focusing on the curriculum itself does not allow teachers to analyze the reality of White privilege and how White privilege receives reinforcement every day. As a result, Ambe (2006) suggested that teachers both new and veteran need to turn inward to look at their own biases and how those biases weave through their teaching and class discussions. Teacher preparation and professional development programs must enable teachers to be culturally aware to teach diverse student populations effectively.

Through awareness, self-reflection, and training, teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural realities (T. Howard, 2003). Studies by scholars in the field show that self-reflection helps to develop positive attitudes towards ethnically and culturally diverse students. Phuntsog (2001) found that teacher attitudes toward cultural diversity were important factors in their willingness to create responsive classrooms. Although public

school curricula may be culturally biased, Phuntsog demonstrated that teachers have the ability to dismantle these biases. According to Krasnoff (2016), through awareness and self-reflection, teachers acknowledge their own biases and inequitable actions when they participate in professional development on equity issues, treat others with respect regardless of their race or national origin, and improve their communication skills by continually checking for understanding. Krasnoff further asserted that if teachers are honest about being unfamiliar with a student's culture, they can build trust and positive relationships. Teachers should ask their students if there are times when their behavior is disrespectful or harassing and not assume that students enjoy comments about their appearance, or welcome being touched without their permission. In essence, teachers should be responsible and face the reality that students' cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds will be different from theirs (Gay & Howard, 2001).

It is also essential to develop the perspectives and attitudes of all teachers, including veteran teachers. Some schools have many veteran teachers who espouse personal biases and misrepresentations of minority students. Many veteran teachers have been teaching the same curriculum over many years to the point that their work is second nature. As classrooms become more diverse, teachers need to work continually to improve their practices and teaching styles to include the changing population. According to Meister and Ahrens (2011), veteran teachers run the risk of plateauing. When teachers plateau, they develop a sense of routine and stagnation. They lose interest in learning, and change becomes difficult. As a result, plateauing can have an impact on curriculum delivery. Before a teacher plateaus, it is vitally important that he or she

engages in professional development on developing cultural awareness to identify any negative belief systems that impact diverse populations of students.

Providing professional development opportunities and new ways of teaching can avoid plateauing (Meister & Ahrens, 2011). Engaging teachers in a continual process of reflecting on personal bias, attitudes, and beliefs while revising the traditional curriculum to a diverse, multicultural curriculum permits them to resist plateauing and to develop resiliency. Resilient teachers continue to advance professionally and to seek new ways to impact students of all races and cultures. Developing a diverse curriculum calls for resilient teachers.

Additionally, it is equally important to culturally responsive teaching that teachers apply an equal level of awareness and reflection to their school's curricula. Acquah and Commins (2013) submitted that teachers' use of culturally responsive teaching practices within their classroom is an important factor, as well as the presence of multicultural education curricula. Changes in one's beliefs, behaviors, and attitude, including self-confidence, are necessary to become a culturally responsive teacher in a diverse classroom (Aydın, 2012). Krasnoff (2016) offered 10 questions teachers may ask when examining curriculum and learning materials, which promotes culturally responsive teaching.

Teachers should receive encouragement to explore their curriculum to ensure they teach students about the contributions of men and women from different cultural backgrounds, including issues and perspectives of minority groups, and provide learning activities that promote an appreciation for non-European cultures. If the curriculum contains biased information or stereotypes, Krasnoff (2016) suggested that teachers

should point this out and that they should provide students with more accurate information. When highlighting such biased information, Krasnoff emphasized teachers being aware of fragmentation or isolation. Krasnoff referred to placing information about people of color, women, or other protected groups in a box or chapter that is separate from the main body of the text. Ogbu (1992) stated, “A curriculum of inclusion, although one that does not simply call attention to cultural deficiencies or oppression, such as slavery or forced relocation is needed” (p. 14). The topic of Black history serves as an example where respect in the classroom for other cultures must move beyond “multicultural moments” or pseudomulticulturalism (Miller, 1997, p. 88). Miller posited that incorporating Black History Month into the curriculum once a year is a multicultural moment. Exclusively celebrating Black history in February prevents the coverage of a wide range of other cultures during the same period (Miller, 1997). The successes of creating a culturally responsive classroom rely heavily on the curriculum and the classroom teacher’s attitude. Today’s teachers must prepare themselves to educate an increasingly heterogeneous student population by engaging in critical reflection on their own personal biases, their students’ racial and cultural differences, and the curriculum they teach.

Advantages of a Multicultural Responsive Curriculum

According to Bennett (2003), the traditional curriculum is full of inaccuracies and omissions concerning the contributions and life events of major ethnic groups. A multicultural education will allow students to understand the world from multiple perspectives and to develop into global citizens. Grant (1993) stated that it is morally evil to dehumanize others through inequitable education, leading to prejudiced societal

thought. Creating a curriculum that is equitable is not only improving the U.S. educational system, but also necessary if we value America's democratic ideals, which are basic human rights, social justice and equal opportunity (Bennett, 1999). A multicultural curriculum affirms and validates (Powell, 2001). It invites us to struggle with the controversies that inevitably arise through our human differences and it creates community out of conflict. It has the potential to unite people and communities. Powell stated that unity comes from acknowledging our common humanity, our common destiny, and our common purpose. By reshaping the traditional curriculum into a responsive curriculum, learning becomes integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered (Villegas, 1991). A culturally responsive curriculum includes issues and topics that relate to students' experiences, backgrounds, and culture, and it challenges the students to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Focusing on culturally responsive curriculum in school settings comes with several advantages for the United States as a society. Lafer and Aydın (2012) emphasized that culturally responsive teaching and curricula serve students and also support the social and economic development of society. The authors asserted that providing diverse students with a positive educational experience will encourage lifelong learning, and educating all students with peers from differing backgrounds has the potential to improve work and social interactions among people of different races, languages, religions, cultures, and ages. (p. 87).

By integrating multiple perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy encourages the inclusion of lesser-known individuals and groups into the curriculum, broadens the knowledge base, and encourages students to value the importance of making informed

decisions. By chronicling the actions and behaviors of Americans addressing social injustices and environmental concerns, it highlights the experiences of patriotic Americans who have attempted to make a difference in their communities (Zong, Garcia, & Wilson, 2002). According to Zong et al. (2002), a culturally diverse framework in a K-12 program rests on the U.S. motto, *E Pluribus Unum*. Its objectives are to develop students' critical understanding of ways in which diversity has contributed to both society's common civic ideals and values and to students' sense of responsibility for addressing issues of democracy, equality, and social justice.

Another advantage is that a culturally relevant curriculum helps to develop acceptance among different cultures and limits prejudice. Daniel (2011) stated that prejudice is "a negative feeling toward a group based on a faulty definition" (p. 154). W. E. B. DuBois (1994) claimed that the problem of the 20th century was conflict and controversy among racial groups, particularly between African Americans and European Americans. He concluded that a culturally diverse curriculum is integral to preparing young children for democratic citizenship (Gay, 2004). Daniel (2011) stated that having a focus on multicultural education can "help to eradicate prejudice and racism." It also "brings different races together in harmony," "builds interaction between diverse cultures," "creates tolerance between two groups," and "eradicates cultural barriers" (p. 2). When children learn about different cultures, it helps to reduce anxiety, prejudice, discrimination, and cultural misunderstandings.

Piaget (1997) stated in his research on the moral development of children that although the home and family environment has the biggest impact on child prejudices, children can change their views. Children learn to change perspectives that may be

developing at home through education and experience. Piaget asserted that peers, teachers, and coworkers in a child's life can neutralize the effects of parental modeling. Children will learn to accept other cultures and people through classroom interactions, but the work will be undone if the curriculum remains unchanged. A balanced, inclusive curriculum is necessary in combination with diverse experiences to develop well-rounded children. Daniel (2011) stated that primary school should be the main focus in combating any form of prejudice.

Tiedt and Tiedt (1994) argued that "young people who will soon become our country's adult citizens, need to learn broad concepts of cultural differences and develop respect for the diversity of our population" (p. 3). The education children experience in school, especially elementary school, helps them to become productive global citizens. Bennett (2003) stated that the interconnected world is yet another reason a multicultural education is advantageous.

Finally, a responsive curriculum makes learning applicable and effective (Gay, 2004). According to Gay (2004), students perform more successfully on all levels when there is a greater congruence between cultural backgrounds and school experiences that include personal efficacy or social responsibility. Student achievement increases for all races and cultures when school is interesting and relatable. Having a multicultural curriculum may be the solution to current problems such as closing the achievement gap and genuinely not leaving any children behind academically.

Research occurring since the 1990s has consistently suggested the importance and relevance of multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching. Children as young as 3 years old are aware of racial differences, and children have a bias towards White,

meaning they prefer people and objects that are White (Banks, 2004). Falbo and de Baessa (2006) conducted a study on the influence of Mayan education on the academic achievement of Indian and Latino students. Like Mexicans in the United States, who receive encouragement to learn English, Indians in Guatemala received encouragement “to drop their indigenous identities and languages to become ‘Latino’” (p. 602). Their study showed that students who attended schools where their language and culture were a part of the curriculum had greater achievements in reading and mathematics than students who went to schools that did not include their language and culture in the curriculum (Zaldana, 2010). This is not to suggest that students should primarily focus on their indigenous identities in schools; instead, students should learn about all races and ethnicities that make up the greater society.

Schools should be culturally responsive and they should expose students to a diverse curriculum that includes all students’ backgrounds and experiences. If the primary goal of global education is to prepare students who are effective and responsible citizens in a global society, then students need opportunities to gain knowledge of the world, engage in problem-solving and critical thinking around significant global issues, and develop skills to view events and issues from diverse perspectives (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). The increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of American society demands that classroom teachers prepare students for national and global citizenship (Ukpokodu, 2006). Students of the 21st century need to develop transformative and reflective knowledge, intellectual skills, and democratic attitudes and values to navigate diverse cultural, social, economic and political contexts successfully (Ukpokodu, 2006). It is the responsibility of the schools to develop perspective consciousness among

teachers and students so that they explore their perspectives and the perspectives of others. In a public school classroom, teachers must give students opportunities to view history through multiple lenses rather than just from a Eurocentric perspective. Such opportunities result from a diverse, culturally responsive curriculum that opens doors for a diverse population to see and understand its history rather than learning about history from a biased perspective.

Gorski (1995) further confirmed the necessity of a multicultural curriculum and culturally responsive teaching. He stated that it is easy and convenient to forget that the public school system in the United States has an overtly racist, sexist, and classist history. The curriculum was Eurocentric and male-centric, both in content and perspective, essentially disregarding the history, stories, perspectives, literature, and accomplishments of women and people of color. Historically, the design of the public school system in the United States helped the upper-middle-class and wealthy White males both professionally and economically. While there have been improvements in practices and equity, social studies curricula continue to focus mainly on a Eurocentric perspective.

According to a recent study, researchers observed over 200 elementary and middle-school teachers in their classrooms and they noticed improved behaviors in African American students where teachers used culturally responsive teaching practices and proactive behavior strategies (Larson, Bradshaw, Rosenberg & Day-Vines, 2018). In culturally responsive classrooms, African American students were more cooperative and engaged.

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework draws on the relationships among Tatum's (1997) stages of racial identity development, critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching to develop culturally responsive classrooms. It is not possible to implement the tenets and principles of critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching effectively through institutional or personal biases. The intent is to remove such biases, so therefore the framework for culturally responsive classrooms begins with teachers and administrators becoming intimate with their personal beliefs and attitudes regarding race and culture.

Educators must first understand and accept that one's cultural background significantly shapes one's personal beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and assumptions. Tatum (1997) used Janet Helms's description of the six stages of White identity formation (contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy) and William Cross's categories of development for people of color to describe how people view race and culture based on their life experiences. Prior to conducting this study several of the teacher participants were disillusioned in terms of their classroom practices. Brandon (2003) asserts in many cases teachers may think they are practicing equity when in fact they are simply unaware of their own bias. Before educators can implement culturally responsive teaching practices, they must identify their racial identity development stage and reflect on their personal biases relating to their cultural backgrounds. Once educators have identified their racial

identity development stage, they can apply the theory and tenets of critical race theory as it applies to culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

Critical race theory in education can analyze social inequity within academic institutions. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000), critical race theory in education is

A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of (Black and Latino) students. (p. 70)

Part of the delivery of culturally relevant pedagogy is the acknowledgment of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how society receives them; therefore, race was a consideration of this study. According to Ladson-Billings (2001), one of the main reasons for culturally responsive pedagogy is to respond to school “settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience” (p. 112). In some cases, these injustices of hostility and alienation are attributable to a history of racism in which some perceive certain groups as academically, culturally and biologically competent or inferior. In terms of academic and sociocultural deficiency, racism persists in being “endemic and deeply ingrained in American life” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016, p. 25).

Culturally responsive teaching puts theory into practice and aims to change the biases of diverse students in the classroom. Engaging in culturally responsive practices will support teachers in planning lessons that include connections to student backgrounds and experiences so that all students can engage in optimal learning. Critical race theory

provides a socio-cultural and historical lens through which researchers can analyze human activity holistically and it asks questions such as what roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000)?

According to the socioculturalist view, cognitive development (or learning) is a socially mediated activity (Johnson, 2009). Thus, the development of our consciousness depends on the specific social activities in which we engage and the physical and symbolic artifacts with which we interact (Johnson, 2009). Critical race theory challenges the hegemonic practices of White supremacy and it brings attention directly to the effects of racism. Critical race theory has five tenets: (a) racialized power, (b) the permanence or centrality of race, (c) counter storytelling as a legitimate critique of the master narrative, (d) interest convergence, and (e) critique of liberalism (Brown-Jeffery & Cooper, 2011). Using the analytical lens of critical race theory in this study provided ways to review and analyze curriculum design, teacher delivery of instruction, the composition and grouping of student classes, the determination and processing of assessment, the allocation of school funding, and the way redistricting works (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical race theory values the lived experiences of marginalized groups and it uses such experiences to understand and make meaning of the world. In essence, the master narrative that those in power have written, communicated, and accepted is not the only voice of truth (Stanley, 2007). Culturally responsive teaching provides a framework for analyzing educational structures and practices that continue to subordinate groups of people, while culturally responsive pedagogy provides a model of putting theory to

practice and how to deliver such instruction. The outcome is culturally responsive teachers and culturally responsive classrooms.

The flowchart in Figure 1 shows the relationships among racial identity development stages, critical race theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. First, educators must identify their racial identity development stage and reflect on their personal biases. Once they achieve cultural awareness, they can apply the tenets of critical race theory along with the theories of culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as a foundation for developing culturally responsive teachers and classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

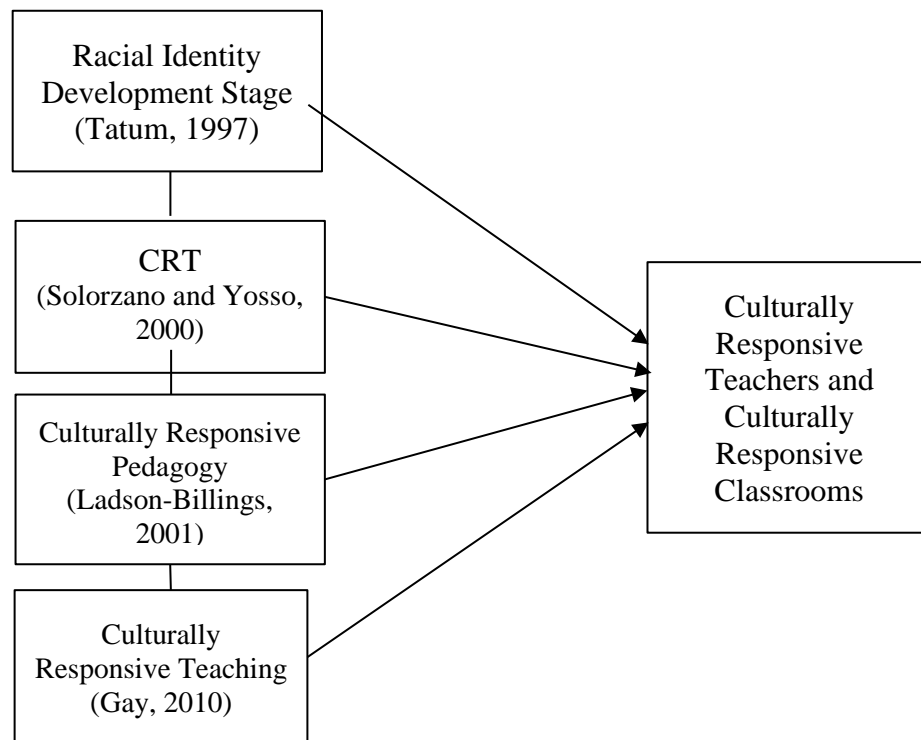


Figure 1. Framework of CRT, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching in action.

Conclusion

The literature regarding culturally responsive teaching shows the importance of creating a classroom environment and a curriculum that support students of all backgrounds, races, and cultures. When students can connect to their learning environment culturally, student achievement in all subject areas increases. Students learn through collaboration with peers and the curriculum on how to accept others who think and act differently. The learning environment helps them to develop awareness, compassion, and acceptance of different cultures. This learning shapes who they are as individuals in the world. As the world and classrooms become more diverse, students must develop an understanding of who they are in the world and an understanding of their peers. Understanding nurtures acceptance in the world.

For teachers to develop culturally responsive classrooms and curricula, they need professional development. Teachers enter the classroom with their own bias and prejudices. When teachers have time to reflect and develop an awareness of their own beliefs, they start to change and grow as educators. This process takes time, and teachers need opportunities to have open, honest discussions with colleagues and professionals who can help them to see how their beliefs are impacting their classrooms. Once educators develop awareness, they can begin to develop culturally responsive classrooms and pedagogy that nurtures the learning of all students. Teachers will be able to learn strategies to reach students of various cultures and backgrounds. In addition, teachers will be able to reshape the curriculum to meet the needs of students with diverse backgrounds. The action research project used three cycles: developing awareness,

creating a culturally responsive classroom, and reshaping the current traditional curriculum.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Design

Introduction

Comprehensive data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) indicated that approximately 80% of K-12 public school teachers in America are Caucasian, while over 50% of K-12 students are students of color. This ethnic disparity places public school teachers, who are majority White, at an experiential disadvantage (Corona et al., 2017). According to the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, racial minorities (students of color) have a greater chance of being taught by lower-paid teachers with less experience, and they also have less access to rigorous math and science classes than White students (Jacobson et al., 2001). Ukpokodu (2006) asserted that students of the 21st century need to develop transformative and reflective knowledge, intellectual skills, and democratic attitudes. It is the responsibility of classroom teachers to prepare students for national and global citizenship. The ethnic disparity between students and teachers at Lanier Elementary was a student population of 43% students of color and a faculty and staff population that was 93% Caucasian (New York State Education Department, 2016). Consistent with the assertion of Corona et al. (2017), the teachers at Lanier Elementary school were at an experiential disadvantage. They lacked cultural knowledge, frames of reference, and past experience of Lanier's culturally diverse student population. To address the ethnic disparity challenges at Lanier Elementary, the researcher conducted an action research study. This chapter describes the methodology that framed the study and it highlights considerations that pertain to the

rationale for the chosen research approach, the research design, action research cycles, methods of collecting data, system for analyzing qualitative data, and limitations.

The purpose of this action research study was to explore culturally responsive teaching by examining teachers' attitudes and skills relating to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). Specifically, the researcher used three cycles to understand and enhance teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and skills relating to culturally responsive teaching. Gay, Nieto, and Ladson-Billings developed instructional practices and strategies to reach racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students (Krasnoff, 2016). Three of these practices by Gay (2018) were relevant to this study, namely developing awareness, creating a culturally responsive classroom, and revising the standardized curriculum to include diverse perspectives. For teachers to become competent, caring, and culturally responsive educators, Gay posited that they must develop an awareness. This awareness, according to Chen, Nimmo, and Fraser (2009), provides teachers the ability to counter beliefs that are implicit in institutional biases and to construct classroom environments that are inclusive. Once teachers develop awareness, they are prone to become cultural organizers, which leads to developing classroom environments that promote cultural and ethnic diversity on a daily basis (Gay, 2018). Culturally aware teachers working in culturally responsive classrooms will naturally begin to look critically at curriculum and content through a cultural lens. Such teachers can analyze the curriculum and revise their lessons to include all cultures and races of students. This action research study used a qualitative methodology to promote understanding of the practices and perceptions of the people under study (Merriam, 2005). The researcher

used a formal, systematic process of data collection and utilization to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students?
2. How can teachers and administrators of Lanier Elementary School develop an awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact classrooms and teaching practices?
3. What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum?
4. How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices?

Worldview

Every person has an ethnic-cultural background, and this background influences each individual's view of the world (McGoldrick, 2005). For the purposes of this study, my worldview perspective is closely aligned with the theory of Creswell and Creswell (2017) as it relates to constructivism and the topic of culturally responsive teaching. According to Creswell and Creswell, social constructivism is an interpretive framework in which individuals seek to understand their world and develop their own particular meanings that correspond to their experience. These meanings form as a result of interactions with others; they are not etched or innate within each individual (Creswell, 2013). Andrews (2012) asserted that social constructionism emerged over 30 years ago from the origins of sociology, and it is also known as interpretivism. Social constructivists view knowledge and truth as creations of the interactions of individuals

within a society. Reality is subjective, and I might share my particular construction of reality with some people, yet other people could construct the same reality in quite different ways. I consider myself a social constructivist in outlook, and I believe that qualitative researchers are inescapably subjective and that the researcher and the respondents should cocreate the research findings.

Educators and students develop a worldview based on their experiences, beliefs, and core values. As classrooms become more and more diverse, it is important that educators become aware of their own worldviews and the worldviews of students and parents. My goal for this research project was ultimately to improve classroom experiences for all children, including those for whom the school may not be a culturally sensitive, comfortable place. Based on my childhood experiences, schools were sacred; my parents and other adults who played a part in my life respected them. Schools were places that provided truth, so, therefore, I believe that all schools should be welcoming spaces with culturally competent staff members. One avenue toward achieving this goal was to look at what truth teachers were teaching in school and to determine what was lacking and what to add to ensure that all students received cultural competency and sensitivity from their teachers. Bringing a constructivist approach to classroom instruction supported teachers and students in becoming self-aware, compassionate, and more accepting of others' perspectives.

Myers (2009) argued that reality in interpretive research is only accessible through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings. Creswell (2013) highlighted that an interpretive approach could describe the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals in terms of a concept or the phenomenon. In

dealing with the human sphere, this translates into gathering deep information and perceptions through inductive qualitative research methods such as interviews and observation, representing this information and these perceptions from the perspective of the research participants (Lester, 1999). Similarly, Creswell (2013) posited that an advocacy/participatory worldview involves research inquiry that has close links with politics and a political agenda. Creswell (2000) further asserted that the research contains an action agenda that promotes reform, and it may change the lives of the researcher, the participants, and the institutions in which they practice or live. In education, there is a disconnect between what teachers teach in the classroom and what is happening in the lives of the children they teach. Classrooms across the country are becoming more and more diverse. There is a need not only to change the curriculum to be more inclusive of different cultures, but also to change the mindset of educators. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), students use their prior knowledge and beliefs to make meaning in the classroom. As educators, it is our role to help students to make connections and to build bridges between the content and their culture, and the cultures of others. This research study focused on the individual experiences of educators at Lanier Elementary relating to the school's curriculum. I explored their experiences with as much openness and inquisitiveness as possible. I addressed specific issues related to important social issues such as students' cultural backgrounds, inequality, oppression, alienation, and classroom teachers' daily practices.

Research Design

This study was necessary because Lanier Elementary school was becoming more ethnically diverse and educators (administrators and teachers) needed to meet the

demands of teaching a diverse population. After exploring the related literature in Chapter 2, the researcher concluded that the research questions were best explored through the use of action research. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) and Creswell (2007) highlighted that the research questions and the problem under study should influence researchers to choose methodologies that best fit. Action research is an inquiry-based form of investigation that is inclusive of all members of a community or organization who share an interest in a problem. According to Girod (n.d.), good action research includes theory, practice, and application in meaningful ways, and it encourages change, examines new methodologies, and supports teacher reflection. Lanier Elementary School is a learning community in which administrators encourage reflective practice and application on a regular basis through grade-level and faculty meetings. Action research was the best fit for the study and the overall school culture.

Borgia and Schuler (1996) stated that action research has five components: commitment, collaboration, concern, consideration, and change. Commitment and collaboration refer to taking the time to study and work together as equal partners. Teachers and administrators at Lanier Elementary committed to taking the time necessary to study culturally responsive teaching and collaborated as equal partners. Borgia and Schuler also stated that concern and consideration refers to being mindful of others' opinions while engaging in reflective practice. Through the PLC, participants shared best practices, reviewed data, and made informed decisions.

According to Stringer (2007), action research provides a systematic approach to acquiring information that allows people to find operative solutions to problems they encounter in their professional environments. It assists practitioners to solve problems

and to improve professional practices. As Elliott (1991) shared, action research has an end goal of changing those procedures to agree with the data so that they are more effective for all involved. Watts (as cited in Ferrance, 2000) submitted that action research allows practitioners to examine their educational practices systematically and carefully. As a PLC, teachers and administrators examined instructional methods for teaching diverse populations. The teacher participants applied culturally responsive teaching practices and studied the results of student achievement. Watts (1985) stated that action research works on the assumptions that teachers and principals work best on problems they identify, when they examine their own work, and when they help each other to develop professionally. In this study, teachers and the researcher collaborated during three cycles to learn about culturally responsive teaching, and then they applied culturally responsive teaching practices to classrooms and the curriculum. Finding methods to teach a diverse population of students was a problem for Lanier Elementary School teachers and administrators, since classrooms had become more and more diverse and student achievement was falling. In this study, the researcher used Stringer's (2007) action research model along with qualitative methods to describe the study results and to understand the impact of the culturally responsive practices the teachers implemented in place of traditional teaching methods.

According to Stringer (2007), action research is participatory research in which educators understand a problem, collect data and information, analyze the data, and create a plan to solve the problem. Stringer (2007) designed an action research model called look, think, act, which the researcher applied to this study. In the *look* phase, researchers gather information and build a big picture. In the *think* phase, researchers

analyze the data, and during the *act* phase, researchers resolve the problem. Prior to going through the look, think, act phases, researchers identify participants and get a sense of the topic or issue under study (Stringer, 2004). According to Stringer (2004), this is called setting the stage. According to Ferrance (2000), there are common themes in research involving the study of action research as a topic: empowering participants, collaboration, gaining knowledge, and creating change.

The *Sage Handbook of Action Research* (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) highlights five major approaches to action research: (a) insider study of own/self-practice, (b) insider study in collaboration with other insiders, (c) insiders in collaboration with outsiders, (d) outsiders in collaboration with insiders, and (e) reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams). In this study, an insider in collaboration with other insiders was the most appropriate approach. To some degree, the biases of the curriculum were a function of the practices of Lanier's teachers and administrators who served as daily internal practitioners. Soliciting feedback and working collaboratively with teachers to improve professional practices reduced biases and ultimately made the school's curriculum culturally responsive.

According to Ferrance (2000), action research is a collaborative activity, usually in a school setting, to search for solutions to everyday problems. The results of action research improve instruction and increase student achievement. During action research, teachers work with problems in their own classrooms, and the focus becomes developing the teacher through on-site professional development, rather than simply acquiring knowledge about an educational topic at a workshop or conference (Borg, 1965). As teachers worked together as a PLC to make their classrooms culturally responsive, revise

lessons, and examine their own beliefs about teaching students of different cultures, they had the opportunity to grow professionally in a collaborative setting rather than in isolation. Ferrance posited that teaching can often be an isolating profession; however, action research gives teachers time to talk about their teaching and strategies they used in the classroom. Ferrance stated that action research builds a learning community among educators, and as a result, students benefit from improved practices.

Professional Learning Communities

Learning organizations and learning communities are one and the same in that they value members and they expect members to be active contributors to the development, pursuit, and accomplishment of the goals process. According to Dufour and Eaker (1998), the members within a PLC have mutual interests and shared beliefs. The success of the PLC depends heavily on the relationships of the members. Members within a PLC may differ in terms of their titles, positions, and responsibilities; however, the belief is that they all have knowledge and expertise that can contribute to the success of the organization. Ikehara (as cited in Dufour & Eaker, 1998) suggested that learning occurs when these members can share their knowledge and expertise through communication and social interaction. When experts are free to dialogue on goals, strategies, and processes, they learn from one another, which leads to organizational growth and improvement. Dufour and Eaker asserted that the members do not simply accept the status quo; they challenge it by asking questions and pursuing new ways of getting better. Like many other schools dealing with diverse student populations, Lanier Elementary faced the challenge of providing a school atmosphere of equality for all its

students. Action research through the use of a PLC allowed data gathering, reflection, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving.

Setting

This study took place at Lanier Elementary School in the King Central School District, located in Westchester County, New York. King Central School District is a K-12 district that boasts over 5,800 students in five elementary schools, one middle school, and two high schools. According to the New York State Report Card data, 70.7% of King students were Caucasian, 19.8% Hispanic, and 6.7% African American (New York State Education Department, 2017). King's parent population was primarily Caucasian, middle-to-upper income families whose salaries ranged from \$85,000 to \$200,000 annually. While King's collective student demographics indicated low levels of diversity and poverty (the population of students of color was 26%, and 14% of the entire student population received free or reduced lunch), Lanier Elementary demographics were significantly different. Lanier Elementary had 43% students of color with 26% of the total student population receiving free or reduced lunch (New York State Education Department, 2016). Consistent with New York State data reports dating back to July 2002, the Hispanic student population of Lanier Elementary grew steadily, while the Caucasian student population slowly declined (New York State Education Department, 2017). The demographics of the faculty and staff of Lanier Elementary have averaged 93% Caucasian over the past two decades, with no increase in teachers of color. This was significant given the ethnic disparities among Lanier's teachers and students, and also the challenges teachers faced with the school's Eurocentric curriculum.

All the elementary schools of the King Central School District followed the Putnam/Northern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) (ELA/social studies curriculum. BOCES is governed by a board of education that consists of representatives from component districts. The board is responsible for curriculum and other policy decisions like school boards that function at the local level. The concept and practice of BOCES developed in 1948 to help school districts to save money by providing opportunities for sharing costs and resources (New York State Education Department, 2017). The Putnam/North Western BOCES of Westchester County was mainly comprised of teachers and curriculum chairs who were European, White, middle-class women. Through the Putnam/North Western BOCES, teachers throughout Westchester County designed the curriculum by deciding the knowledge to impart to students and the values to uphold. As a result, the curriculum at Lanier Elementary School only focused on the dominant culture, and it did not match the school's evolving population of students. One example was a Grade 4 unit of the New York State BOCES social studies curriculum that explained how Dewitt Clinton opened the Erie Canal with his men, yet it marginalized the contributions of African Americans. The unit failed to mention that African Americans helped to make the region the most prosperous in the New World (Levine, 2017). S. H. King (1993) submitted that if the curriculum writing committee were made up of a diverse group, diverse perspectives and opinions would be present when designing the curriculum. Despite the economic benefits and good intentions of the Putnam/North Western BOCES, the ELA/social studies curriculum at Lanier Elementary was standardized and it marginalized certain races of students (Delpit, 2006).

At the time of the study, Lanier Elementary school had many students of diverse backgrounds, and the teachers lacked the skills to explore the school's curriculum and the students' diverse backgrounds deeply for cultural knowledge and understanding. To promote academic and social success for all students at Lanier Elementary, the teachers needed to gain a greater understanding of the curriculum content and their classroom environments, and to mine the knowledge of their students (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Many teachers at Lanier Elementary strictly followed the Putnam/North Western BOCES curriculum without adjusting their instructional practices to meet the needs of their diverse student populations. These teachers lacked cultural understanding or awareness, and they were participating in what Apple (1993) considered classroom death. According to Apple (1993; cf. Ladson-Billings, 2012), classroom death refers to what happens when teachers succumb to rules and regulations that dehumanize students. Teachers participating in classroom death do not try to reach every student (Ladson-Billings, 2012); instead, they simply comply with the rules regardless of the academic outcomes. To disrupt classroom death, Ladson-Billings asserted that the pedagogical practices and the school curriculum must evolve to address the complexities of social inequalities.

The aim of this study was to disrupt classroom death by addressing the issue of Lanier Elementary School's lack of culturally responsive teaching and curriculum. The research site was four third-grade classrooms and three fourth-grade classrooms at Lanier Elementary School. The students in each classroom were preassigned based on their gender, academic abilities (including students with individualized educational plans), and their discipline record. All the classes ranged in size from 19 to 23 and they were

academically heterogeneous. Each of the classes had at least four students of color, and they consisted primarily of Caucasian students from mainly affluent economic backgrounds.

Participants

To begin the action research process, the researcher used Stringer's (2014) process of setting the stage and creating a bigger picture. According to Stringer, a major purpose of planning activities in action research is to establish a climate that engages all stakeholders in the research process. To create engagement, it is necessary to identify the key stakeholders the nonculturally responsive classroom environments affect. The stakeholders involved should coconstruct definitions of the problem that are meaningful to them and formulate different solutions to the research problem.

The researcher used purposeful sampling (Stringer, 2014) to identify key stakeholders. Purposeful sampling involves purposefully choosing individuals based on a particular set of characteristics. According to Stringer, one major characteristic is the extent to which the individuals involved are affected by or have an effect on the problem. For this study, the characteristics included teachers who taught classes where the majority of their students were of a different race than the teacher, had a minimum of 6 months' teaching experience with the school's ELA and social studies curriculum (grade-level specific), and had no formal training in culturally responsive teaching. In addition to choosing individuals who are affected by or have an effect on the problem, Creswell (2007) suggested that purposive sampling selects participants with a variety of purposes in mind, such as choosing people to represent diverse perspectives, participants who are

typical of others in the setting, and participants with a certain knowledge relating to the issue under study.

The ELA instructional coach met these purposes and the researcher asked her to participate, since she had classroom teaching experience of working with students of a different race from hers and she was very knowledgeable on the ELA and social studies curriculum. Consistent with the perspectives of Stringer (2014) and Creswell (2007), the researcher selected educators who were affected by a nonculturally responsive classroom and curriculum, and educators who have an effect on diverse students due to traditional classroom environments. Within the Lanier school community, the principal, instructional coach, and classroom teachers met these criteria.

To conduct the purposive sampling, the researcher sought approval from the International Review Board (IRB). Once the researcher received IRB approval, he scheduled a contact meeting with Lanier Elementary's potential participants (one ELA instructional coach, four third-grade classroom teachers, and three fourth-grade classroom teachers) to solicit their interest and participation in the study. Based on the school's third- and fourth-grade curriculum, student demographics, and the gender and ethnicities of the third- and fourth-grade teachers at the time of the study, the third- and fourth-grade teachers worked primarily with students whose race and ethnicities differed from their own, and who were most affected by the lack of culturally responsive teaching.

The ELA instructional coach was a Caucasian, female, tenured teacher with a total of 8 years of teaching experience, having served 6 of those years at Lanier Elementary. The ELA instructional coach spent 5 years as a fourth-grade teacher and 1 year as an instructional coach at Lanier Elementary. All four of the third-grade teachers

were Caucasian females, tenured with 18 or more years of teaching experience at Lanier Elementary. The most senior of the four third-grade teachers had 29 years of teaching experience, having taught 20 years at Lanier Elementary. Two of the other third-grade teachers had spent their entire teaching careers of 18 years at Lanier Elementary. The final third-grade teacher had 21 years of teaching experience and had taught at Lanier Elementary for the past 17 years.

The fourth grade level was comprised of three teachers: two Caucasian males and one African American female. Both male teachers were nontenured, with one having 2 years of teaching experience serving in his first year at Lanier Elementary. The other male teacher had 7 years of teaching experience and he was serving his fourth year at Lanier Elementary. The female fourth-grade teacher was tenured with over 19 years of teaching experience, all served at Lanier Elementary.

During the initial grade-level meetings, the researcher explained the purpose, intent, and details of the study, including the need for a group of teachers who had a diverse range of ethnicity, gender, and teaching experience. The researcher asked the current ELA academic coach to serve as a participant in the study, given her knowledge of developing and implementing the school's curriculum and her role of working with classroom teachers. The targeted third- and fourth-grade classroom teacher participants represented Caucasian and African American ethnicities as well as male and female genders (see Table 2). Collectively, the teacher participants' professional teaching experience ranged from 2-29 years.

Table 2

Participants in the Action Research Study

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Grade Level	Years of Experience
Juliet	African American	Female	Grade 4	18
Sierra	Caucasian	Male	Grade 4	4
Bravo	Caucasian	Male	Grade 4	2
Tango	Caucasian	Female	Literacy Coach	8
Kilo	Caucasian	Female	Grade 3	29
Delta	Caucasian	Female	Grade 3	21
Woo	Caucasian	Female	Grade 3	18
Charlie	Caucasian	Female	Grade 3	18

Data-Collection Strategies

According to Nasrollahi (2015), the intent of action research is to support teachers in dealing with challenges and problems in teaching and to help them to carry out innovative solutions in a reflective way. This action research study primarily included data-collection strategies consistent with qualitative methodologies. The researcher used interviews and observations in field notes and questionnaires. In qualitative research, the purpose of interviews and questionnaires is to explore the perspectives, beliefs, motivations, and experiences of others (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The study had three cycles and it proceeded through recursive stages of data gathering, open coding, and analysis (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2009). Each of the cycles for this study followed Stringer’s (2007) look, think, act model and it involved all the selected participants. Stringer (2014) asserted that the basis of any investigation is a specific problem or issue. Framing the problem as a question requires careful thought, reflection, and initial analysis, which allows participants and facilitators to reflect on the issue under

investigation. During each of the cycles, the researcher framed the problem as a question and collected and analyzed data. During the *look* phase, the teacher participants gathered information and data about their current beliefs and teaching practices. During the *think* phase, teachers analyzed the data, and they reflected and interpreted how or why things were as they were (Stringer, 2014). Finally, during the *act* phase, the PLC created and implemented a plan of action. The plan of action for each cycle included the framed problem, a detailed outline of the implementation process necessary to reach a possible solution to the problem, and a measurable means of evaluation.

Prior to beginning Cycle 1, the researcher gathered information on each of the potential teacher participants. The researcher interviewed all the potential participants and asked them to complete a questionnaire on culturally responsive teaching to set the stage for the action research study by providing a clear understanding of the teachers' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. As the meetings with the teacher participants occurred, the researcher gathered information regarding the teachers' past experiences, beliefs, personal biases, and the ability to reflect. Although teachers initially may not have had the knowledge to answer questions relating to culturally responsive teaching, they should have exhibited the ability to self-reflect on their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. If a teacher showed the ability to self-reflect on culturally responsive teaching, then this indicated that the teacher had respect for all his or her students, and it indicated a confidence that all the students can succeed (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). If a teacher did not demonstrate the ability to self-reflect or showed a bias towards culturally responsive teaching during the initial contact meeting, then that teacher did not participate in this study. The researcher

informed teachers who expressed an interest in participating in the study that the researcher would need to conduct a preobservation of their classrooms. The researcher used the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist (Appendix E) as the observation tool. During the observations of the teacher participants, the researcher examined their classrooms for how they highlighted various cultural representations. The researcher observed teachers' various cultural representations in the form of bulletin boards, textbooks, and classroom library books along with their behaviors. The observations captured behaviors of teachers relating to where they placed students during educational discussions, if and how they utilized alternative curricula from textbooks, and whether they promoted the one-size-fits-all curriculum model (Wiggan, 2007). The researcher did not use the observations to evaluate the teachers' teaching, but instead to highlight ways in which the teacher interacted with diverse students. For example: *Do teachers hold all students to high academic standards? Is there evidence of diverse resource use in the planning and delivering of lessons? Do students sit in groups to strengthen interpersonal skills and to create a sense of connection with peers? Do the walls display culturally appropriate pictures and bulletin boards to invite all learners into the classroom community? Does the teacher use questioning techniques that invite multiple perspectives and backgrounds?*

Instrumentation

Throughout the course of the study, the researcher collected five types of data: (a) evaluations of teacher and student artifacts (posters, bulletin board materials, classroom books, and classroom assessment logs), (b) teacher and parent questionnaire responses, (c) culturally responsive rubric responses, (d) research journal notes, and (e) interview

transcripts. The actual instruments the researcher used to collect these data was the culturally responsive classroom checklist (Appendix E), a teacher Likert-type scale (Appendix B), a teacher questionnaire (Appendix A), a parent questionnaire (Appendix C), the culturally responsive lesson rubric (Appendix D), a research journal, and four open-ended interview questions, which the researcher audio recorded. The data-collection instruments fell into three broad categories: researcher-completed, participant-completed, and cocompleted. Researcher-completed refers to the researcher administering the data-collection instrument, while participant-completed refers to the participant completing the instrument. Cocompleted is an indication that both the researcher and participant completed the data-collection instrument. For the purposes of this study, the culturally responsive lesson rubric (Appendix D), the culturally responsive classroom checklist (Appendix E), and the researcher journal were researcher-completed; and the teacher questionnaire (Appendix A), teacher Likert-type scale (Appendix B), and parent questionnaire (Appendix C) were participant-completed. The four open-ended interview questions were cocompleted by the researcher and each participant.

Teacher and Student Artifacts

The teacher-student artifact data consisted of culturally responsive materials such as posters, bulletin board materials, and classroom books. I used the culturally responsive classroom checklist (Appendix E) to score and aid in organizing the data. I adapted the checklist from “A Resource for Equitable Classroom Practice 2010” by the Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant, and classroom teachers can use it as a self-reflection tool or as an outside observer. During this study, I completed the culturally responsive classroom form. As I observed the teacher’s classroom for

culturally responsive materials, I placed a checkmark (✓) in either the observed or not observed section of the rubric. If there was evidence of the classroom practice, I checked the observed box, and if the classroom practice was missing, I checked the not observed box.

Teacher and Parent Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires (Appendices A, B, & C), allowed teachers and parents to reflect on the questions and to provide short responses based on their personal experiences. The teacher questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of 10 short response questions and it was a development of Tatum's (1992) stages of racial identity development, which identifies the stage of racial identity with which teacher participants closely align. Tatum based her stages of racial identity development on Helms (1990), and she asserted that there are six stages of white identity formation: (a) contact (precontact): Whites internalize the messages of the dominant society; (b) disintegration (encounter): relationships and events begin to make White children, adolescents, or adults aware of the reality of racism; (c) reintegration: at this stage, there is strong pressure to conform to the norms of the society, and acting against racism may have costs. There is a tendency often to blame others for being victims of racism or their life circumstances; (d) pseudoindependence: beginning to understand cultural and institutional racism, but not yet being sure how to be an effective ally to people of color in the struggle for racial justice; (e) immersion/emersion: learning about White anti-racist history and surrounding oneself with positive White anti-racist people; and (f) autonomy: separating from the values of White supremacy and demonstrating a willingness to engage in anti-racism efforts in solidarity with people of color.

Tatum (1992) also highlighted racial identity development stages in people of color based on Cross's (1991) five stages of identity development in people of color. These stages are (a) preencounter: uncritiqued, children are soaking up society's messages about race; (b) encounter: An event in early adolescence begins to make clear the impact of race on one's personal life. The individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group facing racism; (c) immersion/emersion: individuals learn about the history of their people and they tend to surround themselves with symbols of their own racial identity group; (d) internalization: there is no need to assert the "Blacker than thou" attitude and one is secure in one's own sense of racial identity; and (e) internalization commitment: The person translates a sense of Blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment to the concerns of Blacks as a group.

Identifying the teacher participant's stage of racial identity through the teacher questionnaire (Appendix A) helped to determine the degree to which a nonculturally responsive classroom affected the teacher given his or her stage of racial identity development. Depending on their stage, the researcher provided literature to individual participants to increase their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching. The researcher told all teacher participants that they could stop answering questions at any time while taking Appendix A. The questionnaire was voluntary, and the researcher kept all the information confidential.

Appendix C is the family questionnaire, and it consists of six open-ended questions to collect information on students' backgrounds in terms of their cultural experiences and traditions. The questionnaire went to the parents of third- and fourth-grade students. The researcher sent letters to the parents stating that the questionnaire

was part of a research study exploring culturally responsive teaching by examining teachers' attitudes and skills relating to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students. The parents' participation in the research project was completely voluntary, and they could decline to answer or leave blank any questions they did not wish to answer. There were no risks in participation, and all responses remained anonymous. The researcher kept the data from the questionnaire (Appendix C) confidential and reported them only as part of this doctoral dissertation.

In analyzing the data from each of the questionnaires, the researcher looked for certain details in the responses and applied content data analysis and coding of key words and phrases. For example, the teacher questionnaire (Appendix A) included the question: How do you build on students' knowledge and cultural backgrounds in your teaching? The researcher analyzed the responses for key words or phrases such as *making connections, cultural background of students, traditions, and family values*. The researcher applied the same coding process to the parent questionnaire (Appendix C) as well, given that all the questions were open-ended, and the researcher was looking for specific words and key phrases. The researcher used the analysis of the collective data from each set of questionnaires to drive the research cycles effectively, while also supporting the professional needs of the teachers.

Culturally Responsive Guidelines

During Cycle 3, the PLC used a culturally responsive lesson rubric to revise and develop culturally responsive lessons. Each grade level (third and fourth grade) worked as a team (PLC) and reviewed and revised a current lesson using Aguilar-Valdez's (2015)

Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric (Appendix D). After revisions, a fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Juliet, piloted the lesson while the researcher used the culturally responsive lesson rubric to observe. The Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric has four categories: ineffective, emerging, effective, and highly effective. Once the researcher completed the rubric, he scored it using the New York University Metro Center's Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard. The purpose of the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard was to help to determine the extent to which the third- and fourth-grade curricula were culturally responsive. The tool can assess individual lessons, and the researcher used it to provoke thinking about what students should learn, how they should learn, and how teachers could transform the lesson to engage students effectively.

In creating the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard, researchers drew upon a wide variety of existing resources, including multicultural rubrics, anti-bias rubrics, textbook rubrics, and rubrics aimed at creating cultural standards for educators, determining bias in children books, and examining lesson plans. For the revision of the pilot lesson to succeed, all the scores needed to average effective or higher in each domain of the rubric. The researcher used the results of the revised pilot lesson to answer Research Question 3: What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum?

Research Journal

There were multiple PLC group discussions and observations throughout the course of the study. The research journal consisted of classroom observation notes and field notes pertaining to each of the cycles. The researcher managed the journal and used it to inform the study and action research process. The researcher organized the notes

cycles and maintained them in one research journal divided by sections to allow for qualitative analysis. Bryman (2004) suggested that qualitative content analysis is a searching out of underlying themes in the analyzed material, and it is a prevalent approach to qualitative analysis. More specifically, he expounded the role of the investigator in the process of constructing meaning in and of texts.

The first step in constructing meaning was to organize the discussion notes by cycle, classroom, and teachers present. The next step involved documenting important aspects of each teacher's classroom, such as the attitude of the teachers in terms of their emotions of the day and the individual teacher's viewpoints during PLC discussions or impromptu conversations. The researcher analyzed the journal using constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), there are three major steps in constant comparison analysis. During the first stage, the researcher sorted the journal and coded each smaller part. After coding the journal, the researcher grouped it into categories. Finally, the researcher identified themes to convey the overall content of the journal. The researcher transcribed written observations regarding a particular teacher or event and analyzed them for content. The researcher looked for similarities in comparing field notes of individual teachers or events and coded key words and phrases to analyze any emerging commonalities effectively. Key words and phrases included *teacher beliefs*, *cultural background of students*, *traditions*, *family values*, *active student participation*, *learning process*, and *making connections*. the researcher used the codes for each key word or phrase to evaluate and process data for their impact on the cycle or action research study in general.

Interview Notes

At the end of Cycle 3, the researcher interviewed all the teacher participants. Appendix G contains eight open-ended questions that examined how well the teacher participant understood culturally responsive teaching. The results highlighted the degree of professional growth and helped to guide future teacher reflection. The researcher audio-recorded and transcribed each interview session, sharing transcripts with each participant to ensure validity and authenticity.

Since the researcher was interested in seeing any patterns and themes across the interviews, he analyzed the interview notes using a thematic content analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this is a flexible approach that allows the researcher to identify themes in qualitative data. After transcribing and coding each participant's interview notes, the researcher found common themes by comparing and contrasting the individual notes. Common themes in the respective notes revealed whether teachers understood the differences between culturally responsive teaching, status quo, or what Apple (1993) considered classroom death. The researcher used this data to reflect on a particular cycle or event and to question whether a certain strategy could have been more effective, or if the research strategies positively influenced teacher knowledge and skills. This coding and reflecting process allowed the researcher to answer the research questions and to determine whether the effectiveness of this research process seemed worthy of further use.

Cycle 1: Teacher Readiness and Preparedness

Look. The researcher anticipated that Cycle 1 would be the longest of the cycles and it would lay the foundation for the following cycles as well as anchoring the study.

During this cycle, the participants (third- and fourth-grade teachers, ELA coach, and principal) formed one PLC. According to Dufour and Eaker (1998), the members of PLCs have mutual interests and shared beliefs. PLC members may differ in terms of their titles, positions, and responsibilities; however, the belief is that they all have knowledge and expertise that can contribute to the success of the organization. As Ikehara (as cited in Dufour & Eaker, 1998) posited, learning occurs when these members can share their knowledge and expertise through communication and social interaction. When experts are free to dialogue on goals, strategies, and processes, they learn from one another, which leads to organizational growth and improvement. According to Dufour and Eaker, the members do not simply accept the status quo; they challenge it by asking questions and pursuing new ways of getting better.

During the first PLC meeting, the team reviewed the purpose of the study, the research questions, and Stringer's (2014) action research model of look, think, act. Each cycle of the study addressed specific research questions the researcher identified prior to starting the cycle. Consistent with Stringer's action research model, during each cycle, the researcher framed the problem or issue under investigation in the form of a question. As the research process evolved, the PLC had the flexibility to create additional framed problems or to adjust the preconceived set of framed problems. Throughout the study, the researcher collected ongoing data in the form of questionnaires, observations, interviews, and PLC notes. The researcher used coding to organize this data and to capture salient information. During the first PLC meeting, the researcher introduced the committee to the concept of coding based on the theory of Saldana (2009). Finally, the researcher used previously gathered information from the PLC member's Likert-type

scale, questionnaire (Appendix B), and Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist (Appendix E) as a launching point to conduct an in-depth discussion of culturally responsive teaching. Using Gay's (2018) theory of culturally responsive teaching, the committee gained an in-depth understanding of what culturally responsive teaching was.

During Cycle 1, the PLC focused on answering Research Questions 1 and 2:

- 1) What are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students?
- 2) How can teachers and administrators of Lanier Elementary School develop an awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact classrooms and teaching practices?

Through the PLC, the teachers began to develop the skills to challenge the traditional classroom pedagogies and they examined their own beliefs and biases about teaching a diverse classroom. This meant that teachers participated in a self-reflection process in which they reflected on their past educational experiences of being in diverse environments, the messages they learned about race and culture, and how their personal experiences of race influenced their current teaching (Irving, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Teachers examined their values with a sense of curiosity in a nonthreatening environment. For teachers to become competent, caring culturally responsive educators, they must go through a self-analysis process in which they look at their beliefs about the relationship between culture, ethnicity, and the ability to succeed academically (Gay, 2018). According to Vavrus (n.d.), culturally responsive teachers need to explore their own personal ideas and beliefs about their cultural and racial identity formation. The PLC reviewed related literature on culturally responsive teaching as embodied in the

work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (1975, 1980, 2002, 2010, 2013), and it discussed practices of culturally responsive teaching versus traditional classroom teaching. According to Stringer (2014), in the look stage of action research, it is important to clarify and deepen participants' understanding of the issue.

Think. Having established a starting place, the PLC analyzed the survey data to answer the following questions, according to Stringer (2014): *What is happening here? How or why are things as they are?* The PLC identified and discussed key experiences of having a nonculturally responsive classroom, identifying the main features of their current classrooms, which were nonculturally responsive, and identifying themes that were common in all their classrooms. During PLC meetings, teachers used storytelling as a method of sharing their experiences, connecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Dyson and Genishi (1994) stated that “we all have a basic need for story,” and that “storytelling is a way to organize our experiences into important events” (p. 1-10). Using the method of storytelling during the PLC group meetings created connections and openness among teachers and administrators. Reflecting and developing cultural self-awareness and consciousness-raising for teachers was critical for teachers to succeed as culturally responsive educators (Gay, 2018).

Act. After reviewing the data on teachers' experiences, beliefs and biases, the PLC planned to identify one major issue and common thread in how their belief system impacted the students in their classrooms. The PLC sought to develop an action plan for catching teachers' thinking when biases presented during their planning and teaching. The intent was for teachers to raise their awareness of how their beliefs impact their

teaching. Teachers kept a journal of biases for later reflection. According to Darling-Hammond (2005), developing awareness is the first step in changing beliefs and biases.

In the end, this process strengthened the teacher participants' self-efficacy in making classroom decisions to meet the needs of all students in a diverse classroom. Chen et al. (2009) posited that teachers who are culturally responsive can counter beliefs that are implicit in institutional biases and construct classroom environments that are inclusive and that address social differences, different cultures, and different races. Additionally, culturally responsive teachers have faith in the human dignity and capabilities of all their students (Gay, 2018). For teacher participants to enter into Cycle 2, Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom, teachers needed to start by developing self-awareness.

Cycle 2: Developing a Culturally Responsive Classroom

Look. After completing Cycle 1 of the study, the plan was for teachers to have developed an understanding of culturally responsive teaching and also an awareness of their personal beliefs regarding culture and social differences. Cycle 2 focused on addressing Research Question 3: What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum? During the look phase of Cycle 2, teachers gathered data on how to develop a culturally responsive classroom. The PLC collected data to answer the framed problem: How can we evaluate the classroom environment for cultural responsiveness?

Culturally responsive teaching is a teaching method and pedagogy that recognizes the significance of including students' cultural experiences and backgrounds in all areas of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Diamond and Moore (as cited in Gay,

2018), teachers have specific roles and responsibilities as teachers, such as cultural organizers, cultural mediators, and orchestrators of social contexts for learning. As cultural organizers, teachers must understand how culture impacts the class on a daily basis and develop classroom environments that emit cultural and ethnic diversity (Gay, 2018). As cultural mediators, teachers give students time to discuss problems among different cultures and they work with students to analyze how the mainstream media portray cultures versus reality (Gay, 2018). Finally, as orchestrators of social contexts for learning, teachers recognize and understand that culture influences learning, and they develop lessons that include cultural experiences. For teachers to become cultural organizers, cultural mediators, and orchestrators of social contexts for learning, they must start by developing trust, rapport, and connections with students.

The PLC reviewed discussion notes from Cycle 1, including Gay's (2018) theory of culturally responsive teaching and Saldana's (2009) theory of analyzing qualitative data. Some ways teachers collected data during this cycle included reviewing the literature on culturally responsive classrooms, and viewing videos where teachers are implementing culturally responsive teaching practices based on research. The PLC gathered information on the qualities and characteristics of culturally responsive classrooms, and it organized this data to extract salient information.

Think. Once the PLC had collected data about culturally responsive classrooms, it analyzed and categorized the data. The entire PLC received training on coding and analyzing data. According to Stringer (2014), all analysis is a process of interpretation, but the most important goal is to identify information that clearly represents the viewpoints and experiences of the key stakeholders. The process of coding the data

involves sorting the data into related groups or categories to identify themes. After the PLC sorted and categorized the data, themes emerged. The PLC compared Lanier Elementary's current classroom environments to other research-based culturally responsive classroom environments. The comparison included the physical classroom environment, and the PLC documented it using a culturally responsive classroom checklist (Appendix E).

Act. Afterward, the teacher participants developed an action plan that included redesigning their classroom to be culturally responsive and making connections to students of all backgrounds. Making connections includes building trust and rapport with students and their families. Teachers made connections with families during this cycle through home visits, parent questionnaires, and teacher-parent conferences. A parent questionnaire went to parents in an effort to understand each student's culture, background, and experiences. The parent questionnaire explained why the researcher sought such information (see Appendix C). According to Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004), students often make decisions about how much effort they put into class based on whether they perceive the teacher as caring about them. If students feel cared about and connected to school, they are more likely to succeed, and student achievement increases.

The second step in creating a culturally responsive classroom was choosing posters, books, and charts purposefully with different cultures in mind. Elementary-school students are developing self-identity and self-image, and it is crucial that they see themselves in their classroom and school environment. According to Montgomery (2001), teachers create culturally diverse classrooms by posting diverse images on

bulletin boards to build community and to increase students' sense of being members of the class.

Cycle 3: Revising the Curriculum

Look. Once the PLC reached this cycle of the study, it had gained knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, knowledge of what a culturally responsive classroom looks like, and an understanding of students' cultural needs. The final cycle addressed the research question: How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices? The cycle included the teachers piloting a lesson. Based on the experiences they gained from Cycles 1 and 2, the teacher participants applied their newly gained knowledge and skills to revise and pilot an existing lesson. Mills (2003) stated that action research is a necessary component of teaching, along with curriculum development, assessment, and classroom management. Teachers and administrators analyzed the current curriculum and developed skills to revise the curriculum to make it inclusive of all cultures and races of their current students. According to Nasrollahi (2015), using action research with teachers improves their overall effectiveness, makes their work more meaningful, and allows teachers to see the impact of planned change in their practice. The PLC applied the Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric to gather information about the third- and fourth-grade current curriculum (Appendix D).

For teachers to develop and pilot lessons that were culturally responsive, they needed to look at the curriculum through a culturally responsive lens. Once Cycles 1 and 2 were complete, the teachers had the working knowledge to look critically at the curriculum and content. According to Gay (2018), curriculum content is critical to academic performance and it is an important part of culturally responsive teaching.

Improved learning is a result of meaningful content and relevant teaching for African American, Latino American, Asian American, and Native American students (Gay, 2018). As the literature review stated, revising the current curriculum includes using a culturally responsive lens. Developing a culturally responsive curriculum includes ensuring content about diverse groups is accurate, authentic, and comprehensive (Gay, 2018). Providing students regularly with accurate information about ethnic groups will fill knowledge gaps and correct false beliefs (Gay, 2018). With any curriculum content, teachers need to stop and think about whether the information they are about to teach is true and accurate. During this cycle, the PLC reviewed the current third- and fourth-grade social studies curriculum using Aguilar-Valdez's (2015) Culturally Responsive Teaching Criteria Guide. The PLC answered and discussed the questions, Is there another perspective? Are there pieces of the story missing? The framed problem for Cycle 3 was: How can we develop teachers' knowledge and skills to revise and pilot lessons from their current curriculum?

Think. After gathering information about the current third- and fourth-grade curriculum, the PLC thought about why the curriculum had developed that way. Teachers brainstormed ways to make the curriculum and certain lessons more culturally responsive. During the planning stage of teachers' lesson development, teachers met in their respective grade levels (third and fourth grades separately) to consider and research the answers to the questions regarding other perspectives or missing pieces to the story. Just as teachers apply analytical skills of how to teach reading and writing most effectively, teachers analyzed whether the content was accurate, diverse, and meaningful to the students in their current class. According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive

curricula must be able to foster various types of learning, including cognitive, affective, social, political, personal, and moral. Because there is no one resource that can provide the range of learning for all students, teachers learned to analyze content and to research media, textbooks, and trade books to determine new perspectives and experiences.

Act. Together, the PLC applied a set of culturally responsive guidelines to make lessons and units culturally responsive. Each teacher and grade level applied these guidelines in lesson planning and created a pilot lesson. After piloting the lessons, the PLC met and discussed the results. The teacher participants of the pilot lessons recorded notes and shared artifacts in the form of student work (writing samples, artwork, or quiz responses). At the conclusion of Cycle 3, the PLC reflected on the research process, reviewed the student artifacts, and shared thoughts. The researcher interviewed each teacher individually to gain an understanding of his or her current knowledge of culturally responsive teaching. A committee-researcher journal recorded the entire research process.

Data Analysis

Stringer (2014) asserted that data sources in action research studies are broad and they fit into the categories of *observations, interviews, questionnaires/surveys, and readily available data*. According to Tere (2006), in qualitative data analysis, there are few rigid rules and procedures. The process is very personal, allowing for researcher discretion in terms of data formatting. Throughout this study, the researcher collected and analyzed five types of data: (a) teacher-student artifacts (posters, bulletin board materials, and classroom books), (b) teacher and parent questionnaire responses, (c) culturally responsive rubric responses, (d) the researcher's journal, which contained

observations and PLC notes, and (e) interview transcripts. Consistent with action research methodologies, Stringer (2014) posited that data collection and data analysis should overlap to allow for flexibility in data collection procedures. This process allows the researcher to use new ideas or patterns that may emerge. For this study, data analysis included working with data, organizing them, breaking them down, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what was important and what one could learn, and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). According to Saldana (2009), assigning a word or phrase to summarize a section of visual or language-based data functions as coding in qualitative research. Coding can be evocative, or it can capture the essence of a section or whatever is salient or important to the research.

Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach that involves studying things in their natural settings by attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting, with the researcher going into the participants' site to develop details about the individuals or their actual experiences. Denzin and Lincoln asserted that qualitative research involves the collection and studied the use of empirical materials to describe routine, problems, and meaning in an individual's life. The empirical materials for qualitative research can include case studies, personal experience, introspectives, life stories, interviews, and observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts. Therefore, the credibility of qualitative research depends heavily on the ability, thoroughness, and efforts of the researcher. In the qualitative research paradigm, Patton (2002) viewed this as the validity and reliability of

the research. These terms are not separate when referring to the qualitative research paradigm; instead, terms such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness encompass both validity and reliability.

For this study, the researcher established validity through strategies to check the accuracy of the findings. The researcher created a coherent justification for the themes based on the different data sources through the use of triangulation. Creswell (2009) referred to triangulation as the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, such as parents, students, and teachers in a school setting; different types of data, such as field notes and case studies; and different methods of data collection, such as documents and interviews. The findings within the collected data included a final report or specific descriptions after member checking from the participants to determine accuracy. The researcher established validity through trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability determined trustworthiness for this study. Credibility occurred when the PLC and the researcher engaged in the process of sifting, exploring, reflecting on, and judging the data for meaning and relevance, which ultimately developed themes that accurately captured the experience. To establish credibility further, the researcher applied member checking by having participants review and verify their transcripts for accuracy. In this sense, purposeful sampling increased the in-depth understanding, since the researcher selected the participants based on their rich experiences of working with diverse student populations (Patton, 2002). To ensure dependability, the researcher established an audit trail by preserving and maintaining all transcripts, notes, audiotapes, journals, and teacher-student artifacts. The researcher established authenticity by having

the participants review, acknowledge, and agree to their recorded notes or transcripts, which also maintained respect for the context of the data. the researcher set aside potential prejudices and biases to ensure an equal presentation of all the participants' perspectives so that the reader could arrive at an impartial decision. The researcher established confirmability by linking the data to their sources. To fulfill the doctoral program requirements, the assigned committee chairperson reviewed, scrutinized and validated the data strategies and data analysis sections of this research study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, researchers attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the study participants. Asking people to talk about things that may be very personal to them is not an easy task. This makes the researcher's role critical, as he or she collects data and implements analysis (Creswell, 2007). For this study, my role as the researcher was that of an observer and participant, as I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. I organized the PLC and I facilitated discussions that described relevant aspects of culturally responsive teaching. It was my role to provide the PLC with appropriate professional literature, as well as highlighting assumptions and biases. I asked probing questions during interviews and PLC discussions to engage participants in deep levels of conversation. As the researcher, I built a picture for the participants using ideas and theories from a wide variety of sources.

Ethical Assurances

During this research study, there was an array of ethical considerations. These considerations included institutional and federal standards for conducting research with human participants, conducting research with teacher participants I supervise as their

school principal, honesty and objectivity, social responsibility and confidentiality, and nondiscrimination. These ethical considerations served as basic guidelines for this research study.

Throughout the study, I shared information and collected data. I took responsibility for collecting, coding, and analyzing the data from interviews, questionnaires, and the research journal to uncover emerging concepts and patterns. My role as the researcher included establishing mechanisms for safeguarding information and protecting the privacy rights of the participants, and I began seeking approval for such mechanisms from my dissertation chairperson before the research began. Once approved, I took responsibility for articulating all protocols and procedures to the participants as well as ensuring fidelity throughout the action research process.

To address the important consideration of using teachers as participants in this study, I followed the guidelines of Rowan's IRB, which lists the rights of participants in research. This detailed list is on the IRB website at <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>. The IRB includes the dissertation chairperson of this study, along with a panel of people who helped to ensure the study did not violate the safety and rights of the human subjects. Examples of the IRB guidelines include voluntary participation and informed consent. These guidelines ensured that the teacher participants were participating of their own free will and that they were fully aware of the procedures and potential risks involved in the study. Other IRB guidelines applied to ethical standards that protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Prior to collecting any data for this study, the IRB ensured this dissertation proposal met all the IRB ethical considerations. Despite the ethical rigors of the IRB, there was still the potential for additional issues to

arise such as honesty, objectivity, and discrimination. I saw these as important ethical considerations that closely related to one's potential for personal bias.

As the researcher, I mitigated my potential biases and provided assurances by being objective and nonjudgmental in my thoughts, observations, and actions. I kept a personal journal to organize and document my own thoughts and feelings throughout the study, which I also used to document my relationship with the data and analysis. I shared all my notes on the teacher participants to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The personal journal allowed me to engage in self-reflection and it helped with controlling researcher bias.

Conclusion

Lanier Elementary had a student population of 43% students of color and a faculty and staff population of 93% Caucasian (New York State Education Department, 2016), and the teachers lacked cultural knowledge, frames of reference, and past experiences of Lanier's culturally diverse student population. The purpose of this action research study was to explore culturally responsive teaching by examining teachers' attitudes and skills relating to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010).

During this study, the researcher used three cycles to develop teachers professionally, identify best practices, and apply best practices to classrooms immediately. Teachers worked in collaboration with each other, reflecting on their teaching and implementing new, culturally responsive teaching practices to meet the needs of their students. During Cycle 1, the PLC gathered data about personal biases and beliefs about teaching in a diverse classroom. The framed problem was: What can we do

to broaden our understanding of the local environment and community resources so that we can help our students to interact with knowledge/content more effectively? Teachers took a brief survey regarding their beliefs of teaching a diverse student population, the messages they received relating to culture during their childhood, and their past teaching experiences. In addition, the PLC reviewed literature and available data on culturally responsive teaching versus traditional classroom teaching. During Cycle 2, teachers gathered data on how to develop a culturally responsive classroom. They also collected data to answer the framed problem: How can we evaluate and create the classroom environment for cultural responsiveness? The PLC compared and contrasted the data it collected through the use of culturally responsive rubrics. Finally, during Cycle 3, the PLC developed a set of culturally responsive guidelines and it applied those guidelines to lesson planning. The framed problem for Cycle 3 was: How can we develop teachers' knowledge and skills to revise and pilot lessons from their current curriculum? During this final cycle, teachers wrote and piloted a lesson using culturally responsive guidelines.

As a result of each of these cycles, teachers were able to apply culturally responsive teaching practices to any lesson or unit, and students had more opportunities to make connections to culture, traditions, and real-life social justice issues, resulting in increased student engagement and student achievement.

Chapter Four

Findings

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) stated that students of color account for over half the students in the U.S. public school system. Despite students of color representing the majority of students in public education, there continues to be a cultural gap in many schools, with students of color performing disproportionately badly at all levels of education (Gay, 2010). In her foundational book on culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2010) asserted that filtering teaching through students' own cultural experiences will lead to better performance on multiple measures of achievement. While Gay's theory and research are well documented within the public education community, increasing numbers of U.S. teachers continue to struggle with how they can serve students from cultures other than their own better (Gay, 2010). When it comes to teaching with a heightened understanding of culture, Ambe (2006) suggested that teachers need to be among the best-equipped professionals in the United States. To teach in a culturally relevant manner, Gay (2010) argued that regardless of teachers' ethnic group membership, they must have courage, competence, and confidence.

The main focus of this study was to develop culturally responsive educators at Lanier Elementary school to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse student population. At the time of this study, educators (administrators and teachers) lacked the necessary efficacy to meet the demands of teaching a diverse population. Action research was the preferred method to conduct an inquiry-based form of investigation, including Lanier's ELA instructional coach and third- and fourth-grade teachers. According to Stringer (2007), action research is participatory research in which educators understand a

problem, collect data and information, analyze the data, and create a plan to solve the problem. Lanier Elementary School is a learning community that encourages reflective practice and application on a regular basis through grade-level and faculty meetings. Teachers and administrators at Lanier Elementary commit to taking the time necessary to study culturally responsive teaching and to collaborate as equal partners on creating and implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. Through the PLC, participants shared best practices, reviewed data, and made informed decisions.

The purpose of this action research study was to explore culturally responsive teaching by examining teachers' attitudes and skills relating to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). Specifically, the researcher designed and used three cycles to achieve this objective. Each cycle addressed a specific research question. The participants in the study were the ELA instructional coach, four Grade 3 teachers, and three Grade 4 teachers. While students benefited from the study through teacher reflection and new teaching practices, they were not direct participants in the study. The researcher implemented the actions of Cycle 1 to answer Research Questions 1 and 2:

- 1) What are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students?
- 2) How can teachers and administrators of Lanier Elementary School develop an awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact classrooms and teaching practices?

Cycle 2 targeted Research Question 3:

- 3) What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum?

Cycle 3 addressed Research Question 4:

- 4) How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices?

As the researcher, I sought to identify and examine culturally responsive practices and strategies within the PLC members' classrooms. I wanted to discover teachers' knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching and how they applied such practices to their teaching. Throughout the study, the PLC created and implemented action plans to increase teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and to provide them with the necessary skills to create a culturally responsive teaching environment that included lesson planning. Data-collection procedures included interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, PLC group discussions, and field notes. This chapter presents the data from each individual cycle and it highlights the findings relating to the research questions.

Cycle 1 Results

Developing the professional learning community. Cycle 1 was the longest of the cycles, and it laid the foundation for the remaining cycles, as well as anchoring the study. A critical step in conducting this study was to provide the participants with knowledge about the action research process and to get them comfortable with sharing their professional backgrounds regarding culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, one of the first tasks was to establish a rapport and to form all the participants into one PLC. The participants in the PLC were four Grade 3 teachers, three Grade 4 teachers, and the

ELA instructional coach. The purpose of organizing as one PLC was to promote and maximize learning based on the belief that all the participants have knowledge and expertise that can contribute to the success of the study. As Dufour and Eaker (1998) posited, learning occurs when PLC members can share their knowledge and expertise through communication and social interaction.

Beliefs about race, identity, and educational organizations. Prior to Cycle 1 beginning, all the participants completed a survey that collected data on their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge regarding culturally responsive teaching (Appendix B). The purpose of administering and analyzing this survey was to highlight each participant's cultural beliefs about race and identity in educational organizations. The survey had two parts, the first being a demographic section and the second being a content-focused section requiring the participant to indicate the level to which he or she agreed or disagreed with cultural and racial identity influences. Based on the results of this 8-statement survey, two significant findings emerged: *teachers believe that children of color face different educational challenges than White children*, and *teachers should maintain a cultural competency level when working with children*. The data showed that 6 of 8 participants agreed with the statement, "I was misinformed about different races and cultures growing up," all eight participants either agreed (two) or strongly agreed (six) with the statement, "Teachers should take a cultural competency assessment every 5 years at a minimum," and six of eight participants disagreed with the statement, "White children and children of color face the same challenges in accessing a quality education."

Table 3

Results of Teacher Questionnaire

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Growing up, I lost important friends because students of a different race were not allowed in my home.				2	6
I felt sad growing up, because I was denied access to social situations due to race and ethnicity.			2	2	4
I was misinformed about different races and cultures growing up.		6	1	1	
I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural or ethnic group between 7 and 10 years old.			4	3	1
I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural or ethnic group between 11 and 15 years old.		5	2	1	
I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural or ethnic group between 16 and 21 years old.	1	5	1		1
I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural or ethnic group when I was older than 22 years old.	1	2	4	1	
As a young adult, I talked and learned about racism in school and at home.	2	4	1	1	
I was empowered to be a change agent to interrupt racism.	1	3	3	1	
Teachers should take a cultural competency assessment every 5 years at a minimum.	6	2			
I need to attend a course or workshop on cultural competency every 2 years at a minimum.		3	4		1
Classroom teachers should use race/ethnicity as a guiding principle in instruction.	1	3	3		1

Table 3 (Continued)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am consciously aware of my personal biases and stereotypes around racial/ethnic, gender, and other individual differences.	2	5	1		
Through personal life experiences I am familiar with social struggles that involve blatant discrimination (i.e., racial/ethnic, gender, religious, disability, etc.).	2	3	1	2	
White children and children of color face the same challenges in accessing a quality education.			2	3	3
On a routine basis, you disaggregate data along demographic lines to adapt your teaching practices to the race and culture of your students.		1	4	2	1

Note. Results of teacher questionnaire. Eight teachers at Lanier Elementary School participated. Participants answered individually.

The findings that emerged from the participants' responses were important, because they quickly highlighted the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge levels regarding cultural diversity, and they provided a starting point for the first PLC discussion. The researcher later used the findings to provide each participant feedback on his or her racial identity development based on the theory of Tatum (1997). This was significant, because the findings suggested that the teacher participants were aware racism exists, and that they need ongoing training to understand the challenges children of color face better. Tatum asserted that when Whites accept that racism exists and make a genuine attempt to be anti-racist, they are aligned with the immersion/emersion stage. It was important to inform the teachers that not all people will go through every stage of

racial identity and that some of the stages may be cyclical. Some teachers may spend a large part of their lives believing racism against children of color does not exist and later experience a negative event that proves that racism does exist. This would then place them in another stage or even create a sense of guilt or shame at knowing how difficult life is for children of color.

Identifying each participant's stage of racial identity development created a sense of awareness that proved beneficial for both the researcher and the teacher participants. As the researcher, I gained insight into the teachers' beliefs and attitudes in terms of racial equity among Whites and children of color. At Lanier Elementary, racial equity among students is a sensitive and rarely-discussed topic, which conceals the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and administrators. Having data that reveal how teachers perceive racial challenges of students of color allowed me to structure and guide the PLC discussions. Providing the teacher participants with the findings along with research and theory on Tatum's (1997) racial stages of identity development allowed them to self-reflect and to engage in rich PLC discussions on culturally responsive teaching.

Participants' racial identities. In Chapter 6 of the book "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria," Tatum (1997) used Janet Helms's description of the six stages of White identity formation (contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy) to describe how White people view race and culture based on their life experiences. Tatum also used William Cross's categories of development for people of color: preencounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. These findings can categorize people of color based on their life experiences involving race and culture.

The researcher gave the participants their responses to the survey and asked them to review Tatum's (1997) stages of racial identity development. The researcher encouraged participants to identify their stage of racial identity based on their personal experiences and responses to the survey. This gave participants knowledge about diversity involving race, bias, and prejudice, and it also showed them that many people experience similar feelings. In some cases, teachers do not know that others lack cultural knowledge and they consider their own shame, guilt, embarrassment, or anger an uncomfortable experience that they alone are experiencing. It was important to inform the teachers at the beginning of the study that these feelings were normal, and that they would be part of the learning process. Knowing in advance which stage an individual or a colleague is experiencing provides a sense of understanding when a person decides to participate in or withdraw from a certain conversation or topic.

First PLC meeting (March 21, 2019). During the first meeting, there was a review and discussion of Tatum's (1997) stages of racial identity. The participants had the opportunity to share their stage of racial identity development, and each decided to share with the group. This immediately established a safe environment in which the participants could communicate their personal views or experiences and relate them to theory. Mrs. Woo said, "I didn't grow up around any people of color and never really understood their issues. I thought I was the only one who didn't know a whole lot about race and culture until I heard you guys." Mrs. Charlie shared, "I oftentimes can't tell what ethnicity a person of color is and feel scared or embarrassed to ask." These first conversations were breaking down barriers. Teachers were being honest and real about their beliefs, thoughts, and experiences. The experience allowed teachers to enter into the

immersion stage of racial identity. They made a genuine attempt to understand the connection between their upbringing as children and young adults and the impact it has on how they teach in the classroom. According to Tatum (1997), the immersion stage in White people is when adults connect to their White identity and make a sincere attempt to be anti-racist.

The first Cycle 1 meeting covered the purpose of the study, coding, Stringer's (2014) action research model of look, think, act, and a Ted Talk on culturally responsive teaching. Since the PLC would be reviewing and coding data together, they needed to understand the coding process and how it applied to the research questions and the action research process. The PLC reviewed "The Danger of a Single Story," by Adichie (2009) to build its knowledge of culturally responsive teaching from the perspective of scholars in the field. During the meeting, the PLC engaged in dialogue regarding the action research process, the results of the survey, the coding process, and culturally responsive teaching. The participants received a copy of the document, "Culture in the Classroom" by Project Create (South East Regional Resource Center [SERRC], 2015). Project CREATE received funding from an Alaska Native Education Program Grant through the U.S. Department of Education. From 2012 to 2015, SERRC partnered with Bering Strait School District to develop protocols, tools, and training to evaluate teachers on culturally responsive practices and skills. Project CREATE developed cultural standards for educators to develop indicators and evidence to evaluate teachers for culturally responsive instruction. The project culminated with the publication of the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators (SERRC, 2015). The researcher used this document in this study because it was part of SERRC's Project CREATE and it supported a teacher

evaluation framework that aligned with research-based instructional models such as Danielson's (2013) Framework for Teaching. All the teacher participants have been trained in the Danielson Framework for Teaching model, and they receive evaluation based on this model at least twice a year.

During the PLC discussion, the researcher took field notes and highlighted two significant concerns. Seven of the teacher participants stated that "the Danielson Rubric does not address culturally responsive teaching," and five of the teacher participants shared, "We don't feel we have the expertise to create cultural standards that will align to the Danielson Rubric." Three of the participants asked questions such as "What if we implement culturally responsive practices and they conflict with the Danielson Framework?" and "What if we're being observed by another administrator while we're being culturally responsive, and we're scored low based on the Danielson Rubric?" Collectively, the participants' responses indicated that they felt the Danielson Rubric is not culturally responsive, and they were afraid to deviate from what they perceived as traditional instructional practices associated with the rubric. Based on the participants' responses, I structured a discussion to clarify and address these concerns. We discussed each of the four domains of the Danielson Rubric.

Domain 1 of the rubric involves lesson planning and the preobservation conference with the observing administrator. The researcher shared that Domain 1 of the rubric does not dictate the lesson topic, materials, or resources. Teachers would have the autonomy to take an existing, Eurocentric lesson and to enhance it with culturally responsive resources based on the needs of the students. In fact, a question on the preobservation form for Domain 1 specifically asks the teacher to describe the

backgrounds and learning needs of the students and to address how the lesson objectives will meet such needs.

Domain 2 of the Danielson Rubric deals with the physical classroom environment as well as student behavior. The researcher reminded the participants that this domain encourages teachers to arrange student desks and furniture to promote collaboration, and to display bulletin board materials relevant to the lesson. Domain 2 also sets criteria for promoting rapport among students and the teacher (referring to students by their names, equitably calling on students to respond, and allowing students to share and participate in lessons). All the criteria elements of Domain 2 are consistent with culturally responsive teaching.

Domain 3 of the Danielson Rubric focuses on the delivery of the lesson. This domain lists criteria that assess the questioning of the teacher, discussion techniques, and whether or not the students are engaging in the lesson. These criteria also support culturally responsive teaching. Being culturally responsive involves asking open-ended questions and allowing students to share and contribute to lessons from their cultural perspectives. Giving students factual information about a specific topic is not necessarily being culturally responsive, and nor does it satisfy the rubric criteria of student engagement. Both Domain 3 and the tenets of culturally responsive teaching involve the students in being active participants in the lesson. In action, students should respond to the information, ask questions, and, where appropriate, explore different perspectives of historical events.

The last domain of the Danielson Rubric is Domain 4, which involves reflecting on the lesson and a postobservation conference with the observing administrator. Under

Domain 4, the teachers' evaluation has only one criterion: their ability to write a postlesson reflection in which they share their opinions on how the delivery of the lesson went. The written reflection should address the conduct of the students, whether the students engaged in the lesson, whether the teacher deviated from the lesson plans, and what the teacher might do differently the next time, if appropriate.

To address the responses that indicated that three participants were concerned with administrators scoring them low "for being culturally responsive," the researcher emphasized the pre- and postconferences. In addition to each of the domains of the Danielson Rubric being conducive to culturally responsive teaching, the teachers would also have the opportunity to explain their intent. During the preobservation conference, the teachers could meticulously explain how their lessons would meet the needs of all their students and what specific methods they would use during the lesson. At the end of the lesson, the teachers had the opportunity to explain what actually happened, how the students responded, and what adjustments they made.

After the PLC reviewed the Danielson Rubric and discussed the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators (SERRC, 2015), all the participants were convinced the cultural standards would align with the Danielson (2013) Framework for Teaching. This discussion proved beneficial, because the PLC could see the connection between the Danielson Rubric and research-based standards relating to culturally responsive teaching.

Coding with participants. Following the first meeting of Cycle 1, all the participants completed a questionnaire (Appendix A) electronically through Google Forms. The purpose of administering the survey was to identify and build on the participants' cultural knowledge, awareness, and cultural experiences. Based on the

results, the researcher created a code book with the following themes: (a) teachers' beliefs and attitudes, (b) knowledge level of culturally responsive teaching, and (c) showing awareness of culturally responsive teaching. Under the first theme, *teachers' beliefs and attitudes*, I found that most of the participants had limited knowledge of other cultures and that participants were not aware of how to implement culturally responsive teaching. This was based on the following responses:

Mrs. Woo: I know very little about Hispanic culture or Black culture. This directly affects my teaching.

Mr. Sierra: The more exposure students get to different types of people, the more willing they are to not only accept others, but also see themselves in them. I am conscious of the fact that I do not know a lot about every culture, and I make my students aware of this fact.

Mrs. Charlie: When I first became interested in education, I feel that we overemphasized instructional practices and consequently did not place a strong enough emphasis on the student.

Under the second finding, *knowledge level of culturally responsive teaching*, the participants' responses indicated that their knowledge level came from undergraduate and graduate education courses rather than direct experience. While teachers had some knowledge about creating a culturally responsive classroom, they lacked the experience to apply such knowledge. Direct experience gives teachers an opportunity to apply theory in practice. This was based on the following responses:

In undergrad, I took a Sociology of Diversity class as an elective in my major. I found that to be really interesting at the time, and it really broadened my horizons to the differences people see and feel in their everyday lives.

Mrs. Kilo: I took undergraduate and graduate classes on multicultural education and multicultural literature classes. I also took in-service credit classes on multicultural education.

Mr. Bravo: In my undergraduate coursework, I took classes in multicultural literacy and multicultural education. In multicultural literacy, I learned how books and stories about diverse cultures can be affirming for students, and a means for inclusion, as well as powerful teaching devices.

Ms. Juliet: Preservice training included courses based on multicultural understanding and differentiation.

Under the third theme *showing awareness of culturally responsive teaching*, teachers have a desire and growth mindset for learning how to be more culturally responsive. Participants responded by saying:

Mrs. Charlie: I feel having this mindset has helped me embrace the variety of cultural differences in my classroom and think critically about how my own biases may impact the way I interact with students or the expectations that I implicitly have for each of them.

Ms. Delta: I ask questions about my students' upbringing, what their home life is like, how they celebrate certain holidays, and so on.

Mrs. Woo: I am conscious of the fact that I do not know a lot about every culture, and I make my students aware of this fact. I always tell my students that “I’m still learning.”

I would always try to engage students by relating what they were learning to their background. I always tried to make the effort to ask them questions and have them teach the class something about their connection.

An analysis of the participants’ responses showed that there were attempts to build relationships with all students; however, there was no evidence of effectively implementing a culturally responsive teaching environment. The teachers’ responses did, however, indicate they ask questions about the backgrounds of their students and put effort towards making their classrooms more culturally responsive with statements such as:

Mr. Sierra: I ask questions about my students’ upbringing, what their home life is like, how they celebrate certain holidays, and so on.

Mrs. Charlie: I am conscious of the fact that I do not know a lot about every culture, and I make my students aware of this fact.

These statements also suggest the potential for the projection of personal biases. Brandon (2003) supported this point when she posited that teachers might think they are practicing equity when in fact, they are simply unaware of their own biases. With the exception of one teacher’s response, none of the responses suggested that teachers are aware of their personal biases and how this can impact their teaching practices. As Brandon asserted, these deeply rooted biases transfer to the schoolwide culture and also into classrooms. These findings suggest that changing the curriculum alone without

changing the attitudes of teachers will make little impact in helping students to develop values of acceptance and social justice. Administrators should encourage self-reflection among teachers and it should become a part of the school culture.

Cycle 1 plan of action. When applying the Alaska Cultural Standards for Educators (SERRC, 2015), to the participants’ responses, the PLC identified gaps in the teachers’ practices. The data revealed that the participants’ responses to the open-ended questionnaire did not mention Standards B, C, and D (Table 4).

Table 4

Three of Alaska Cultural Standards Used in the Study

Alaska Cultural Standards	Description
Standard B	Culturally responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students.
Standard C	Culturally responsive educators participate in community events and activities in appropriate supportive ways.
Standard D	Culturally responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school.

Note. These standards pertain to culturally responsive teaching and they are as a tool to analyze participants’ responses.

The PLC decided to focus on Standard B: Culturally responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students (SERRC, 2015). Based on Stringer’s (2014) action research process, the PLC was now ready to enter the act phase of Cycle 1. During the act phase, the PLC created and implemented a plan of action that included

linking local community resources to the lessons and topics the teachers were teaching. The plan of action included the framed problem, an outline of an action process necessary to reach a possible solution to the problem, and a measurable means of evaluation. The goal of Cycle 1's action plan was to utilize local resources within the school community to broaden teachers' and students' cultural awareness and perspective, consistently and authentically. The main objective was to create a brochure highlighting all the cultural resources within the local community. The PLC members created a brochure (Appendix H) that they printed and electronically shared with each other. The brochure, titled "Curating a Culture," describes culturally diverse organizations within the local community.

Some of the organizations served the Muslim, Hispanic, Asian, German, and Indian cultures. As teachers are planning lessons and units, they can easily contact an organization for information to supplement a lesson, or they can plan a visit. This is one way to create authentic experiences for the students at Lanier Elementary School. The PLC members used the brochure as a resource to enhance their curriculum during Cycle 1. For example, the fourth-grade team contacted the Indian American Cultural Association of Westchester as part of their Native American unit. They planned a question and answer session between the students and a member of the organization. This experience enhanced the unit and brought the culture to life for the children. The PLC evaluated the action plan of creating a brochure based on the evidence of members using local, cultural resources in their classrooms. They also used the Alaska Cultural Standards Rating Scale to evaluate the action plan.

Cultural resources. Several of the PLC members decided to utilize an Islamic Community Center as one of the resources. All the teachers serving on the PLC were teaching skills in their classrooms relating to acceptance and respect in response to the March 15, 2019, New Zealand bombing attacks against Muslims. Since there was a local Muslim community center in the brochure and several of the PLC members had students of Muslim backgrounds in their classes, the PLC decided to create a presentation entitled “All are Welcome.” The teachers highlighted facts about the Muslim faith and they ultimately suggested that students write a letter to the local Islamic Community Center seeking more information about its culture, practices, and daily life. The students had several questions (Why do Muslims wear hijabs? What holidays do you celebrate? What type of food do Muslims eat?), and they decided to write a letter inviting teachers from the Islamic Community Center to visit their classrooms. Teachers from the community center responded to the letter and agreed to visit Grades 3 and 4. The questions from the students and the Islamic Community Center teacher’s responses are in Table 5.

Table 5

Islamic Center Visit Student Questions and Responses

Questions	Answers
Why do Muslims wear hijabs?	<i>We wear the scarf to be known as Muslim women. Also, as a reminder that we have a creator and to be grateful and that God is helping us through the day.</i>
What holidays do you celebrate?	<i>Ramadan is our biggest holiday. This is a time of fasting for a month. Children do not have to fast during Ramadan. Usually when they become young adults, they begin to fast.</i>

Table 5 (Continued)

Questions	Answers
Why do you celebrate them and what do you do during them?	<i>Ramadan is a holy month and a time of prayer and fasting.</i>
How did Ramadan start? What type of food do Muslims eat?	<i>We eat similar to you. We eat cereal, rice, and pasta. All fruits and vegetables. We also have nuts and eggs. We don't eat anything prepared with animal fats or alcohol. Similar to what you eat.</i>
What do you wear because of your faith/culture?	<i>We wear the hijab as a symbol of our faith.</i>
Why don't boys wear hijabs?	<i>Men and women both need to be covered. Women wear the hijab while men are expected to cover their knees, so they wear long shorts or pants.</i>
We are wondering if you move to a different country do you still have to wear your hijab?	<i>Yes, we would still need to wear a hijab.</i>
Where do you get the clothes that are different than what we see in the stores?	<i>Mostly online, like I'm sure your families shop online too. We go to Macy's and the city too.</i>
I wonder how you put on your hijab?	<i>It's like wearing a scarf, which is wrapped around your head. Very easy to put on.</i>
What are popular foods in your culture?	<i>Kosher beef, dairy, lots of spices too.</i>
What gods do they have in the Muslim faith?	<i>We believe in one God, Allah. Allah means God.</i>
What do you believe in and why?	<i>We share some beliefs with the Christian faith like one God, peace, and love. We read the Quran.</i>
Is fasting optional in your religion?	<i>Children do not fast, but adults fast.</i>
Do kids who go to Muslim-based religious schools have the same subjects as U.S schools? Do they have recess?	<i>Yes, children learn to read and write. Children learn math and science. They also learn about the Quran. They have breaks like recess and play with other children. They also pray in school.</i>

Note. Participants actively engaged students in brainstorming questions for members of the Islamic Center. During a Q&A presentation, members of the Islamic Center answered questions.

These data support the research of Banks (2001) and they highlight content integration, which involves including a variety of cultures, values, concepts, and materials in teaching. According to Banks, the minds of people create knowledge, and this is a critical part of multicultural education. The visit from the Islamic center served as an authentic experience for the students and teachers, and it aided in knowledge construction. As students begin to make sense of the world around them, it is natural to develop biases. According to Aboud (2008), if no one interrupts a bias at a young age, students believe it is acceptable. Young children are naturally curious about the world. The Islamic visit was an opportunity to learn about the Muslim culture and traditions. Children were able to see that while we have different traditions and we may look different, we also have many similarities. The conversation among the students and Islamic center teachers addressed any biases developing in children and also accurately informed the PLC members. Culturally responsive teaching involves educators being cognizant of students' biases, which are potentially developing during their school years. Banks referred to prejudice reduction as teachers educating students to be tolerant of race, ethnicity, sexual preference, disabilities, and various religions. Engaging in conversations, collaborating, and asking questions challenged biases, and students developed an understanding that was able to reduce any prejudice developing in their young minds.

The Islamic Center visit was also an example of equity pedagogy because the PLC allowed for students to learn about cultural differences by giving them an authentic experience with the Muslim Center. Teachers empowered the students in Grades 3 and 4 who are of Muslim descent. When schools empower students from all backgrounds and

identify the things that hinder learning, this is an empowering school culture (Banks, 2001). The leader of the community center and the PLC agreed to make this an annual event of visiting the school each year during the celebration of Ramadan, as many students at Lanier Elementary practice the Muslim Faith.

Evaluating the “All Are Welcome” presentation. As the question and answer presentation took place, the PLC observed the interactions using the Performance Indicator Ratings for Alaska Cultural Standard B. Standard B addresses the educator using the authentic environment, which is defined as the local community of which all students are members regardless of their cultural heritage. The resources available for an educator may include people, local businesses, community centers, and organizations. Educators should use these resources regularly to link the authentic environment with their classroom curriculum to help students to develop connections between content and their everyday lives. Table 6 lists several examples of student and teacher behaviors that researchers may observe when implementing Alaska Cultural Standard B.

Table 6

Alaska Cultural Standard B Behaviors

Example Student Behaviors	Example Educator Behaviors
Student artifacts reflect knowledge of the local environment.	Educators’ activities/assignments facilitate making connections to the local environment and culture.
Students demonstrate interest and engagement when using the local environment and/or resources.	Educator uses the local environment, i.e., out-of-doors lessons, field trips, place-based investigations, etc.
Students’ attitudes and or behaviors demonstrate respect for the local community resources, i.e., respecting land area, personal property, other persons, etc.	Educator organizes students to interact with the local resources being presented, i.e., groups, prepared questions, graphic organizers, etc.

Note. The examples highlight observable indicators of student and teacher behaviors that align with Alaska Cultural Standard B.

The rubric for Alaska Cultural Standard B has indicators and four categories to rate activities that connect the local environment to the curriculum. The four categories on the rating scale are *unsatisfactory*, *basic*, *proficient*, and *exemplary*. Based on the descriptions under each of the rating categories, the PLC scored the “All are Welcome” activities as *proficient* (Table 7).

Table 7

Alaska Cultural Standard B Rating Scale

Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Exemplary
The educator’s use of the local environment, community resources, and/or issues was not appropriately connected to the introduction of content.	The educator makes cultural connection(s) to the content, but the majority of the students cannot state how the connection relates to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues	The educator makes cultural connection(s) to the content and the majority of the students can state how the connection relates to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.	The educator makes cultural connections to the content in unique and creative ways so that all students are able to state how the content connects to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.

Note. The bold type indicates the score from the PLC.

The description under proficient reads, “The educator makes cultural connection(s) to the content and the majority of the students can state how the connection relates to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.” The PLC felt that activity leaders met this standard based on the teacher participants’ behaviors and actions when addressing cultural issues among their students. Months prior to the “All are Welcome” presentation, teachers and students held biases against Muslim dress and practices. There were documented reports of physical Education teachers directing third-grade girls who practice the Muslim faith to remove their hijabs during certain gym activities. There were also reports of fourth-grade, non-Muslim students teasing Muslim students during lunch periods. The non-Muslim students simply could not understand why students who practice the Muslim faith would not eat popular Americanized foods such as BBQ ribs, pulled pork sandwiches, and pork chops. These behaviors by the

Physical Education teachers and non-Muslim students not only showed that they lack awareness, but also indicated the marginalization of the customs and traditions of Muslim students at Lanier Elementary. The PLC actions of creating the “All Are Welcome” question and answer session exposed both teachers and students to authentic practices by the local Muslim group. They also provided a traditionally marginalized population of students with a voice and an opportunity to see the school representing their values.

Prior to the “All Are Welcome” activity, students of the Muslim faith would celebrate holidays such as Ramadan annually without receiving the same acknowledgment as other traditionally celebrated holidays. Since the teachers of the local Islamic Community Center have agreed to visit the school annually during the celebration of Ramadan, students of the Muslim faith will be able to see connections between their everyday lives and the sharing and teaching within the classroom. Other students will also learn more about cultures different than their own, as well as understanding the purpose of the community centers located in their local environment. The creation and implementation of “All Are Welcome” addressed student biases and connected students with local resources. Table 7 shows the students received rich responses to their questions, which supports a rating of proficient when applying the Performance Indicator Ratings for Alaska Cultural Standard B.

Summary

At the beginning of cycle one the participants formed a PLC. The team reviewed the purpose of the study, the four research questions, and Stringer’s (2014) action research model of look, think, act. Throughout the study, the PLC collected ongoing data in the form of questionnaires, observations, interviews, and discussion notes. Based on

the theory of Saldana (2009), the concept of coding was introduced during the first PLC meeting. The data indicated the teachers had limited knowledge in terms of culturally responsive teaching and they lacked cultural awareness and perspective. Consistent with Stringer's action research model, the PLC framed the problem, *What can we do to broaden our understanding of the local environment and community resources so that we can help our students interact with knowledge/content more effectively?*

The PLC decided to focus on Standard B: Culturally responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students (SERRC, 2015). During the act phase, the PLC created and implemented a plan of action that included linking local community resources to the lessons and topics the teachers were teaching. The plan of action included the framed problem, an outline of an action process necessary to reach a possible solution to the problem, and a measurable means of evaluation. The PLC members created a brochure (Appendix H) that was printed and electronically shared with each other. The brochure was entitled "Curating a Culture," and described culturally diverse organizations within the local community. The PLC also created a presentation entitled "All are Welcome." The presentation included a video and guest speakers to the school and also highlighted facts about the Muslim faith. The students and teachers were provided with the opportunity to prepare questions and engage in dialogue with Muslims. In the end, cycle one strengthened the teacher participants' self-efficacy in making classroom decisions to meet the needs of students in a diverse classroom.

Cycle 2 Results

To introduce Cycle 2, the PLC met on May 13, 2019, and it reviewed Cycle 1 findings, particularly the teacher participants' sociocultural knowledge and backgrounds as they apply to culturally responsive teaching. The PLC discussed and agreed that the intent of Cycle 2 was to assist all PLC members in creating culturally responsive classroom environments for their assigned students. Cycle 2 focused on addressing Research Question 3: What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum? The preplanned actions of Cycle 2 included having the teachers become cultural organizers, cultural mediators, and orchestrators of social contexts for learning. The teachers started developing trust, rapport, and connections with students by sending home a family questionnaire (Appendix C). The family questionnaire gathered information on the students' and families' cultural background in terms of languages spoken at home, family traditions, and how they celebrate birthdays and cultural holidays. Prior to sending the family questionnaire home with students, each PLC member's (teacher's) classroom bulletin boards, visual aids, and libraries displayed the necessary vocabulary and arrangement of seating for the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist (Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant, 2010). This classroom checklist is in Appendix E, and it allows the observer to annotate whether a teacher's classroom or physical environment is culturally responsive based on the cultural background of the assigned students. The PLC attempted to identify gaps, frame a problem, visit classrooms from a neighboring district that specializes in culturally responsive classrooms, analyze data, and implement culturally responsive classroom strategies within their classrooms.

During the *look* phase of Cycle 2 (May 1, 2019), the researcher reviewed each teacher participant’s assigned class roster to learn general information (race, ethnicity, and place of birth) about his or her students’ demographics and cultural backgrounds. Over the course of two days, May 2- 3, 2019, the researcher used the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist to observe each teacher participant’s classroom to see if the physical environment supported the cultural backgrounds of the students. To avoid distracting the teachers, students, or classroom instruction, the researcher observed the teacher participants’ classrooms during times when they and their students were not present. These times varied and they included lunch and planning periods, or after school hours. Based on the researcher’s observations, all seven classrooms scored in the not observed categories of *bulletin boards, displays, and other visuals represent the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of students; uses a variety of visual aids to support learning of all students; and some content vocabulary is displayed in the students’ heritage language* (Table 8):

Table 8

Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices: Classroom Environment Walkthrough

Classroom Practice	Observed	Not Observed
Bulletin boards, displays, and other visuals represent the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of students.		x
Uses a variety of visual aids to support learning of all students.		x
Some content vocabulary is displayed in the students’ heritage language.		x

The classrooms mainly contained bulletin board materials that primarily supported Eurocentric views and perspectives. For example, two of the fourth-grade classrooms had bulletin board materials that highlighted the Colonial Period as a peaceful farming period for all Americans. These bulletin board materials were on display despite having several African American students in these classrooms, with one African American family refusing to send its daughter to school on May 6, 2019, the day of the annual colonial celebration by the fourth-grade teachers. The third-grade classrooms had the majority of English as a New Language (ENL) students, yet none of the books, visuals, or bulletin board materials represented the ENL students' ethnic backgrounds. The classrooms mainly represented American values and random elements of diversity among books and characters. Despite the presence of over 15 different languages and cultures in the third-grade classrooms, the only non-English language there was Spanish. Even within the Spanish community, the third-grade students represented diverse backgrounds, as some of the students were from Ecuador, Mexico, and Puerto Rico.

During the next PLC meeting, the researcher gave each teacher participant a copy of the scored Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist based on his or her individual classroom environment. Mrs. Kilo and Ms. Delta did not agree with the findings in the category of bulletin boards, displays, and other visuals representing the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of students, while the five other members stated they agreed. Mrs. Kilo and Ms. Delta believed their classroom materials and visuals represented diversity, because they had books with African American characters and posters on the wall showing famous African Americans. However, most of the students in their classes were of Spanish ethnicities. While their classroom materials may be more diverse than some

of the other teacher participant classrooms, the materials they had did not connect with the classroom population. A culturally responsive classroom responds to the culture at hand and connects with the current students' backgrounds and experiences.

After the researcher explained the results of the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist, the PLC agreed the next step of Cycle 2 would be to create a family questionnaire to solicit information on the cultural backgrounds of each teacher participant's assigned students. The family questionnaire would consist of six open-ended questions (Appendix C). The reason for soliciting the students' cultural background information through the use of a family questionnaire was to gain insight on the students' cultural experiences and traditions and to design the teacher participants' classrooms to support student diversity. The PLC members agreed that the family questionnaire would go to the parents of third- and fourth-grade students on May 21, 2019. The information they collected would help them to address the deficit areas of the seven teacher participants' classrooms that scored in the not observed categories of the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist: *bulletin boards, displays, and other visuals represent the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of students; uses a variety of visual aids to support learning of all students; and some content vocabulary is displayed in the students' heritage language.* The teacher participants would rearrange their bulletin board materials, improve their classroom libraries, and acknowledge all students' cultural traditions in their classrooms, such as holidays and birthday celebrations. All the teacher participants sent the family questionnaire to class parents on May 21, 2019, with a cover letter stating that the questionnaire was part of a research study exploring culturally responsive teaching. The letter also informed the parents that their participation in the

research project was completely voluntary and that they may decline to respond or leave blank any questions they did not wish to answer.

While waiting for the return of the student family questionnaires, the PLC committee also met on May 21, 2019, and discussed the article, “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Gay, 2002). During the discussion, the main focus was on Gay’s (2002) assertion that culturally responsive teaching is more than displaying characters of brown people on bulletin boards or the cover of books. Well into the discussion, Mrs. Charlie and Mrs. Kilo shared, “We simply don’t know what we don’t know.” The article review and discussion segued into viewing two separate videos entitled Culturally Responsive Teaching (Martinez Fellows, 2014) and Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher (PCG, 2012). The videos gave the PLC members a visual perspective of culturally responsive teaching coming from different educators in the field. While viewing the videos, each PLC member took notes regarding the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching and the previously discussed topics from the article Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2002). In reaction to the videos, “Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Martinez Fellows, 2014) and “Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher” (PCG, 2012). members of the PLC highlighted the following in their notes:

Mr. Sierra: “Photos of students and families should make students feel like home.”

Mr. Bravo: “Individual needs of students should be met regardless of the culture that they’re from. We should allow the students to tell us about their culture,

family traditions and we should celebrate it in our classrooms. We could create a center in the room with pictures of the students' families and special traditions.”

Mr. Sierra: “Culture as a filter—allows us to make sense of things.”

Mrs. Woo: “What students say about their culture; does it have to be true?

Should we as teachers act on it anyway?”

Ms. Delta: “Our cultural night can be a way to start addressing our students' culture. We can use it to bring diversity to light.”

Mrs. Kilo: “Culture and race are NOT the same thing!”

Mrs. Charlie: “We should be asking more questions of our students and families.

We need to really know our students!”

Ms. Juliet: “Make sure the student understands that the teacher sees the students.”

In reaction to the article entitled “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching”

(Gay, 2002), the PLC members' responses included:

Mrs. Charlie: “Our bulletin boards are really lacking cultural diversity. Mine do not represent my students.”

Mr. Sierra: “The visual aids in my classroom are not culturally responsive to the students. I need to brainstorm how to do it.”

Mr. Bravo: “The academic language in my room is not done, but [it] sounds like it can easily be done.”

Ms. Juliet: “This article really goes into depth about culturally responsive teaching. We need training or a workshop to help guide us in creating this type of environment.”

Mrs. Woo: “I need to review my classroom rules and the school’s discipline plan. Some of my students might have certain behaviors that are unique to their culture and different from mine.”

Mrs. Kilo: “Students should know who we are as much as we should know who they are. Differences are okay, and they should be celebrated.”

Based on the article discussion and the viewing of both videos, the PLC’s notes suggested that in culturally responsive classrooms, teachers should get to know students by asking questions, communicating with parents, and creating opportunities for students to share and celebrate their family traditions and cultures. The PLC’s notes also suggested that in a culturally responsive classroom environment, the classroom teacher must understand his or her own cultural identity by rigorously examining his or her cultural beliefs, particularly when they concern classroom management, organization, and procedures. The PLC members agreed that the videos and articles were very helpful in increasing their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and they also suggested additional training in the form of visiting culturally responsive classrooms, or workshops on culturally responsive teaching. At the relevant time of year (May 2019), school districts throughout the state of New York were conducting annual state assessments and they were not amenable to visitors during this period. The workshop option became the preferred method for developing the PLC’s training on culturally responsive teaching. On May 23, 2019, the PLC attended a workshop entitled “Classrooms as Culturally Responsive Learning Communities” sponsored by the BOCES. The objectives of the workshop were to examine culture as it applies to classroom communities, consider how classrooms can facilitate students’ integration to mainstream culture, and examine critical

classroom strategies that facilitate students' cultural integration into a community of learners. As the researcher, I felt it was important that the PLC members continued expanding their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching. Knowledge from articles, videos, and workshops would better prepare the teachers in becoming culturally responsive and also help them to react to the results of the family questionnaires.

Results from the family questionnaire. The objective of the family questionnaire was to gain information on the students' cultural backgrounds and traditions so that the teacher participants could design their classroom environments to support the needs of all their students. There were 166 third- and fourth-grade students at Lanier Elementary, and one questionnaire went to each family. The families had 8 days, May 21 through May 29, 2019, to complete the survey and return it to their child's teacher. By May 29, 2019, the PLC had received 71 completed surveys for a total of 43%.

The responses to Question 1 revealed that all 71 families spoke some English at home, regardless of the student's ethnicity. Sixteen of the 71 responses came from families of ENL students. All 16 ENL families listed other languages spoken at home in addition to English, including Spanish, Ukrainian, Patois, Ghan, and Italian. The PLC found this information useful because it showed that some of the other languages were not the students' native languages. Mrs. Woo shared, "I just always assumed any additional languages being spoken at home must be in my student's native language. I guess I never thought about my students being born in one country and their parents being from another."

The data revealed three themes: *celebrating holidays*, *eating cultural foods*, and *spending time together as a family*. The data also revealed that the majority of the families celebrate birthdays and holidays such as Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas with some sort of food. Examples from the theme, *celebrating holidays*, include:

“A lot of our family traditions revolve around food. Either dishes my daughter grew up with or food I learned to cook.”

“We like to take walks, have dinner, go to museums, zoos, and parks. We like to take road trips and travel.”

“We have dinner/cake on the day and usually a larger party after for birthdays.”

“Easter time celebrating with eating special bun and cheese. Also, Christmas time celebrating with traditional sorrel drink and rum fruit cake.”

“Sports to watch and participate in; we enjoy traveling and exploring restaurants; we play video games and we read.”

“Usually, we go to restaurants, but sometimes we celebrate at home.”

“Our family traditions as it relates to our cultural background revolves around food and cooking authentic Italian cuisine. This is more apparent during the holiday season.”

“We play soccer together, going to the zoo, movies, library, church, parks, and playing dominos! Also walking our dog.”

“Birthdays are a big deal. We celebrate birthdates with a family party, lots of singing, food, and ice cream cake.”

“Celebrating all Catholic/Christian holidays. Celebrating Columbus Day—Italian/American parade. Eating large meals and many courses with a lot of family around. During holidays or whenever family is visiting.”

The survey also solicited information on the student’s cultural backgrounds and traditions. The responses maintained the themes of celebrating special occasions by spending time with family and eating cultural foods. The following are examples of the themes *eating cultural foods* and *spending time together as a family*:

“Jamaican/American. The highest-ranking in Jamaica includes values honoring parents and elders! Tradition wearing bright colors, celebrate the Fourth of July with some Jerk chicken on the grill.”

“The most important thing is to spend time with your family and keeping traditions (or the idea of traditions) alive so they can be passed down to future generations.”

“Be with the family. In my tradition, it is always important to respect family. We say to our kids you have to respect everybody at school and everywhere. We love to make food.”

“We think food is important, because it brings the family together to help in the kitchen and talk about how your day was.”

“Foods are eaten on certain days/holidays. No meat at certain times—only fish during certain times. Family—this is extremely important—being together.”

“Spend time with family.”

“It is traditional for boys and girls turning 13 years old to have a Bar (for boys) or Bat (for girls) Mitzvah. This is the coming of age ritual followed by a big celebration/party with family.”

“God and family are strongly valued.”

“We believe in acceptance, inclusion, tolerance—Be kind to all. Family is the forefront of our tradition.”

“Our culture is based on our family and the importance of the family bond.”

Regardless of the families’ languages spoken at home, their ethnicity, or their cultural background, the most resounding theme in Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 was the promotion of spending time together as a family. The majority of the 71 responses indicated that families enjoy celebrating holidays and special events by eating foods and spending time together.

The significance of the three themes was they each provided a starting point for the teacher participants to develop their classroom environments. Montgomery (2001) stated there are five guidelines for teachers when developing a culturally responsive classroom: (a) implement a self-assessment to determine the knowledge of one’s own culture and the culture of others, (b) use culturally responsive teaching methods and materials in the classroom, (c) foster a classroom of respect for individuals and their cultures, (d) develop interactive learning environments, and (e) continue to use cultural awareness assessments throughout the year. The teacher participants became aware of their own cultural beliefs in Cycle 1, and the results of the family questionnaire allowed them to learn the cultural backgrounds of their students.

The teachers can now use the theme of family traditions to develop interactive learning and to foster a classroom of respect for all the students and their cultures. At a minimum, the teacher participants' bulletin boards should depict family celebrations based on their students' cultural backgrounds. The teachers should also adjust how they acknowledge and celebrate holidays within their classrooms, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. For example, one of the family questionnaires revealed the family was from Jamaica and it didn't celebrate Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July the way most people born in America do. The teacher can facilitate an environment in which other students can learn how other cultures celebrate holidays as opposed to promoting one traditional approach. Teachers in culturally responsive classrooms aim to make learning relevant by using students' backgrounds and cultural knowledge (Jones-Goods, 2015). Characteristics of a culturally responsive classroom are empathy, caring, leadership, and development of social relationships (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Monroe, 2005; Schneider, 1993). The feedback from the family questionnaires can facilitate progress toward reaching each of these characteristics in the classroom.

In addition to the findings of the three themes (*celebrating holidays, eating certain foods, and spending time together as a family*), the family questionnaires revealed specific information about individual students and families. For example, Ms. Juliet learned that one of her students, whom she assumed was African American was actually Rastafari Jamaican. Ms. Juliet shared, "I never would have imagined he was Jamaican, because he doesn't have an accent. He looks and sounds African American and he or his family never said he was Jamaican." The PLC organized the 71 responses by classroom, and each teacher serving on the PLC reviewed his or her class set of questionnaires. In

reviewing their family questionnaires, all the teacher participants learned something new about at least one student in their classroom and also that their current classroom environment is not reflective of their students' cultural backgrounds. Table 9 highlights the teacher participant, the new cultural discoveries of the student, and the actions the teacher participant will take to address the new discoveries.

Table 9

Teacher Insight/Learning from Appendix B

Teacher	Student	Discovery	Action Plan
Juliet	A	A student of hers whom she assumed was African American, was actually Jamaican.	Juliet decided to put the Jamaican boy in her class with another Jamaican student. The students were able to talk to each other about their culture, and they shared with the class what their families cooked for Lanier's cultural celebration, which led to a greater discussion about the different foods students ate.
Delta	B	A student of hers was from Egypt but never spoke about it in class.	The student had been uncomfortable sharing about his culture in other lessons. The survey gave Delta talking points for discussion to make the student feel more comfortable.
Kilo	C	Many different cultural backgrounds of students in her class.	Kilo always made sure to have diverse books and decor around her classroom, but it was random. The survey enabled her to target the cultures of her students, rather than choosing cultures randomly.

Table 9 (continued)

Teacher	Student	Discovery	Action Plan
Bravo	D	A few of his Spanish students discussed American holidays they celebrated, but they had a different flair and they included foods that aligned with their culture.	When writing in their writers' notebook about how families celebrate the long weekend off, Bravo asked students to describe the different foods their family had. He wrote them on the board, and he had different students of Spanish heritage explain to the class what their families ate. It sparked a discussion of all the different foods students in their class ate.
Sierra	All students	Sierra realized that he did not even know the true backgrounds/origins of his students.	Plans for next year: For birthday celebrations, Sierra plans to ask parents not only to bring in traditional "birthday party food," but also foods that reflect his students' culture. Sierra will set up a culture corner in the classroom and highlight the different cultures of his students throughout the year.
Charlie	All	Noticed that many families were hesitant to discuss religion at all.	Started to discuss parts of her religion/culture and asked students to make connections of their own. By discussing her culture/religious beliefs, students felt more comfortable opening up and sharing their ideas.
Woo	E	Student attended the Islamic Center next door to the school.	The student was able to answer additional questions that the students had after the "All are Welcome" presentation. Woo started a culture wondering anchor chart in her classroom. When students had questions about a certain culture, they could put them on the board, and students could talk to their classmates and teach them something. The goal was to make students more comfortable asking questions than ignoring differences.

The findings were significant because they proved to the teachers that they did not really know the cultural backgrounds of their students and that their classroom displays

and libraries did not support the students' diverse backgrounds. In addition to teachers knowing the backgrounds of their students, it is equally important that students know and understand the cultural backgrounds of other students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the United States will likely become a majority minority country by 2043. This means that over 50% of the U.S. population will identify as belonging to an ethnic minority group or any group other than non-Hispanic White. Students of the 21st century will operate in an environment where they will likely work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Today's teachers must welcome cultural diversity into their classrooms, as 21st-century students will need to be able to interact, communicate, build relationships, and work effectively with people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These data suggest that a culturally crafted family questionnaire can start to facilitate a process in which teachers can gain insight into the cultural backgrounds of their students. Educators should send the family questionnaire home to students' families and they should use the resulting information to set up the classroom environment and to prepare students to operate in a future society that will be even more diverse in terms of religion, ethnic background, and sexual orientation.

Cycle 2 plan of action. Based on the data collection and analysis from the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist and the family questionnaire, the PLC framed the problem: How can we evaluate and change our physical classroom environment for cultural responsiveness? The achievement goal of the action plan was to create a culturally responsive environment consisting of culturally diverse bulletin boards, displays, other visual aids, and classroom libraries. This environment would change year to year, depending on the demographics of the classes. The PLC wanted to

create a set of practices to learn about the students first, before setting up classes each year. This year, the classrooms may represent many Spanish families, while next year, the same classroom may represent African Americans. The PLC developed three objectives to meet the goal of the action plan:

1. Collect cultural background information on all students through the use of a questionnaire (Appendix C). Some of this information may come in at the end of the school year for teachers to analyze over the summer in preparation for the new school year.
 - a. Analyze survey data to identify students' cultural traditions, customs, and celebrations.
2. Display cultural images and symbols representative of students' individual backgrounds by including students in setting up displays. Some simple practices may include having students bring in items (artifacts, pictures, clothing, etc.) that symbolize and represent their culture or having them create bulletin boards with art representing their culture.
3. Create culturally responsive classroom libraries based on individual student cultural backgrounds. Each year, teachers order textbooks, picture books, and novels with money from the school. Teachers will commit to using the money for books that represent all students.

The PLC implemented and accomplished the goals of the action plan by having the students bring in pictures and artifacts from their homes that represented them. Students also chose work for displays and created pieces of artwork representing their culture for the classroom. For example, Ms. Juliet had one student from Jamaica bring in

a picture of a Jamaican Olympic athlete, Usain Bolt, because he represented hard work and perseverance. The student brought in the picture to display and talked about what the picture meant to him. Another student created a picture of his 10 brothers and sisters, some of whom are staying with relatives back in Ecuador. With every image of art, the classroom became more inclusive of the students' backgrounds. Students had the opportunity to see the classroom as their own rather than the teacher's classroom. They became part of the fabric and culture of the room. Including the students in the process made the classroom represent the students rather than representing the teacher. Additionally, the PLC members added sections to their classrooms to spotlight their students' cultures.

The cultural responsive classroom checklist and the family questionnaire revealed the teachers' classrooms were not culturally responsive.

Summary

During Cycle 2, the PLC gathered data on the teachers' classrooms in terms of their bulletin boards, materials, displays and cultural backgrounds of their students. The collected data (culturally responsive checklist and family questionnaire) revealed the teachers didn't really know the cultural backgrounds of their students, therefore their classrooms lacked cultural responsibility. The framed problem for cycle 2 was: How can we evaluate the classroom environment for cultural responsiveness? The PLC developed an action plan that included the teachers redesigning their classroom to be culturally responsive and making connections to students of all backgrounds.

Teachers made connections with families during this cycle through home visits, family questionnaires, and teacher-parent conferences. A family questionnaire was sent

to parents in an effort to understand each student's culture, background, and experiences. The PLC analyzed the data collected from the questionnaire and used the information to create culturally responsive classrooms. The teachers reorganized their classrooms and chose posters, books, and charts purposefully with different cultures in mind. The teachers also designated special areas of their classrooms and had the students bring in pictures and artifacts from their homes that represented them. Students were given opportunities to choose work for displays as well as create pieces of artwork that represented their culture. With every image of student created displays, the environment became more inclusive and the students had the opportunity to see the classroom as their own, and not just the teacher's.

Cycle 3 Results

A culturally responsive curriculum serves students and supports the social and economic development of society (Lafer & Aydın, 2012). When classroom teachers integrate multiple perspectives, culturally relevant pedagogy encourages the inclusion of lesser-known individuals and groups into the curriculum, broadens the knowledge base, and encourages students to value the importance of making informed decisions (Zong et al., 2002). Cycle 3 focused on addressing the research question: How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices? Based on the knowledge and experiences participants gained from Cycles 1 and 2, the teacher participants (PLC) applied their newly gained skills to revise and pilot an existing lesson from their current science and social studies curriculum. Teachers serving on the PLC divided into teams of third and fourth grade and analyzed current lessons through the lens of culturally responsive teaching. As teachers learned from previous cycles, a culturally

responsive lesson is without bias from the dominant cultures in the class, according to Jean Aguilar-Valdez (2015). The lesson gives students an opportunity to share their thoughts and to collaborate (voice), choice through differentiation, and opportunities to take in information in several different ways, and it connects the content using real-life experiences. A culturally responsive lesson also gives students an opportunity to connect information to issues that are important in their lives.

With this newly gained knowledge, teachers critically analyzed one lesson from their science (Grade 3) and social studies (Grade 4) curriculum using Aguilar-Valdez's (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric. Teachers looked for evidence of voice, differentiation, communication, connection, social justice, and equity/decolonization. Based on the results of the rubric, third- and fourth-grade teachers revised their lessons to be more culturally responsive and piloted the lessons with their current classes. During Cycle 3 and based on the curriculum pacing chart, the third-grade teachers had planned to teach the water cycle as part of their science curriculum and the fourth grade teachers had to teach the American Revolution as part of their social studies curriculum. Both the third- and fourth-grade teachers reviewed a lesson in their traditional curriculum using Aguilar-Valdez's Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric (Appendix D). According to Gay (2018), culturally responsive teaching includes using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference to make learning relevant for ethnically diverse learners. Culturally responsive lessons use the strengths of diverse students to teach students. They validate and affirm culturally diverse students, because they build bridges between their cultures and the school.

According to Aguilar-Valdez (2015), *voice* is allowing students to work collaboratively or to share ideas, including their learning experiences, backgrounds, and strengths with classmates and teachers. *Differentiation* is allowing students to learn content in a variety of ways to match their learning styles. A differentiated lesson is tailored to meet the needs of the students (Tomlinson, 2000). *Communication* is allowing students to access the content in a variety of ways. Some students may understand material better through audio/visual presentations. For example, students who are bilingual often benefit from audio/visual presentations. *Connection*, the next area on the rubric, links the students' real lives to the content they are learning. It helps students to make sense of the material and to understand the content through their cultural lenses and experiences. The last two areas on the rubric are *social justice* and *equity/decolonization*. *Social justice* provides students a conduit to connect learning to current events, while *equity/decolonization* pays attention to the cultural perspective in which content explanation is taking place. For example, is the content being explained from the dominant culture's perspective? Culturally responsive lessons are inclusive of different perspectives (the dominant culture and the nondominant cultures). As the teachers reviewed the lessons using the rubric, they noticed areas that could be more inclusive of diverse students' experiences and more culturally responsive.

The nonrevised lesson, “A Cool Drink of Water.” The third-grade team reviewed the nonrevised science lesson, “A Cool Drink of Water” using Aguilar-Valdez's (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric (Appendix D), and it discussed the questions, is there another perspective? and are there pieces of the story missing? The results (Table 10) revealed that the lesson rated *emerging* in the areas of *voice*,

differentiation, communication, connection, and social justice. In the area of *equity/decolonization*, the lesson scored in the *effective* range. The third-grade team justified the scores by highlighting facts that revealed that the lesson did not connect to the life experiences of the students and failed to capture multiple perspectives. The lesson did not provide opportunities for students to explore multiple perspectives on water conservation in depth. The lesson mainly highlighted how the United States conserves water. The third-grade teachers revised the lesson to focus more on awareness of how different people around the world get water, and how people conserve water globally.

Table 10

Review of Third-Grade Science Lesson, “A Cool Drink of Water” Prior to Revision

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>VOICE The lesson allows places for students to work together collaboratively or to share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with peers and teacher.</p>	<p>The lesson does not have an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has one opportunity for students to turn and talk to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has many opportunities for students to work collaboratively or share their learning experiences such as strengths and cultural backgrounds.</p>	<p>Throughout the lesson, students have opportunities to collaborate or share their learning experiences such as strengths, weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and interests.</p>
<p>DIFFERENTIATION The lesson provides opportunities for students to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.</p>	<p>The lesson activities have no differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide more than one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities are differentiated, and they provide opportunities for choice.</p>
<p>COMMUNICATION The teacher communicates the main concepts in the lesson in several different ways.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in one way.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in two similar ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in three or more ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in several ways depending on the students’ cultural backgrounds.</p>

Table 10 (Continued)

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>CONNECTION The lesson incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson does not connect to the students' real-life experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has a real-life connection.</p>	<p>The lesson has many real-life connections and it represents multiple cultures.</p>	<p>The lesson has a real-life connection, it represents multiple cultures, and the lesson provides opportunities for students to learn about their own and/or others' cultures.</p>
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE The lesson provides opportunities for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives.</p>	<p>The lesson does not connect with social concerns that affect students' lives.</p>	<p>The lesson at times connects to social concerns that affect students' lives.</p>	<p>The lesson provides several predetermined opportunities to connect to social concerns that affect students' lives.</p>	<p>The lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and research social concerns that interest them and that affect their own lives.</p>
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION The lesson minimizes bias perspectives in texts and lesson concepts, so students have equal access, and they can participate openly with students from dominant backgrounds.</p>	<p>The dominant culture is the only culture in the text and lesson discussion.</p>	<p>There are a few cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.</p>	<p>There are many cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.</p>	<p>Students have opportunities to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own cultures.</p>

Note. Four third-grade teachers analyzed the lesson together as a team.

In the area of *voice*, the third-grade teachers felt the nonrevised lesson needed to provide students with more opportunities to discuss their learning and experiences relating to the lesson. Mrs. Woo described the lesson as being “teacher focused and not student focused.” She shared that there are a lot of third-grade students from different parts of the world and that the lesson does not allow opportunities for students to meet and share their knowledge of water conversation (Field notes, May 7, 2019). She emphasized how the lesson consists of objectives that describe water conversation from the U.S. perspective, but it does not take into account the experiences of students and it only focuses on the teacher providing information (Field notes, May 7, 2019). Mrs. Charlie added that the lesson “lacked student choice, multiple pathways to complete assignments, and limited collaboration opportunities for students,” and Ms. Delta pointed out that the lesson only contained “one opportunity for student collaboration through the use of a 2-minute turn and talk,” (Field notes, May 7, 2019). Turn and talks are grounded in the theory of Danielson (2013), and they use a summarizing technique that involves two students sharing and receiving information in an organized manner. One student has a time limit to share information while the other student listens, asks questions, and prepares to share out if the teacher asks. Mrs. Woo referenced how she communicated concepts mostly through teacher lectures using SMART Board technology as a guide (Field notes, May 7, 2019). All the third-grade teachers felt strongly that their students had life experiences that could enhance discussions; however, the design and structure of the lesson did not allow for student-to-student discussions (Field notes, May 7, 2019). The third-grade team therefore scored the nonrevised lesson as *emerging* in the area of *voice*.

While discussing the area of *connection* the third-grade team determined that the lesson was lacking. Mrs. Kilo stated, “I have a very diverse class and this lesson lacks multiple representations of cultures and experiences in both the text and the discussion” (Field notes, May 7, 2019). She emphasized that having multiple perspectives allows students to see diverse viewpoints and, therefore to become well-rounded students and citizens (Field notes, May 7, 2019). Other third-grade teachers supported Mrs. Kilo’s assertion, as they shared that several of their students were from Third-World countries where water was less accessible than in the United States (Field notes May 6, 2019). Mrs. Kilo added that during a class discussion, one of her students shared that his parents did not allow him to bathe or shower daily due to water scarcity in his former country. She explained that several other students from Guatemala joined the discussion and shared how their parents would fill their bathtub with water and each of their siblings would use the same water to bathe (Field notes, May 7, 2019).

Lanier Elementary encourages personal hygiene through daily baths or showers, which contradicts the cultural beliefs and experiences of some students. Based on the cultural backgrounds of the current third-grade students, the lesson content did not meet their needs. Due to the growing trend of culturally diverse students, this finding was significant, because this lesson has traditionally covered the perspective of the United States in terms of water conservation. The lesson did not consider the traditions of other countries as adequate means of conservation; therefore, the teachers scored the lesson as *emerging* in the area of *connection*

In the area of *equity/decolonization*, the third-grade teachers highlighted that the lesson content only featured the dominant culture’s perspective. The nonrevised lesson

primarily focused on giving students information about how communities in the United States get water. Since many students at Lanier Elementary School are from South America and water conservation is important to their families, the third-grade teachers felt it was important for the lesson to take into account how other cultures conserve water. Ms. Delta expressed that the nonrevised lesson only focused on “how we, as Americans, get water and conserve water” (Field notes, May 7, 2019). Mrs. Charlie agreed and share that “the lesson does compare how people around the world get water; however, the focus is on the perspective of the United States with few opportunities for students to share their personal and cultural views” (Field notes, May 7, 2019). Mrs. Woo and Mrs. Kilo agreed, and the team scored the lesson as *emerging* in the area of *equity/decolonization*.

Revising the lesson, “A Cool Drink of Water.” After reviewing the current lesson, the third-grade team brainstormed ways to revise the lesson to make it more culturally responsive in the areas of *voice*, *connection*, and *equity/decolonization*. During the planning stage, the teachers met and decided to start with the area of *voice*. Mrs. Woo and Ms. Delta felt that the inclusion of protocols such as the brainstorming carousel would add student collaboration and improve the lesson in the area of *voice* (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Ms. Delta explained to the third-grade team the brainstorming carousel allows small groups of students to rotate around the classroom, stopping at different stations for about 1-2 minutes. While visiting the stations, students can share their cultural knowledge of water conservation with the group. Each group can leave notes at every station for all groups to read (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Mrs. Woo emphasized how the brainstorming carousel promotes collaboration, allows students to share

perspectives, and is inclusive of all students, which would add *voice* to the lesson (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Mrs. Kilo and Mrs. Charlie agreed, and they added that the brainstorming carousel gives students opportunities form groups with multiple students (as opposed to only one) of differing backgrounds, which facilitates a systematic process that allows students to share opinions and perspectives with each other (Field notes, May 9, 2019). With the addition of the brainstorming carousel, the third-grade teachers scored the revised lesson as *highly effective* in the area of *voice*

The next area the teachers revised was *connection*. At the time of this study, 36% of the student population at Lanier Elementary School was Hispanic, mostly from South America. There were 38 students who were English Language Learners, and 10 of those students were in Mrs. Woo’s classroom. Mrs. Kilo began the discussion by sharing that 40% of the students in her class were Hispanic, so the lesson should include opportunities for those students to make connections (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Mrs. Woo contributed to the discussion by adding that many of her students were Spanish speakers, “so the lesson should include resources such as visual images and videos to help students understand the content” (Field notes, May 9, 2019). At the time of the meeting, the team agreed it did not have adequate resources in its possession to provide the range of learning for all the students. Together, the third-grade teachers researched media, textbooks, and trade books to determine new perspectives and to gather new information. Mrs. Charlie researched audiovisuals and added the video, *A Cool Drink of Water*, and Mrs. Delta added the lesson objective: *The students will watch the video “A Cool Drink of Water” on Chromebooks and reflect on how the story connects to their own life or culture* (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Mrs. Woo emphasized the importance of including

resources that connect to the students' cultural backgrounds and she added the lesson objective: *The students will collaborate using a carousel activity with photos from the book ("I notice/I wonder")* followed by a group discussion of the book and carousel (Field notes, May 9, 2019). With the addition of these resources and lesson objectives, the team scored the revised lesson as *effective* in the area of *connection*.

The final area the third-grade team revised was *equity/decolonization*. The team started its discussion of *equity/decolonization* by submitting that water conservation looks different in different countries; therefore, classroom discussions should include global perspectives (Field notes, May 9, 2019). The teachers felt the lesson needed revision to take into account the diversity among their students who represent different countries of the world. Based on knowledge they gained from Cycle 2, the third-grade teachers referenced the research of Ladson-Billings (1994), asserting that culturally responsive teaching includes students' cultural references in all aspects of learning and it involves student-centered instruction, learning within the context of culture with the teacher as the facilitator.

Mrs. Kilo suggested adding breadth to the lesson by having the students describe what water conservation means to them and why it is important from their cultural perspectives (Field notes, May 9, 2019). Mrs. Delta shared, "Once the students have described their perspective, they should be placed in groups and reflect on the question: *Do you think all people on earth have plenty of water? Why or why not?*" Mrs. Delta suggested that when placing students in groups, each group should be heterogeneous based on the students' cultural backgrounds (Field notes, May 9, 2019). The intent of the activity would be to generate a discussion among the students in which they share

authentic experiences of water conversation based on their lived experiences. The teacher would serve as a facilitator of the process by assigning students appropriately to groups and ensuring that every student has an opportunity to share. The lesson activity should conclude with a class discussion in which the students share what they learned from their group. The teacher of the lesson would then use this information to highlight diverse perspectives of water conservation based on the students' lived experiences and also to introduce new information.

The teachers agreed that identifying the students' cultural frames of reference regarding water conservation would allow them to use the students' frames as conduits to build the students' knowledge of water conversation. The teachers also felt that this student group activity would give the lesson multiple perspectives of marginalized cultures and broaden the students' understanding of water conservation (Field notes, May 9, 2019). The team agreed that with the addition of these revisions, the lesson scored as *highly effective* in the area of *equity/decolonization*.

Table 11 gives a description of each area of Aguilar-Valdez's (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric, and how the teachers' scored the revised version of the lesson, "A Cool Drink of Water."

Table 11

Review of Lesson, “A Cool Drink of Water” After Revision

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>VOICE The lesson allows places for students to work together collaboratively or to share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with peers and teacher.</p>	<p>The lesson does not have an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has one opportunity for students to turn and talk to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has many opportunities for students to work collaboratively or share their learning experiences such as strengths and cultural backgrounds.</p>	<p>Throughout the lesson, students have opportunities to collaborate or share their learning experiences such as strengths, weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and interests.</p>
<p>DIFFERENTIATION The lesson provides opportunities for students to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.</p>	<p>The lesson activities have no differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide more than one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities are differentiated, and they provide opportunities for choice.</p>
<p>COMMUNICATION The teacher communicates the main concepts in the lesson in several different ways.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in one way.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in two similar ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in three or more ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in several ways depending on the students’ cultural backgrounds.</p>

Table 11 (Continued)

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>CONNECTION The lesson incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	The lesson does not connect to the students' real-life experiences.	The lesson has a real-life connection.	The lesson has many real-life connections and it represents multiple cultures.	The lesson has a real-life connection, it represents multiple cultures, and the lesson provides opportunities for students to learn about their own and/or others' cultures.
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE The lesson provides opportunities for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives.</p>	The lesson does not connect with social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson at times connects to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson provides several predetermined opportunities to connect to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and research social concerns that interest them and that affect their own lives.
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION The lesson minimizes bias perspectives in texts and lesson concepts, so students have equal access, and they can participate openly with students from dominant backgrounds.</p>	The dominant culture is the only culture in the text and lesson discussion.	There are a few cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	There are many cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	Students have opportunities to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own cultures.

Note. The rubric shows the scoring results of the revised lesson, "A Cool Drink of Water."

Based on the information they gained from Cycles 1 and 2, the third-grade teachers applied their new knowledge and skills of looking at both versions of the lesson through a culturally responsive lens. The revised lesson allows students to learn from each other through reflections and discussions. Additionally, in the revised lesson, students receive the information in multiple ways, including a read aloud, discussion during the brainstorm carousel, and a video titled “A Cool Drink of Water.” The teacher can now facilitate a process that allows students to connect the material to their own lives by sharing about their countries of origin. In addition, U.S. students and students from other countries gain empathy for others who lack water and they develop an appreciation for differences. According to the New York State Education Department (n.d.), students are practicing mutual respect for experiences that are different from their own.

The nonrevised “Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War” lesson. The fourth-grade teachers used Aguilar-Valdez’s (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric (Appendix D) to review and score the traditional, nonrevised lesson entitled “Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War.” The lesson consisted of reading about the Continental Army, and teachers asked students to create interview questions for a soldier. The lesson asked students to work independently and it allowed for one opportunity for student choice. In addition, the lesson did not connect to the students’ current lives, as there was no discussion about how the events of the Revolutionary War affect life today. The traditional, nonrevised lesson lacked connections to current social events and it only included the perspective of the dominant culture. Table 12 shows that the nonrevised lesson was mostly *ineffective* and *emerging*, according to Aguilar-Valdez’s (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric.

Table 12

“Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War” NonRevised Lesson

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>VOICE The lesson allows places for students to work together collaboratively or to share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with peers and teacher.</p>	<p>The lesson does not have an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has one opportunity for students to turn and talk to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has many opportunities for students to work collaboratively or share their learning experiences such as strengths and cultural backgrounds.</p>	<p>Throughout the lesson, students have opportunities to collaborate or share their learning experiences such as strengths, weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and interests.</p>
<p>DIFFERENTIATION The lesson provides opportunities for students to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.</p>	<p>The lesson activities have no differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide more than one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities are differentiated, and they provide opportunities for choice.</p>
<p>COMMUNICATION The teacher communicates the main concepts in the lesson in several different ways.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in one way.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in two similar ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in three or more ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in several ways depending on the students’ cultural backgrounds.</p>

Table 12 (Continued)

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>CONNECTION The lesson incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson does not connect to the students’ real-life experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has a real-life connection.</p>	<p>The lesson has many real-life connections and it represents multiple cultures.</p>	<p>The lesson has a real-life connection, it represents multiple cultures, and the lesson provides opportunities for students to learn about their own and/or others’ cultures.</p>
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE The lesson provides opportunities for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives.</p>	<p>The lesson does not connect with social concerns that affect students’ lives.</p>	<p>The lesson at times connects to social concerns that affect students’ lives.</p>	<p>The lesson provides several predetermined opportunities to connect to social concerns that affect students’ lives.</p>	<p>The lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and research social concerns that interest them and that affect their own lives.</p>
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION The lesson minimizes bias perspectives in texts and lesson concepts, so students have equal access, and they can participate openly with students from dominant backgrounds.</p>	<p>The dominant culture is the only culture in the text and lesson discussion.</p>	<p>There are a few cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.</p>	<p>There are many cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.</p>	<p>Students have opportunities to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own cultures.</p>

The results of the rubric show that the fourth-grade teachers scored the nonrevised version of the lesson *ineffective* in the areas of *voice*, *connection*, *social justice*, and *equity/decolonization*. The rubric defines an *ineffective* lesson in the area of *voice* as not having an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences. The nonrevised lesson was teacher-directed and content-based with a gradual release. There were no opportunities for collaboration, and the teacher and the preplanned resources were the only sources of information. During the discussion of the backgrounds of the students during a fourth-grade PLC meeting, the teachers described their students' experiences relating to the military as diverse (Field notes, May 14, 2019). Several of their African American and Hispanic students had parents, family members, or relatives who served in the military, while many of their White students had little to no experience of servicemen (Field notes, May 14, 2019). The fourth-grade teachers felt the nonrevised lesson did not provide a structured format for the students to share their experiences of servicemen and to learn from each other. The nonrevised lesson only promoted a Eurocentric perspective of military history, which justified a scoring of *ineffective* in the area of *voice*.

As per the rubric, an *ineffective* lesson in the area of *connection* does not connect to the students' real-life experiences. The fourth-grade teachers felt the lesson did not connect to the students' life experiences of servicemen, as it only highlighted the contributions of White soldiers. Several of the current African American fourth-grade students were children of active servicemen with rich legacies of military service. For example, one African American student's father was a retired army officer who currently taught military history at the West Point Military Academy. This particular student had a

different connection and perspective of military history than that of the lesson. During class discussions, Ms. Juliet stated that this student often shared stories of famous African American soldiers and their contributions to wars and military history (Field notes, May 14, 2019). A common story the student shared was the history and legacy of the “Buffalo Soldiers,” since this particular group of African American soldiers was stationed at the West Point Military Academy and the student’s father often spoke of their contributions (Field notes, May 14, 2019).

The nonrevised lesson did not fairly represent the contributions African Americans and other cultures made to the American Revolutionary War. It only represented White soldiers, depicting their culture as dominant and them as the main contributors to the success of the war. When the researcher asked, *How so?* Ms. Juliet emphasized how the nonrevised lesson marginalized the contributions of African American soldiers by not including them in the research (Field notes, May 14, 2019). She shared that all the lesson resources, such as articles, books, and pictures focused on White soldiers such as the famous Delaware Crossing (Field notes, May 14, 2019). The lesson material did not show any soldiers of color involved in the Delaware Crossing, when in fact there were. All the associated pictures and characters mainly depicted White soldiers with Caucasian features, such as straight hair and thin lips (Field notes, May 14, 2019). McLean (1997) posited that when the literature in the curriculum ignores or denies a specific group’s existence, it invalidates the self-identity and experience of that group. The nonrevised version of the lesson served as an example of McLean’s assertion. The fourth-grade teachers felt that students who had relatives as servicemen

and veterans of foreign wars would see the nonrevised lesson as a disconnect from their real-life experiences (Field notes, May 14, 2019).

The rubric depicts an *ineffective* lesson in the area of *social justice* as not connecting with social concerns of students' lives. After a discussion of the nonrevised lesson, the fourth grade teachers determined that the lesson was strictly content-based (Field notes, May 16, 2019). The lesson did not speak or relate to social justice issues that involved other cultures during that period. Curwood et al. (2009) submitted that schools and educators condone social injustices by failing to include a diverse range of literature in the curriculum. During the discussion, Ms. Juliet highlighted that many soldiers of color had subservient roles. She shared that during the American Revolutionary War, soldiers of color could not serve in leadership roles, such as commissioned officers. The army was segregated, and White soldiers and soldiers of color could not occupy the same quarters (Field notes, May 16, 2019). Because the nonrevised lesson did not show the perspective of marginalized cultures and only focused on the dominant culture, the fourth-grade teachers scored the lesson *ineffective* in the area of *social justice*.

The rubric defines an *ineffective* lesson in the area of *equity/decolonization* as the dominant culture is the only culture represented in text and lesson discussion. One of the objectives of the nonrevised lesson is: *Define the Continental Army and explain the importance of the Continental Army*. The lesson content highlights significant events such as the battle of Newport, Rhode Island, yet it never mentions the contributions and sacrifices made by other cultures. As an example, hundreds of George Washington's soldiers began deserting after suffering from typhus, dysentery, pneumonia, and

starvation during the winter of 1777-1778, and hundreds of African American soldiers willingly replaced them despite Washington's strong opposition to recruiting African American soldiers (Takaki, 2008). Over time, this particular group expanded to include Indian, Mulatto, and African American soldiers, and it was known as the "Black Regiment." This group was responsible for repelling three fierce assaults during the battle of Newport, Rhode Island, yet the nonrevised lesson content did not mention its contributions. During the American Revolutionary War, different cultures contributed to the success of the war. The nonrevised lesson, however, only focused on the contributions of White soldiers and it depicted them as the dominant culture. Because the nonrevised lesson did not highlight any key contributions made by other cultures, the fourth-grade teachers scored the lesson as *ineffective* in the area of *equity/decolonization*

Revising the "Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War" lesson. After meeting as a fourth grade PLC, reviewing the lesson, and applying the knowledge from Cycles 1 and 2, the fourth-grade team revised the "Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War" lesson by making it more culturally responsive. During the fourth-grade planning meeting on May 21, 2019, the teachers added several opportunities for students to collaborate and share during each stage of the lesson. When the researcher asked the team, How can we make this lesson more collaborative and effective in the area of voice? Mr. Bravo responded, "By adding a brainstorming carousel and making it less teacher-directed. I plan to assign my students to groups and allow them to share with other groups and also the entire class" (Field notes, May 20, 2019). Mr. Sierra then presented two articles featuring African American Soldiers of the Revolutionary War that

included Primus Hall and Prince Whipple. When the team asked Mr. Bravo, *Who were these soldiers?* he responded,

Prince Whipple was George Washington's bodyguard during the war and Primus Hall committed several acts of bravery during the war. I am providing opportunities for the students to research African American soldiers in addition to European soldiers, since these cultures closely relate to the students represented in our classrooms. (Field notes, May 20, 2019)

With these additions, the team rated the lesson as *highly effective* in the area of *voice* (Table 13).

Table 13

“Soldiers of the American Revolutionary War” After Revision

Criteria	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>VOICE The lesson allows places for students to work together collaboratively or to share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with peers and teacher.</p>	<p>The lesson does not have an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has one opportunity for students to turn and talk to share their learning experiences.</p>	<p>The lesson has many opportunities for students to work collaboratively or share their learning experiences such as strengths and cultural backgrounds.</p>	<p>Throughout the lesson, students have opportunities to collaborate or share their learning experiences such as strengths, weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and interests.</p>
<p>DIFFERENTIATION The lesson provides opportunities for students to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.</p>	<p>The lesson activities have no differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities provide more than one opportunity for differentiation.</p>	<p>The lesson activities are differentiated, and they provide opportunities for choice.</p>
<p>COMMUNICATION The teacher communicates the main concepts in the lesson in several different ways.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in one way.</p>	<p>The teacher explains the main concepts in two similar ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in three or more ways.</p>	<p>The teacher communicates the main concepts in several ways depending on the students’ cultural backgrounds.</p>

Table 13 (Continued)

Criteria	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>CONNECTION The lesson incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	The lesson does not connect to the students' real-life experiences.	The lesson has a real-life connection.	The lesson has many real-life connections and it represents multiple cultures.	The lesson has a real-life connection, it represents multiple cultures, and the lesson provides opportunities for students to learn about their own and/or others' cultures.
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE The lesson provides opportunities for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives.</p>	The lesson does not connect with social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson at times connects to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson provides several predetermined opportunities to connect to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and research social concerns that interest them and that affect their own lives.
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION The lesson minimizes bias perspectives in texts and lesson concepts, so students have equal access, and they can participate openly with students from dominant backgrounds.</p>	The dominant culture is the only culture in the text and lesson discussion.	There are a few cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	There are many cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	Students have opportunities to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own cultures.

The fourth-grade team revised the lesson in the area of *connection* by adding an ethnically diverse group of soldiers as options for research. For example, Mr. Sierra and Mr. Bravo created lesson objectives that directed students to choose an influential soldier from an ethnically diverse group and to generate a set of interview questions, the students would ask their chosen soldier. Both teachers shared that they reviewed the various ethnicities of the fourth-grade students and worked together to create a list of soldiers with similar ethnicities (Field notes, May 20, 2019). All the fourth grade teachers agreed that adding lesson objectives that allow students to research additional soldiers of color and generate interview questions will extend the students' learning beyond European soldiers. Since students had many opportunities to make real-life connections, the revised lesson scored *effective* in the area of *connections*.

To address the area of *social justice*, the fourth-grade teachers revised the lesson to include an article entitled, "Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War" by Elizabeth M. Collins. The article highlights the circumstances slaves endured while fighting in the Revolutionary War. For example, the students will learn how Washington feared putting weapons in the hands of slaves and relegated them to support roles like digging ditches (Collins, 2013). The teachers shared that they wanted to add the article because it highlighted social justice issues such as state legislators reneging on promises to free slaves who served in the war and slave owners receiving compensation instead of their slaves. During the meeting, Ms. Juliet suggested grouping the students and providing them with a copy of the article and having them read and respond to the following questions: Describe conditions soldiers of color faced during the American Revolutionary War. How are these conditions similar and different today? If you were a part of the

state legislature in 1776, how would you have treated your soldiers in terms of equipment, pay, assignments, and freedom? Why? (Field notes, May 20, 2019).

Collectively, the fourth-grade teachers agreed that adding the article and questions would provide the students the opportunity to explore injustices beyond the European perspective (Field notes, May 20, 2019). The teachers scored the revised lesson *effective* in the area of *social justice* as a result of the changes above.

The final revision was in the area of *equity/decolonization*. During the team discussion, Mr. Bravo pointed out,

Prior to our meeting and planning, this lesson mainly focused on the Continental Army and George Washington's Soldiers. It was written from a European perspective and did not relate to all of our students' cultural backgrounds. Now that we've added African American soldiers, group activities and articles, I think we[']ve achieved equity. (Field notes, May 20, 2019)

Mr. Sierra shared, "I see your point, but I think we just need to make it more specific" (Field notes, May 20, 2019). The teachers decided to revise the lesson essential question specifically to target the role of African American Soldiers. The revised lesson essential question became what roles and duties did African Americans have during the American Revolution? When the researcher asked the team, "Why this particular lesson essential question?" Ms. Juliet responded, "Because the contributions of African American soldiers are marginalized in this social studies unit. As we study other wars, our students will hear about the French, Spanish and Native Americans, but not about the contributions of African Americans" (Field notes, May 20, 2019). The other fourth-grade

teachers agreed. The team now rated the lesson as *effective* in the area of *decolonization/equity*.

Once the revision was complete, Ms. Juliet showed excitement and agreed to teach the revised version of the lesson. On May 22, 2019, Ms. Juliet taught the revised lesson as the researcher observed and recorded notes. The following day (May 23, 2019), Ms. Juliet, the fourth-grade team, and the researcher met to debrief. During the meeting, Ms. Juliet shared that she felt the students were engaged and focused. She defined engagement as students having choice and the permission to collaborate with their peers (Field notes, May 23, 2019). Students were also able to make connections to the lesson, ask questions, inquire, and explore the topic. Observation notes indicated that the students had opportunities to research an ethnically diverse group of revolutionary soldiers and also to find pictures of soldiers that looked like them or their family members (Field notes, May 22, 2019). Once the lesson revision was complete, it validated the self-identity and experiences of African Americans. For example, one student researched the soldier Thomas Peters, who was known as the first African American hero. The student expressed how this picture of an African American soldier of the American Revolutionary War resembled his uncle and he shared his uncle's experiences, which led to a class discussion. During the debriefing meeting, Ms. Juliet indicated that this particular student rarely shared experiences without prompting (Field notes, May 23, 2019). Accordingly, the revised lesson scored *highly effective* in the areas of *voice* and *communication*. The lesson scored *effective* in the areas of *differentiation*, *connection*, *social justice*, and *equity*.

After revising and piloting the third- and fourth-grade lessons, the PLC felt there was no need to create a set of culturally responsive guidelines, because the Aguilar-Valdez (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric already provides the concise guidance that is necessary to revise lessons. During the PLC meeting, the third- and fourth-grade teacher teams indicated that the rubric listed key areas that were necessary to view any lesson through a culturally responsive teaching lens (Field notes, May 29, 2019). The PLC felt that instead of trying to invent a new document that would be redundant at best, the focus should be on educating teachers about each of the areas of the Aguilar-Valdez (2015) Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric. The third-grade teachers shared that they also felt it was important to educate teachers about the benefits of using the culturally responsive rubric, such as building empathy, acceptance of differences, and connections (Field notes, May 29, 2019). The third- and fourth-grade teachers emphasized that through the use of this rubric, children from the United States and other countries can learn from each other and develop an understanding of how and why everybody is different (Field notes, May 29, 2019).

Teacher interviews. At the conclusion of Cycle 3, the researcher interviewed each of the PLC members individually using eight open-ended questions (Appendix G). The researcher specifically designed these questions to see how well the teacher participants understood culturally responsive teaching after completing all three cycles of the study. From the analysis of the results, three themes emerged: *teaching and learning from students' diverse backgrounds, displaying and acknowledging students' unique cultural traditions and celebrations, and gaining knowledge through the PLC model.*

Teaching and learning from students' diverse backgrounds. Gay (2010)

defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). One of the open-ended interview questions, “How would you define culturally responsive teaching?” explored the teachers’ understanding of culturally responsive teaching as Gay defined it. All the PLC members’ responses included components of Gay’s definition of culturally responsive teaching. All the teachers referenced using the cultural backgrounds of their students to enhance teaching and learning within their classrooms. One teacher defined culturally responsive teaching as “trying to incorporate the diversity of the students in your classroom.” Another teacher stated that it is “Focusing on the importance of showing multiple perspectives and looking through the lens of students’ cultures to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.” Three of the teachers’ responses included the words, “Learning the cultural backgrounds of students and using this information to teach.” Collectively, the teachers’ responses created the theme, *teaching and learning from students’ diverse backgrounds*, and this showed their understanding that culturally responsive teaching is consistent with Gay’s research.

Displaying and acknowledging students’ unique cultural traditions and celebrations. Several of the PLC members’ responses to describing what a culturally responsive classroom looks like created the theme *displaying and acknowledging students’ unique cultural traditions and celebrations*. Responses to support this theme included,

I think it's important and imperative that we take every opportunity to have our different ethnic backgrounds [reflected] on our bulletin boards, that our smart boards include those languages, those foods, and those cultures. I think that maybe photos from different countries of children's origin, vocabulary with pictures in their native country or place, and different languages being apparent throughout the classroom will help to display students' unique traditions and celebrations.... To me, what stands out in a culturally responsive classroom are the students in the classroom having their backgrounds, experiences, families, cultures visible. It involves celebrating and sharing their differences and being able to see that within the classroom walls. (Field notes, June 3, 2019)

In general, the teachers indicated that the classroom should not be based solely on the dominant culture in terms of decorations, but instead indicative of the students who use the classrooms for learning purposes. The students should be able to see themselves in the curriculum and classroom physical environment (Field notes, June 3, 2019).

The researcher asked the teachers, "How can you decorate your classroom to support culturally responsive teaching?" Seven of the eight participants' responses mentioned a belief in making connections by identifying students' unique cultural backgrounds and using this information in their classroom environments (Field notes, June 3, 2019). One teacher's response was: "Photos from different countries of children's origin, vocabulary with pictures in their native country or place, and different languages would be apparent throughout the classroom." This response supported the research of Weinstein et al. (2003), who posited that culturally responsive classrooms could foster connectedness and community with such things as pictures of individual

students on the walls, a map of the world to highlight where everyone comes from, or a welcome banner in different languages. The teachers' responses were also consistent with the research of Jones-Goods (2015), who posited that culturally responsive classrooms could make learning relevant by using students' backgrounds and cultural knowledge.

Gaining knowledge through the PLC model. The final theme, *gaining knowledge through the PLC model*, was a response to the question: How effective is the PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices? Every member of the PLC felt that the PLC model was a success. Each of their responses indicated that they gained knowledge regarding culturally responsive practices. One takeaway from teachers was,

I know more about culturally responsive teaching now than I did when we first started this process. I'm more aware of myself as a teacher, as myself as an African American woman, and what I can now bring to the classroom because I am more aware of my own thinking and my own challenges.

The process raised teachers' self-awareness of themselves as culturally responsive educators. Another teacher said that she

found it just really interesting to talk to everybody and even to talk to the grade levels above mine. I found that very eye-opening, and I didn't know some things about my colleagues, I was like, Oh, that's interesting.

A third teacher commented, "I'm just speaking from my own experience. It's definitely changed the way I perceive the world around me" (Field notes, June 3, 2019).

The themes and their associated responses show that the PLC members understood what culturally responsive teaching is and how a culturally responsive classroom should look. Although participants sometimes worked as a PLC and sometimes as grade-level teams, the researcher did not interview teacher participants as a PLC or grade-level team. Each participant received an individual interview, which facilitated uniqueness and authenticity. All members could individually articulate their understanding of culturally responsive teaching, which clearly shows they now understand how to use the diverse backgrounds of their students to optimize their classroom practices.

Summary

The purpose of Cycle 3 was to address the research question: How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices? The PLC worked to revise two lessons. One lesson was a Grade 3 lesson and the other was a lesson from Grade 4. The PLC scored each lesson using a rubric of Jean Aguilar-Valdez (2015). The revised lessons gave students an opportunity to share their thoughts and collaborate (voice), provided students with opportunities to take in information in several different ways, and connected the content with real-life experiences.

Teachers learned that a culturally responsive curriculum serves both students and classroom teachers. A culturally responsive lesson gives students an opportunity to connect information to issues that are important in their lives. When classroom teachers integrate multiple perspectives and culturally relevant pedagogy, all students benefit. Students of the dominant cultures build acceptance and empathy for others, while

students in nondominant cultures can build confidence in their own culture and identity through sharing and seeing themselves in the lesson contents.

Conclusion

At the time of this study, the PLC lacked the necessary efficacy to meet the demands of teaching a diverse population. Action research was the method used to conduct an inquiry-based form of investigation through the use of a PLC. According to Stringer (2007), action research is participatory research in which educators understand a problem, collect data and information, analyze the data, and create a plan to solve the problem. Teachers and administrators at Lanier Elementary formed a PLC and took the necessary time to study culturally responsive teaching and collaborate as equal partners on creating and implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. Through the PLC model, participants shared best practices, reviewed data, and made informed decisions.

The purpose was to explore culturally responsive teaching by examining teachers' attitudes and skills relating to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010). Specifically, three cycles were designed and used to achieve this objective. Each cycle addressed a specific research question and followed Stringer (2014) *Look, Think, Act* action research model. As the study progressed through each of the cycles, I was able to discover teachers' knowledge of and beliefs about culturally relevant and responsive teaching. I also identified and examined deficits of the PLC member's culturally responsive practices and strategies within their classrooms. To address such deficits, the PLC created and implemented action plans to increase teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and to provide them with the necessary skills to create a culturally

responsive teaching environment that included lesson planning. Data-collection procedures included interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, PLC group discussions, and field notes. This chapter presented the data from each individual cycle and highlighted the findings related to the research questions.

Chapter Five

Discussion

To promote academic and social success for students at Lanier Elementary, a culturally responsive approach to teaching was necessary. Culturally responsive teaching provides students from nondominant cultures different ways to relate to curriculum and demonstrate their degree of proficiency. Lanier Elementary School has many students of diverse backgrounds, and the third- and fourth-grade teachers sought to increase their understanding of curriculum content and also to mine the knowledge of their students (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Through this study, teachers were able to build their self-efficacy and to develop the skills to look at different lessons through a culturally responsive lens.

Specifically, this study involved the development of a PLC in which third- and fourth-grade teachers learned about student diversity and developed culturally responsive teaching practices. The study helped teachers to become aware of their own biases towards teaching diverse learners, and it transformed the way they implemented classroom practices in terms of curriculum and environment. The researcher used a qualitative methodology, in tandem with action research, to focus on culturally responsive teaching to make the third- and fourth-grade curricula more inclusive for students. The study took place in three cycles. Cycle 1 focused on building awareness and developing teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching. Cycle 2 focused on developing a culturally responsive learning environment where third- and fourth-grade teachers critically analyzed their classrooms to create a culturally responsive

environment. Finally, the third cycle involved the teachers applying their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching to revise lessons from their traditional curricula.

Discussion of Findings

Gay (2000) asserted that the basis of the culturally responsive framework is the belief that schools are agents for promoting social justice and equity. For this belief to manifest, teachers must channel learning through the cultural reality and experiences of the learner. The results from this study suggested that the attitudes, awareness, and beliefs of teachers are critical to their ability to provide culturally responsive instruction to diverse learners. The results also indicated that teachers who participate in a PLC focusing on the diverse backgrounds of students are more responsive to student needs within their classrooms.

Prior to this study, the third- and fourth-grade teachers taught their social studies and science curricula as the lessons appeared on the school's Scope and Sequence Curriculum Map. The curricula were Eurocentric, and the teachers did not revise their lessons or teaching practices based on the cultures and backgrounds of their students. According to Loewen (1996), much of the history in historical textbooks is inaccurate and provides students and teachers with misinformation. Teachers themselves are often unaware of accurate historical events. The teacher questionnaires and interviews conducted in the beginning of the study revealed several of the teachers had sheltered childhoods with limited exposure to people of color. The data also revealed the teachers did not know the cultural backgrounds of their students. The teachers' knowledge levels and attitudes towards student diversity were indicators of whether their classrooms were culturally responsive. Ambe (2006) submits in order to change traditional curriculums to

reflect the diversity in classrooms throughout the United States today, teachers need to be prepared and curriculums must be revised.

Krasnoff (2016) asserts if teachers are sincere and honest about being familiar with a student's culture, trust and positive relationships can be built. Teachers should ask their students if there are times when their behavior is viewed as disrespectful or harassing and not assume students enjoy comments about their appearance, or welcome being touched without their permission. In essence, teachers should be responsible and face the reality that students' cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial and social class backgrounds will be different from theirs (Gay & Howard 2001). In support of Krasnoff's assertion I used family questionnaires to increase the teachers' knowledge of their students which proved to be significant in creating culturally responsive classroom environments. This study revealed that an important characteristic of cultural responsiveness is the degree of teacher familiarity with the cultural backgrounds of their students. Once the third- and fourth-grade teachers learned who their students were, they were able to apply a culturally responsive framework by using their students' prior knowledge, past experiences, and cultural references while teaching lessons.

Another positive impact of this study was that teachers used their newly gained knowledge to explore and revise specific lessons as well as their classroom environments based on the cultures and backgrounds of their students. A culturally responsive curriculum includes issues and topics that relate to students' experiences, background and culture and it challenges the students to develop higher order thinking skills (Villegas, 1991). The study showed that reviewing a student's academic records and basic registration packet was enough to learn the cultural background of the student. The

academic records and registration packets at Lanier Elementary did not provide teachers with students' authentic experiences or cultural frames of references. Teachers that use culturally responsive teaching practices connect the curriculum to students' background, develop connections with families, understand students' experiences, create connections with local organizations, create a classroom community where everyone feels valued, and recognize differences in culture as a strength (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By creating a family questionnaire to solicit cultural background information, the teachers learned about their students' cultures, families, and background experiences, and they eventually included students in creating a classroom that represented them.

The study also showed that awareness through reflective practice was a significant factor in promoting culturally responsive teaching practices. The demographic shift of increasing ethnic minorities places public school teachers, who are majority white, at an experiential disadvantage (Corona, et al, 2017). As cited in Aydin et al. (2017) the shift also presents challenges to an educational system that has historically struggled with educating students who are non-White, who come from a background of poverty, or for whom English is not the native language. This is significant given the challenges school districts face professionally developing teachers as well as the long history of biased textbooks in American public schools. In addition to biased curricula Brandon (2003) posits teachers continue to carry deeply rooted biases that are transferred to classrooms and the school-wide culture. Teachers may think they are practicing equity when in fact they are simply unaware of their own bias. Changing the curriculum alone without changing the attitudes of teachers will make little impact in helping students develop values of acceptance and social justice (Brandon 2003). Several

of the teacher participants shared they too thought they were practicing equity within their classrooms prior to this study. As the study progressed through the cycles; professional literature, Ted Talk videos, and ongoing dialogue helped the teachers become aware of their own limitations, biases, and prejudices about different cultures. Through self-awareness, reflective practice, and the use of Tatum's (1997) racial identity development stages, teachers understood areas they needed to work on to embrace culturally responsive teaching fully. These results indicated that there is a need for teachers to reflect on and explore their own biases and frameworks continuously if they are to develop and implement the instructional practices they need to instruct diverse student populations adequately.

Demographics in schools are rapidly changing. Classrooms are full of students from different countries and backgrounds. Culturally responsive teaching is a bridge to help students to connect to the content in the curriculum and to engage in learning. Educators need opportunities to engage in ongoing professional development on how to teach using culturally responsive practices. Culturally responsive teaching is a mindset as much as it is a set of practices for educators. Teachers need time to explore their own biases in safe environments and then time to learn new ways of teaching students in the classroom. Prior to this study, third- and fourth-grade teachers at Lanier thought of differentiation as meeting students' needs by changing the product of an assignment or the process by which the students learned the material. This study shows that differentiation is now changing to include culturally responsive teaching practices by giving students the opportunity to connect and engage with the material from the perspectives of their own cultures and backgrounds.

This study provides guidance to school administrators and others with decision-making authority as they work to create culturally responsive classrooms within their school environments. The third- and fourth-grade teachers improved their cultural awareness through the use of a systematic approach that included a scheduled time to reflect, discuss, and collaborate with members from their grade level on how to cater to students of diverse backgrounds. The results of this study highlighted the PLC model in conjunction with action research as an effective process to promote collaboration and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Research Question 1

Prior to beginning Cycle 1 of the study, the answer to Research Question 1: What are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students? was that the teachers at Lanier Elementary had limited knowledge regarding culturally responsive teaching, yet they all believed it was important. The teachers also showed a positive attitude towards culturally responsive teaching, as their willingness and motivation to explore and practice culturally responsive techniques showed.

The results of the questionnaire also indicated the third- and fourth-grade teachers at Lanier actually lacked cultural knowledge. The questionnaire data showed that only two of the eight teacher participants took a course in college relating to multicultural education, and that their training on how to teach diverse students did not extend beyond one or two formal courses. The other six teacher participants shared that they did not receive any substantial training or coursework in culturally responsive teaching or multicultural education in general.

Despite the limited knowledge of culturally responsive teaching among the teachers, their attitudes indicated an interest in learning and a willingness to learn. Their motivation and enthusiasm to read professional literature and to explore culturally responsive teaching practices deeply demonstrated this. The teachers formed a PLC and they discussed literature relating to the culturally responsive framework, as Gay (2000) highlighted. Throughout the study, the teachers frequently used their personal time to read articles, view videos, and research topics for PLC discussions. The teachers also applied new culturally responsive practices as they learned them throughout the study. Examples included revamping their opening day questionnaires to include cultural questions, changing their classroom bulletin boards, and adjusting the seating arrangements of their students. These actions indicated that the teachers were willing to learn and that their attitude towards culturally responsive teaching was positive and enthusiastic.

By the conclusion of the study, the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of culturally responsive teaching had greatly improved. Their actions during Cycles 2 and 3, when they rearranged their classrooms and revised lessons showed this; and also their rich responses during the interviews at the conclusion of the study.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: How can teachers and administrators of Lanier Elementary School develop awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact classrooms and teaching practices? This question examined the development of the teachers' sociocultural knowledge and self-awareness. The answer to the question is by applying a reflective process that identifies teachers' and administrators' beliefs and

degree of sociocultural knowledge; and by developing their awareness through Tatum's (1997) research-based theory on racial identity development stages.

Given the varying degrees of teacher awareness and sociocultural knowledge, I realized it was necessary to establish a starting point. I used the culturally responsive survey (Appendix G) and Tatum's (1997) stages of racial identity development to gauge the teachers' degree of awareness, sociocultural knowledge, and beliefs to establish a starting point. After the teacher participants completed the culturally responsive survey, I used Tatum's stages of racial identity development to analyze the responses individually, and I assigned each teacher participant to a stage. I purposely chose not to reveal my assigned racial identity development stages to the participants until a reflective PLC discussion on the results of the culturally responsive survey could take place. During the reflective PLC discussion, several of the teacher participants shared that they had completed questionnaires regarding race and culture in the past, but they had never analyzed their responses based on theory and research.

All eight teacher participants shared that they never knew that racial stages of identity existed, and they learned from how closely their responses to the culturally responsive survey matched Tatum's (1997) racial identity development stage of *immersion/emersion*. This stage is characterized by an increasing willingness to confront one's own biases, to redefine Whiteness, and to become more activist in directly combating racism and oppression. All the teachers categorized themselves as in the immersion/emersion stage. After posing the question "How well do we know our students?" to the PLC, the teacher participants realized that they do not have enough sociocultural knowledge of their students' backgrounds. In fact, all eight of the teacher

participants shared that they do not know the ethnicity of all their students and families. There was then a discussion: “Can classroom teachers truly become more activist in directly combating racism and oppression if they do not really know and understand the cultural backgrounds of their students and families?” This sparked conversations about how difficult it can be to discuss race and culture with students and families, yet how important it is that teachers are aware of such backgrounds. Unprovoked, several of the teacher participants then revisited their self-categorized stage of immersion and changed their racial identity development stage. They also asked, “What stage did you categorize us as?” I saw this dialogue among the teachers and with me as evidence of the teacher participants reflecting on their actions and becoming aware of their sociocultural knowledge and the beliefs that impact their classrooms.

With the exception of one teacher, I categorized all in the stage of *pseudo-independence*. During this stage, Tatum (1997) suggested that the person begins to attempt to understand racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences and might reach out to interact with minority group members similar to him or her. Ultimately in this stage, understanding European American White privilege, the sociopolitical aspects of race, and issues of bias, prejudice, and discrimination tend to be more of an intellectual exercise. I shared with the teachers my categorization, which I submitted based on their responses to the culturally responsive survey and also their minimal attempts to understand and act on the diversity within their classroom and school community. Three of the seven teacher participants disagreed with their categorization in the *pseudo-independence* stage, but they did agree that without knowing the ethnicity of their students, they would not be able to represent them appropriately in their classroom

displays, bulletin boards, or lessons. All the teacher participants agreed that they never thought about the impact of their racial identity development stage on the ethnicity of their students and practices until they engaged in a structured reflective process.

Research Question 3

The answer to Research Question 3, What strategies can administrators employ to assist teachers in developing a culturally responsive classroom and a culturally responsive curriculum? includes the following strategies: Administering culturally responsive family questionnaires to the families of students and designing the classroom (seating, bulletin boards, and labeling displays in different languages) based on the responses; intimately learning the cultural backgrounds of the students (family traditions, birthday celebrations, how they celebrate holidays, their ethnicity, and the origin and meaning of their names) by conferencing with parents and students; reviewing classroom resources and materials such as books, articles, videos, and manipulatives to represent the students ethnicities; and acknowledging holidays from the students' cultural backgrounds.

During Cycle 2, the researcher observed each teacher participant's displayed vocabulary, classroom bulletin boards, visual aids, libraries, and arrangement of seating using the Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist (Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant, 2010). The PLC reviewed the teachers' registration information for all their assigned students. Much of the students' registration information regarding race and ethnicity did not match the teachers' perceptions of their students. For example, some students were registered as Puerto Rican, yet the teacher perceived them as African American or Jamaican. The teachers began by developing trust, rapport, and connections

with students and their families by sending home a family questionnaire. The purpose of the family questionnaire was to gather information on the students' and families' cultural background in terms of languages spoken at home, family traditions, and how they celebrate birthdays and cultural holidays to create a culturally responsive environment.

The PLC used the family questionnaire responses to identify students' cultural traditions, customs, and celebrations and to display cultural images and symbols representative of students' individual backgrounds. The PLC members also included the students in setting up displays by having them bring in items (artifacts, pictures, and clothing) that symbolize and represent their culture, or by having them create bulletin boards with art representing their culture. The PLC also created culturally responsive classroom libraries based on individual students' cultural backgrounds. Some of the teacher participants placed special orders of textbooks, picture books, and novels that represented the cultural backgrounds of all their students. Additionally, the teacher participants added a section to their classrooms to spotlight their students' cultures. When the teachers included the students in the process, the classroom represented the students rather than representing the teacher.

Based on the findings of Research Questions 1 and 2, teachers first need to increase their sociocultural knowledge and to know the cultural backgrounds of their students before they can appropriately plan and implement a culturally responsive classroom. The initial data from student registration packets showed that the teachers did not know the cultural backgrounds of their students; therefore, they did not organize or plan their classroom environments based on the needs of their students. After analyzing the culturally responsive family questionnaires, redesigning the classrooms based on the

responses, intimately learning the cultural backgrounds of the students, and reviewing classroom resources and materials, the third- and fourth-grade teachers' classrooms were culturally responsive to their students.

Research Question 4

The answer to Research Question 4, How effective is a PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices? was evident in the teachers' increase in knowledge and the improvement in their classroom practices. Prior to forming a PLC, there were no optimal, structured meeting forums for third- and fourth-grade teachers to brainstorm problems, share ideas, and learn from each other. Traditional staff development days and faculty meetings were forums in which teachers mainly received information with only time for questions relating to understanding the information. When teachers could form groups and engage in dialogue during such meetings, the groups were random, and the directives normally involved the teachers discussing the presented information, not necessarily problems that affected them. Veteran teachers such as Mrs. Woo, Mrs. Charlie, Ms. Juliet, and Mrs. Kilo averaged over 19 years of teaching experience at Lanier Elementary, and they had witnessed the student demographic shift. Over their entire careers of service at Lanier Elementary, they received annual staff development in the form of faculty meetings, superintendent conference days, and BOCES workshops, yet their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching prior to forming a PLC was limited. As the results of Cycle 1 showed, the teachers indicated that they knew very little about different types of cultures, particularly African American and Hispanic, despite the constant increase in students of these cultures and also annual staff development.

Unlike the traditional staff development forums (faculty meetings, superintendent conference days, BOCES workshops, and grade-level meetings), the PLC model allowed the teachers to form specific groups, frame problems that directly impacted their practices, collect data relating to the problem, leverage the groups' expertise to develop an action plan to solve the problem, and learn from each other. The survey on the use of the PLC model made it clear that the teachers' knowledge and practices had improved. The effectiveness of the model showed that the teachers implemented culturally responsive practices by rearranging their classrooms and revising their lessons for the first time while serving at Lanier Elementary. The effectiveness of the model was also evident in the teachers' responses in their interviews at the conclusion of the study. During the interviews, the researcher asked each of the PLC members, "How effective is the PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices?" As the findings section of Chapter 4 showed, each of their responses indicated that they gained knowledge regarding culturally responsive practices, which was in stark contrast to their responses prior to the study. Each member demonstrated and articulated an understanding of culturally responsive teaching, which clearly shows the effectiveness of the PLC model. All the teacher participants now understand how to use the diverse backgrounds of their students to optimize their classroom practices.

Reflection on the Conceptual Framework

The basis of the study's conceptual framework was the relationship between CRT, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching to develop culturally responsive classrooms. The framework for culturally responsive classrooms included

planning with CRT in mind and implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching practices. The end result was culturally responsive teachers and classrooms.

The researcher used CRT in education to analyze social inequity within academic institutions. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000) CRT in education is a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of (Black and Latino) students. (p. 70)

Part of the delivery of culturally relevant pedagogy was the acknowledgment of who children are, how they perceive themselves, and how society receives them; therefore, race was part of this study. According to Ladson-Billings (2001), one of the main reasons for culturally responsive pedagogy is to respond to school “settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience” (p. 112). Before the teachers could apply any of the culturally responsive teaching practices, they needed to acknowledge and change any personal biases relating to students in their classrooms.

The conceptual framework was significant in guiding teachers through a systematic approach of gaining cultural knowledge and reflecting on personal biases. Tatum’s (1997) racial identity development stages allowed the teachers to identify their personal biases based on their life experiences. With this knowledge, the teachers were able to gain a theoretical sense of how and why they perceived certain races the way they did. This newly gained knowledge served as a starting point for the study. The teachers could view their students, the classroom environment, and their practices in a nonbiased manner. The conceptual framework, specifically the tenets of CRT, gave a specific lens

to view teaching practices and the curriculum. As the teachers and I analyzed the current curriculum with CRT in mind, it allowed us to see how the curriculum caters to the dominant culture and marginalizes nondominant races. We learned that the curriculum is helping to shape young minds in a way that keeps the dominant culture superior to the nondominant cultures. Culturally responsive teaching practices provided a vehicle with which to start transforming the classrooms and the teachers' mindsets. Teachers developed an awareness of their own bias and they identified areas where their bias comes through their teaching practices. I learned that culturally responsive teaching supports teachers and students of all backgrounds and it develops a framework for teaching and learning in the 21st century. It is critical for all teachers to develop these practices to teach a just and equitable curriculum that recognizes all cultures are recognized in the content. Culturally responsive teaching responds to the need to develop all children's social, emotional, and academic lives.

Implications for Leadership

Prior to this study, I thought of myself as a transformational leader (Shields, 2010) who placed emphasis on school culture and climate by promoting fairness and equity among the faculty, student, and parent communities. While conducting this study, I had several opportunities to reflect on the students and programs of Lanier and to come face to face with gaps in my leadership style as it relates to my practices. This study has highlighted the current demographics and politics of the school environment, which has changed under my tenure as principal. Lanier Elementary needs transformational and transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) from teachers and school administrators. While I have always placed emphasis on social justice and served as an advocate for children,

this study showed me what it looks like in practice. Social justice and advocacy cannot occur without carefully considering the whole child. In this context, considering the whole child means culturally personalizing instruction by taking into account the child's previous instruction, current skill level, socioeconomic status, and, yes, race!

In reflecting on my leadership practice for the past 17 years, Lanier Elementary and the King Central School District have served as major influencers. Lanier Elementary is the first and only school where I have served as principal. Starting out as a novice principal comes with expected challenges; however, starting in a place such as the King County School District of Westchester County as an African American adds additional challenges. When I began as principal in 2002, people judged schools largely by their state assessment scores. Within the King County School District, people judged principals by test scores, how well they managed politics involving bargaining units, influential parent groups (Parent Teacher Associations), central office directives, and the school budget. Regardless of a principal's talent, if he or she could not produce acceptable test scores, keep the teacher's union happy by avoiding grievances, and ensure that the state passed school budgets by appeasing parent organizations and other taxpayers, that principal would not receive tenure. As a novice and an African American working in one of the wealthiest counties in America, this was a very daunting task.

Being an African American principal in a predominantly White district placed me in a situation where I had to serve as an advocate for all families of color. This meant I had to provide assistance in disciplinary superintendent hearings that did not involve families or students at Lanier, serve as a counselor and liaison to other principals when they were involved in disputes with people of color, and be the face and role model of

diversity within the King Central School District. This was very challenging for me as a novice principal because I had limited experience and knowledge of the fine intricacies of race relations. At the time, the King Central School District did not tolerate change well. People considered the schools successful, and annual budgets passed. People expected leaders to learn politics, address problems early, and maintain the status quo. This meant navigating the political arena of race, school programs, and the “haves and have nots.” On some occasions, families of color referred to me as “Uncle Tom,” and my White colleagues saw me as “racially biased” towards people of color. Despite these challenges, I was able to meet these demands by applying transformational leadership. I was able to establish relationships with stakeholders within the school community and to maintain the status quo. After 4 years, I received tenure and I continued the path of transformational leadership, given that people considered the school successful under my leadership.

As a transformational leader (Shields, 2010), I found myself placing a lot of emphasis on serving as a role model for the community by upholding high personal standards with the hopes of inspiring teachers and students by my actions. I created several meaningful programs for students such as before and after school “Buddy Clubs” that reinforced academic skills through role modeling and mentorship. While programs such as the Buddy Club have provided added value at Lanier, they have not taken into account all the inputs in students’ lives. Inputs such as cultural and language barriers and poverty can limit access to programs, and it is necessary to address them. Transformative leadership places a strong emphasis on social justice, which in turn addresses student access (Shields, 2010). Transformative leadership is a necessary component of

guaranteeing curriculum access for students (Shields, 2010). In the words of John Maxwell, “*Everything* rises and falls on leadership.”

Carland and Carland’s (2003) perspective on leadership best describes my leadership experiences while serving as principal of Lanier Elementary. Carland and Carland stated: “Far too often people just decide upon a strategy, then follow it step by step, even when it becomes obvious the situation has changed; even when it becomes obvious the plan cannot work” (p. 98). I entered my role as principal intending to implement the school’s curriculum and enhance the school environment by bolstering resources and refining teacher practices. What I now realize is that practices, programs, and resources all need to change: refinement or bolstering is not enough. Cultural responsiveness is not just a typical professional development topic; instead, it is a way of thinking that ongoing transformative leadership must foster. Through transformative leadership, teachers and principals should embrace diversity and foster connections between the school and the diverse populations they serve (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In action, this involves hiring practices, professional development, and resource allocation.

Social justice starts with hiring faculty and staff who closely match the student demographics. As an experienced principal, I realize that such people may not be available; therefore, schools should seek individuals who espouse a culturally responsive orientation. By exploring Tatum’s (1997) racial identity development stages, I showed that a teacher’s racial identity, personal life experience, societal interactions, and personal perceptions influence instruction and the curriculum. Despite these findings, the probability of teacher demographics changing to match that of the students is low, which is why transformative leadership by the school’s principal is paramount. Through

transformative leadership, leaders can influence quality teachers to teach students from any race or ethnicity, regardless of their own; however, the teachers must be willing to embrace a culturally responsive orientation.

This study has shown the benefits of channeling transformative leadership through professional development that challenges teachers to engage in deep introspection on their personal biases and the impact of these biases on classroom instruction. Principals cannot lead where they have not been or they are not willing to go; therefore, inspiring teachers through transformational leadership is also a key part of effective professional development. This means leading by example through staying abreast of current trends in education, reading professional literature, and participating in training and conferences alongside teachers. Rather than applying leadership that focuses on the status quo, this study suggests that leadership that intentionally focuses on providing professional development with a culturally responsive lens is critical.

Training teachers, revising curricula, and making home-school connections all require resources. Prior to this study, my leadership style did not place much emphasis on resource allocation. Within the King Central School District, the district's central office mainly manages budgets and resources as opposed to school buildings. Central office administration sets budget lines, and additions in certain budget lines require approval from central office administration. If principals are to succeed in implementing culturally responsive practices within budget systems such as the King Central School District, transformative leadership is necessary. Transformative leadership involves equity and student advocacy. This study has led me to believe I must consistently advocate for planning and placement of culturally responsive resources at Lanier

Elementary. This means destroying opportunity gaps by challenging the budget line status quo and working with district leaders to provide systemic training on culturally responsive teaching. It means applying leadership that prioritizes allocating resources in ways that support cultural responsiveness in multiple facets of the school community.

Implications for Practice

As the number of culturally diverse classrooms continues to increase at Lanier Elementary, teachers will also continue to face challenges in meeting the needs of culturally diverse learners. This study has shown that the district and school administration must anticipate this change and begin professionally developing teachers and preparing the school community. The traditional methods of staff development, such as superintendent conference days and faculty meetings have left the teachers of Lanier lacking the subset of skills outside the realm of theory. The strategies this study has highlighted as culturally responsive depict the subset of skills that are necessary to have an impact on teaching and learning at Lanier Elementary. Culturally responsive strategies will only happen at Lanier Elementary if teachers and school administrators prioritize and embrace them.

If teachers at Lanier do not know what they do not know about themselves in terms of their personal biases, then there should be a safe and rigorous process to teach them. Teachers at Lanier will develop an awareness of their sociocultural knowledge and beliefs that impact their classroom practices by identifying their own cultural beliefs through staff development, student information, and a systematic process of reflection. Teachers will receive training in Tatum's (1997) stages of racial identity development, and they will determine which stage their cultural backgrounds and experiences closely

align. When teachers see research-based theory on race, culture, religion, and ethnicity, they will be able to view themselves and others through culturally responsive lenses. Once teachers have an understanding of theories relating to culturally responsive teaching, they receive encouragement to assess and analyze their own personal backgrounds. Culturally responsive surveys or questionnaires will provide teachers with assessments of their sociocultural knowledge. The results of such surveys or questionnaires will not be public information, but instead they will be private to the teachers for the purposes of reflective practice.

When teachers are successful in managing their personal biases in terms of how they perceive the world, they must then become cognizant of students' biases as well. Banks (2001) refers to prejudice reduction as teachers teaching students to be tolerant of race, ethnicity, sexual preference, disabilities and various religions. Equity pedagogy is achieved when teachers allow for students' cultural differences by modifying methods of instruction. When schools empower students from all backgrounds and identify those things that hinder learning, Banks (2001) highlights this as empowering school culture. To promote equity pedagogy, the assistant principal and I will provide classroom teachers with their student demographics and ask questions such as, how well do you know your student's cultural backgrounds? How do your classroom practices (instruction, holiday celebrations, seating and grouping of students, and physical environment) either advocate for or marginalize students in your classroom? Ogbu (1995) submits engagement among diverse students require a holistic approach where the *what, why and how* of teaching is meaningful and unified. McIntyre, Rosebery, and Gonzalez (2001) suggest in order for teachers to do this effectively, teachers must first learn about the cultural distinctiveness

of their student ethnic groups and then transform any associated sensitivities into effective classroom practices.

Once teachers are aware of their students' cultural backgrounds, they should then learn how to use the students' diverse backgrounds to maximize learning. So often in the field of education, teachers enter their classrooms without adequate training in culturally responsive teaching. Over the past twenty years researchers have consistently shown in order for better learning opportunities to occur, teachers need to know more about the world of the children they teach (Graybill, 1997; Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003), yet in traditional schooling such experiences are either absent or ignored (Bankston, 2002; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 2002). If school districts or schools do not offer this training, then teachers must pursue it on their own. The entire faculty of Lanier Elementary will receive a survey to measure its knowledge of culturally responsive teaching, and professional development will follow accordingly. Based on the research the literature review highlighted and the findings of this study, it is likely that most teachers at Lanier did not receive culturally responsive training in their teacher preservice programs, which now places the onus on the school and school district. Because a district such as King is relatively large with diverse school populations, I will take responsibility for training the faculty of Lanier based on the school's unique student and teacher demographics. At Lanier Elementary, faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and special committees will expose teachers to professional seminars that promote culturally responsive teaching based on the teachers' student demographics. This will take place semiannually at a minimum, and it will become the norm, since the teacher-to-student demographics can

change within the school year based on student transfers and teachers serving on long-term leaves of absence.

The most important practice I will implement at Lanier Elementary School is the PLC model. At the beginning of each school year, every grade level will function as a PLC. The entire faculty will receive training on the look, think, act phases of Stringer's (2014) action research model. Once teachers have received guidance in a systematic reflective process, training in culturally responsive teaching, and training in action research through the use of the PLC model, the teachers will decide the future staff development topics. I will allocate consistent times for each of the PLCs to meet, collect their framed problems, and provide the necessary resources to support their action plans. Based on the different grade levels and different student demographics, it is likely that staff development will look different for different grade levels. Monthly staff development will not necessarily take place at the same time for all teachers, as it has in the past. Some grade levels may require visits to other schools, unique workshops, or specific speaker visits to their classrooms. My practice will be to resource the training and to provide flexibility with scheduling.

Considerations for Future Research

The research focused on helping teachers to be culturally responsive and revising the curriculum to be inclusive of students of different cultures in their classes. The study did not focus on the impact these changes had on students from the dominant culture. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), between fall 2013 and fall 2025, the number of White students will continue to decrease from 50% to 46% and students who are Black will decrease from 16% to 15%; However, the percentages of

students who are Hispanic are likely to increase from 25% to 29%. To promote academic and social success for all students, a culturally responsive approach to teaching is necessary. A consideration of future research would be to analyze the effects of these changes on students from the dominant culture in the classrooms. For example, does culturally responsive teaching help these students to celebrate diversity and to develop feelings of unity and empathy towards others?

In addition, the subjects (Grade 3 and 4 teachers) in this study were receptive to developing a self-awareness of their biases and they were open to changing their teaching practices. Another consideration for future research would be to include a larger number of subjects (e.g., Grade K-5 teachers) and to revisit the question what are teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of ethnically diverse students? The teachers in this study had positive attitudes and they were open to learning about culturally responsive teaching. Future research could include the responses from a larger number of teachers, noticing any resistance from teachers and exploring how any resistance impacts a school community in the classroom and among teachers.

A third consideration for future research is that it could expand the professional development models to develop teachers professionally. Is the PLC model the best model to teach educators about culturally responsive teaching, or are there more effective professional development models? Future research could look at different professional development models for culturally responsive practices in teachers to see if one model is more effective than another.

Finally, a fourth consideration for future research would be to focus on culturally responsive leaders. Conducting the same study with district and school-level administrators in education rather than teachers would be useful. The study could look at the attitudes and beliefs of leaders concerning culturally responsive teaching within the school district. It could also include studying the impact culturally responsive leaders have on school communities. The school community would include parents, teachers, and students.

Recommendations

This study focused on developing culturally responsive teaching practices and classrooms. With that in mind, there are a few actions that researchers could take right now. The first would be to build schoolwide teacher awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices. Teacher leaders or administrators could do this during faculty meetings and Superintendent Conference Days. The study revealed that building teacher awareness is essential to developing culturally responsive practices in the classroom. As the study revealed, teachers come from many different backgrounds and they need self-understanding of how their backgrounds impact their teaching in the classroom.

After building teacher awareness about culturally responsive teaching, school leaders could support teachers in equipping classrooms with the tools to be culturally responsive. For example, culturally responsive classrooms include libraries with books that have diverse characters and settings. Classrooms could have diverse art supplies for students, such as multicultural crayons and paint colors. For kindergarten classrooms, teachers could promote diversity by having inclusive dolls and games. These recommendations would start the process of developing culturally responsive classrooms.

Finally, after developing awareness and equipping classrooms, it would be useful to revise each curriculum on a district level and to build teacher capacity through ongoing professional development and evaluations. This study made it clear that the current curriculum focuses on the dominant culture. Each grade-level curriculum needs analysis and revision to be culturally responsive. Once the curriculum revisions have taken place, teachers need ongoing professional development to learn how to teach the new curriculum using culturally responsive practices, and administrators need to use evaluations to develop accountability.

Rigor

This action research study primarily included data-collection strategies consistent with qualitative methodologies. Some of these qualitative methods were interviews and observations in field notes and questionnaires. In qualitative research, the purpose of interviews and questionnaires is to explore the perspectives, beliefs, motivations, and experiences of others (Gill et al., 2008). The study consisted of three cycles, and it proceeded through recursive stages of data gathering, open coding, and analysis (Holly et al., 2009). Specific strategies that checked the accuracy of the findings for the research questions ensured the rigor of the study. The data-collection tools consisted of surveys, questionnaires, open-ended interview questions, and the researcher's journal. Throughout the study, each of the data-collection tools highlighted the teachers' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and produced appropriate information for precise analysis. The researcher triangulated the information and corroborated it through multiple sources, such as the teacher participants, parents within the school community, and student artifacts. Rigor was evident when the teachers and the researcher engaged in

a process of sifting, exploring, reflecting, and judging the data for meaning and relevance, which ultimately developed themes that accurately captured the teachers' experience. The researcher verified specific descriptions of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, or classroom practices through member checking (Creswell, 2009). The researcher applied member checking by having the teachers review and verify their questionnaire responses and interview transcripts for accuracy. In this sense, purposeful sampling and the researcher's working relationships with the teachers increased the in-depth understanding of the data. A coherent justification for the themes based on the different data sources emerged through this process of triangulation.

To ensure dependability, the researcher established an audit trail by preserving and maintaining all transcripts, notes, audiotapes, journals, and teacher-student artifacts. The researcher set aside all potential prejudices and biases to ensure all the participants' perspectives received equal presentation so that the reader could arrive at an impartial decision. In addition, a requirement to fulfill the doctoral program requirements associated with this research study, the assigned committee chairman reviewed, scrutinized, and validated all the data strategies and data analysis sections.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study, scale is prominent. Qualitative research studies can provide detailed descriptions and depth, yet the results of this study are only suggestive based on scale. Only two grade levels participated in this study; therefore, it is unclear whether the strategies and PLC model the teacher participants in this study used would increase cultural responsiveness in a larger group of teachers if they implemented it in the same manner. Another factor is the dynamics of the third- and

fourth-grade teachers. Both grade levels consisted of teachers with varying years of experience working together as a team and sharing a public and professional bond. Five of the eight teacher participants had over 17 years of experience of working with me as their principal, and collectively we all shared a relationship that was more one of camaraderie than adversarial.

Another limitation was timing. Since the study took place during the winter months, school days were unpredictable due to school closings. School closings and delays caused the PLC participants to reschedule meetings, and it was necessary to extend the curriculum. Also, during the months of March and April, students in Grades 3-5 took the New York State Math and ELA tests. Given that teachers' evaluations had links to the results of these tests, the teacher participants prioritized preparing their students for the tests. At times, this led to distraction, or a lack of focus by the teacher participants. In addition, teacher absences during the study interrupted the consistency of the cycle work during the study. Substitute teachers were unaware of how to teach the revised curriculum, so during those times, students received the traditional curriculum content. The teachers created the revised curriculum as they were teaching it, so it was not complete until the end of the study. This caused some confusion among students.

Last, my ethnicity as an African American and my role as the principal of Lanier Elementary could potentially have caused some of the participants to withhold certain thoughts or comments regarding culturally responsive teaching during PLC discussions. While my past experiences and interactions with the participants did not lead me to believe that this was the case, there was a possibility that the participants may not have

wanted to offend me by characterizing themselves as either supportive or unsupportive of culturally responsive teaching.

Conclusion

In order to promote academic and social success the students at Lanier Elementary, a culturally responsive approach to teaching was required. Consistent with the research and theory of Ladson-Billings (2009), knowledge was explored in depth through culturally responsive teaching provided by multi ethnic cultural frames of reference. Lanier was filled with students of diverse backgrounds and teachers needed a greater understanding of curriculum content in order to mine the knowledge of their students (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The third and fourth grade teachers of Lanier Elementary lacked the training and efficacy to deeply explore the school's curriculum in search of knowledge and understanding. Despite the limited knowledge of culturally responsive teaching among the teachers, the findings of cycle one showed their attitudes indicated an interest in learning and a willingness to learn. Their motivation and enthusiasm to read professional literature and to explore culturally responsive teaching practices deeply demonstrated this. The teachers formed a PLC and they discussed literature relating to the culturally responsive framework, as Gay (2000) highlighted. Throughout the study, the teachers frequently used their personal time to read articles, view videos, and research topics for PLC discussions. The teachers also applied new culturally responsive practices as they learned them throughout the study.

Specifically, this study involved action research based on the philosophy of Stringer (2014) and also the PLC model (Dufour and Eaker 1998). Unlike the traditional staff development forums (faculty meetings, superintendent conference days, BOCES

workshops, and grade-level meetings), the PLC model allowed the teachers to form specific groups, frame problems that directly impacted their practices, collect data relating to the problem, leverage the groups' expertise to develop an action plan to solve the problem, and learn from each other (Dufour and Eaker 1998). The survey on the use of the PLC model made it clear that the teachers' knowledge and practices had improved. The effectiveness of the model showed that the teachers implemented culturally responsive practices by rearranging their classrooms and revising their lessons for the first time while serving at Lanier Elementary. The effectiveness of the model was also evident in the teachers' responses in their interviews at the conclusion of the study. During the interviews, the researcher asked each of the PLC members, "How effective is the PLC model in leading teachers to develop culturally responsive practices?" As the findings section of Chapter 4 showed, each of their responses indicated that they gained knowledge regarding culturally responsive practices, which was in stark contrast to their responses prior to the study. Each member demonstrated and articulated an understanding of culturally responsive teaching, which clearly shows the effectiveness of the PLC model. At the conclusion of this study, all of the teacher participants understood how to use the diverse backgrounds of their students to optimize their classroom practices.

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Appendix A

Eligibility Survey

Action Research: Creating a Culturally Responsive Classroom Environment

Researcher: Tracy Norman

Introduction:

As part of this action research, the researcher will use purposeful sampling to select participants for this study. In purposeful sampling, the researcher intentionally chooses individuals who are affected or who have an effect on the problem under study. The series of questions below should determine whether a nonculturally responsive classroom affects you or whether you have an impact on students in a nonculturally responsive classroom. At any time, you may request to stop answering the questions. The questionnaire is voluntary, and all information given or shared will remain confidential.

1. Please describe your teaching experience. Include the various settings you have taught in as well as your years of teaching.
2. What is your philosophy of teaching?
3. How does your cultural background differ from the students you teach? Describe how it impacts your teaching?
4. As you were going through your preservice training, describe the training you received in multicultural education? Please explain.
5. How are your instructional materials and curriculum selected for your school and classroom?
6. How do you plan a lesson for your students?
7. How do you build on students' knowledge and cultural backgrounds in your teaching?
8. In your opinion, how has teaching changed since you started in the profession?
9. How do you decide on bulletin board displays, pictures, and other visual images in your classroom? Please explain.
10. How do you decide on the books to add to your classroom library? Please explain.

Appendix B

Participant Survey

The purpose of this survey is to measure participants' cultural beliefs about race and identity in educational organizations from the perspective of its members. This survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. There are two parts to this survey, the first being a demographic section and the second being a content-focused section requiring you to indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with cultural and racial identity influences using the rating system provided.

1. Please write your full name here.

Demographic Section Please complete choosing the appropriate answer that applies to you.

2. Sex of Respondent

Mark only one oval.

Male

Female

3. Teaching Assignment

Mark only one oval.

Generalist (classroom teacher, ICS teacher, LLD/BD teacher)

Specialist (reading coach, math coach, gym, art, technology, etc.)

4. Number of leaders worked with:

Mark only one oval.

1-3 4 or more

Content-Focused Section: Identify your agreement level with the cultural and racial identity statement provided by choosing the corresponding number.

1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

5. Growing up, I lost important friends because students of a different race were not allowed in my home.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

6. I felt sad growing up because I was denied access to social situations due to race and ethnicity.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

7. I was misinformed about different races and cultures growing up.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

8. I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural, or ethnic group between 7 and 10 years old.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

9. I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural, or ethnic group between 11 and 15 years old.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

10. I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural, or ethnic group between 16 and 21 years old.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

11. I began to develop an interest in my own racial, cultural, or ethnic group when I was older than 22 years old.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

12. As an early adult, I talked and learned about racism in school and at home.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

13. I was empowered to be a change agent to interrupt racism (Tatum, 1992).

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

14. Teachers should take a cultural competency assessment within every 5 years at a minimum.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

15. I need to attend a course or workshop on cultural competency every 2 years at a minimum.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

16. Classroom teachers should use race/ethnicity as a guiding principle in instruction.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

17. I am consciously aware of my personal biases and stereotypes around racial/ethnic, gender, and other individual differences.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

18. Through personal life experiences I am familiar with social struggles that involve blatant discrimination (i.e., racial/ethnic, gender, religious, disability, etc.)

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

19. White children and children of color face the same challenges in accessing a quality education.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

20. On a routine basis, you disaggregate data along demographic lines to adapt your teaching practices to the race and culture of your students.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

Powered by Google Forms

Appendix C

Family Questionnaire

Purpose

Classroom teachers and building staff will use this questionnaire to develop lessons and learning experiences based on your child's culture, experiences, and background.

Child's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

What languages are spoken at home?

What are your family traditions?

How do you celebrate birthdays and other important family events?

What do you feel is the most important thing about your culture?

What else would you want us to know about your culture and traditions?

Appendix D

Culturally Responsive Lesson Rubric

(Adapted from Jean Aguilar-Valdez, 2015)

Curriculum: ELA _____ Social Studies _____ Science _____

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
VOICE The lesson allows places for students to work together collaboratively or to share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with peers and teacher.	The lesson does not have an opportunity for students to work collaboratively or to share their learning experiences.	The lesson has one opportunity for students to turn and talk to share their learning experiences.	The lesson has many opportunities for students to work collaboratively or share their learning experiences such as strengths and cultural backgrounds.	Throughout the lesson, students have opportunities to collaborate or share their learning experiences such as strengths, weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and interests.
DIFFERENTIATION The lesson provides opportunities for students to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.	The lesson activities have no differentiation.	The lesson activities provide one opportunity for differentiation.	The lesson activities provide more than one opportunity for differentiation.	The lesson activities are differentiated, and they provide opportunities for choice.

Criterion	Ineffective	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>COMMUNICATION The teacher communicates the main concepts in the lesson in several different ways.</p>	The teacher explains the main concepts in one way.	The teacher explains the main concepts in two similar ways.	The teacher communicates the main concepts in three or more ways.	The teacher communicates the main concepts in several ways depending on the students' cultural backgrounds.
<p>CONNECTION The lesson incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	The lesson does not connect to the students' real-life experiences.	The lesson has a real-life connection.	The lesson has many real-life connections and it represents multiple cultures.	The lesson has a real-life connection, it represents multiple cultures, and the lesson provides opportunities for students to learn about their own and/or others' cultures.
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE The lesson provides opportunities for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives.</p>	The lesson does not connect with social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson at times connects to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson provides several predetermined opportunities to connect to social concerns that affect students' lives.	The lesson gives students the opportunity to explore and research social concerns that interest them and that affect their own lives.
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION The lesson minimizes bias perspectives in texts and lesson concepts, so students have equal access, and they can participate openly with students from dominant backgrounds.</p>	The dominant culture is the only culture in the text and lesson discussion.	There are a few cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	There are many cultures in texts and lesson discussions/ explanations.	Students have opportunities to make connections between the concepts they are learning and their own cultures.

Appendix E

Culturally Responsive Classroom Checklist

Adapted from “A Resource for Equitable Classroom Practice” (Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant, 2010)

The classroom teacher or an outside observer can use the following checklist as a self-reflection tool or an outside observer. As you look around the classroom, place a checkmark (✓) in observed, if there is evidence of classroom practice, or not observed if the classroom practice is missing.

Classroom Practice	Observed	Not Observed
The seating arrangement accommodates collaboration and discussion.		
Bulletin boards, displays, and other visuals represent the racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students.		
The classroom uses a variety of visual aids to support the learning of all students.		
Some content vocabulary is in the students’ heritage languages.		
The classroom library contains books that have main characters of different races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.		
The classroom library contains books with different geographical settings (urban, rural, and suburban).		
The classroom library contains books in languages meaningful to students’ backgrounds.		
Students and teachers make connections and show respect and genuinely care for each other. Classroom community is evident.		
The classroom has a set of shared rules and guidelines. It is evident that the class created the community rules together.		
The teacher has high expectations for all students. Students have high expectations for themselves and they believe they can achieve them.		

Appendix F

Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric

(Adapted from SERRC, 2015 and Connect with Kids, n.d.)

Communication: The teacher integrates and connects traditions, customs, values, and practices of the students when communicating about new content.			
Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
The teacher's use of cultural traditions, customs, values, and practices did not connect appropriately to the content delivery.	The teacher makes cultural connection(s) to the content when communicating but the students have limited understanding of how the connection relates to their cultural traditions, customs, values, and practices.	The teacher makes cultural connection(s) to the content when communicating and most students can state how the connection relates to their cultural backgrounds.	The teacher makes cultural connections to the content when communicating using unique and creative ways so that all students are able to state how the content connects to their cultural backgrounds.
Student Engagement: The teacher uses students' traditions, customs, values, and practices to engage students in learning content.			
Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
The teacher does not use students' traditions, customs, values, and practices to engage students with the content.	The teacher uses the students' traditions, customs, values, and practices, but the majority of students do not seem engaged and/or motivated to learn.	The teacher makes connections between the students' traditions, customs, values, and practices, and the majority of the students are engaged and motivated to learn.	The teacher uses cultural connections to students' traditions, customs, values, and practices in creative ways so that all students are engaged and motivated to learn.

Questioning and Discussion Techniques: The educator uses methods to include all voices in the discussion.

Ineffective	Developing	Effective	Highly Effective
The teacher calls on the same student. The lesson has minimal to no discussion about the content. Students receive no encouragement to voice their opinion or add ideas. The lesson is teacher directed.	The teacher calls on individual students with little wait time. The teacher asks very few follow-up questions and student participation is minimal.	The teacher uses methods to include all voices in the discussion. The teacher asks a variety of questions to guide students to think about the content through the lenses of different cultures, traditions, or customs as appropriate.	The teacher uses a variety of discussion techniques that encourage student-initiated inquiry. Students build on each other's ideas and disagree respectfully. Students make connections between the content and cultures, traditions, or customs as appropriate.

Appendix G

Culturally Responsive Teaching Interview Questions

Teacher's Name: _____


Researcher: _____

The following questions are designed to see how well the teacher participant understands culturally responsive teaching. The results will guide teacher reflection and professional growth throughout this study.

1. How would you define culturally responsive teaching?
2. Based on your knowledge and experience, describe a scenario in which culturally responsive teaching practices would be appropriate in a classroom.
3. Explain how culturally responsive teaching could result in equality for all students.
4. Describe a culturally responsive classroom.
5. What are the benefits of culturally responsive teaching?
6. How might culturally responsive teaching and inclusion support each other?
7. What do you see as the challenges of implementing culturally responsive teaching?
8. How does your current English language arts or social studies curriculum support culturally responsive teaching?

Appendix H

“Curating Culture: What the Community Has to Offer” Brochure for Educators

<p>Add your own resources here:</p>	<p>Curating Culture: What the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Community Has to Offer</p>  <p>Using our Community Resources to culturally enrich our curriculums</p>
<p>What is our goal? We have seen the great things that our community has to offer. Within our community there are businesses, community centers, parents, families and students that have a wealth of knowledge. Our intent is to infuse knowledge from the local community into our classrooms.</p> <p>BELOW ARE CULTURAL RESOURCES THAT CAN BE ACCESSED AND USED IN YOUR CLASSROOM</p> <p>Hudson Valley Islamic Community Center Members of this community have been involved in Islamic and social responsibility projects for many years. The Hudson Valley Islamic Community Center plans to continue in this path. The center's goal is to provide religious, educational, recreational, sporting and social services to the Muslim community. Contact Information: (914) 528-1626 • http://hvicc.org/ • info@hvicc.org</p> <p>Community Resource Center Community Resource Center (formerly Hispanic Resource Center) is a community-based organization founded in 1998 to promote the cultural, economic, educational and professional integration of immigrants to the already established larger community and to advocate for those in need. We aim to provide the tools to prepare new immigrant families to become self-sufficient and active members of the community. Contact Information: 914.835.1512 • http://www.crcny.org/ • info@crcny.org</p>	<p>OCA [REDACTED] & Hudson Valley Chapter Embracing the Hopes and Aspirations of Asian Pacific Americans The mission of our organization is to advance the social, political and economic status of Asian Pacific Americans in Westchester and Hudson Valley communities. OCA seeks to: Advocate for social justice, equal opportunity and fair treatment, Promote civic participation, education, and leadership, Advance coalition and community building and foster cultural heritage Contact Information: http://www.oca-whv.org/index.html • info@oca-whv.org</p> <p>German American Social Club of Peekskill In 1936 a small group of Americans of German descent gathered to form a club with the purpose of preserving the traditions, culture and heritage of their German homeland. The first Club President was Otto Bollhagen. Since that time, many dedicated men and women have given their time and their talents to preserve the liberty, equality and tolerance of the new land they have chosen and to contribute, as club members, to the good of their community. Contact Information: http://www.gac1936.com/ • (845) 528-5800</p> <p>Indian American Cultural Association of [REDACTED] IACAW is the foremost cultural organization serving the Indian community of Westchester for more than a quarter century. Its mission is to promote a greater understanding of the Indian culture, art, music, literature, food and the diversity of people of Indian origin. Since its founding in 1973 by a small group of new immigrants that settled in Westchester County, the Association has advanced the knowledge of Indian culture not only within the County but throughout the tri-state area. Contact Information: https://iacaw.org/ • (251) 404-7736</p>

Note. The images show the front and inside of the brochure. To protect the identity of individuals and school district, identifying information is concealed.

Appendix I

Grade 3 and Grade 4 Pilot Lessons

Grade 3 Pilot Lesson: A Cool Drink of Water Before Revisions:

Objective: to raise awareness of differences in access to fresh drinking water around the world.

Essential Question: *What are the different ways that people get access to fresh drinking water around the world?*

1. As a class, read and discuss the book *A Cool Drink of Water* by Barbara Kerley.
2. Have the students turn and talk about the main concepts of the lesson. Have the students share with the class.
3. Discuss ways we get water in the United States and in our community. Show a SMART Board presentation about the importance of water conservation.
4. Students complete sheet *A Cool Drink of Water* individually or with a partner.
5. Wrap-Up Activity – Venn diagram/wrap-up discussion.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Lesson Revised:

Book: *A Cool Drink of Water* by Barbara Kerley

Objective: to raise awareness of differences in access to fresh drinking water around the world.

Essential Question: *What are the different ways that people get access to fresh drinking water around the world?*

1. As a class, read and discuss the book *A Cool Drink of Water* by Barbara Kerley.
2. Have the students collaborate using a carousel activity with photos from the book (“I notice/I wonder”).
3. Regroup for discussion of book and carousel.
4. Students watch the video *A Cool Drink of Water* on Chromebooks and reflect on how the story connects to their own life or culture.
5. Show a SMART Board presentation defining water conservation and ask students to describe what water conservation means to them and why is it important from their cultural perspective.
6. Students complete sheet *A Cool Drink of Water* individually or with a partner.
7. Wrap-Up Activity – Venn diagram/wrap-up discussion.

Homework:

Students create a poster or PowerPoint presentation with family about how their country of origin gets its drinking water to share and hang around the classroom.

A Cool Drink of Water Sheet

Name _____

Listen to this book and pay close attention to the photos. Your teacher will read it twice. Talk with your classmates about the pictures. Then you will do a carousel.

After the carousel, answer these questions:

1. Why do all people share a common need for water?
2. What is different about the ways that people get water?
3. Do all people on earth have plenty of water? Why or why not?

Grade 4 Pilot Lesson Before Revisions:

Essential Question: How did the Continental Army help to defeat the British during the American Revolution?

Mini Lesson:

- Define the Continental Army and explain the importance of the Continental Army.
- Show students pictures and primary source documents of George Washington and his soldiers in the Continental Army.
- Read a short passage modeling the “stop, think, paraphrase” strategy to highlight key details about the Continental Army.

The army was disorganized, barely trained, starving, and badly unequipped. The group was not united for too much of the war and led by generals often bickering, undermining, or fighting with each other. The victories, while qualified, are remarkable in this light. (Ferling, 2007, p. PAGE)

Group/Independent Work

- Have students read an article on George Washington and the Continental Army. Students will use the “stop, think, paraphrase” strategy to highlight key details and summarize the article. Explain to the students that they will *interview* a Continental Army Soldier by developing interview questions and researching the answers.
- Students will choose one influential soldier to research. They will create questions and research the answers.

Closure

- Revisit the lesson essential question. Have students share about the soldier they research in partners or small groups.
- Have students discuss what they learned about the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

Grade 4 Pilot Lesson After Revisions:

Essential Question: What roles and duties did African Americans have during the American Revolution?

Mini Lesson:

- Have students draw and color a picture of an American Revolutionary War Soldier.
- Have the students share their illustrations. As a class, make observations about the ethnicities depicted in the images students created.
- Explain to the students that they will learn about the important role African Americans played in the American Revolutionary War and introduce the lesson essential question.

Group/Independent Work

- Read the article to give students background knowledge on African Americans' roles during the Revolution. Students will use the “stop, think, paraphrase” strategy to highlight key details and summarize the article. Students will have the choice to read the article with a partner so they can discuss concepts as they read, or students will read the article independently. Since there are several Spanish-speaking students in Grade 4, students will also have access to the article in Spanish.
- Explain to the students that they will *interview* some influential African American Soldiers by developing interview questions and researching the answers.
- Students will choose one African American soldier to research. They will create questions and research the answers.

Closure

- Revisit the lesson essential question. Have students share about the soldier they research in partners or small groups.
- Have students discuss what they learned about African Americans during the American Revolution.
- After reflecting on the lesson, have students reflect on other major wars in which their ancestors participated. Have students research these wars and bring information to share to the next class.

Appendix J

CRT Action Plan

FRAMED PROBLEM				
What can we do to broaden our understanding of the local environment and community resources so that we can help our students to interact with knowledge/content more effectively?				
ACHIEVEMENT GOAL				
To utilize local resources within our communities to broaden teacher and student cultural awareness and perspective, consistently and authentically.				
OBJECTIVES				
1. Create and publish a CR Brochure for Staff and Parents that highlights a diverse array of resources amongst the community. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify resources in our community that are available to us (partnerships, utilize parents). b. Identify what parents/families have to offer the school community and curriculum. c. Identify what we want students to know. 				
SUPPORTING RESEARCH				
OBJECTIVE ACTIONS & DESCRIPTIONS	PARTY/DEPT RESPONSIBLE	TIME FRAME	RESOURCES REQUIRED	DESIRED OUTCOME
	PLC	MAY 2019	Parent Database Local Library Chamber of Commerce/Town Hall	Students make connections between their local environment, community resources, community issues, and the content. Educator’s plans include references and activities connecting content to the local environment

Evaluation Plan

Indicator 1: Educator’s plans include references and activities connecting content to the local environment.

- Educator’s plans reflect using the local environmental resources on a regular basis, i.e., speakers, field trips.
- Educator’s plans integrate the content standards with cultural standards utilizing local resources.
- Educator’s plans reflect the use of the local environment’s seasonal activities, i.e., traditional uses of resources for different seasons.
- Educator’s plans include elements to make connections between the students and the local environment, i.e., field trips, guest speakers, out of doors, activities, etc.

Rating Scale

Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Exemplary
The educator’s plans do not incorporate knowledge of the students’ local environment, community resources, and issues in the teaching of their content.	The educator incorporates knowledge of students’ local environment, community resources, and issues into the planning process; however, there is no statement of how the activity, lesson, or reference will connect to the content.	The educator incorporates knowledge of students’ local environment, community resources, and issues into the planning process, and there is a statement of how the activity, lesson, or reference will connect to the content.	The educator’s plans use the students’ local environment, community resources, and issues in unique and creative ways to make connections to the content.

Indicator 2: The educator engages students in learning experiences that integrate the local environment, community resources, and issues when interacting with content.

Example Student Behaviors	Example Educator Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Student artifacts reflect knowledge of the local environment. <input type="checkbox"/> Students demonstrate interest and engagement when using the local environment and/or resources. <input type="checkbox"/> Students’ attitudes and or behaviors demonstrate respect for the local community resources, i.e., respecting land area, personal property, other persons, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Educators’ activities/assignments facilitate making connections to the local environment and culture. <input type="checkbox"/> Educator uses the local environment, i.e., out-of-doors lessons, field trips, place-based investigations, etc. Educator organizes students to interact with the local resources, i.e., groups, prepared questions, graphic organizers, etc.

Rating Scale

Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Exemplary
The educator's use of the local environment, community resources, and/or issues had no appropriate connection to the introduction of content.	The educator makes cultural connection(s) to the content, but the majority of the students cannot state how the connection relates to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.	The educator makes cultural connection(s) to the content and the majority of the students can state how the connection relates to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.	The educator makes cultural connections to the content in unique and creative ways so that all students are able to state how the content connects to the local environment, community resources, and/or issues.

ADDITIONAL NOTES
