

ABSTRACT

The Impact of Quality Professional Development in the Areas of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Instrumental Case Study in an Economically Disadvantaged Rural Middle School

Emily C. Caldwell, Ed.D.

Mentor: Sarah Smitherman Pratt, Ph.D.

A problem exists for many rural and economically disadvantaged schools because teachers are not prepared to teach the students sitting in their classrooms. Each person has their own unique culture that helps them navigate the world around them, but what happens when the needs of the school do not meet the needs of the student? The use of culturally relevant and responsive teaching can help bridge these needs.

An instrumental case study suited my research because it allowed me to collect rich, thick data from the participants after experiencing training about culturally responsive teaching strategies. My research supported the advancement of a professional development series based on the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). The newly designed professional development presented information on culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching strategies to participants to explore, understand and apply these strategies in their classrooms. To capture the participant's application and understanding of the culturally

responsive teaching strategies, I utilized the following data collection tools: observation follow-ups, response journals, semi-structured interviews, and field notes.

The findings of the CRP professional development series revealed the importance of the three tenets of the pedagogy which are self-awareness, cultural competencies, and critical consciousness when bridging the gap between students' unique cultures and classroom learning. The participants engaged with the self-awareness tenet, and they started by building relationships with their students by taking the time to talk and learn about them. As the relationships grew, the participants created learning activities based on the needs of the students. Next, the participants explored the cultural competence tenet and found they did not always have to be experts. They could bring in experts from the communities and work toward building a strong community relationship. Through the lens of the last tenet of CRP, critical consciousness, participants discovered that by using collaborative student center learning activities, students were more willing to share their knowledge with their peers. This study implied that the consistent application of culturally responsive teaching strategies in a rural, economically disadvantaged middle school worked for all students and created a more positive classroom culture.

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The Impact of Quality Professional Development in the Areas of Culturally Relevant
Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching: An Instrumental Case Study in an
Economically Disadvantaged Rural Middle School

by

Emily C. Caldwell, M.Ed.

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Brooke Blevins, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Sarah Smitherman Pratt, Ph.D., Chairperson

Madelon McCall, Ed.D.

Jess Smith, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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DEDICATION

To my late father, Henry W. Coffield, who taught me the value of education,
not giving up, and that I can do hard things.
Throughout my life, he was always my cheerleader.

CHAPTER ONE

Background and Needs Assessment

Introduction

Students in rural economically disadvantaged communities across Eastern North Carolina (ENC) struggle to meet the rigors of academic performance. Students and teachers in rural populations face cultural challenges that directly impact classroom quality. Economically disadvantaged students in ENC experience fewer positive relationships with teachers and staff, fewer opportunities for collaborative learning, and less opportunities for field trips and guest speakers. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), 54.5% of economically disadvantaged students attending a local sixth through eighth grade middle school were not proficient in reading or mathematics for the 2017–2018 school year. This specific proficiency statistic directly reflects the academic reading and mathematics performance at the research site. Economically disadvantaged middle school students in rural communities across ENC struggle with reading and mathematics proficiency more than their more economically advantaged peers in major metropolitan districts (Edwards, 2021). Without adequate educational interventions for these students, their impoverished environments directly affect their current and future educational and social outcomes. I created and implemented professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) using culturally responsive teaching strategies to address the glaring academic proficiency disparity amongst rural economically disadvantaged children in Eastern North Carolina.

Teachers used culturally relevant teaching strategies to create positive classroom environments and student-centered lessons.

Statement of the Problem

Academic deficiencies and inequities in the classroom are common themes encountered by students across all socioeconomic backgrounds throughout the United States. Sacks shared (2016, early onset section), that “only 46% of three- to six-year-olds living in poverty are able to write their names.” However, focusing on the socioeconomic lens of rural communities, the issue of academic deficiencies and inequities in the classroom is further compounded as these communities are also becoming more culturally diverse (Johnson, 2012). According to Johnson and Strange (2007), 95% of the consistently poorest counties are rural. Compounding this cultural challenge, one in five children within these rural communities live in poverty (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Teachers hold a great deal of power in educating impoverished rural students. Fredrick et al. (2004), define psychological or emotional engagement as the engagement students have with their classmates, teachers, and schoolwork. Johnson (2013, p. 102) states, “everything that takes place in a school is built on relationships and validation”.

Armed with this knowledge, teachers should recognize that not every student learns the same or comes to school for the same outcome as their peers. Lynch (2014) shares that student’s living in poverty have limited worldly experiences, due to their inability attend pay-to-play field trips, and participate in extracurricular activities. In the words of Geneva Gay (2002), from her pivotal paper on culturally responsive teaching, “...teachers’ knowledge about and attitudes toward cultural diversity can be powerful determinants of learning opportunities and outcomes” (p. 613). In the learning

environment experienced daily by economically disadvantaged students, these determinants are particularly germane to the parents and families from non-dominant cultural communities who tend to feel unwelcome within the dominant culture engendered within their child's school (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

To help economically disadvantaged parents and families navigate the dominant culture of the school, some schools have taken the research by Ishimaru et al. (2016) to heart and installed what they have been termed "cultural brokers." Cultural brokers create a safe place to assist non-dominant cultures in learning how to successfully navigate both the school and the community. Cultural brokers effectively assimilate cultures to conform to the dominant culture of the school rather than forcing students and families from non-dominant cultures to find their voice and be recognized as a non-dominant culture.

Dovetailing with the work done within the non-dominant cultural student's school environment, schools leverage cultural brokers to retrofit parent involvement within the traditional educational framework (Ishimaru et al., 2016). The driving force behind many schools adopting cultural brokers and other inclusive cultural outreach programs is recognizing the need for school communities to move toward inclusive environments that celebrate all cultures, not just the dominant cultures. As promising as a cultural brokerage may be for schools faced with cultural divides, it is certainly far from perfect.

While exploring the idea and implementation of cultural brokers within the traditional educational framework, one of the issues Ishimaru et al. (2016) found was that the use of cultural brokers rarely provides a way for school personnel to learn from these students' families. Schools miss out on genuinely understanding the often-complex familial environment and challenges students and families face, particularly those who

live in poverty. Compounding the issue of cultural disparities, living in poverty can manifest as depression and directly affect students' learning outcomes (Roy & Raver, 2014). As evidence of this, students living in poverty often demonstrate academic and behavioral challenges to a greater degree than their affluent peers (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). To address the distinct challenges that cultural and economic disparities present in the classroom, including culturally responsive teaching strategies increases student engagement and student achievement (Masten, 2001). In 2019, the U.S. national polling authority, Gallup, released its findings from a 2015–2017 poll across 34 Texas school districts comprising 128 schools and 113,800 5th–12th grade students (Gallup, 2019) which set out to gauge the effect of student engagement on student achievement. The Gallup poll data provide correlational evidentiary support for their hypothesis that student engagement directly affects student achievement (Gallup, 2017).

Teachers need to understand and choose from differing definitions of student engagement to increase student achievement. Student engagement divides into three categories: behavior, cognitive, and emotional (Fredricks et al., 2004) According to engagement research by Fredrick et al. (2004), behavioral engagement is the participation and involvement, cognitive engagement engages thoughtfulness and investment to the activity, and emotional engagement is the connections between the relationships and the willingness to complete the task. This method of teaching is collectively known as CRP and culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The classroom teacher versed in CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies creates a welcoming learning environment for a diverse student population that increases student engagement. CRP increases student achievement through the idea that “good teaching requires good

relationships”, thereby emphasizing increasing student achievement through increased student engagement (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 136). Ladson-Billings (2009), states that culturally relevant teaching views knowledge as continuously re-created and shared (p. 88). Teacher support influences student engagement regardless of the engagement type; behavioral, cognitive, or emotional (Fredericks et al. 2004). Ladson-Billings states in her 1995 research, “the trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to “choose” academic excellence” (p. 160). If schools ignore their diverse student populations, student learning can remain stagnant, and engagement can fall (Paris, 2012).

Much of the reluctance to confront the growing diversity of the classroom population does not necessarily begin with the schools. Traditionally, teacher preparation programs in the United States prepared teachers to teach middle-class European Americans (Dilworth, 1992). This traditional approach did little to prepare teachers in areas like the rural southern U.S. where students living in poverty are more predominant than in more urban areas (NC Rural Center, 2019). Since Dilworth’s findings (1992), many teacher preparation programs have made great strides in preparing teachers to teach diverse student populations, in theory. However, many of these same programs do not have a direct student-teaching conduit to diverse schools due to geographic locale of many teaching colleges (Young, 2010). Theory is never a substitute for experience; thus, many programs do not prepare teachers with the practical experience required to teach diverse student populations (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Carter Andrews (2021) shares that teacher preparation programs cannot successfully train middle class white female teachers to teach students with culturally diverse backgrounds. In addition, Carter Andrews (2021) states that teacher preparation programs must have a clear focus on

cultural relevance, give pre-service teachers a diverse opportunity in the field, and have time for critical reflection to grow their sociocultural awareness (p. 418). Geneva Gay explains that student culture should impact the teaching-to-learning process and play a central role in preparing teachers for the diverse student populations they will likely experience within their classrooms (Gay, 2013). Ladson-Billings highlights three core tenets of CRP that can help when teaching diverse student populations: building self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. By coupling Ladson-Billings' three tenets of CRP with Gay's culturally responsive teaching, teachers can improve student engagement in a culturally and economically disadvantaged school. To the crux of the problem of practice and the strategies laid herein, Ladson-Billings' and Gay's research are particularly relevant within the current and future classroom environments of rural Eastern North Carolina. To this end, using the CRP framework, there is a clear need for further research in implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies in economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse rural schools.

Literature Review

To securely establish the need for further research in the practical application of using CRP to create and implement effective, culturally responsive teaching strategies in economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse rural schools, it is necessary to first look at the existing research within the field and how it pertains to this pressing issue. Within this literature review, I examine the foundations and progression of CRP, cultural proficiency, culturally responsive teaching strategies, the impact of critical race theory, poverty, growth versus fixed mindset, the culturally relevant classroom, school culture and leadership, professional development, and, finally, a synthesis of the overall literature

review. This instrumental case study draws from the information within this literature review that speaks to the pressing need for culturally responsive teaching strategies within economically disadvantaged rural schools. The literature review herein underpins how students from different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds benefit from school communities that embrace culturally relevant pedagogy through culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

One of the more observable issues casting light on the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy within United States schools (U.S.) stems from the curricular denial of African American culture as a distinct subject within U.S. culture beyond the conventional norms traditionally taught (Giroux & Simon, 1989). In essence, African American culture is not solely linked to or rooted in poverty and the legacy of slavery. Instead, it is a rich interlinking tapestry that touches all aspects of U.S. cultural development (Ladson-Billings, 1992). At its core, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy of opposition. To give more concise context, the “opposition” within culturally relevant education refers to opposing that which ignores the rich cultural reach and impact of non-dominant cultures within extant dominant cultures in the context of the diverse classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Rather than focusing on its oppositional nature, it is more beneficial to understand how CRP empowers individuals by applying three critical criteria to test the efficacy of respective pedagogy. Using these three critical criteria, CRP is effective if it empowers all students to engage with, contribute to, and even challenge the conventional U.S. cultural milieu. These three critical criteria are: (a) all students must experience academic

success; (b) all students must develop and maintain individual cultural experiences; and (c) all students must develop a critical consciousness through which the social order's status quo can be openly challenged (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

CRP focuses on student achievement and acceptance of student cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Pedagogy that centers upon student achievement while encouraging students to accept their cultural identities requires teaching strategies that recognize, understand, and critique extant social inequalities to fully understand cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Applying CRP to lesson planning relies heavily upon a teacher's understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and ideas about building a community of learners (Young, 2010).

The goal of CRP is for learners to want to be successful and excel (Morrison & Rose, 2008). For CRP to work effectively in the classroom, teachers need to see themselves as community members and use their skills to connect schools and the community (Boyle-Baise, 2005). In CRP research, a key element to achieving the school-community connection is the ability to link traditional learning principles with understanding and appreciation of different cultures with a particular focus on the diverse makeup of the individual classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

CRP is particularly apropos to the increasingly diverse U.S. classroom in its ability to provide deeper connections and ways of learning with learners of different cultural backgrounds (Ray, 2019). In striving towards its impact upon the end learner, there is also a distinct focus within culturally relevant pedagogy upon the instructor increasing their knowledge of self and how their experiences compare to those of their students and how to leverage this understanding to the benefit of all students (Jenkins,

2018). With the aforementioned in mind, classroom practitioners of CRP must engage in reflective practice (Yang, 2008). Incorporating reflective practice and understanding of oneself within the context of the diverse makeup of the individual classroom into classroom strategies ensures the practitioner is fully aware of their beliefs and assumptions and how these may influence their teaching (Ray, 2019).

Armed with this sense of self, teachers can leverage effective classroom strategies toward CRP that focus on student achievement and acceptance of student cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A pedagogy that centers upon student achievement while encouraging students to accept their cultural identities requires teaching strategies that recognize, understand, and critique extant social inequalities to fully understand cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Darling-Hammond (2006) states, “teachers need to understand the person, spirit, of every child and find a way to nurture that spirit” (p. 300).

As with any process improvement initiative or reform, for it to be effective, CRP must be fully integrated into every aspect of the classroom (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Equally important, though exceptionally difficult to enact, is incorporating culturally relevant education beyond the classroom—ideally within the home—to optimize student engagement (Gay, 2010). Too often, parents and community members alike are, at best, misinformed about the nature of student education in the classroom, which leads to a lack of reinforcement of student education and engagement away from the classroom (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Further confounding the school, classroom-to-community, and home disconnect is the often-negative information from low-performing schools highlighted by community talking-heads and media sources (Robbins, 2001). While common, this seemingly omnipresent practice is exceptionally discouraging and focuses

only on the deficits of the school and community and completely ignores whatever positives may exist and might otherwise be optimized (Gay, 2010).

Cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is a mindset of how one navigates a diverse world (Nuri-Robins et al., 2006). Cultural proficiency creates an atmosphere in which people interact effectively with one another (Lindsey et al., 2019). In normative society, privilege and entitlement left unrecognized, function as a negative and often create barriers within cultural situations (Lindsey et al., 1999). Culture and its respective diversity are not an option—everyone has a culture that may or may not be distinct from their peers (Lindsey et al., 2019). Within different cultures, familial definition tends to be the primary home-based support or detriment in children’s education once they leave the classroom and return to their home environments each day (Lawson, 2003). Teachers can address this disparity within the classroom and between the classroom and child’s home environment by creating an atmosphere of cultural proficiency—but they must be willing to be vulnerable, curious, open, and reflective (Brion, 2019). Thinking more broadly about cultural proficiency, it is an inside-out approach that largely focuses on individuals inside an organization and removes blame and guilt for cultural heterogeneity. Cultural proficiency requires time to think, reflect, decide, and change (Nuri-Robins et al., 2006).

Cultural proficiency is a proactive tool useful in any setting where the focus is behavioral, not emotional (Carmella et al., 2011). The cultural proficiency framework is a model used to shape an organization’s culture (Argyris, 1990). To improve the culture of an organization, the individuals must be willing to transform their behaviors using the four tools used to develop cultural proficiency: (a) the continuum; (b) the essential elements; (c) the guiding principles; and (d) the barriers (Lindsey et al., 2019).

In the first of the four tools used to develop cultural proficiency, the continuum, six points focus on unique ways of seeing and responding to diversity (Nuri-Rovins et al., 2006, p. 3). These six points explore the initial responses to differences. The first point is cultural destructiveness, which occurs when the organization notices and attempts to mute the difference (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2018). Cultural incapacity, the second point, occurs when the organization notices the difference, sees it as wrong, and removes power derived from this difference from the culture (Saul, 2020). The third point is cultural blindness. Cultural blindness occurs when an organization ignores cultural differences and pretends that such differences simply do not exist (Welton et al., 2015). Cultural pre-competence, the fourth point, occurs when organizations notice a difference, but the response is inadequate. At the fourth point, organizations observe limitations in controlling and accounting for cultural differences (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012). The fifth point is cultural competence, when an organization recognizes and fully understands cultural differences (Jenks, 2011). Organizations achieve cultural proficiency in the sixth and final point (Nuri-Robins et al., 2006). Thus, the continuum tool of creating a culturally proficient organization allows cultural differences to be noticed and responded to effectively in various environments (Lindsey et al., 2019).

The essential elements are the second tool for creating a culturally proficient organization (Gay, 2000). The essential elements provide standards for behavior in individuals during their transition through organizational change (Jackson, 2015). In the essential elements tool, or phase, it is necessary for individuals to assess culture (both their own and others), understand and value diversity, understand the many dynamics of

diversity, adapt, and assist in changing the cultural knowledge of the organization (Nuri-Robbins et al., 2006).

The guiding principles comprise the third tool for creating a culturally proficient organization and are the foundation of the cultural proficiency framework (Lindsey et al., 2019). The guiding principles outline how culture is a predominant and inextricable force within an organization (Walaszczyk, 2021). The guiding principles further outline that the dominant culture serves individuals differently based on cultural norms (Saul, 2020). The guiding principles also show that each group's identities must be acknowledged (Borkett, 2018). Further, the guiding principles teach that there are differences within cultures (Goudeau & Croiset, 2017). Finally, the guiding principles teach that the unique needs of each culture must be respected (Nuri-Robbins et al., 2006).

Finally, barriers are the fourth tool in the cultural proficiency framework (Lindsey et al., 2019). The barriers that interrupt an organization from being cultural proficiency are the presumptions of entitlement, oppression, and not seeing the need to adapt. These three barriers are often at the root cause when attempts at becoming cultural proficiency are abandoned or become stagnant in an organization (Carpenter-Song et al., 2007). The presumption of entitlement barrier is the belief that an individual's character defines achievements and societal benefits. Organizational and societal cultural barriers may overshadow one's character (Brion, 2019). Oppression—so palpable to the oppressed party—is often not acknowledged by the individual that benefits, such as youth in the face of ageism or the strong-bodied in the face of ableism (Hayes & Cheng, 2020). The inability to see the need to adapt rounds out the barriers to the cultural proficiency framework. In this barrier, individuals or organizations do not see the need to adjust to

the non-dominant cultural needs of others, but rather, that non-dominant cultures should adapt to the organization's needs (Weng & Gray, 2017).

CRP is informed by critical race theory. According to Mills and Unsworth (2018), critical race theory provides principles and structure for educators to discuss and deconstruct race across society. Critical race theory intends to be a movement that works at transforming relationships between race and racism (Cabrera, 2018). The five tenets that construct critical race theory are (a) racial power, (b) permanence, (c) counter storytelling of the master narrative, (d) interest convergence, and (e) the critique of liberalism (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 70). Critical race theory focuses on the effects of racism and hegemonic practices of white supremacy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Within the context of critical race theory, white supremacy refers to "... subtle and extensive forces in everyday mundane actions and policies that shape the interest of white people" (Delgado & Ansley, 1997; Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). Ladson-Billings (2013) found that using critical race theory can increase academic rigor and used the theory as the basis for developing the three tenets of CRP. In Ladson-Billings' 2014 research, she shares that practitioners can link learning principles with a deep understanding and appreciation of culture. Ladson-Billings created the three tenets of CRP to investigate the effectiveness of critical race theory in the context of education. She recognized that the three tenets of CRP, (a) self-awareness, (b) critical consciousness, and (c) cultural competence, best describe this contextual application of critical race theory. Ladson-Billings found that the interest convergence tenet of critical race theory is a strong underpinning to the three tenets of CRP. Interest convergence stresses racial equality and equity for anyone whose interest converges with the interest of the majority (Milner, 2008). An effective culturally

diverse classroom applies interest convergence through the lens of color blindness (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Though well-meaning in its intentions, applying interest convergence through the lens of color blindness tends to devalue the experience and realities of students of color in deference to the dominant cultural norms and does little to affect effective culturally relevant teaching strategies (Sleeter & Delgado, 2004).

To change the status quo of racism within the dominant culture, individuals must refuse the ideology that racism is non-existent (Gillborn, 2015). Milner (2008) represents interest convergence using the example of a bilingual program. In his description, Milner (2008) shares how Spanish-speaking students are bused to the best school in the district because middle-class families understand the need for their students to be bilingual in a diverse world. Milner (2008) discusses how teacher preparation programs often do not instruct educators on how to teach students of color because this focus is often not an interest of those who develop the teacher preparation program.

Culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is an alternative approach to educating diverse populations and is an effective tool for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2002). Culturally responsive teaching serves as a key element in successfully developing and implementing professional development and teaching strategies that follow the culturally responsive pedagogy paradigm (Gay, 1993). Six key characteristics encompass culturally responsive teaching: (a) validating; (b) comprehension; (c) multidimensional; (d) empowering; (e) transformative; and (f) emancipatory (Vincent & Kirby, 2015).

In the first of the six characteristics, validation, teachers must be aware of the diverse culture within their classrooms and how culture affects a student's ability in the

classroom (Gay, 2010). Teachers aware of how students' culture impacts their learning are much more likely to create an atmosphere optimally conducive to learning by incorporating instructional strategies that meet the needs of all students (Gay, 2005).

For the second key characteristic of culturally responsive teaching, comprehension, teachers must bring in a variety of texts and resources that showcase the diversity of the students (Gay, 1993). In this respect, Gay (2005) and Ladson-Billings (2014) share a common belief that culturally relevant and responsive teaching empowers learners, touching upon the fourth key characteristic of culturally responsive teaching, empowerment. Through empowerment, students begin to see themselves as learners and feel the academic success that was previously seemingly unattainable (Gay, 1993).

Multidimensionality is the third characteristic of implementing culturally responsive teaching, which technically comes before empowerment. A multidimensional classroom incorporates students' cultural backgrounds and experiences while eliminating obstacles such as negative attitudes and often lower academic and behavioral expectations of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002). Reality lies within the eye of the beholder, and the truth of each person's culture is how they see and experience the world around them (Vincent & Kirby, 2015). While we view our world through this subjective lens, we also become blinded to other cultures and how different their perceptions and experiences may be from our own (Agyeman & Erickson, 2012). This perspective teaches students to accept middle-class European-American norms as the barometer by which to live and act within society (Gay, 2002). Gay (2013) points out in a later article that "marginality is contextual and relative, and there is something positive and constructive among people and communities most disadvantaged in mainstream society"

(p. 54). Gay (2013) refers to teachers committed to transforming the learning so no group is seen or left feeling powerless. While not without its use and application, if we use this barometer without conscious acknowledgment of the different views, perspectives, and distinct experiences of other cultures, the deficits, rather than the enhancements, of these differing cultural norms will be highlighted (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Poverty and Education

Poverty is the lack of income or assets (Wages, 2018). According to Wages (2018, p.1), "...socioeconomic status is a large predictor for students' success in schools." Within this vein, Wages (2018, p.2) shares that "poverty is not an excuse for student learning, it is a barrier." According to a study by Perry and McConney (2010), school poverty has a larger impact on student achievement than individual student poverty. Due to diminished tax bases, rural schools within rural communities are often afforded far fewer resources than their urban counterparts, resulting in the community's poverty extending to impoverished resource-deficient schools (Azano et al., 2021). Wages (2018) discusses that often students in poverty live in overcrowded homes. This lack of privacy can impact the parenting skills that focus on monitoring school assignments and little participation in attending parent-teacher engagements (Solari & Mare, 2012).

According to Haberman (2007), children of poverty are not all destined for academic failure. However, Haberman (2007) points out that school and student performance is directly affected by the lack of resources available to schools restricted to per-pupil spending (i.e., no other revenue streams) in impoverished districts. This lack of resources affects the school facility and the availability of teaching materials and deters

highly qualified staff from seeking employment with smaller schools. Haberman (2007) highlights that the lack of funding in the per-pupil spending-dependent districts prevents smaller schools from fully responding to students' academic and social needs. Beyond resource disparities within the schools, there are also community academic perception disparities among parents and teachers. For example, parents living in poverty are less likely to participate in parent-teacher conferences because they are aware of their lack of academic skills and need basic concepts about their student's performance explained to them (Hammond, 2015). Similarly, faculty within impoverished districts are often lateral entry and lack the traditional teacher preparatory background or are brand new teachers with no experience (Wages, 2018). As such, faculty meetings in economically disadvantaged districts often perpetuate the pedagogy of poverty due to the need for administrators to explain seemingly basic concepts to their lateral entry or inexperienced faculty (Gorski, 2008).

Haberman (1991) describes the pedagogy of poverty as living, not the preparation for living. Haberman defines the pedagogy of poverty as school and teaching practices emphasizing lecture and rote memorization. Haberman further observes that teachers are involved with various activities that promote a pedagogy of poverty, such as parent-teacher conferences, the collection of data, and faculty meetings. Haberman (1991) identifies how data collection makes teachers prejudiced against their students' learning—instead of the data demonstrating what the student knows; it focuses teacher attention upon the student's deficits rather than their abilities. These activities, which underpin the pedagogy of poverty, reinforce and cultivate a culture of compliance rather than learning (Hammond, 2015). For schools to move beyond a pedagogy of poverty,

schools must foster a culture and life for teachers and students alike that is a life in and of itself and not merely preparation for life beyond the school and classroom (Haberman, 1991).

While much of the literature focuses on differences in culture in terms of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is essential to note that poverty is not itself a culture. Instead, it is an ever-impactful deficit experienced across all cultures and cultural divides (Roy & Raver, 2014). Through the adversity of their life experiences, students in poverty view their learning as a deficit inherent to their economic situation (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). An excellent example of this economic perception of environmentally inherent inequity is the distinct advantage enjoyed by children who are fortunate enough to attend daycare or preschool over those who are not. Students in poverty and too poor to participate in daycare or preschool lose out on the increased social skills and basic academic skills acquired by their daycare or preschool peers (Yoshikawa & Beardslee, 2012). As a result, the educational inequities imparted to students in poverty compared to their daycare or preschool-attending peers tend to snowball as they continue to rise through the grade levels (Aber et al., 2007). This early inequity often translates into the learned behavior by students in poverty of inherent inadequacy and their tendency to be dependent learners (Roy & Raver, 2014).

Perpetuating the early inequity extant post preschool, however well-intentioned, teachers tend to have low expectations of students because of poverty, language, or culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Perhaps partly to blame for this teacher bias is the observation that many students living in poverty fear failure and have difficulty forming relationships (Wages, 2018). To combat this inequity, effective practice for creating a

culturally appropriate and responsive classroom environment is to be aware of how the brain perceives actions as a threat or reward (Hammond, 2015). Depending upon the student's learned perception of their ability to deal with new information, their brain naturally attaches meaning to data as it is received. Depending on a student's learned associations, this meaning will be positive or negative (Seligman, 2006).

Rural education. Rural communities face unique challenges such as access to resources and geographic isolation (Murphy et al., 2003). According to Montgomery (2010), the depth of poverty is more pronounced in rural communities. The Rural School and Community Trust (2005, p. 6) states that "... poverty is the single strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement." Within rural communities, the lack of resources like grocery stores and the size of the geographic location plays an integral part in the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. A school or school system is poor when a poor revenue stream stems from a poor local tax base. A poor tax base means a poor school system (Bryant, 2019). A lack of revenue impacts rural school systems due to the need to balance funding between classroom materials, administration, and educators. Bryant (2019) shares that many states offer in-grant funds to rural school systems. However, these funds are provided with the attached caveat that they must be used on specific reforms, such as new facilities, busses, computers, or tablets, and not towards the basic educational needs of the students.

Shifting the focus from resources to the psychological element that affects teacher recruiting and retention in rural communities, many are concerned with the loss of anonymity that teaching in small communities and school systems brings (Bryant, 2019). Shafft's (2016) article supports Bryant's (2019) statement on teachers' loss of anonymity.

Shafft (2016) shares that rural schools are the heart of rural communities. Because of this, the schools act as a center for the community. As part of the community, teachers are held to greater accountability in and around these small communities—often inescapably.

The achievement gap. In the U.S. classroom experience, there is a distinct chasm between building awareness and the successful student attainment of actual knowledge, particularly between poor and affluent students (Dweck, 2012). More colloquially within modern parlance, this chasm between different groups of students—germane to this study, between affluent and poor students—is known as the “achievement gap” (Griner & Stuart, 2013). More specific to the achievement gap between poor and affluent students, Wages (2018) refers to it as the income achievement gap. Wages (2018) defines the income achievement gap as “any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance for educational attainment between different groups of students” (p.47).

Teachers, schools, and communities need to acknowledge the existence of a student achievement gap (Hammond, 2015). Culture plays an integral role in whether students can overcome this gap, requiring teachers to incorporate culturally relevant teaching strategies (Artiles et al., 2010). It is helpful to look to the intersection of neuroscience and pedagogy to gain a practical insight into the differences between dependent and independent learners and how culture and socioeconomics can play a crucial role in determining whether students will fall into the achievement gap (Hammond, 2015).

Dependent and independent learners. Pedagogically, students who are dependent learners are those whose education and knowledge are dependent upon rote memorization

and skills that are low on Bloom's taxonomy (Hammond, 2015). Completing these basic skills consistently without engagement does not allow students to engage in a productive struggle with the material (Porges, 2011). Neuroscientists have discovered that this productive struggle grows our comprehension, retention, recall, and understanding (Means & Knapp, 1991). Whether or not a student becomes a dependent or independent learner depends mainly upon the inequitable nature of education (Hammond, 2015). While the classroom, familial and cultural environment necessary for a student to be successful may not be available to all students, students of minimal economic or differing cultural norms are at a distinct disadvantage from their peers (Hammond, 2015). As such, many economically or culturally disadvantaged students do not have the opportunity to develop habits of mind to apply to more complex thinking (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

The inequity of education unfolds daily in elementary schools—the crucible of students' foundational knowledge essential to full educational engagement later in their academic careers (Brownlee et al., 2012). Students fortunate enough to attend preschool have already been taught how to “play” school and can typically identify colors, know the alphabet, have impulse control, and are ultimately able to move through the day more seamlessly than students who are not “school ready” (Aber et al., 2007). Teachers spend time with these students trying to bridge the gap while unwittingly creating a more significant gap for these students in the future (Aber et al., 1997). Hammond (2015) observes how dependent learners depend on the teacher to carry the cognitive load while independent learners carry most of the workload themselves.

Dependent students—those who are most likely to fall prey to the achievement gap—are passive learners and will wait for assistance instead of attempting to tackle

more challenging work on their own (Dweck, 2012). In their fervorous focus on mastery of the basics, teachers unwittingly stifle the lessons on higher-order thinking processes so desperately necessary for the future success of these students, which creates passive learners and propagates the vicious cycle of the achievement gap (Griner & Stuart, 2013). Hammond (2015) describes culturally responsive teaching strategies as recognizing and leveraging a student's cultural background to create a safe environment for students to learn and grow into independent learners.

The consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies and creating a culturally responsive classroom empowers students to carry more cognitive workload and move from dependent to independent learning practices (Dweck, 2012). The first step in creating a culturally responsive classroom is for the teachers to be aware of different cultures and know the lens of their personal cultural views (Marshall, 2002). The next step to increase engagement and move towards a culturally responsive classroom is to create an atmosphere of partnership (Yeager & Walton, 2011). By creating an atmosphere of partnership, teachers learn how to balance student support and care when pushing students beyond their comfort levels. Teaching students how to talk openly about their learning, inclusive of strengths and challenges, only enriches the classroom partnership atmosphere (Hammond, 2015). When initially creating a culturally responsive classroom environment, it is essential to use routines that support the brain's natural learning and connect to the students' cultures and communities (Farrington et al., 2012). Following this practice creates consistent routines for students and naturally conditions their brains to prepare to learn new information (Hammond, 2015).

The culturally relevant classroom. There are three cultural levels in the culturally relevant classroom: (a) surface culture, (b) shallow culture, and (c) deep culture (Hammond, 2015). Surface culture is our daily lives' visual and tactile culture, such as food and music. Shallow culture refers to the standard rules, attitudes, friendships, and nonverbal communication we must engage in to get through the day. Conversely, deep culture is where the unconscious assumptions and biases that make us who we are, are found. The deep cultural level is where one develops the lens through which one views the world around them and builds schema (Hammond, 2015).

Before a classroom can become culturally relevant, the teacher must acknowledge their own cultural bias and expand their knowledge on different cultural displays, not just the “holiday” displays (Gay, 2013). To this end, Gay refers to four crucial steps to implement culturally responsive teaching. The first step is replacing deficit perspectives (Boykin, 2002). The second is understanding critics' resistance to culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010a). Third, teachers must understand why and how culture is essential (Banks & Banks, 2010). Fourth, and finally, teachers need to make pedagogical connections within the context of teaching, which is to say, teachers need to focus on controlling and affecting the environment in which they have control—the classroom (Gay, 2010b). As evidence of this culturally relevant deficiency within the classroom, one needs to look no further than the local educational community, overwhelmed by the lack of student-teacher connections led by the divide in culture in the classrooms (Kozol, 1992). As Kozol points out, the lack of cultural understanding between teachers leads to a lack of teacher-to-student connections and perpetuates a cycle of cultural dissonance (Kozol, 1992). Addressing the culturally relevant deficiencies of consistency in

classroom management is an excellent example of clearly defined expectations when creating a welcoming classroom environment for all students (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Gay (2013) discusses that “cultural differences are an unconditional part of human heritage” (p. 61). To Gay’s point, educators cannot separate their cultural background and beliefs but need to be aware of these beliefs as they enter the classroom.

In addition to consistent classroom management and clearly defined expectations, teachers must build a strong rapport with students to build a sense of community in the classroom environment (Brafman & Brafman, 2011). As teachers hear about the importance and the need to build rapport with students, they are often left with no time to build these relationships (Offerman & Rosh, 2012). Despite the difficulties in achieving it, building rapport between teacher and student within a classroom atmosphere built around an alliance between teachers and learners makes for a significant cognitive edge for all students (Hammond, 2015). Educators must get to know their students, build connections, give positive affirmation when students accomplish tasks and create a positive environment (Offerman & Rosh, 2012). Additionally, teachers must foster trust in their relationships with students. To create an atmosphere of trust, one needs to listen with grace—to hear with grace is to be an active listener (Hasson et al., 2010). Give the speaker attention, understand what the speaker is saying, do not judge what the speaker is saying, and honor the cultural way of communicating (Hammond, 2015, p. 79).

After creating a relationship and partnership with students, it is crucial to become an ally in their eyes (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Becoming an ally takes practice; one must be willing to put in the hard work of helping students find the right tool on their own, rather than explicitly direct them to the tool (Gay, 2010c). Doing so will help the student

become more confident in their independence. It will go far in assisting teachers to be confident in their students' capacity to be critical learners (Banks, 2010). Students need allies in the classroom and need to know that there is someone on their side to help them fight the daily uphill battles (Gordon, 2004). When creating an alliance with students, it is essential to agree on the goal and the necessary tasks to complete the goal (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Creating the alliance aims to help students feel more confident and willing to take more academic risks and, in turn, create independent learners (Boykin et al., 2005). Another way to create an alliance in the classroom is through the lens of an asset, not deficiency—to engage the student's schema and move forward (Hammond, 2015). Ultimately, the culturally relevant and appropriate classroom is a partnership between teachers and students (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

A culturally relevant and responsive classroom environment is necessary for learners to build intellectual capacity. To build intellectual capacity, the learner must first process new information (Ritchhart, 2002). By processing new information, learners activate their prior knowledge or schema. The three steps required to process information are input, elaboration, and application (Hammond, 2015). In the input stage, the brain must filter what information to input. The data is presented first in the short-term memory, where it sits and waits (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). At this point, the new information is trying to attach itself to prior knowledge. The next stage is elaborating the information that has been recently input (Cabrera & Colosi, 2012). In this stage, the newly input information creates meaning. The third and final stage is the application stage, in which the brain processes data and actively looks for ways to apply it to new experiences and knowledge (Dweck, 2012).

A culturally responsive teacher will recognize which strategies are most appropriate and effective for their students and present new information their students can optimally process (Griner & Stewart, 2012). The brain needs time to process information, and processing presents itself as a cycle. The brain takes in information for some time and then cycles down to process the data. During this cycling downtime, the brain makes connections and creates meaning before applying current knowledge (Dweck, 2012). It is helpful to relate all of this to economically disadvantaged low-academic achievers. These students typically do not have the performance-awards-system-based school enrichment opportunities afforded to “normative” academic achievers. Examples of these enrichments are school visits to zoos and museums and other cultural enrichment activities (even sports), which these low-academic-achiever students miss out on because they could not master the basics in an appropriate timeframe. Thus, their cognitive learning process is inherently different from their peers (Roy & Raver, 2014).

Growth vs. fixed mindset. Building a partnership in the classroom cannot happen without a shift in mindset (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). A key goal in creating a change in mindset is to create self-efficacy in students (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). To instill self-efficacy in students, educators need to coach and support a classroom mindset that teaches and reinforces the “I think I can” cycle, which is a growth mindset (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Conversely, the fixed mindset is just that—fixed—and a person cannot increase their ability independently, “...they have what they have” (Dweck, 2012, p.7). Dweck (2012) describes how students with a growth mindset (independent learners) will continue to reach high academic levels while students who demonstrate a fixed mindset (dependent learners) typically plateau early in their education. Creating and fostering a

growth mindset helps students reframe mistakes as opportunities and continue working toward academic achievement (Hammond, 2015).

Having focused on the fixed mindset of the dependent learner and the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies to reach these learners, it is equally important to focus on the essential underpinnings of the growth mindset attributed to independent learners (Means & Knapp, 1991). Furthermore, according to ability, the literature delves deeply into honing the differences between a fixed and growth mindset (Han & Stieha, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). Within the frame of ability, there are two distinct and separate meanings. One is a fixed ability, and the second is a changeable ability (Dweck, 2012). As Dweck (2012) defines, the growth mindset establishes that a person's essential qualities can grow through effort, help from others, and applying learning strategies. Embracing a growth mindset requires students and teachers to realize that there is a choice (Means & Knapp, 1991). Although it is ultimately up to the learner to determine how they would like to react to a given learning situation according to their learned ability, effective culturally relevant teaching strategies can go far in assisting the fixed mindset dependent learner to realize their ability and move to more of a growth mindset independent learner perspective (Renaud-Dubé, 2000).

Dweck (2012) clearly articulates how students come into the classroom with a mindset already in place—either fixed or growth—and how this predetermined mindset and personal learning perspective play a more significant role in student achievement than effort. Dweck (2012) compares two groups of students: a fixed group and a growth group. The study shows a correlation between growth mindset students who believe they can complete more challenging work and achieve a higher success rate than fixed

mindset students who do not feel equipped to deal with challenging work and did not make significant progress. The study also examines how developing the growth mindset does help students progress; however, this progress shows a diminishing rate of return as ability levels begin to plateau (Dweck, 2012). Nevertheless, as students start to plateau in their ability, it is still essential to continually foster a growth mindset to mitigate a return or development of a fixed mindset (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Continually cultivating a growth mindset ensures that students remain engaged in the classroom and continue their desire and willingness to try new things (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Conversely, students who demonstrate a fixed mindset and are not challenged to move toward one of growth continually fall behind the progress of their growth mindset peers leading to an ever-widening gap in academic achievement (Hwang et al., 2019). This widening gap between fixed and growth mindset students is primarily due to students internalizing that ability level and outcome is predetermined and beyond their control (Binning & Browman, 2020).

Travers et al. (2014) study supports Dweck's theory on the benefits of the growth mindset. In Travers et al. (2014), students completed five stages in reflective goal setting: self-awareness, selecting suitable growth goals, visualizing future growth goals, identifying theory, tools, and techniques to generate goal statements, and applying growth goals. Participants in Travers et al. (2014) successfully identified what behavior barriers they faced, such as lack of self-discipline, and were able to work to correct these behavior barriers and move forward with their goals. Participants who followed the five-stage approach for setting academic growth goals managed on-task behaviors and improved their educational outcomes (Travers, 2011, 2013). Participants used self-reflection

journals and social engagement as personal accountability measures, which greatly assisted participants in creating and maintaining academic goals (Travers, 2011, 2013).

While Dweck (2012) established the mindset theories, and Travers et al. (2014) researched the benefits of using a growth mindset to develop academic achievement goals, it was Chao et al. (2017) and later Cho et al. (2018) who successfully researched the effects of incentives in reinforcing the growth mindset. Cho et al. (2018) further explore how external rewards can occasionally enhance motivation (Chao et al., 2017) and dive deeper into setting up an incentive system to support a growth mindset. Cho et al. (2018) compared different cultures to evaluate the most effective incentives across cultures. Through their efforts, Cho et al. (2018) found that student choice is the most cross-culturally effective incentive. The efficacy of student choice discovered by Cho et al. (2018) echoes findings from Hammond's (2015) earlier research.

Hammond (2015) observed that students must be community members or stakeholders in the classroom. Giving students choices in their education creates an alliance and partnership between teacher and student (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). Following Hammond's lead, Chao et al. (2017) developed lessons with teachers that explored the brain's inner workings and discovered how new connections, knowledge, and understanding are achieved. Chao et al. (2017) found that while many students respond positively to rewards geared towards increasing the growth mindset, students living in poverty saw mitigating results. These students exhibited a pre-determined perception that their academic abilities were unalterably deficient and were less likely to attempt new things or adapt to the growth mindset (Yeager et al., 2014). Students locked in a fixed mindset find it easier to be complacent than attempt something new (Dweck &

Sorich, 1999). Chao et al. (2017) found that external incentives effectively enhance or undermine a student's motivation. Whether an incentive serves to improve or undermine motivation dramatically depends on how the incentive is structured and presented to the student (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Thus, rewards must be positive reinforcements to increase students' intrinsic motivation (Dweck, 2012). The respective research conducted by Hammond (2015), Chao et al. (2017), and Cho et al. (2018), all strongly reinforce the importance of incentives when presenting challenging material, explaining the purpose, or the "why" of the material (Sinek, 2009), as incentives can create a platform for mindset transformation for students.

School Culture and Leadership

Schools often rely upon parent involvement at home with student learning as a remediation tool for low student engagement in the classroom (Ishimaru et al., 2016). However, parents and families who are economically disadvantaged tend to feel unwelcome and marginalized in their children's schools and will typically not engage with schools enough to make the home student learning engagement and accountability model beneficial (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Correspondingly, a student's sense of inclusion is directly affected by a lack of community belonging their parents perceive within the school (Hands, 2014). This sense of a lack of inclusion creates cultural and racial boundaries between schools and communities, often unwittingly creating a family-to-school disengagement that directly affects student performance in the classroom (Dyrness, 2011). Compounding the family and community-to-school disconnect and schools' reliance on parental involvement, teachers who work in economically

disadvantaged schools typically have less experience engaging with students' families than teachers in middle-class schools (Nieto, 2002).

As Hammond (2015) discusses in her research, the dynamic relationship between schools, teachers, families, and communities is crucial to increasing student engagement. In response to the growing call to address the school and teacher to family and community needs, the U.S. Department of Education (US DOE, 2002) urged school systems to move to a “dual capacity” model for family-school engagement. The US DOE model (2014) strives to create a partnership between families and schools. Through these relational partnerships and alliances between educators and students' families, teachers can help empower students to make better decisions concerning their education (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). As well-meaning as the 2014 US DOE legislation is, teachers know that these essential connections require better classroom decisions—decisions based on our behaviors and how these behaviors are affected by our assumptions or perceived truths (Sinek, 2009).

Historically, in the U.S. classroom, student decisions are made in response to manipulation and the employment of fear tactics (Sinek, 2009). People use fear when facts are secondary, engagement is tertiary, and production is critical. Schools use fear to motivate students and teachers (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). A germane anecdotal example of using fear as motivation within the school ecosystem is the practice of tying teacher bonuses to increased end-of-grade scores in math. However well-meaning, this incentive structure creates a vicious cycle of manipulation and anxiety within the classroom that inherently disrupts the meaningful teacher-to-student engagement necessary for authentic learning (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Sadly, manipulation is not isolated to education and

has become the norm in everyday decision-making due to the inconvenient truth that it works temporarily (Sinek, 2009). Just as manipulation strategies are not effective in the schools between administrators and teachers, or the classroom between teachers and students, neither are they effective leadership strategies in any situation (Carmella et al., 2011). Manipulation from administrators does not build a loyalty base with staff, faculty, or students and is even less effective in positively engaging with families and communities (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017).

To transcend outmoded methods of attenuating student decision-making such as fear and manipulation, an atmosphere of transparent communication must be established between teachers, students, and families (Hammond, 2015). One of the essential elements of a child's educational environment requiring transparency is the communication of the "why" factor (Delpit, 2006); however, effective communication of this why factor between all parties involved can be a daunting hurdle to overcome (Lindsey et al., 2019). Interestingly, communication breakdown occurs when one party takes extra care with what is said to avoid a misinterpretation of meaning (Sinek, 2009). What results is often a feeling of being talked down to or disrespected by the receiving party (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). Within the teacher-to-student and family communication dynamic, non-dominant cultures and economically disadvantaged families often feel powerless and demurred when dealing with their children's school and teachers (Roy & Raver, 2014). When a sense of unequal power exists between parties, particularly in the school-to-parent and family dynamic, the result is often a breakdown in communication (Sinek, 2009).

To combat the power disparity and avoid communication breakdown, Sinek (2009) proposes using what is known as the "golden circle of leadership" as an effective

tool to communicate the why-factor, how-factor, and what-factor when conveying an important topic between parties. The visualization graphic of the golden circle of leadership is concentric rings centered on a bullseye, with the why-factor at the center, the how-factor as the next ring, and the what-factor in the outer ring. Sinek (2009) places the why-factor at the center of the bullseye as it is the center of the outcome.

Neurologically, the why-factor is sympathetic to the limbic system, where our primal senses, such as loyalty and trust, are located (Hammond, 2015). A simple visual system to ensure communication of the essential elements of a decision to all vested parties increases the likelihood of ensuring transparency and promotes a feeling of belonging and inclusion between faculty and the community (Lindsey et al., 2019). Establishing the why-factor so all parties can relate gives everyone the same goal to work towards and achieve together (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Underscoring the importance of effectively communicating the why factor, effective leadership comes from creating an environment of trust where everyone is equal and accountable and no one party is in the dark (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). Successful communication strategies are integral to being an effective, culturally relevant teacher and can be effectively taught and learned by educators through impactful professional development (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017).

Professional development. Traditional teacher professional development effectively conveys general information about diverse cultures within the classroom (Gonzalez, 1995). However, general cultural information during conventional professional development does not provide teachers with the robust knowledge necessary to succeed in a culturally diverse classroom (Hammond, 2015). To overcome this gap in general professional development, leveraging a funds of knowledge (FOK) approach

when building a classroom community with students will create a positive learning experience based on what teachers can do rather than what they cannot (Hogg, 2011). Gonzalez and Moll (2002, p. 625) use this definition to define FOK: "... that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them this knowledge." This definition illustrates that FOK focuses on students' knowledge and creates connections based on their unique perspectives and life experiences. As Hammond (2015) and Dweck (2012) discuss, it is vital to focus on the student, identify what the student can do, and create educational and social-emotional activities that will foster funds of knowledge. Focusing on funds of knowledge with students will create opportunities for students to build schema, make meaningful connections, and enable the teacher to scaffold student learning (Gonzalez, 2005). To establish a fund of knowledge, teachers need a vast knowledge of social and cultural contexts to effectively teach diverse populations (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In addition to the cultural knowledge that the successful, culturally relevant teacher must wield, they must also have the right mindset towards their teaching practices (Spiess & Cooper, 2009). Like their students, teachers can have either a fixed or growth mindset regarding their profession (Aguilar & Pohan, 1996).

Cultural capital is a cultural influence acquired over time and influences an individual's way of thinking and acting (Bernhardt, 2013). In schools, cultural capital manifests in student self-esteem, self-image, and the trajectory of academic success (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). For example, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with academic foundations early on (Schwartz, 1998). As a result, these students experience a snowball effect as they progress in their educational careers,

often resulting in very low self-esteem and self-image and the development of dependent and fixed-mindset learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As one may begin to see, describing cultural capital is not easy; however, it directly affects power and social discourse between students and their teachers and peers (Bernhardt, 2013). Within the concept of cultural capital and students' self-perceptions, as a FOK framework, AVID directly supports changing how underrepresented students view themselves within the school power and social dynamic (Mickelson & Heath, 1999). Impressively, students participating in AVID present higher attendance rates and experience a much lower suspension rate than their non-AVID peers (Wooldridge, 2017).

Synthesis of the Literature

This instrumental case study seeks to contribute to the literature within the field of rural and culturally diverse education by first, understanding the need for culturally responsive teaching and CRP in the classroom; second, increasing student and family engagement; and third, developing effective professional development to foster culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy across the school environment and throughout the community. Gay (2013) states education should incorporate in-school and out-of-school learning to create relevant knowledge for the learner. The need for culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy in classrooms is essential to increase student engagement, support students toward a growth mindset, and empower students to discover that ability level is not predetermined nor indelibly fixed (Dweck, 2012). Through the journey of creating culturally proficient classrooms and overall school culture, teacher, student, and family involvement will improve (Nuri-Robins et al., 2006).

Creating culturally proficient classrooms and school culture will form an alliance that incorporates each family's unique culture to create a safe environment for all parties involved (Gay, 2013). The development and participation of the professional development central to this instrumental case study will equip teachers with the tools needed to become culturally responsive teachers and actively engage with culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers becoming more familiar with culturally responsive teaching strategies and techniques will naturally create a positive learning environment for students and their families (Gay, 2010b).

Culturally relevant pedagogy. Within culturally relevant pedagogy, the curricular denial of African American culture as a distinct subject beyond the traditionally taught conventional norms (Giroux & Simon, 1989) is palpable within culturally diverse rural classrooms. Effective practical application of CRP touches on all aspects of the rich tapestry cultural development within the U.S. (Ladson-Billings, 1992) can be effectively applied through the practical application of CRP. Though CRP and culturally relevant education are at their core pedagogies of opposition, it is the opposition to ignorance of the breadth, reach, and impact of non-dominant cultures upon dominant cultures and instead seeks cultural balance within the diverse classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1992). This cultural balance is achieved by applying the three critical criteria of CRP, which empowers students from all cultural backgrounds to engage fully, challenge, and become immersed in culturally diverse classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

The primary goal teachers should aim to achieve using CRP is for students in culturally diverse classrooms to want to be successful and excel (Morrison & Rose, 2008). To create successful, culturally relevant teaching strategies, teachers must apply

the tenets of CRP to lesson planning with an understanding of their students' diverse backgrounds and perceptions to build a community of learners within the classroom (Young, 2010). To create a community of learners, teachers need to see themselves as community members and use their position as a conduit through which schools can more effectively connect with the communities they serve (Boyle-Baise, 2005). Classrooms achieve the school-to-community connection by linking learning principles with an understanding and appreciation for the diverse cultural makeup within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Beyond the importance of leveraging CRP to foster greater school-to-community connections within the classroom, CRP-based teaching strategies can result in deeper connections and increasing learning outcomes amongst culturally diverse learners (Ray, 2019).

For CRP teaching strategies to be successful, there is a distinct emphasis on teachers focusing on their inward lens through which to gain a strong sense of self and understanding of how their own experiences and points of view compare with those of their students (Jenkins, 2018). Through this introspective lens, teachers wishing to successfully implement CRP must strive to align the needs and perspectives of their diverse students through reflective practice (Yang, 2008). Through the lens of the sense of self, teachers can more effectively teach the tenets of CRP towards effective teaching strategies in the culturally diverse classroom (Young, 2010). With a broader understanding of the effectiveness of CRP in teaching culturally diverse classrooms, it is necessary to look at the element of poverty in culture and education (Wages, 2018).

Poverty and education. Beyond the cultural challenges evident with the culturally diverse rural classroom, many rural classrooms exist within impoverished areas resulting

in poverty affecting many schools, teachers, and students alike (Azano et al., 2020). Teachers and communities recognize that “socioeconomic status is a large predictor for students’ success in schools” (Wages, 2018, p. 1). Particularly germane to the resource-deficient nature of schools in impoverished rural communities, school poverty has a larger impact on student achievement than individual student poverty (Perry & McConney, 2010). Due to their resource deficient nature and the lack of allure to attract trained teachers to impoverished rural areas, schools within these areas must often rely upon filling their faculty ranks with lateral entry teachers who lack formal teacher training or new teachers who typically move on to larger school districts after a year or two (Wages, 2018). Despite the additional challenges within impoverished school systems, failure is not the final destination for impoverished children (Haberman, 2003).

Since the literature and research focus on cultural diversity within the classroom through the lens of student and community ethnicities and socioeconomics, it is important to convey that poverty is not a culture in and of itself. Rather, the commonality of poverty in the classroom transcends all cultures (Roy & Raver, 2014). Unfortunately, many economically disadvantaged students view poor academic performance as endemic to their economic situation and get caught up in a learned pessimism (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). This endemic perception is often perceived among students of means who were privileged to attend daycare and preschool and those who were not with the prior achieving earlier academic successes through a stronger educational foundation than the latter (Yoshikawa & Beardslee, 2012). These early educational foundational advantages tend to snowball as students progress through grade levels attributing to achievement gaps (Dweck, 2012) between students in poverty and those with means within the same

classroom (Aber et al., 2007). Thus, the early inequity experienced between daycare and preschool attending students and those who do not have the same opportunities translates into students of poverty feeling inherently inadequate (Roy & Raver, 2014) and becoming dependent rather than independent learners (Hammond, 2015).

Corresponding to the despondency around lower academic achievement felt by students living in poverty who were not afforded the same foundational opportunities as their more affluent peers, teachers tend to have lower expectations of students of poverty and those with language or cultural differences (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Here again, we see that poverty is not a culture in itself; it presents the same challenges and is often relegated to the same treatment by schools and within the classroom as cultural diversity (Roy & Raver, 2014). Thus, it is more appropriate to employ culturally responsive teaching strategies to create a culturally appropriate and responsive classroom environment (Hammond, 2015).

School culture and leadership. Within rural, economically disadvantaged communities, schools often rely on parent involvement at home with student learning as an extra engagement layer to reinforce classroom engagement and learning (Ishimaru et al., 2016). A disconnection in this reliance often occurs due to economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse parents feeling marginalized or disenfranchised within the school and therefore not sufficiently engaged with schools or students' learning to affect this much-needed home and community support (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). The indirect creation of cultural and racial boundaries mitigates the family and community engagement necessary for students to achieve full support and academic success (Dyrness, 2011). Compounding this issue are teachers working in economically

disadvantaged and culturally diverse schools who do not have experience or adequate training to make these connections in and outside the classroom (Nieto, 2002).

A disconnect in the crucial interrelationship between teachers, students, schools, families, and the community is detrimental to student engagement and academic success (Hammond, 2015). Through relationships built on partnerships between teachers and students, schools and families, and communities, teachers can help empower their students to make better decisions concerning their education, leading to better outcomes (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). Teachers need to make better decisions in the classroom to foster these meaningful relationships between teachers and students, schools and families, and communities (Sinek, 2009). Rather than relying upon traditional hierarchical means of manipulating students through tactics of fear and intimidation which disrupt teacher-to-student engagement necessary for a successful classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2012), a classroom of trust and transparent communication between teachers and students must be established (Hammond, 2015). Central to establishing this trusting and transparent environment is clear communication of the why factor (Delpit, 2006) so that all parties clearly understand: teachers, students, families, and communities (Lindsey et al., 2019). Identifying and communicating the why factor central to student learning to all parties involved provides everyone with the alignment of student achievement goals and dramatically increases the likelihood of greater student academic outcomes (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Underpinning the necessity of clearly and effectively communicating this why factor is the need to create an environment of mutual trust, respect, understanding, and different perceptions endemic to the culturally and economically diverse classroom using culturally responsive teaching strategies (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017).

Implementing successful culturally responsive teaching strategies in the economically and culturally diverse classroom starts with teacher professional development. While teachers are exposed to general information about diverse classrooms in most teacher preparatory programs (Gonzalez, 1995), this general preparation does little to prepare teachers for what is genuinely needed to teach economically and culturally diverse classrooms (Hammond, 2015). One technique shown to have significant efficacy for teachers is to employ a funds of knowledge (FOK) framework within the classroom (Hogg, 2011). The definition of FOK is the knowledge a person has based on their unique life experiences (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002). To be effective within the economically and culturally diverse classroom, FOK empowers teachers to craft lesson plans to deliver information in a way that is relatable and relevant to students (Dweck, 2012) and culturally responsive across a diverse cross-section of learners within the same classroom (Hammond, 2015). Leveraging FOK within the classroom creates opportunities for students to build schema and make meaningful and personally relevant connections, allowing teachers to scaffold student learning (Gonzalez, 2005). Central to incorporating FOK within the classroom, schools must train teachers in different social and cultural contexts germane to diverse populations (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Perhaps most importantly, like their students, teachers must have the right mindset towards their teaching practices (Aguilar & Pohan, 1996) to successfully implement culturally responsive teaching strategies like FOK and CRP (Spiess & Cooper, 2009).

Concluding synthesis. As stated at the beginning of this literature review, there is a need for further research on the practical application of using culturally relevant pedagogy to create and implement effective culturally responsive teaching strategies in

economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse rural schools. This instrumental case study seeks to contribute to the literature within the field of rural and culturally diverse education. This contribution was accomplished by understanding the need for culturally responsive teaching and CRP in the classroom; second, increasing student and family engagement; and third, developing effective professional development to foster culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy across the school environment and throughout the community.

Theoretical Framework

I conducted this instrumental case study (Stake 1995) using the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy created by Ladson-Billings (1995). Research from Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) supports Ladson-Billings CRP research that teachers need to create a non-judgmental and inclusive environment for cultural backgrounds for there to be learning in the classroom. To conduct this study, I used a CRP lens, which allowed the development of the professional development and the data collection to the needs of building relationships with students and building educational experiences that incorporate students' experiences and culture (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). It is important to note that CRP focuses on the importance of culture in school rather than race and racism (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

CRP stems from ideals of critical race theory, which identifies race as a crucial consideration for culturally relevant pedagogy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Ladson-Billings (2001) shared that the “central reason for CRP is to respond to the school settings where students felt alienated, and hostile as characterize their school experience” (p. 112). The following five tenets underpin critical race theory: racialized power; the

permanence of race; counter storytelling; interest convergence; and the critique of liberalism (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). CRP—the framework for the research in this instrumental case study (Stake 1995)—applies the theme of the interest convergence tenet of critical race theory into a framework for educational pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP and critical race theory recognize the value of lived experiences by marginalized groups in their understanding of the world (Brown-Jeffy, 2011).

Ladson-Billings (1995) conceived CRP as a theoretical model that addresses student achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness that challenges inequities perpetuated across institutions. Ladson-Billings (1995) postulated that teacher ideologies and beliefs are the driving force behind school reform. Reforms fail because teachers are not prepared to change for the reformation to be successful (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Through Ladson-Billings' (1995) research, three tenets emerged of culturally relevant pedagogy: the conception of self, the development of cultural competence, and the concept of critical consciousness. Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses that the culturally relevant teacher needs to have self-awareness—the ability to develop students academically, cultural competence to support, nurture, and maintain cultural integrity while succeeding academically, and support and develop critical consciousness in students. Table 1.1 visually represents the CRP framework tenets and the definitions that guided this research.

Administrators and teachers must know that all students are capable of academic success (Hammond, 2015). My primary reason for using the CRP framework in this research is to help fellow educators to develop a community of learners that feel heard and appreciated. To build a community of learners, start by encouraging the whole, not

the few, and acknowledge that knowledge is not static but is shared and constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The CRP framework supported the culturally responsive teaching strategies in the professional development series because culturally responsive teaching strategies will help “find solutions in achievement disparities in school” (Gay, 2013, p. 54).

Table 1.1

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Framework

Self-Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Reflective action	Awareness of your cultural lens	Critique the norms and recognize inequalities
Recognize your cultural background and bias	Transparency and trust	Communication and collaboration

Conclusion: Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to explore how teachers in a local, rural, economic disadvantage, low-performing middle school understand culturally relevant pedagogy, apply culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. The case for this study is the CRP professional development. I created and conducted the professional development focusing on culturally responsive teaching strategies for the fall semester of the 2021–2022 school year. I offered the entire faculty and staff the opportunity to participate in a series of professional developments, for which participation was voluntary. Throughout this study, the professional development was delivered through five consecutive sessions from August to December 2021, with each session lasting no more than 45 minutes. My intentions for this instrumental case study

are to create a gateway through which teachers will engage and connect with students in their classrooms to increase overall academic achievement. During the professional development sessions, participants used strategies from preeminent researchers in CRP and culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 2009, 2014, Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

Research in professional development emphasizing culturally responsive teaching strategies in schools is essential for building relationships between teachers, students, and the community (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Professional development centered on culturally responsive teaching strategies helps close academic achievement gaps, support students' social and emotional well-being, and create a strong bond between schools and the community (Binning & Browman, 2020). This instrumental case study informs teachers and administrators of the importance of the culturally relevant pedagogy framework and culturally responsive teaching strategies throughout the school. It creates an atmosphere where students want to participate and learn (Hammond, 2015). The following chapter details the research design and methodology used to develop the professional development. The professional development teaches participants about CRP, and culturally responsive teaching strategies and how applying these strategies helps meet the needs of a rural, economically disadvantaged sixth to eighth-grade middle school.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Introduction: Research Question

My research uses a qualitative instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) that explores the impact that a CRP professional development has on participants' application of culturally responsive teaching strategies during instruction. The problem that teachers at the research site—an Eastern North Carolina (ENC) school—faced was a lack of student teacher relationships and an inability to make positive connections with their students. This problem stemmed from teachers not having the tools to make their instruction relevant to their students.

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to seek understanding of how teachers in a local, rural, economic disadvantage, low performing middle school understand culturally relevant pedagogy, apply culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. At the time that the research study was conducted, outside of this instrumental case study, distinct research on culturally responsive teaching strategies in economically disadvantaged middle schools did not exist. As such, this research study serves to help teachers increase student and community engagement using effective, culturally responsive teaching strategies.

I created and conducted a CRP professional development to assist the participants in creating a toolbox of strategies to make their instruction relevant to the needs of their students, build relationships with students, and families. The instrumental case study

design (Stake, 1995) allowed me to understand the needs of the participants as they learned and used culturally responsive teaching strategies in an economically disadvantaged rural middle school in Eastern North Carolina (ENC). I created a self-awareness pre-survey to identify what, if any, culturally responsive teaching strategies the participants knew prior to the study. The data for this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was collected through semi-structured interviews, field notes, observations, observation follow-ups, and response journals. This instrumental case study explores the central question: While participating in an ongoing professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, how do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural, middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply these strategies in their classrooms?

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

I was an employee at the research site, an underperforming Title I funded middle school in rural Eastern North Carolina (ENC), while the research for this instrumental case study was conducted. The location and description of the school setting are significant to the study because I attended a school very similar to the research location throughout my formative years. During these formative school years, I experienced first-hand the drastic differences in educational resources made available to rural schools serving an economically disadvantaged population compared with those serving communities of middle-to-upper class populations. Like most rural, economically disadvantaged schools, the public schools where I was educated did not receive the same quality or number of materials (i.e., outdated, or abused editions and not enough books for all students) that schools in adjacent townships received (Edwards, 2021). This is not

to say that rural school settings are bad or not as good as their more affluent counterparts—on the contrary (Farrington et al., 2012). There are, however, distinct disadvantages to living and teaching in a rural, economically disadvantaged community that are not experienced by more affluent or resource-rich communities and respective schools (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

In many rural locations, property values are low resulting in low tax revenue which causes these areas to receive less resources than schools in urban or suburban communities (Azano et al. 2020). To attract teacher talent to schools in rural areas, administrators must often resort to monetary incentives contingent on additional funding made available by the school district. When additional district funding is not available, monetary incentives for teacher recruiting are still used, but administrators must be very creative and decide what to carve out of the budget to fund these incentives (Lowe, 2006). Financial incentives work for a short time to attract talent but do little to retain talent within rural communities (Debra & James, 2001). Teachers typically use time spent in these rural schools to hone their skills to move to larger schools with more students, resources, activities, and support (Kasey et al., 2018). The talent attrition, recruiting, and retention cycle in rural schools leads to a constant staff-turnover ratio that often exacerbates recruiting efforts (Monk, 2007). As a product of this environment, first as a student and now as a teacher, I know first-hand the help teachers need and the lack of resources they receive to become more comfortable with their students' cultures to affect optimal student and family engagement. In rural communities, students and families need to feel a strong relationship to the school environment (Azano et al. 2020). According to research from Azano et al. (2020) rural communities have been marginalized, ignored,

and often pushed aside because of commonly held societal assumptions that rural areas are socially deficient.

Having attended a rural economically disadvantaged school, my perspective on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching strategies are examined through the principal lens of constructivism. Within the realm of constructivism and education it is important to note that constructivism places the learner at the center of planning and supports the need to build schema which in turn is a focus for the student's FOK (Hogg, 2011). As a constructivist educator, I believe that effective teaching and learning are based on building—or making new—knowledge with previously learned information (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Constructivism learning is an active process where students are actively engaged in their learning through real-life experiences and problem-solving (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Through the lens of culturally relevant teaching strategies central to this case study, I view learning as a social endeavor that requires conversation and modeling to understand concepts (Gay, 2010c). Indeed, the idea of culturally relevant teaching strategies is not new to academia (Gay, 1993). Decades ago, Lev Vygotsky (1978) discussed how students need social interactions and scaffolding within a culturally relevant framework to learn new ideas. Vygotsky observed that students watch interactions and then apply what they have witnessed to various situations to see if they will receive the same outcome. Through Vygotsky's approach, the learner is allowed to have their learning needs met with the appropriate scaffolding.

The constructivist perspective further builds upon the scaffolding espoused by Vygotsky, focusing on students' schema (Gay, 1993). By incorporating a focus on student schema, learning becomes more individualized; nonetheless, some students

require prior knowledge to be created because they do not have the previous experience or foundations to attach to new information (Gay, 2000). As a researcher, my view is akin to the social constructivism view, where learning becomes a social matter to gain knowledge (Morrison et al., 2008). Through the constructivism perspective, learning becomes more individualized upon reflecting on what has been learned as the student attenuates the ability to manipulate the information, thereby compounding actual knowledge and understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

It is worth noting that my view, and the case study contained herein, are also conducted through the lens of an active educator. Using this lens allows me to evaluate student (and teacher) mindsets and self-perceptions and how these impact teachers' cultural proficiencies and students' academic successes. The active educator lens further allows for my educational philosophy to be exposed. My educational philosophy is a progressive view of education in which students are prepared for an ever-changing society that builds upon students' knowledge and interests. Students need to have the opportunity to bring their experiences into their learning and evolve this new information into life-worthy content learning (Hammond, 2015). While researching the rural community and the schools that serve them, I determined that teachers need explicit instruction in culturally responsive teaching practices to become more culturally proficient (Jenkins, 2018).

Theoretical Framework Application

The theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009, 2014) informs the various aspects of this study's design. The culturally relevant pedagogy framework is derived from the interest convergence tenet of

critical race theory (Bell, 1980; Milner, 2009). Critical race theory has five tenets that make up the framework, and Ladson-Billings uses these as a basis to create the culturally relevant pedagogy tenets (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b).

The data collection for this study is based on Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy tenets: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. These tenets are the foundation for the culturally responsive teaching strategies and questions asked during the semi-structured interviews and in the small group professional development sessions. The central research question was created using the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy to identify culturally responsive teaching strategies to present in the professional development.

As Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) observed, creating a non-judgmental environment increases student engagement. However, such a judgment-free environment within the classroom is a challenge, for which Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2012) identify the use of culturally relevant pedagogy tenets as a good start. Culturally relevant pedagogy is the foundation that underpins culturally responsive teaching strategies and furthers cultural proficiency in the classroom (Gay, 2000).

For this instrumental case study, the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy informs the design of a pre-open-ended survey, semi-structured interview questions, and response journal. The pre-open-ended survey seeks to identify what the participants already knew about culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching strategies prior to the study. The semi-structured interview questions generate feedback on the usefulness of the methods taught and whether participants will continue to use them. The response journals collect what participants learned through the

professional development. The research question for this instrumental case study is: While participating in an ongoing professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, how do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural, middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply them in their classrooms? Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy framework framed my research question by giving me a foundation to explore culturally responsive teaching strategies to create a learning atmosphere that is relevant to the needs of the students regardless of background. Table 2.3 illustrates the content presented and discussed at each professional development session regarding the three tenets of CRP.

In creating the professional development central to this study, I started with a reflection activity to introduce the self-awareness tenet to the participants (Gay, 2010c). The goal of the reflection activity is to make participants aware of their thoughts and implicit actions. Further, the reflection activity shows participants how to teach students to be mindful of their own thoughts and implicit actions and how they can shape their perspective and learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies that teachers need to know that all students are capable of learning, which is the reason for developing the self-awareness pre-survey as well as introducing participants to CRP. With this knowledge, teachers begin to help students, and themselves, build self-awareness by building rapport and discussing different perspectives. Self-reflection is a learned skill that must be taught and learned (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In teacher preparation programs, preservice teachers need to be engaged in multiple opportunities to self-reflect critically according to Carter Andrews (2021). These opportunities allow teachers to push themselves out of their comfort zones and acknowledge their bias (Carter Andrews 2021). While continuing to

create self-awareness, teachers can begin to include diverse perspectives and a sense of inclusivity by using students' names and their vocabulary in classroom examples. This strategy increases engagement and allows students to speak about the example constructively and how it applies to them (Hammond, 2015).

Cultural competence is the second tenet used in the culturally relevant pedagogy framework and is equally central to this study's culturally responsive teaching strategies (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Cultural competence is an essential tenet because it is the basis from which people from differing backgrounds and experiences can interact effectively (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Building cultural competence in the classroom depends on trust and transparency between teachers and students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). The strategies used in this study to increase cultural competence depend on each party being aware of their own cultures and beliefs and the need to bring community members into the classroom to engage others on their beliefs and perspectives. As classroom facilitators, teachers need to be adaptable and willing to engage in crucial conversations to move the class toward cultural awareness (Nuri-Robins et al., 2006).

The third tenet used in the professional development within this study is critical consciousness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Critical consciousness builds upon the foundation of self-awareness and cultural competence, the classroom becomes a community of learners by building rapport, understanding, and acceptance of the different cultures in the classroom. Under the guidance of the tenet of critical consciousness, curricular assignments are created within a learner-centric focus rather than just curricular-centric (Gay, 2013). Real-world assignments are created that incorporate peers working together to solve the problem rather than individually. Friere (1970) discusses that students lose

the ability to learn and apply critical consciousness because they are being told to learn instead of how to learn. Friere further shares that the lack of critical consciousness has a detrimental impact on the ability to transform the world. Friere states, “Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (p. 35). As Gay and Kirkland (2003) discuss, an additional element central to critical consciousness is that teachers need to be given opportunities to practice self-reflection on race and cultures and have meaningful conversations with their students. Applying cooperative-based learning such as jigsaws and project-based activities allows students—and teachers—to explore different perspectives and start understanding each other’s cultural diversity. Culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledges the culture of students’ experiences, values, and understandings in the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted a qualitative research study using an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) approach by creating professional development to improve teachers’ awareness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching strategies via the CRP framework in the rural classroom. While designing the study, it became apparent that data collected will trend heavily towards qualitative rather than quantitative measures. The instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995) is appropriate due to the need for real-world teacher and student understanding and insight with the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies that support the CRP framework in the rural classroom setting. The instrumental case study design is also appropriate to explore culturally responsive teaching strategies to understand a social and human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative data

generation for this instrumental case study is based on teacher reflections, semi-structured interviews, and walkthrough observations. A qualitative instrumental case study allows me to capture participants' understanding and insights that emerge from the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in the CRP professional development case.

A case study, as defined by Yin (2018) is “an investigation of a contemporary phenomenon when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). The use of multiple data sources (field notes, observations, observation follow-up, semi-structured interviews, and reflection journals) constructed triangulation to ensure validity of the data. The multiple data sources help to support the a priori themes in this study. Constructing validity by organizing the data to identify the a priori themes provide this case study with rich descriptions of the culturally responsive teaching strategies that each participant used.

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) focusses on a CRP professional development at a local rural sixth–eighth grade middle school. The CRP professional development is intended for teachers who want to increase their understanding and application of culturally responsive teaching strategies. This study starts with a reflective pre-survey to gauge the teacher's prior knowledge of culturally responsive teaching strategies, and data are collected to determine what culturally responsive teaching strategies work best for participant teaching styles.

This case study investigates what culturally responsive teaching strategies participants use and how they apply these strategies to their classes. To gather participants for this study, I emailed an interest letter with the pre-survey and asked for volunteers for the study's professional development from the population of teachers and

staff at the Title I school where I taught. The instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) design serves as a window for me to gain a general understanding of the insight from the research question by studying how the participants in the CRP professional development understand and use the culturally responsive teaching strategies.

The strength of conducting an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is that it allowed me to target a small population of faculty to develop a quality CRP professional development focused on culturally responsive teaching strategies that provides them the opportunity to explore and apply these strategies. Through this study I was able to collect participant thoughts that brought overall personal value to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another strength of this case study is that the participants and I were able to construct meaning of the data as the research evolved. The open-ended questions in the response journals and semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to share their views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) focusses on participants understanding, interpretations, and applications of culturally responsive teaching strategies via the CRP framework in a rural underperforming, economically disadvantaged school. The faculty at the research site are 77% White middle class, while the student body is comprised of 60% African Americans from economically disadvantaged homes. When I created the interest survey to distribute to the faculty, I decided to make the questions concerning faculty's demographic information multiple choice. An intended outcome from the interest survey is that I want the faculty to be aware of examples of culturally responsive teaching and to create word-of-mouth interest

amongst faculty in the research study. I created the survey to distribute to the faculty to determine the level of knowledge the teachers had with cultural proficiency and culturally responsive teaching strategies prior to engaging with the professional development.

Site Selection

The site where I conducted research for this study is an at-risk, rural Title 1 middle school in ENC. The building was at capacity at the time of the study, and open enrollment status was suspended for the school year. A new building is currently being built on the property to assist with the rising number of families enrolling in the district. The research site was chosen out of convenience as I was employed at the site during the study. At the time of the study, the school had 908 students enrolled (Table 2.1). Of these 908 students, 107 students were identified as students with special needs and had individualized education plans (IEPs). Out of the 908 students, 493 are males (n=493) and 415 are female (n=415). Table 2.1 categorizes students within the research site by biological gender and ethnicity.

Table 2.1

School Demographics

Characteristic	Number of Students
Male	493
Female	415
African American (AA)	487
Asian (A)	17
Hispanic (H)	41
Native American	4
White (W)	295
Total Number of Students	908

Participants

The participants for this case study were identified by purposeful convenience sampling. The participants were sixth through eighth-grade teachers and a school counselor. The site where the research was conducted consists of 54 faculty members including school counselors, an instructional coach, teachers, and teacher assistants. Out of the 54 faculty members seven completed the self-reflection survey.

Participants were chosen based on the completion of the self-reflection interest survey. The self-reflection interest survey was presented to all teachers to determine the starting point of their self-awareness of culturally responsive teaching strategies and their desire to participate in the study. The self-reflection survey is a needs assessment for the development of the CRP professional development: I needed to know where the participants' knowledge level was, and whether they are a novice learner, intermediate learner, or an experienced learner. The self-reflection survey consists of four questions—two multiple choices, one short answer, and one “yes or no.” The first self-reflection survey question asks participants what they know about culturally responsive teaching, for which the choices are: (a) I know nothing about culturally responsive teaching strategies, please tell me more, (b) I know a few strategies, or (c) I know and implement a few culturally responsive teaching strategies in my classroom, but I would like to learn more. Participant answers to this first question informs me if the participants are novice learners, intermediate learners, or experienced learners.

The seven participants all chose option (a) ‘I know nothing about culturally responsive teaching strategies, please tell me more’. Participants' choice of option (a) informed me that respondents were novice learners. After receiving and reviewing the self-awareness surveys, I identified culturally responsive strategies to model and teach

during the professional development central to this study. I invited the seven voluntary participants who completed the survey to an initial informational meeting. At the initial meeting I received informed consent from participants by outlining the purpose, learning objectives, and expectations of the professional development that would be conducted as part of the study. In my description, I disclosed the strategies that would be the focus of this professional development. While all seven participants attended the first professional development session, only four subsequently attended sessions two, three, and four. However, all seven original participants attended the fifth and final session.

The three participants that only attended two of the five professional development sessions shared that their lack of participation was due to unforeseen circumstances with Covid- 19 quarantines and protocols. These three participants also shared that due to the quarantines they were not able to consistently meet the data collection needs but they wanted to assist however they could. Out of these three participants one participant shared that she needed additional time to adjust to the school because this was her first time working in a rural, low performing, economically disadvantaged school. The volunteers were briefed on the data collection requirements, permissions, compensation, and opt-out option (see Appendix F). Table 2.2 illustrates the subject or position held by participants, and the years of experience they have working in the school system.

Table 1.2

Participants

Participant	Grade	Years Experience
Bellatrix	School Counselor	13
Molly	Special Education (IDMO)	16
Sal	Math–7th	14

Participant	Grade	Years Experience
Gil	ELA–7 th	6
Petunia	Special Education–8th	22
Luna	ELA–7 th	22
Hermione	ELA–6 th	12

Professional Development

The participants engaged in professional development for this study throughout the first semester of the 2021–2022 school year. The data collection process for the professional development cohort consisted of a pre-self-awareness survey, three observations, three follow-up meetings after the observation, two semi-structured interviews, and four response journals. Initially, a self-awareness survey was created and distributed to the entire teaching faculty at the research site. The survey was created and distributed via Google forms (see Appendix A). This form was used to determine what level of prior knowledge the participants had with the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies prior to the CRP professional development. The data from the survey was used to determine what strategies will be best taught according to participant teaching experience: novice, intermediate, or expert. The survey was completed by seven members of the faculty and these members became the participants for the instrumental case study. I met with the professional development cohort face to face and reviewed the topics of the professional development and the different data collection tools that would be utilized in the professional development. Table 2.3 is an overview of the topics that were discussed each month at the respective professional development session.

Table 2.3

CRP Professional Development Topics

Month	CRP Topic	Self-reflection	Self-awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
August	Welcome and overview of CRP PD	X			
September	Goals and values toward education				
October	What are the three tenets of CRP?		X	X	X
November	CRP Tenets in Action!		X	X	X
December	Thank you and Let's Reflect!				

Professional development sessions one and two. The culturally responsive teaching strategies professional development consists of five meetings. For this study, the purpose of the first of the five professional development meetings is to introduce the topic and the expectations of the participants. The professional development introduction meeting lays the groundwork for the subsequent four meetings. The initial professional development meeting consisted of defining what culturally responsive teaching is, examples of culturally responsive teaching strategies and how consistent use of the strategies benefits students. The session began with the following working definition provided from Understood.org (2022, para. 1), “Culturally responsive teaching is a

research-based approach to teaching that connects students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school.”

Next, participants and I discussed how culturally responsive teaching uses the lens of funds of knowledge rather than a deficit approach to teaching and learning, and how teachers need to view students and families from a positive rather than negative perspective. We then discussed how culturally responsive teachers create high expectations for students and communicate these expectations with students and their families. During the first professional development, we discussed how adopting culturally responsive teaching in the classroom turns learning from teacher-directed to student-directed, allowing teachers to become facilitators. We then discussed culturally responsive teaching strategies and how to implement them in the classroom with no additional preparation time. The strategies that were provided during the professional development sessions were taken from Saphier et al. (2008) and Lemov (2010). A list of these strategies can be found in Appendix G.

The second session of the professional development met in September of 2021. At this professional development, only four of the seven participants attended. The purpose of the second professional development meeting is to discuss the true value of education and focus participants on the goal of culturally responsive pedagogy. Haberman (1991) posits that School practices emphasize lecture and rote memorization, which is referred in the literature as a “pedagogy of poverty” which is enforced by deficit thinking rather than funds of knowledge. For the second professional development session, participants were shown methods of culturally responsive pedagogy that move students from dependent learners to independent learners (Hammond, 2015). The professional development cohort

discussed the teacher and student partnership in their current classes and how they would like their classrooms to look in the future.

During the cultural competence discussion of the professional development, we discussed the need to be aware of one’s own cultural lens and how internal biases can serve as a barrier and impact the ways teachers implement instruction. In the critical consciousness segment of the professional development, participants discussed increasing peer engagement, recognizing inequity in the presentation of the curriculum, and teaching students how to problem solve real-life issues. Table 2.4 shows the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy and demonstrates the topics discussed during the professional development sessions.

Table 2.4

CRP in Professional Development

Self-awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Know what bias that you have	Aware of your cultural lens	Peer engagement
Recognize your cultural background	Create opportunities for guest speakers to enter your classrooms–virtual feed trips	Real-life problem-based learning
Funds of knowledge	Provide an equal learning opportunity for all	Recognize inequality

Professional development session three. The purpose of the third professional development session is for participants to review their values toward education, their goals for continuous use of the culturally responsive teaching, and to review the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Conducted in October, professional development session three again consisted of four of the original seven participants, Bellatrix, Molly,

Gill, and Sal. During this third professional development, we discussed self-awareness and what it means for ourselves and for our students. Next, we discussed cultural competence, and appreciating and celebrating cultures. Lastly, we discussed the concept of critical consciousness, which involves recognizing issues in society and taking action to address these issues.

As part of the discussion, participants volunteered ways in which they have increased their self-awareness in the classroom. Next, I shared Ladson-Billings' (2006) definition of cultural competence with participants, "...helping students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 36) which served as a point of discussion for cultural competence. The last discussion point in the session centered around critical consciousness and, using myself as an example, what culturally relevant teaching strategy I apply to support this tenet. As defined by Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 476) critical consciousness is "... recogniz[ing], understand[ing], and critiq[ing] current social inequities." The goal of critical consciousness is to create and provide equal learning opportunities for all our students.

The third professional development session ended with participants sharing what had gone well for them and how their students had reacted to culturally responsive teaching strategies. Each participant subsequently chose another strategy to use with their classes. Molly decided to set high expectations for her students. Bellatrix chose to call on each student during a lesson, Gill chose to consistently use student names in his classroom, and Sal chose to tackle rapport building with his classes.

Professional development session four. The fourth professional development session occurred in November. The purpose of the fourth professional development

session is for the cohort to review the three tenets of the culturally relevant pedagogy framework: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. The cohort shared their successes with the culturally responsive teaching strategies they had utilized over the preceding eight weeks. Each of the four participants shared how building rapport played a tremendous role in their classes. Participants shared that their students were having meaningful conversations with them, and that parents were also more supportive. I asked what had changed from the beginning of September until then, and they said that they were allowing the students to be themselves, and they were viewing students through a lens of achievement, not student deficits.

The next section of the professional development entails reviewing strategies and recognizing the hard work participants have done up to this point. By the fourth professional development session, participants had chosen to focus on strategies that are supported through the self-awareness and critical consciousness tenets. The participants created the next steps for the upcoming four weeks. Bellatrix chose to act as a guest speaker in several of the middle school classrooms. Molly chose to focus on using learning centers to support her students. Gill chose to use a digital field trip to create cultural competence, and Sal chose to target building rapport and gamifying his classroom activities.

Professional development session five. The fifth and final professional development session was held in December. The purpose of the fifth professional development session is for cohort participants to review, share, and respond to their experiences and perceived efficacy of culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching strategies learned and implemented in their classrooms throughout the semester. This

thirty-minute session culminated all the hard work that the participants put in. The session began with a huge, “Thank You!” During this session, each participant had the opportunity to share their successes with implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies. All seven participants were able to join this final professional development session. While three of the seven could not meet all the demands the core four did throughout the semester, they still brought strength and valuable perspective to the study. The semester in which the research was conducted was riddled with absences and stresses heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. To round out this final professional development, a visual was created to identify the culturally responsive teaching strategies that best supported each participant’s three tenets of CRP.

Data Collection Procedures

In this section I discuss the data collection procedures that I use in this instrumental case study. I use five different sources of data for this study: field notes during professional development sessions, three observations, three observations follow-up meetings immediately after the observations, two semi-structured interviews, and four reflection journals to triangulate data for credibility and dependability. I use Google Forms to eliminate bias and increase fidelity in the data by recording participants’ honest thoughts in a readily accessible medium. What follows is a further breakdown of these data collection procedures.

Data collection for this study began in September of 2021 and concluded in December of 2021. At each professional development session with respective participants, informed consent around the use of data received and progression of the study was discussed. Next, data were reviewed from field notes from previous meetings,

observations, observation follow-up meetings, reflection journals, semi-structured interviews, and field notes for the current session were taken. The first source in the data collection process was the collection of the pre-self-awareness survey. This data was collected before the professional development session began. The information gleaned from the survey was used to create the CRP professional development based on the needs of the participants. Field notes were taken at each of the professional development sessions. The field notes served as documentation of the taught strategies discussed and assisted in ensuring that strategies were communicated within the professional development framework. At the conclusion of the last professional development, the participants created a table to display what culturally responsive strategy they used and how it applied to the culturally relevant pedagogy tenets, as seen on table 3.6 in Chapter Three. Table 3.6 captures the participants thoughts during the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Participants were also able to share their experiences with these strategies with other participants and model how implementation looks and plays out in a real classroom.

Another form of data collected used in the study is response journals (see Appendix B). Response journals were implemented to document teachers' thoughts after their initial lesson using a culturally responsive teaching strategy taught during their professional development session(s) (Yin, 2018). The reflection journal allowed participants to reflect on the culturally responsive teaching strategy used and was a chance for participants to share feedback in a safe and honest space. The response journal also provided participants the opportunity to process efficacy of implemented strategies in their classrooms.

For the third data source, I conducted three observational walkthroughs. During the initial professional development meeting I asked the participants if they would allow me to observe them in their classrooms or while working with small groups, to which they all agreed. The classroom observations allowed me the opportunity to view participant using the taught strategy from the professional development sessions. These three classroom observations were conducted unannounced, without any pre-scheduling to preserve the natural integrity of the practical implementation of taught strategies. During these unannounced observations, I employed a field notes protocol (Talbert, 2021). For the template, see Appendix D. During the initial meeting with participants at the beginning of the study, I discussed the data collected from the pre-self-awareness survey. At the end of each session, I sent out a reflection journal (see Appendix B) with questions that participants were expected to answer in writing.

The fourth source of data collection used in the study is observation follow-up meetings. The observation follow-up meetings occurred immediately after the observation and allowed participants and to freely discuss and explore the implementation of the taught strategies and observed efficacy on student engagement. In addition to using the follow-up meetings to collect necessary data, I also used the follow-up to continue to build rapport with participants, gather pertinent background information, and assess participants' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices. I transcribed the follow-ups with teachers and facilitators and coded the information to protect all participants' safety and anonymity.

The fifth source of data collection used in this study is the individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C). I recorded participants' responses in writing and

with a voice recorder. I scribed answers to the semi-structured interview questions in real-time as the participant answered. While asking questions, I also took notes on the participant’s behavior utilizing the field note protocol during the interview. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to collect data-based insights on the understanding of the participants’ implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies taught during professional development sessions and the effectiveness and participant perception thereof (Yin, 2018). Data-based insights from these interviews were then used to determine if the strategy was appropriate for the class or the participants. Table 2.5 provides a visual flow representation for data collection throughout the five-month study.

Table 2.5

Data Collection Timeline

August	September	October	November	December
Pre-Survey	Observation 1	Semi-structured Interview 1	Observation 3	Semi-Structured Interview 2
Introduction to PD	Observation Follow-up	Observation 2	Observation Follow-up 3	Response Journal 4
Participant Signed Consent	Response Journal 1	Observation Follow-up 2	Response Journal 3	
		Response Journal 2		

After collecting data from this study, I created pseudonyms to ensure participants remained anonymous and data could not be linked directly to any participants. I created codes that reflected the three tenets of CRP: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. I then categorized the codes into themes. The coding system mapped data by the strategy used and whether participants felt the strategy was effective.

Data Analysis Procedures

For data analysis procedures, I brought together the multiple sources of evidence to answer the research question. I used the data collected to gain insight into the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Data was collected and coded based on a priori themes and deductive codes from the three tenets of CRP. During the data analysis process, I secured the files on an external drive. I took note of the deductive codes that emerged from the data collected and placed and categorized the themes based on the three tenets of CRP. Finally, I generated visual representations of the key findings from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The first step I took when analyzing the data was to organize it by hand. I decided to organize the data in the professional development series format. Table 2.5 show the month that each data collection tool was utilized and analyzed. I organized the data by the data collection tool and analyzed it by tool rather than by participant. I conducted professional development session one and analyzed the pre-self-awareness survey and this information gave me the road map by which to plan the other four professional development sessions. After the second professional development session I collected data from observation one, observation follow-up one, response journal one, and the field notes from the second professional development session. I organized and analyzed this information by first organizing all the observations together, observational follow-ups together, and response journals together. I used the field notes to help me to continue to build an impactful professional development to meet the needs of the participants. As I analyzed the data, I looked for the a priori themes from the CRP framework. The recurring theme of building relationships with students became evident. I then conducted

the third professional development and analyzed semi-structured interview one, observation two, observation follow-up two, response journal two and the field notes from the CRP professional development. I organized the data collected from the participants based on the data collection tool rather than by the participant. Next, I conducted professional development session four and analyzed observation three, observation follow-up three, response journal three, and field notes from the professional development session. The data from this session were organized and analyzed by data collection tool rather than by participant. Finally, I conducted the fifth and final professional development session and I analyzed the second semi-structured interview, response journal four, and the field notes from the professional development session. Table 2.6 provides a visualization of what topics were discussed each month and the data collection tool that was used to collect the a priori assumptions offered from the CRP framework and tenets.

Table 2.6

*Alignment of Professional Development,
Data Collection Tools, and Theoretical Framework*

Month	Professional Development Session	Data Collection Tool	CRP Tenet
August	Welcome and overview of the CRP professional development Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies Self-Reflection	Pre-Self Awareness Survey Field Notes	Self-Awareness Overview of the three CRP tenets: Self-awareness, cultural competence and critical consciousness

Month	Professional Development Session	Data Collection Tool	CRP Tenet
September	Goals and values toward education	Observation 1	Self-Awareness
		Observation 1 Follow up	Self-Awareness
		Response Journal 1	
		Field Notes	Self-Awareness Self-Awareness
October	What are the 3 tenets of CRP? Self-Awareness Cultural Competence Critical Consciousness	Semi Structured Interview 1	Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Observation 2	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Observation 2 Follow up	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Response Journal 3	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
November	CRP Tenets in Action! Self-Awareness Cultural Competence Critical Consciousness	Observation 3	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Observation 3 Follow up	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Response Journal	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Field Notes	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
December	Thank You and Let's Reflect!	Semi Structured Interview 2	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Response Journal 4	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness
		Field Notes	Self-Awareness, Cultural Competence, Critical Consciousness

After organizing the data, I read through it to gain an idea of the information shared by participants, then read through it again and generated notes as I read. As I

reviewed the notes, I spoke with the participants individually to determine if the data collected was an accurate representation of the participant’s experience. The participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies and how it impacted their classrooms and student relationships.

Once I completed my notetaking, I created a codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to identify themes around which to organize the data. I then transitioned into applying codes to the identified themes of culturally relevant pedagogy. I created codes using abbreviations of the three CRP tenets. I assigned the codes to the three tenets as follows: SA for self-awareness, CC for cultural competence, and RW for critical consciousness.

The codes revealed which tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy the participant used based on the data from observations, follow-ups from the observations, interviews, and reflection journal data. Table 2.7 is the codebook I developed to analyze the data collected from observations, follow-ups, semi-structured interviews, and reflection journals from the three tenets of CRP.

Table 2.7

Codebook

CRP Tenet	Definition	Codes
Self-Awareness (SA)	Being aware of one’s bias and the importance of creating a safe learning environment for students both socially and intellectually.	Building relationships; rapport; safe environment; use of student names in examples; calling on each student; gamify instruction
Cultural Competence (CC)	The ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own.	Guest speakers; virtual fieldtrips

Critical Consciousness (RW)	Student's culture as a basis for learning, communicating high expectations, and reshaping curriculum to reflect student's diversity leads to better educational outcomes.	Problem-based learning; learning centers; small groups
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These codes were applied to the culturally responsive teaching strategies that the participants used in their classrooms. Once the codes and strategies were identified, I began cross-referencing with the culturally relevant pedagogy framework to identify which tenet the participants choose to interact with. I then created a visual for the participants so they could see which strategies supported the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy (see Table 3.2).

As the participants and I met face to face in our professional development sessions, we created a visual to identify which strategies increased student engagement. The visual created during the professional development sessions is a table with the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. The table was completed based on the culturally responsive teaching strategy the participant chose to utilize and can be found in Chapter Three (see Table 3.3).

The use of field notes when observing the participants allowed for member checking the behaviors that I observed and gave me an opportunity to ask follow-up questions. The observations gave me a glimpse into how the participant used the chosen culturally responsive teaching strategy. Through these observations I was able to collect data using the field note protocol (see Appendix D) to view the participants understanding and application of the chosen culturally responsive teaching strategy. I

followed up with the participant immediately after the observation to answer any questions had and to member check what I observed.

As a collective group of four, we created a visual and added to each CRP tenet in each professional development session as a reminder of what strategies were chosen and to give participants the opportunity to ask questions and learn from one another. I recorded the semi-structured interviews so I could transcribe the discussion and determine the codes and themes from the conversation. I chose to analyze the data chronologically as it was collected and by data collection type rather than participant. Organizing the data by the data collection tool rather than participant afforded me the opportunity to look at the data and not the participant. This insured that I was not comparing participants and I was able to see what the data was saying rather than the participants, and this helped eliminate bias in the data analysis procedure. Analyzing the data as it was collected afforded me the opportunity to clarify any misconceptions or concerns that arose between the professional development sessions.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

I triangulated the multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of data in this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). To disclose my possible bias for this research, I shared my relationship with the site and participants in the researcher's positionality and site selection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected through observations, follow-up meetings after the observations to member-check information, response journals, field notes, and semi-structured interviews. I used the field note protocol developed by Dr. Talbert (2021) to take notes

during the professional development sessions, observations, observation follow-ups, and semi-structured interviews. Data from the response journals were collected through a digital platform and the interviews were recorded and transcribed by hand.

As I reviewed and analyzed the data, I used member checking to seek clarification on participants' data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected and analyzed between the five CRP professional development sessions while I was an employee at the research site, and I had a familiar relationship with the participants. Through my employment at the research site, I already had a rapport and collaboration built with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the CRP framework by Ladson-Billings (1995), through which I used the a priori codes for the three tenets of CRP: self-awareness (SA), cultural competence (CC), and critical consciousness (RW). I consistently read through data and made notations to create a coding system that represented the culturally responsive teaching strategies the participants used to support the three tenets of CRP. Using the coding system, I could identify and share with the participants how their findings supported the CRP framework. Through the coding process, I used the identified a priori themes from the collected data and created a visual of the culturally responsive teaching strategies used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of coding and triangulation of the multiple data sources increases the study's trustworthiness. The coding allows credibility of participants, the integrity of participant anonymity, and the dependability of collected data. Triangulation of the data provides a better understanding of how the participants used culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms to create a positive learning environment for their students (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The first ethical consideration in this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is not to harm the participants or the site. I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and documents required for approval from the school district in which the research site was conducted (Appendix E). Baylor University's IRB determined this study concerns non-human subject research and is therefore exempt from IRB review. I have stated research bias, such as my own background bias, my attendance at an economically disadvantaged rural school during my formative years, and bias I have as an employee at the research site and familiarity with the participants. In the initial meeting with participants, I obtained informed consent by fully disclosing the research question for the study, the expectations, and schedule of CRP professional development sessions. Participants were also informed of when, where, and what data were to be collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The administrator at the research study location granted me permission to conduct the study research. The administrator informed me of the research site approval via an internal email (see Appendix E).

To counterbalance ethical concerns with data collection during participant meetings, if participants asked for a comment to be removed from their data I marked through the data with a dark sharpie and showed them that the data had been removed. As a five-year employee at the research site, I had a familiar relationship with the participants prior to the research being conducted. To remove bias from responses received from the participants I used digital platforms to collect response journals. I analyzed the data by hand between each CRP professional development session to ensure

that information being provided addressed the needs of the participants. I also member checked with each participant to ensure the data collected was correct (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used a priori codes from the CRP framework, and I created a codebook to address the themes that emerged from the participants' use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. I used pseudonyms to provide anonymity with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I maintained full disclosure of the research and consistently practiced confidentiality with the data analysis procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I maintained copies of the permission to conduct research and made an opt-out form if any participants chose to withdraw from the research, a copy of this form is in Appendix F. I also created a visual for the CRP professional development sessions demonstrating the culturally responsive teaching strategy and the CRP tenet it supported. This visual illustrated the work that had been completed during the CRP professional development.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are variables that researchers are not able to control. The limitations of this instrumental case study were a small sample size, research conducted during the global pandemic Covid-19, and inconsistency of participant involvement. The purpose of this instrumental case study is to seek participants' understanding on the use and application of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms. The case for this instrumental case study is the CRP professional development series. I chose the professional development as my case because I want to help the reader understand a real-life situation (Yin, 2018 p. 30) and answer the following research question while

participating in an ongoing professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy: ‘How do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural, middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply these strategies in their classrooms.’ The professional development was created using Ladson-Billings (2014) CRP tenets as the framework and Gay’s research on culturally responsive teaching strategies. The participants were bounded by the CRP professional development (Yin, 2018).

A limitation is the small sample size. The site had 54 possible participants from which seven volunteered. Out of the seven participants who volunteered, four completed all the data collection and professional development sessions within the case. The small number of participants in this instrumental case study offers a small sample of the classroom discoveries of applying culturally responsive teaching strategies to lessons.

The global pandemic Covid-19 is the most impactful limitation in this study. The impact of quarantines and safety protocols caused some participants to only participate periodically and slowed my data collection procedures. I had to rearrange data collection timelines because of Covid-19 safety protocols and participant quarantines. The lack of overall participant volunteers and the inconsistency of participant involvement was directly due to the Covid-19 safety protocols. Three of the seven participants were unable to participate fully in the CRP professional development sessions because of chronic absences caused by Covid-19 safety protocols. All the participants participated when they were available.

Delimitations are the boundaries set by the researcher, and delimitations of this instrumental case study are the research site—an economically disadvantaged rural middle school—time constraints, and the instrumental case study design. The first limitation is the researcher’s knowledge of the site and participants. This is seen as a limitation because this knowledge might cause bias in data collection and analysis. I used triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and multiple data sources to ensure validity and reliability. I also used a digital platform to collect individual response journals to decrease bias, and member checked (Creswell & Poth, 2018) with each participant to ensure the data collected was correct.

The research site limited the study because it was only available to faculty and staff that worked at the site. The site was chosen because I was employed at the research site and had knowledge of both the research site and the participants. Another delimitation of this research is the time constraint to conduct the study. I had the fall 2021 semester, August–December, in which to conduct the study. I had a semester to conduct research and the case study with seven school faculty participants. Only having seven participants was a benefit because I had more time to collect and analyze data. The case study design allowed me the opportunity to collect and analyze multiple sources of evidence and triangulate the evidence to ensure validity and reliability (Yin, 2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to seek understanding of how teachers in a local, rural, economically disadvantaged, low performing middle

school understand culturally relevant pedagogy, applied culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. The study employs the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy to support and direct culturally responsive teaching strategies taught to and learned by participants during the five-month professional development created for this study. The participants consist of seven total, comprised of five white females and two white males. The participants' teacher or facilitator levels are broken down as follows: one female sixth–eighth grade school counselor, one female sixth–eighth-grade exceptional children teacher (self-contained setting); one female eighth-grade exceptional students' teacher; one female sixth grade English language arts teacher; one male and one female seventh grade English language arts teacher; and one male seventh-grade math teacher.

Participant data were gathered and analyzed using category organization with unannounced observations, observation follow-up meetings, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and response journals. The data was then triangulated by summarizing, identifying codes, and placing these codes into recurring themes. During the study's professional development sessions, I shared the data with participants using the culturally relevant pedagogy visual to identify which tenet—self-awareness, cultural competence, or critical consciousness—impacts student engagement. Chapter Three reflects upon the data collected for this instrumental case study and determines which culturally responsive teaching strategies increase student engagement.

CHAPTER THREE

Results and Implications

Introduction

The participants for this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) had the opportunity to participate in a series of five professional development sessions addressing the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies through the culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) framework. The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to seek understanding on how teachers in a local, rural, economic disadvantage, low performing middle school understood culturally relevant pedagogy, applied culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflected on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. This research answers the following research question: ‘while participating in an ongoing professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, how do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply these strategies in their classrooms?’

Professional development session one was an introduction to the professional development. In this session expectations and general information were shared such as expectations of the professional development as well as getting signed informed consent with an opt out option in the likelihood someone wanted to leave the study. In sessions two through four, participants learned about the three tenets of CRP and how to understand and apply culturally responsive teaching strategies. The fifth professional development session was used as a celebration for the participants and served as an

opportunity for participants to reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies learned throughout the professional development sessions.

The data for this instrumental case study was collected using response journals, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, observational follow-up, and field notes from the participants at a rural economic middle school in ENC. A key finding the participants discovered is that building strong relationships with their students was a game changer for them. The participants found that building strong relationships with their students provided the opportunity to understand their students' interests and to communicate with their students more effectively. This relates to the first tenet of CRP, self-awareness. Through the lens of the self-awareness tenet of CRP, participants discovered that they neither knew their students as well as they thought, nor understood their interests. Another key finding for participants was that the use of problem based learning and center teaching and learning was effective in increasing student engagement. A notable outcome from a couple of the participants was the use of virtual fieldtrips to increase background knowledge for students. The data collected from the participants in this study answers the following question: in what ways do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural, middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply them in their classrooms?

I used a priori assumptions present in the CRP framework to determine which culturally responsive teaching strategies the participants chose, used, and reflected on in their classrooms. Chapter Three is divided into case description, qualitative data findings, thematic analysis, emergent themes, and implications and recommendations. The case description section contains an overview about the CRP professional development

sessions as well as information about the seven participants who engaged with the professional development sessions. In the qualitative data findings, I go into greater detail about the professional development sessions and data collected. The data were collected between each CRP professional development session for which the data collection schedule can be viewed on Table 2.5. The qualitative data findings section highlights the culturally responsive teaching strategies the participant used and their findings. Within the thematic analysis section, I discuss the themes that emerged in the first cycle coding and second cycle and the application to the CRP framework. In the implications section I describe how participants discovered that through the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies they created a more positive classroom environment. I conclude this chapter with an overall summary of the participants' findings.

Case Description

I defined the case for this research study to be the CRP professional development series. The CRP professional development series focused on how the participants understood and used culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms. I described the participants in the professional development and outlined how I collected data chronologically, which occurred during observations, professional development sessions, interviews, and response journals, which all occurred between professional development sessions and observations. During observations, I collected individual participants' words and actions. I also noted how the students as a collective group engaged during instruction to offer a complete reflection of the observation. During professional development sessions, I collected conversations from group interactions. I initiated the topic for discussion and then took field notes on the conversation that

ensued. I conducted semi-structured interviews after the second and fifth professional development sessions. Lastly, participants recorded reflections in their response journals after each professional development and observation. Altogether the data collection provided a detailed description of the case.

There was a total of seven educators across various disciplines who participated in this instrumental case study. The participants for this case study volunteered after completing a prior knowledge survey and coming to the first professional development and introduction session. In this case study there were two middle class white male and five middle class white female participants. Out of the seven participants, six were teachers and one was a school counselor. Four of the seven participants fully participated in this research, which means they attended the five professional development sessions, participated in two semi-structured interviews, completed four response journals, and had three observations followed by three observation follow-ups. Due to Covid-19 protocols and safety measures not all the participants were able to attend all sessions and participate in all data collection measures. Three of the seven participants attended the first and last professional development session. Table 3.1 shows the participants' attendance in the professional development.

Molly is a self-contained special education teacher at the middle school. She has taught in a self-contained setting for sixteen years. She is a National Board-Certified teacher (NBCT) and a lifelong learner. As a self-contained special education teacher, she teaches grades six through eight, and the students in her classroom have moderate to severe disabilities. Molly volunteered to participate in the research because she wanted to learn how to better engage with her students.

Table 3.1

Participant's Attendance

Participants	Professional Development	Topic Discussed
Molly Bellatrix Gill Sal Luna Hermione Petunia	1	Introduction and Expectation What is Culturally responsive teaching? What can I expect to glean from this professional development? Let's become Self- Aware
Molly Bellatrix Gill Sal	2	What is the goal of culturally responsive teaching and what is its value toward education? Let's review be aware of our own views and values
Molly Bellatrix Gill Sal	3	Let's move our students from dependent learners to self-directed learners! CRP has 3 tenets lets learn about them and how they can help your students. Self-awareness Cultural Competence Critical Consciousness
Molly Bellatrix Gill Sal	4	Let's review our CRP Tenets! Self-Awareness Cultural Competence Critical Consciousness
Molly Bellatrix Gill Sal Luna Hermione Petunia	5	Let's Wrap it Up! Thank you! Pluses and wishes

Molly shared that she often struggles to make connections with some of her students, and she would like to learn strategies that will help her build relationships with her students.

Petunia is a resource special education teacher in the eighth grade with twenty-two years of experience. As a resource teacher, Petunia works with her eighth-grade caseload to ensure they are receiving their specially designed instruction and accommodations. Petunia shared that her expectation for professional development was to learn ways to engage students that are not digital. Petunia shared that she has strong relationships with her students, but when giving them a break, she defaults to using a Chromebook or cell phone for free time.

Bellatrix is a school counselor in her 13th year in this role. She works closely with students, teachers, parents, and community organizations to ensure the needs of the students are being met. Bellatrix volunteered to participate in the study because she was looking for ways to engage students in small group settings. She often works with students in the 1:1 setting and was interested in exploring strategies to increase engagement in the small and whole group setting. Bellatrix applied the culturally responsive teaching strategies to both her small group student meetings and the large group classroom lessons.

Gill is one of the school's seventh-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. He has been an ELA teacher for six years. Gill volunteered to participate in the study because he wanted to learn strategies that can help him increase student engagement. His goal was to move from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-led classroom. Gill knew his students and their interests, but he struggled with letting go of control of the classroom.

Another seventh-grade ELA teacher is Luna. This was her first year at the school; she taught in Arkansas for twenty-two years before transitioning to ENC. Luna stated that her goal was to learn how to relate to the students at the school. She shared that the school demographic is different than where she taught before.

Sal is a seventh-grade male math teacher with fourteen years of experience. Sal interned at this school fifteen years ago, and he cannot see himself anywhere but here. Sal is a structured teacher with a militant discipline. He holds a black belt in taekwondo from the town dojo owned and operated by his father. Sal shared that his expectations for professional development were to learn how to build relationships with his students and incorporate more technology into his lessons. Sal shared that he hoped to increase student engagement in his second core math class.

Hermione is one of the sixth-grade ELA teachers with twelve years of experience in the role. Hermione is a quiet teacher whose expectation for the professional development were to move from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered one. Her goal was to learn instructional strategies for her students and help put them in charge of their learning.

Qualitative Data Findings

The data findings start with a brief overview of what occurred in the first two sessions of the CRP professional development and then move into an exploration of the findings from the data collection tools: observation one, observation follow up one, and response journal one. Next, there is a brief overview of the third CRP professional development and the findings from the following data collection tools: interview one, observation two, observation follow up two, and response journal two. After these

findings, the CRP professional development is reviewed along with the data that was collected during this time frame: observation three, observation follow up three, and response journal three. Finally, an overview is provided of the fifth CRP professional development and the findings from interview two and response journal four are reviewed.

Professional Development Sessions One and Two

Professional development one occurred during the mandatory teacher workdays in August. For session one, the topic covered was titled, ‘Culturally responsive teaching strategies and you.’ At this first session, all seven participants were in attendance. This professional development session was informational only. The participants learned that culturally responsive teaching strategies are research-based, and consistently applying these strategies can improve student engagement. During this section, I outlined the data collection procedures and an overview of culturally relevant pedagogy. I concluded with the participant participation and informed consent form. Participants wishing to participate could place the signed sheet in my mailbox in the front office.

Professional development session two started with a welcome to four of the seven original participants. Only four participants were available because of quarantines due to Covid-19 exposures. In this session, we discussed the value of education and how we, as educators, can use culturally responsive teaching strategies to combat student’s negative perceptions of learning. The participants discussed how the educational system needs to change because it is stigmatizing students in underperforming schools. Participants reflected that their student test scores are not proficient, and it is a cycle that needs to be broken. Participants shared that currently, there is no true partnership in their respective classes and that they perceive themselves as alone in carrying the academic load. I

initiated the session with the prompt that the education system is creating a culture of poverty. The participants shared that they had never looked at education as a culture of poverty. They had always seen education as a way of escaping poverty. During this meeting, the four participants discussed ways to frame their thinking and actions to support struggling students. Participants shared their need to be aware of their own cultural lens and personal baggage that they unconsciously bring into the classroom daily. The participants shared that they knew they needed to look at the funds of knowledge that their students bring into the school, but the constant focus on test scores pushes this thought process to the backburner and serves to continually highlight students' deficits rather than their funds of knowledge.

Molly asked why people think education is only for the wealthy. Gill jumped in to share because it was created for wealthy white men, and Bellatrix shared yes, but times have changed. Gill asked whether the standards had changed. The group fell silent as they contemplated Gill's question. I observed the participants get anxious because they were uncomfortable with their thoughts. I shared with students that culturally responsive teaching strategies can move the students in their class from being dependent, passive learners to more engaged and active learners by applying a couple of strategies.

In sessions one and two, the participants received background knowledge on culturally responsive teaching strategies and how to implement them. We discussed how building relationships with students could impact student learning because as students build trust with the teacher, students will more readily share their interests. The main point discussed was to view students from a funds of knowledge lens rather than a deficit

lens. The participants shared that viewing students from a funds of knowledge lens would be difficult because of how assessment data are presented.

Observation One

Observation one was an unannounced observation to see how the participants used the culturally responsive teaching strategy they chose. During the observation, I looked at how the participants utilized the strategy and how I could support them. I concluded each observation with a brief conversation to ensure I accurately captured the teaching session.

Data from observation one. Observation one occurred after the second professional development session, which was held in September. The participants agreed for me to enter their classrooms unannounced to observe participants' implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies taught during the professional development. I focused my observations on participants' words and actions. When students engaged in instructional activities, I noted collective efforts such as raising hands and group participation. I did not collect any student-specific data. When conducting the unannounced observations, I used Talbert's (2021) field note protocol to capture what I observed both instructionally and through body language. The expectation of the observation was to see the culturally responsive teaching strategy in action. After the observation, I conducted a quick follow-up to debrief the participant and see what support I could offer to make these strategies more consistent in the classroom. After each observation, I took a moment with the participants to ask follow-up questions and member-checked to ensure that the behavior I observed was faithful to the snapshot. The data contributed to themes that emerged.

The first unannounced classroom observation was conducted in participant Bellatrix's classroom. After the observation, I followed up with Bellatrix to member check what I had observed and ask follow-up questions. I asked Bellatrix to reflect on how she felt the lesson went. She shared that the lesson went well, and students responded positively to being asked how they were doing and being provided time to respond and be themselves. I shared with her the behaviors that I observed, and as the class began talking about themselves and how they felt, I observed an increase in student engagement. At first, only three students raised their hands, but as confidence and comfort levels built in the classroom, twelve hands went up to respond and share in kind. Bellatrix was using a strategy to build relationships with the students.

The next participant I observed was Molly, who had chosen to implement strategy to start building rapport with her students and their families. Like Bellatrix, Molly also began the day by greeting her students at the classroom door and calling them by name, whereupon students "lit up" when hearing their names. After Molly's cordial greeting, students came into the classroom, took their seats, and greeted their classmates. Once all students were present, Molly entered the classroom with calm body language and a soft voice. Molly took a moment to observe her students collectively before asking if anyone wished to share how they were doing with the class. Molly then asked the class if anyone had anything else they wanted to share. One student raised her hand and shared that she was having a good morning. Her classmates clapped in genuine support. With the ice now broken, another hand went up, whose owner stated that he was not having a good morning and did not like mornings—this sparked conversation in the group. Students

continued to share how they felt in the morning and openly discuss what helped them or what they were concerned about.

After Molly's observation, I observed Gill giving students a choice assignment. Gill had already made strong connections with his students, so he chose to work on choice assignments and project-based learning using culturally responsive teaching strategies. At the time of my unannounced observation, Gill's students were working on a group-based project that they had selected from a list provided to them by their teacher. Each group of students were given a problem to address, such as dress code, food choice in the cafeteria, encore selection, school start time, and school calendars. Students were allowed to pick their groups, and then a random number generator was used to determine each group's number. Once a number was assigned to each group, they were allowed to choose their problem to solve. Each member in each group had a job. Everyone in the group was a brainstormer and researcher, but other jobs included timekeeper, recorder, and presentation maker. Gill set a ten-minute timer for each group to brainstorm and research. After the timer expired, the groups discussed what they had found and began sorting the information. Gill circulated the room to offer support to groups struggling with the demands of group work. Throughout the exercise, group members remained engaged in their problems and actively performed their respective job functions.

The last participant to engage with the unannounced observation was Sal. While he was reviewing for an upcoming assessment, I showed up unannounced to observe Sal's class, and he agreed to the observation. The culturally responsive teaching strategy that Sal chose to implement was gamifying instruction. Students in Sal's class were reviewing positive and negative integers, and he was using an editable educational

gaming platform to facilitate instruction. This platform requires students to use independent strategies to move up a class leaderboard rather than quickly and accurately solving questions on a board. Students worked independently at their desks, answering questions while Sal monitored student progress using the data provided by the program. The gaming platform allowed Sal to see which concepts students answered incorrectly and the time spent on each question.

Observation one follow-up. During Bellatrix's follow-up meeting, she volunteered to learn ways to increase student engagement in her student and faculty success role. The first culturally responsive teaching strategy Bellatrix implemented concerned building rapport with students. The self-awareness tenet of CRP supports building student rapport. Following the self-awareness tenet, Bellatrix created positive relationships with students and their families through increased open and honest communication. Bellatrix began to establish rapport with her students with a simple daily routine—greeting each student at the door and asking them how they were doing. Once all her students had entered the room, Bellatrix welcomed all students within her class collectively and allowed students to share their feelings with the whole group. Next, Bellatrix reviewed the agenda for the day's lesson and allowed students to ask questions and express any excitement or concerns that they may have.

After Participant Molly's first observation, I followed up with Molly and asked how she felt the lesson had gone. She replied, "I think the lesson went very well; we are working on creating rapport with each other rather than between teacher and student." Molly shared that building a solid connection with everyone in the room will help develop stronger learning bonds.

Following Participant Gill's first observation, I followed up with Gill and asked him how he felt the lesson went. He stated, "It went better than I expected." He explained that he is constantly stressed when trying something new with his students. As part of his implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies for this lesson, Gill had his students brainstorm a list of issues they felt impacted the school. At first, students had difficulty coming up with ideas, but they soon agreed that the cafeteria and the dress code were common problems. To continue, Gill asked them about choosing classes, when school started and ended during the day, and the school calendar. After they brainstormed a list of ten issues, they voted to bring the list down to four. Gill felt the whole process strengthened students' bond in the classroom, for now.

Following his first observation, I followed up with Sal, who shared that he felt the activity went well. He stated, "I do not like using technology in my lessons, especially not computer games." Nonetheless, Sal said that his goal was to learn strategies that can help increase his students' engagement, and he felt that including games is a good place for him to start. He reviewed the data and remarked with astonishment, "... this student doesn't turn in any work, but I now know they can do it." The interaction with Sal's review of the data collected from the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies was the revelation I hoped to see in the study. The observation follow-up gave me the opportunity to member-check the observation with Sal. I shared the findings that I observed, and the follow-up gave Sal an opportunity to expand on the discussion. Sal was able to show me the gaming platform and how his students that are reluctant to participate in class were suddenly answering questions correctly and demonstrating their understanding of the topic.

Response Journal One

After the first two professional development sessions and observation, each participant completed a response journal with three questions: a) What strategy did you choose? b) How did it go? and c) Will you continue to use this or these strategies? These prompts allowed participants to reflect on their current thinking and how they might consider making changes in future instruction.

Bellatrix and Molly decided to increase student and family rapport while Gill focused on project-based learning and Sal on gamifying instruction. Each participant stated that the use of the respective strategy went well, and their comfort and confidence level improved the more they applied the strategy. All participants agreed to continue to use the strategy that they had chosen because their comfort level increased with the application of the strategy and therefore, they were using the strategy more consistently.

I included the data from the response journals in the analysis. I allowed them time to compose the responses, which created the opportunity for more thoughtful responses than if they had been prompted immediately after the professional development or observation. This generated more complete thought on the application of the strategies chosen and added to rich description to the findings. An example of this is from Sal on the use of rapport building with his students,

...I had my students write me a confidential letter to inform me of any concerns that they were facing. I then used the letters to create a seating chart that would place the student in an area of the classroom that was best for them.

Giving the teachers time to process and write increased a response from a yes or no to an open-ended response.

Professional Development Session Three

Professional development session three involved the participants reviewing their values toward education, their culturally responsive teaching goals and reviewing three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Four participants, Bellatrix, Molly, Gill, and Sal attended this session. During the professional development, we discussed self-awareness and what it means for ourselves and our students. The participants shared how self-awareness allows us to reflect on how we react to others who are different from us. I initiated the session with the prompt, “In what ways have your students been more engaged in class?”

Following this, the participants shared how building relationships has helped them learn more about the students’ interests. Gil shared that he included his colleague’s names in his vocabulary assessments with students. He has seen higher grades on the assessment because students read them more closely to see what shenanigans the teachers are up to. Sal asked Gil why he decided to use the teachers’ names instead of students’ names, and Gill responded with “street cred.” Students must keep their reputation of not doing homework and being cool.

Next, the participants discussed cultural competence. I asked the participants why no one chose a strategy for cultural competence. Cultural competence aims to create and provide equal learning opportunities for all our students. Overwhelmingly, the response was, “I wasn’t sure how to do this.” A conversation ensued about bringing in guest speakers using a digital platform or in a socially distanced area (due to ongoing COVID-19 concerns). The participants discussed using experts in our building and digital field trips.

Through the consistent conscious use of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, the participants shared that they have made better connections with their students and have more authentic conversations. The participants discussed cultural competence, and Bellatrix, the school counselor, volunteered to come in to speak to classes as an expert on career exploration. The participants support each other in the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies during the professional development sessions.

Interview One

After the third professional development session, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants to better understand their unique ideas related to culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. The participants signed up for a day and time that would work best in their schedule for the interview. The interviews lasted no more than thirty minutes.

I interviewed Bellatrix on her use of culturally responsive teaching strategies, and she committed to using games to build engagement. Bellatrix used gamifying instruction as her strategy. She shared that using the clickers game was a great way to have all students participate. According to Bellatrix, “the clickers activity allowed students to answer questions without other students seeing their answers and gave me instant feedback on how the questions were answered so I could correct misconceptions immediately.” Bellatrix also did a relay race to discuss backpack organization and how it is essential to be prepared for class. She gave the students something to look for in their backpacks, and the first student to find it would earn a point. The goal of the activity was for the student to have an awareness of what was in their backpack. Bellatrix stated that

she would write or post the instructions on the board so that students would have a reference point. The students seem to enjoy themselves during these strategies, and Bellatrix reported a 100% participation rate.

Molly shared in her first interview that she would focus on implementing learning rotations, building rapport, and setting high expectations for her students. Molly was fortunate to work with her students for three consecutive years as a self-contained teacher. She shared that this helped build strong relationships with her students' families. As Molly learned more about her students, she was able to create examples that were more engaging. Molly shared that she was slowly introducing learning rotations to her students. She stated that they were feeling slightly overwhelmed by the rotations, so she was going more slowly by only having stations for one academic area at a time. Molly committed to continue to apply culturally responsive teaching strategies as she teaches, and she believed that she would get more engagement the more she implemented the strategy.

Gill shared in his first interview that he would be working on building rapport with his students and problem-based learning. Gill gave his students a problem that was plaguing the school, and they worked in groups to come up with solutions. All the students were engaged in the planning and discussing of the problem. Gill stated that he enjoyed hearing students discuss solutions even though some ideas would worsen problems. Gill was excited to continue to use culturally responsive teaching strategies as he was seeing fewer negative behaviors and greater student engagement.

During Sal's initial interview, he shared that he would be working on building rapport with students and gamifying education. Sal's initial culturally responsive teaching

strategy was building rapport with his students. Sal had students write a letter to him stating any learning concerns, such as, “Don’t seat me by this student because I will talk,” or, “I need to sit close to the board to see.” Sal shared that, though willing, he was apprehensive towards gamify lessons because he likes to always be in control of his classroom. Sal shared that he would continue to use these two strategies, but he is cautious of giving up some of the controls he believes gamifying strips away.

Observation Two

After the third professional development session and interviews concluded, I observed participants in their classrooms. I used field notes (Talbert, 2021) to record what I noticed and what I reflected concerning CRP. Each observation included a follow-up conversation to verify the accuracy of the data.

Data from observation two. I observed Bellatrix conducting a small group session with four students. Immediately, I observed the students sitting around the table with calm body language as they were speaking with their peers. Bellatrix had previously built rapport with these students, which was observable by their relaxed body language. Students sat turned toward the speaker and listened attentively. Bellatrix reviewed the norms for the small group session and gave students the expectation that each one of them would engage in the discussion. Bellatrix gave each student a copy of questions that they could respond to during the session. These questions varied from surface questions to questions requiring more vulnerable answers. The students had complete control over which questions they answered. This helped create a comfortable and safe environment to talk and share.

Bellatrix started the session by asking what students think Mr. M feels when a student throws a pencil across the room? The students were slow to answer, but Bellatrix gave ample processing time for students to think about the scenario and answer. One student answered that Mr. M did not like the pencil thrown across the room. When Bellatrix asked why, the student responded that it kept Mr. M from doing his job of "...teaching us and keeping us safe." The conversation continued around why it is essential to feel safe at school to which the students shared a variety of responses. Bellatrix reminded the classroom that all students needed to participate. Upon hearing this direction, students stopped, looked around the table, and asked a student from whom they had not heard a response what she thought, to which the student replied. The student seemed to be waiting for an invitation to the conversation. Once the student made the initial comment, she began to engage in the conversation more freely.

After observing Bellatrix, I observed Molly and her class during their library time. Molly began class by praising her students for appropriate behavior while transitioning through the hall to the library. Molly told the students why they were in the library. She used a smartboard to project the expectations for appropriate library behavior and the consequences if the behavior was not appropriate. After Molly gave the expectation to the group, she asked that they repeat it back to her. Every student reiterated the expectation. The students sat down at the computers and began working on their tasks. Students raised their hands when they had questions or needed something.

After Molly's second observation, I observed Gill, who was teaching a lesson on Greek and Latin roots. Students were engaged in a writing activity that would help them review for their upcoming Greek and Latin roots assessment. Students were creating

sentences that would help them remember their vocabulary words. During the lesson, Gill told the students to use their names in the sentences and those of their peers because using this information would create a connection that would remember. Gill set forth the expectation that sentences that used a person's name had to be positive. He used his name and one of his peers in a sentence to demonstrate what he meant. The students laughed at the example and tried their hands at the exercise. The students had fifteen minutes to come up with eight sentences. Gill asked if anyone had a sentence they would like to share, and five hands raised. The students shared their sentences, and the students seemed to enjoy hearing the names of people they know used in the sentences.

I observed Sal during a mathematics lesson on the unit rate. As I entered the classroom, it was quiet, and the students were listening to Sal explain the definition of unite rate. The students looked confused by the multiple steps, at which point Sal stopped the lesson and asked the students what things they liked. The students gave some suggestions, and he picked one of their interests to use as an example. The students sat up straighter in their seats, picked up their pencils, and started working on the problem with Sal. Not every student followed along with Sal, but the strategy did engage more students than were engaged prior to implementing the strategy. Each example after that, Sal chose a student to tell him of an item that was of interest to them, and they substituted that item for the actual item on the worksheet.

Observation two follow-ups. After Bellatrix's second observation, she sent her students back to class, and I asked her follow-up questions and member-checked to make sure that my notes were an accurate account of the observation. I asked Bellatrix how she thought the lesson went, to which she responded that she felt the lesson went well.

Bellatrix observed that giving the students a list of questions and letting them decide which questions they were comfortable responding to helped keep the conversation going and create a safe environment. Students did not have to share any information that they were not comfortable sharing. I then asked Bellatrix what she might do differently? She replied that she would not do anything differently and thought the lesson went well.

Bellatrix stated she would be making a copy of the questions to hang in the classroom so the students could see them and feel free to initiate conversations with their peers or me.

After Molly's second observation concluded and after library time, the students followed the educational support professional back to the classroom. I reviewed my notes with Molly and asked her follow-up questions. When asked how she felt the culturally relevant teaching strategy lesson went, Molly responded positively. "It went well," Molly said. She then continued, "I have recently started having students repeat the expectation that I have given them. This has been a significant change for us because it allows the students to own their behavior." Upon reflection, Molly stated that she needs to be more consistent with asking students to repeat expectations back to her, given this proven success. Molly went on to state that consistency is the key to success.

Following Gill's second observation, I followed up with Gill, and he was pleased with how the activity went. Gill stated, "Students don't typically like to write, but this made the writing process less painful." Gill noted that he liked hearing some of the conversations as the students were writing because it meant they were thinking about the words. Upon further reflective questioning, Gill mused, "Next time, I will have more examples of the word in different tenses." A group of students chimed in and commented

that the sentence did not sound right because of the tense, but they could not figure out how to change the tense.

After his second observation, I followed up with Sal to review my notes and see what he thought of the lesson and the culturally responsive teaching strategy used. Sal felt the lesson improved when he asked students about their interests and utilized them in the examples. Upon further reflective questioning, Sal stated, “Next time, I will create a worksheet with examples that interest our students.” Sal was very pleased with the results of implementing his chosen culturally responsive teaching strategies, stating, “I will continue to use the culturally responsive teaching strategies that I have implemented so far this semester. I am enjoying the gamifying platforms and using student interests as examples.” Upon final reflection of Sal’s growth in building relationships with his students using his chosen culturally responsive teaching strategy, he reflected, “I would not have had this opportunity if I would not have built rapport with my class.”

Response Journal Two

After the observations and follow-up conversations, I requested the participants complete a response journal with the same three questions as the first response journal: What strategy did you choose and use, how did it go, and will you continue to use this or these strategies? I collected the response journals through a Google form. The response journal offered participants the opportunity to share how their selected strategy was working in the classroom as well as give feedback.

Bellatrix shared that she was working on creating a safe environment where students are comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. Bellatrix shared “I am priming the students when they come in around what the expectations are for the small group.”

This quote was in reference for creating a safe environment where students feel comfortable to share their thoughts. When discussing creating high expectations for all students, Bellatrix commented, “I explained that I needed 100% participation, and they would have a copy of the questions and could answer what questions they were comfortable answering.” As a school counselor, Bellatrix was excited to have had participation in a small group setting, stating, “I had 100% participation, and the students listened to each other and were supportive.”

Molly focused on creating high expectations with her students. Molly stated, “I am telling the students what I expect from them and having them repeat it back to me.” Molly shared that having the students repeat back directions and expectations has been a game changer with her students. Molly affirmed that she started having students repeat directions and expectations during morning meeting time and she plans on adding it to two more blocks of time. Molly shared that her students are responding as a whole group and she plans to keep the response to the entire group. Molly stated, “...when a student is not following the expectation, I will follow up with them individually and have them tell me the expectation to see if that will redirect them.”

Over the past couple of weeks, Gill’s class focused on using names in examples to help increase engagement. Gill practiced this strategy in a vocabulary lesson. Gill placed the students in small groups, so each student had the opportunity to share a sentence. Students enjoyed writing sentences that involved themselves or their peers, and they liked to hear the sentences as well. Gill stated,

It is always lovely when we can do something that feels local and real for the students. Next time I do this activity, I will have jobs for students such as fact-checker for vocabulary tense, punctuation police, and grammar guards.

Gill felt the need for the jobs in the small group activity is essential to keep the students on task. The fact-checker will ensure the word was used correctly, punctuation police to make sure the sentences have punctuation at the end of the sentence, and the grammar guards will check over the sentences and make sure they sentences started with a capital letter and has subject verb agreement.

In Sal's journal response, he explained,

Since our last meeting, I have focused on building rapport with all the students. I have started using the 2x10 method. I talk with one student for two minutes for ten consecutive days. I started this strategy with one of the quietest students in the class. The student started talking to me about something other than mathematics on day four. I will continue to work to build rapport with all students because I want to create a classroom atmosphere where everyone feels welcomed.

Sal's intention in building rapport with his class was to create a classroom environment where all students felt acknowledged and heard.

Professional Development Session Four

The fourth professional development session occurred in November. The purpose of the fourth professional development session was for the cohort to review the three tenets of the culturally relevant pedagogy framework: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. I initiated the fourth session with the open-ended question: What changes have you noticed since you have started using culturally responsive teaching strategies?

The participants shared their successes with the culturally responsive teaching strategies they utilized over the past eight weeks. Each participant shared how building rapport played an instrumental role in their classes. They shared that their students were having meaningful conversations with them, and parents were also more supportive. I asked what had changed from the beginning of September until now? To which

participants replied that they allow the students to be themselves and view student achievement rather than student deficits. During this discussion, Gill shared how he used problem-based learning in his classroom and how his students had been fully engaged with the process. He shared those students had confidently tackled a school issue and were proud of their work. Gill stated it was the first time he did not have any missing assignments from his students in a very long time. Gil's students were so proud of their work they asked him if their slide shows can be shared with the school principal.

The participants openly discussed how culturally responsive teaching strategies positively impacted their classroom environment and student attitudes. The participants shared that changing their viewpoint from a deficit to a growth mindset helped them see their students more thoroughly and holistically. Additionally, participants shared that they have brought up the concept of funds of knowledge in staff meetings when discussing with their colleagues.

Observation Three

The third and final observation occurred after the fourth professional development session. The purpose of conducting a third observation was to examine how participants interpreted information disseminated during the professional development sessions through the implementation of instructional strategies. These observations generated a more detailed description of the participants' experiences and understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Data from observation three. During Bellatrix's third observation, she acted as a guest speaker in a sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Bellatrix distributed a career interest survey to the students. As the students completed the survey,

Bellatrix circulated around the room and assisted students who asked for questions to be clarified. After each student had completed the survey, she asked, "... what skills are you interested in?" Four out of thirty-two students raised their hands and stated their interests. Bellatrix announced to the class that she needed one hundred percent participation in the discussion. She set up the parameters for the discussion by telling each student to talk to their left elbow partner for two minutes to share their findings. Each student participated as asked, and when the attention returned to the whole group, she would call on students. Each student shared skills or traits they had learned about themselves. One student shared that it said she would be a good teacher, and she said, "no, I won't." Students felt welcome to share their findings and how these skills can help them discover what they would like to do when graduating high school. Bellatrix had worked with the class previously, and she made connections and built rapport with the students prior to this exercise, thus the students were comfortable talking with her.

I observed Molly and her class participating in learning centers. Molly's students were working in their learning centers with peer helpers. Peer helpers are general education students who take "peer helper" as an elective class. To become a peer helper, students must complete an application and undergo an interview process to determine if they are a good fit for the program. The peer helper program's characteristics are kindness and respect for students' privacy. If a peer helper is discovered talking inappropriately about a student in the self-contained class, then they are removed from the program. Students worked together to complete puzzles, count tasks, and organize binders during the learning rotations. While observing the learning centers, I saw Molly's students attempt all tasks first and ask for help when needed. The peer helpers spoke

quietly and calmly to the students and offered support but not answers. Students were relaxed in their centers, and they transitioned well when their timers went off. The peer helpers stayed at the learning center, and the students rotated. Students quickly chatted and got to work. The students knew the expectations of the learning center and peer helper.

In Gill's final observation, his class worked on Greek and Latin roots. Students were placed into groups of four to complete the assignment. The assignment was a jigsaw assignment where each student had a topic to complete and share with their peers. Each student had a root or base word, and they needed to define the term, find a sample word, create a sentence, and finally present it to their peers in their group, and the peers added it to their lists of affixes. Gill circulated around the classroom to monitor classroom behavior and clarify any questions and concerns.

When I entered Sal's classroom for his final observation, the students worked on a mathematics review sheet. The review sheet used information he gathered from the students by building rapport with the students and his colleagues' names. Sal continuously circulated around the room and supported students. After twenty minutes of working on the review sheet, the students transition to the Chromebook to participate in a review game. The students were readily engaged in the online review game, answering questions correctly to earn more strategies to overtake their opponents.

Observation three follow-ups. After the observation, I asked Bellatrix how she felt the lesson went at our follow-up session. She stated that it went better than she had expected. She shared that the more she can go into the classes and work with students in areas in which she is an expert has helped in creating a respectful environment. She talks

to students now in the hallway and across the building, and they are more comfortable with her and her role in the school. Bellatrix shared that as a school counselor, sometimes students attached a stigma to you—you are only there to help the kids that what to hurt themselves or are crying. She said that being a guest speaker allows her to share her expertise with the students and create a more inclusive environment.

During Molly’s follow-up, I asked her how she thought things had gone, and she thought that the experience had been a strong positive. She did state that the learning centers are not as robust as in the past, and that is due to schools reacclimating from the Covid-19 mandates. Molly reflected that she needs to rebuild learning stamina in her students. Molly also shared that her students enjoyed the learning centers. They feel safe exploring and asking their peers questions. My students are learning valuable skills by being in small groups. They are learning how to fail and try again, not fail and quit. They learn that there is support when they need it, and kindness can be found everywhere.

During Gill’s follow-up, he shared that he did not set up roles for the group members like he thought he would, but he thought the jigsaw activity would be more engaging and decrease downtime. Gill shared that he would continue to use the jigsaw activity during his Greek and Latin roots lesson but not frequently. He fears that students would become bored with the same activity every two weeks, and we need to keep activities constantly changing.

Sal stated in the follow-up after the observation that students are more interested in answering questions relevant to them rather than some absurd melon buying situations. “What kid buys fifty melons?” Sal reflected that he has learned that students would rather learn about their teachers on the questions than themselves. He shared that, “...students

in elementary schools like to hear about themselves, but when they hit middle school, they are unsure of themselves and lack the confidence to handle the attention.” Gil stated that he is not a fan of the online review game platforms, but that students love them and are scoring better on assessments because of them, so he will continue to use them.

Response Journal Three

The prompt for the third response journal included the same three questions as the first two journals: What strategy did you choose and use, how did it go, and will you continue to use this or these strategies? I again collected the response journals through a Google form. The response journal offered participants the opportunity to reflect on how another selected strategy was effective in their classroom as well as to provide feedback.

Bellatrix shared in her response journal that she would like to continue to act as a guest speaker in teachers’ classrooms. She feels that this strategy will continue to grow a positive culture across all grade levels. Bellatrix shared that the students are beginning to see the counselors as Jacks and Jills of all trades and are there to help. One thing Bellatrix said that she would do in the future is to consistently meet with all the students in sixth grade and continue to meet with them in seventh and eighth grade. This will help her to create stronger relationships with students and families.

Molly shared in her response journal that she enjoyed teaching using learning centers. She liked that she could differentiate the centers for the needs of the students. She also likes having peer helpers to facilitate the centers. Molly said the skills that her students and the peer helpers can gain from each other are more valuable than anything she could ever teach.

Gill's response journal stated that students worked together to teach their peers their Greek and Latin roots. The students could explain the words using their vocabulary rather than the teacher's vocabulary. The students seemed to be engaged in the activity, and Gill felt he would be able to include this activity in a choice board. Gill stated that he would not do this activity often because he feared that students would start to regress and not put in the effort to learn and share.

Sal's response journal shared that the students are more engaged when working on things that interest them. This has put some additional work on Sal because he must now modify the worksheets, but if the students are making progress, he will continue to put in the extra work. Sal stated that there was nothing he would do differently, and "I have been able to take the culturally responsive teaching strategies and include them in my routine."

Professional Development Session Five

The fifth and final professional development session was held in December. The purpose of the fifth professional development session was for cohort participants to review, share, and respond to their experiences and reflect upon the efficacy of the culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching strategies learned and implemented throughout the semester. I initiated the discussion with the same open-ended question from the previous two professional development sessions: in what ways have your students been more engaged? Participants were open and honest in their discussions. They shared how they were scared to initiate a new teaching strategy or lens with each other. They shared that looking at students from a funds of knowledge standpoint was challenging but rewarding. The mindset shift from deficit to funds of knowledge would

also improve their relationships with parents. They were making it a point to reach out to parents and tell them something positive their student did. Sal shared that he is not convinced of the gamification of mathematics, but he appreciated that students were more engaged when he let them use specific platforms.

The participants shared how the strategies have improved their classrooms by seeing students as individuals, knowing their interests, and creating opportunities for students to be themselves. Table 3.2 shares a culmination of the data and hard work of the seven participants. Table 3.2 illustrates the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness and the strategies the participants utilized.

Table 3.2

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Action

Strategies for Self-Awareness	Strategies for Cultural Competence	Strategies for Critical Consciousness
Build rapport with students (use 2x10 - student letters - student interest)	Inviting guest speakers in	Peer engagement
Used games to engage students and continue to learn student interests	Counselors volunteered to become guest speakers in classrooms to discuss Social-Emotional topics	Using project-based learning
Calling on each student/preparing them with questions	Being aware of your culture (Poverty)	Students have given a real-life scenario and ask to explore it using digital resources
Created different free-time activities based on student interest (drawing, coloring, puzzles, books; no device time; games like Uno or tic-tac-toe) “free time” was used to give students a break to calm them	Peers struggled talking about their experience with poverty	Community of learners
Student vocabulary	Used digital field trip to engage students and build background knowledge (students in poverty do	Centers or rotations

Strategies for Self-Awareness	Strategies for Cultural Competence	Strategies for Critical Consciousness
	not have the same opportunities as non-poverty peers)	
Student name: Used student names and teacher's names to increase student engagement - in GC students preferred the teacher's names be used in examples instead of their (MS- worried about their street cred)	Gallery walks - students were reading the <i>Outsiders</i> and the teacher created a gallery walk to discuss the social class differences (right and wrong side of the tracks)	Students were given choice boards for assignments
Discussion about how the use of students' names could be viewed as negative - must be aware of the examples - Keep it Positive!!	Also discussed the fashion of the time and how we are currently wearing some of the same things now (Chucks)	Participants discussed how using rotations has really changed their perspective of teaching and putting the students
	Funds of knowledge	(Continued) in control of their learning. Teacher shared how this was moving some of their students from a learned helplessness phase to more confident (teachers shared that the students who were becoming less dependent on her also exhibited less inappropriate behaviors). Teachers shared how the rotation/learning center allowed them more time to differentiate learning for their students.

Interview Two

The second interview occurred after the last professional development session. The purpose was for each participant to engage in a conversation to reflect, individually, on their thinking and teaching. Data from the interviews offered a more robust picture of the participants' experiences concerning CRP. In Bellatrix's final interview, she shared

that using culturally responsive teaching strategies has increased both her and her students' engagement in the classroom. Bellatrix shared that she utilized the strategies of building rapport, creating a safe environment for students, and calling on each student on a continual basis. Using these strategies, especially building rapport, and gleaning their interest, has increased engagement with Bellatrix's students in large and small groups. She stated that she can go deeper with questions in a one-to-one setting now because she has taken the time to build rapport and create a safe environment for her students.

In Molly's final interview, she shared that using culturally responsive teaching strategies has increased her student's overall engagement. Molly felt that the overall use of the culturally responsive teaching strategies had gone well throughout the semester. Building rapport with students and families helped students be more engaged in her class, and it also helped Molly to understand students' perspectives and how she can meet them where they are at. Molly stated that when a student is having difficulty making appropriate choices and, "wants mommy," she can go ahead and message the parent and let them know what is going on. The use of a phone app allows Molly to interact with the parents without making a phone call. The parents know that they can reach Molly throughout the day, and the students know that Molly can reach their parents anytime throughout the day. Molly stated, "I can let them know if something is going on or if they are worried about something." Molly shared how technology has been instrumental in her success in building rapport with students and families. Family members have shared with her that they appreciate that a quick text or email is more convenient for them than a phone call at their place of work.

In Gill's final interview, he stated, "...in my experience, being able to find common ground with students of different backgrounds makes a huge difference." Gill went on to say that building an essential rapport with economically disadvantaged students makes them more willing to lower their guard and share about obstacles standing in the way of their access to educational materials and opportunities. Gill believes that the more extended the connection and rapport are, the more trusting the student becomes. Gill further reflected that, often the students most impacted by socio-economic disadvantages are the ones that take the longest to develop trust. Because of this, Gill believes it may take more time than teachers are typically considering establishing rapport, and because of this, it is essential to remain cognizant of how actions and words may impact the willingness of the student to connect. Gill noted that despite this challenge, it is often a minor element shared about a teacher that can open the door to rapport between student and teacher. Gill explained,

...for example, one student struggling in multiple ways, including behaviorally, finally began to change and evolve after realizing I used to have season tickets to sporting events at a college they liked. After that, the student started to consider his actions towards my class and me differently, which opened the door to eventual authentic connections.

During Sal's final interview, he shared his views on building rapport and gamifying his mathematics review. Students in Sal's class were more engaged after using gaming platforms, especially those involving strategies over skills to climb the leaderboard. Through the implementation of these gaming strategies in his class, students were actively trying to solve problems correctly. Sal stated that he has noticed that when he uses these gaming platforms more as a spiral review tool, the students score better on their assessments. Students in Sal's class liked that the more correct answers they get, the

more strategies they get use against their peers. Sal stated that culturally responsive teaching strategies have been a positive experience and that he would continue to use them.

Response Journal Four

The fourth and final response journal prompt included the same three questions as the first three: What strategy did you choose and use, how did it go, and will you continue to use this or these strategies? As before, I collected the response journals through a Google form. The response journal offered participants the opportunity to reflect on a different strategy, how they implemented it, to what degree it was effective, and offer reflections related to this strategy.

Bellatrix was a guest speaker in several middle school classrooms. She stated that this gave her a new lens through which to view the needs of the students. When she entered the classroom, she put the agenda on the board and told the students that the expectation for the day was for everyone to participate. She had a list of questions that she would be asking, and she passed out the question stems, so each student had a copy. She had utilized the question stems in a previous lesson, and she had great feedback and discussion, so she tried it again. Bellatrix shared that the students raised their hands and volunteered to answer questions before being called on. This was one of her most student-engaged presentations yet. She felt that this was because she had primed the students with the question stems and set the expectation that everyone would be called on.

Molly wrote her last response journal to reflect the culturally responsive teaching strategies she utilized throughout the semester. Over the semester, Molly built rapport

with students and families, used learning centers to support instruction, and set clear and high expectations for her students. Molly shared that she has had great success with culturally responsive teaching strategies. Molly stated, “I have shifted my view from a deficit view to funds of knowledge view. This shift has helped me equip my students with the skills they need to succeed in life, not just for an assessment.”

In Gill’s last response journal, he reflected on his problem-based learning project. Gill shared that this project was a lot of work, but the students enjoyed it, and were able to see themselves solving real problems. Gill felt sure some maturity happened during this project, both for his students and for himself. Gill confirmed that he will continue to utilize problem-based learning in his lessons and that he is planning and thinking of one to use every semester.

Sal wrote in his final response journal that he already knew the power of building rapport with students. Nonetheless, Sal shared that he did not realize that incorporating a gaming platform for review could motivate students to such a high degree. Sal stated that he will continue to use the gaming platforms for spiral review so long as the students continue working and engaging with the material.

Hermione shared in her response journal that she started using rotations or learning centers to teach. “Learning centers have changed my teaching perspective and put the students in control of their learning,” stated Hermione. At first, she had thought that this strategy was an awful idea, but after a couple of weeks of it, the students began to settle down and started owning their learning. Hermione reflected that she liked to use learning centers to focus on a small group of students and their needs for fifteen minutes. Using this strategy, Hermione observed that everyone is starting to get what they need.

In Petunia's response journal, she shared how she worked this semester to create different free-time activities based on student interests that she had gained from building rapport with her students. These free-time activities included drawing, coloring, puzzles, and reading. Petunia shared, "I spent time sitting and talking with my students without a device in front of them." Each day, this took a small amount of time and gave Petunia "huge paybacks." Petunia shared that the students were "easily redirected when off task, and there was more mutual respect between students, teachers and staff."

Luna shared in her response journal that she focused on a culturally responsive teaching strategy that focused more on her rather than the students. Luna's chosen culturally responsive teaching strategy centered around being aware of her culture and how it impacts others and, in this case, poverty. Luna stated in her response journal, "I chose the novel *The Outsiders* to read with the students because it discusses so many concerns that our students are facing. While discussing the book, I noticed that the students struggled to talk about poverty." Luna's students understood what it was to be "broke" but did not understand poverty. She shared that her classes participated in a gallery walk to bridge this gap in understanding and create background knowledge. During the gallery walk, students looked at different scenes from the book that depicted social class differences and fashion at the time in which the novel takes place. Table 2.4, located in Chapter Two, shares a culmination of the data and hard work of the seven participants.

The data collected from the participants during the three observations, three observation follow-ups, two semi-structured interviews, four response journals, and field note from the professional development shared that the participants took time to actively

listen to their students and used that information to build relationships with the students. The participants took the information they learned in the professional development series and applied the culturally responsive strategies in a way that would be meaningful to their students and to themselves. During this time the participants reflected on the strategies used and adjusted for their classes. One participant, Gil chose a cooperative learning strategy that is under the critical consciousness tenet but quickly realized that he needed to build relationships with his students. Gil shared, “that the need for the relationships would help increase critical thinking in the activity. The students would feel comfortable sharing their knowledge during the activity.” Also, participants realized that building relationships with their students helped them see the funds of knowledge that each student had.

Thematic Analysis

The themes that evolved from the field notes, observations, follow-ups, semi-structured interviews, and response journals followed a deductive approach to analysis. As I first created the codebook to organize the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I knew that I would be coding themes based on the CRP theoretical framework tenets. Codes were assigned to each of the three tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy: SA for self-awareness, CC for cultural competence, and RW for critical consciousness. I transitioned into applying codes to generate findings based on what emerged from the data. The notes revealed that participants choose more culturally responsive teaching strategies around the themes of self-awareness and critical consciousness. The themes that emerged from the study were: building relationships with the students and creating an environment for students to drive their learning. All three culturally relevant pedagogy tenets were present

in this instrumental case study, but the participants focused heavily on building relationships and creating an atmosphere where students had a choice in their learning.

First Cycle Coding

First cycle coding is the strategy that occurs in the initial coding process of data (Sadana, 2012). In this initial phase I applied descriptive coding to the data collected from the participants (Sadana, 2012). I used descriptive coding because I was describing the participants choice of culturally responsive teaching strategy and how the strategies supported the three tenets of the CRP framework. Table 3.3 illustrates an example of the culturally responsive teaching strategy and the CRP tenet the strategy supports.

Table 3.3

Examples of Data for Codes

CRP Tenet	Code Name	Example
Self-Awareness (SA)	Building relationships	Building the rapport with students and families helped students be more engaged in class. Helped me to know where they are coming from and how I can meet them where they are at.
	Rapport	Used 2x10 strategy to build strong relationships with students learned something about every student in my class.
	Safe environment	The use of these two strategies allowed the students to open up and talk freely about how they use SM. - While I didn't like how the students were speaking about SM it gave me a glimpse into how they see it.
	Use of student names in examples	The teacher used his peers in the examples. Students enjoyed hearing sentences and examples about people they knew.
	Calling on each student	Calling on each student and incorporating their interests, names and things. Even when I am meeting with a student 1:1 and we are talking about something specific I can use their interest in their conversation to help peak the conversation and keep it going. Can get more than just a surface conversation, you can dig deeper.

CRP Tenet	Code Name	Example
	Gamify instruction	I didn't know that incorporating a gaming platform for review could be so motivating for students. I will continue to use the gaming platforms for spiral review as long as the students are working.
Cultural Competence (CC)	Guest speakers	Students enjoyed hearing about jobs that applied to their interests.
	Virtual fieldtrips	Digital field trip to engage students and build background knowledge (students in poverty do not have the same opportunities as non-poverty peers).
Critical Consciousness (RW)	Problem-based learning	Students were working in small groups to solve a problem that they picked out of options. Students were taking turns talking and listening to their peers. Students were giving polite feedback and saying, I like that, that is a good idea. All students were participating.
	Learning centers	The use of learning centers has really changed my perspective of teaching and putting the students in control of their learning. At first, this was an awful idea but after a couple of weeks of it, the students began to settle down and really started owning their learning. I like to use learning centers because I can focus on a small group of students and their needs for fifteen minutes and then another. Everyone is starting to get what they need.
	Small groups	Small group rotations (exploratory learning) with peer helpers.

Participant and CRP. I analyzed the data for the case study through a constructivist lens. I reviewed the pre-survey the participants completed and began to outline the cohort's needs. The data from the pre-survey showed that the participants' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching strategies was novice. The participants stated on the pre-survey they did not have any prior knowledge of culturally responsive teaching strategies; however, they did want to learn how to apply these strategies.

I used this data to construct the first professional development session that focused on what culturally responsive teaching strategies are and how I implement these strategies in the classroom. The participants viewed a list of strategies and determined which strategy they wanted to focus on first (see Appendix G). All the participants decided to address the self-awareness tenet and work toward building stronger relationships with students. The second professional development session discussed how culturally responsive teaching values education.

After the second session, I completed observational walk-throughs. I observed how the participants implemented the culturally responsive teaching strategy in these walkthroughs. I completed a quick follow-up to answer any questions they may have, and member checked the data. I could only complete observational walkthroughs with four of the seven participants due to absences and other instructional constraints.

The third professional development session continued to look at the value of education through culturally responsive teaching. I conducted the first round of two semi-structured interviews. During this time, I interviewed four participants, completed another round of observations, and collected response journals. At the fourth professional development session, the cohort discussed educational values and the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. After this meeting, the participants participated in another round of observations and response journals.

The fifth and final professional development was a celebration. During this time, a visual was displayed showing the growth of culturally responsive teaching strategies utilized over the semester. I looked at how the themes were used to construct the meaning

of the strategies chosen and how they were used to build the culturally relevant pedagogy tenets.

Table 3.4 illustrates the culturally relevant pedagogy tenet that each participant chose, the data derived, and the data collection method used. Table 3.4 shows that all three of the of the culturally relevant pedagogy tenets were present over the course of this single case study. Table 3.4 illustrates that six participants decided to use a self-awareness culturally responsive teaching strategy to increase student engagement.

Table 3.4

Participants in Action with CRP

CRP Tenet	Strategy	Participant	Source for Evidence
Self-Awareness	Built rapport using 2 x 10	Bellatrix	• Observations
		Molly	• Response journals
		Gil	
		Sal	
		Luna	
		Hermione	
	Gamify instruction	Sal	• Observations
		Petunia	• Response journals
	Calling on each student	Bellatrix	• Observations • Response journals
		Petunia	• Observations • Response journals
Creating different free time activities	Gill	• Observations	
		• Response journals	
Student vocabulary	Bellatrix	• Observations	
		• Response journals	
		• Observations	
		• Response journals	
Student names, interest, and teacher names in examples	Molly	• Observations	
		• Response journals	
		• Observations	
		• Response journals	
Cultural Competence	Guest Speakers	Bellatrix	• Response journal
	Being aware of your own culture (poverty)	Gil	• Response journals
		Luna	• Interviews
	Discussion on poverty (student centered)	Gil	• Response journals
		Luna	• Observation follow-up
	Digital Fieldtrips	Molly	• Response journal
	Gallery walks	Luna	• Response journal
Fashion on time periods and comparison to today	Luna	• Response journal	

CRP Tenet	Strategy	Participant	Source for Evidence
Critical Consciousness	Peer engagement with learning rotations	Molly Hermione Petunia	• Response journal
	Peer engagement with project-based learning	Gil	• Observation • Observation follow-up • Response journal
	Peer engagement with choice boards	Hermione	• Response journal

Five of the participants chose a culturally responsive teaching strategy that supports creating cultural competence in the classroom and four participants utilized a culturally responsive teaching strategy that supported the critical consciousness tenet. From the data collection tools used—observations, follow-up questions, and response journals—Table 3.4 highlights two salient themes across participants: an emphasis on student connections and creating safe environments. The four participants in the initial phase created a safe and welcoming environment for students to explore their learning both socially and intellectually.

The participants applied relationship building, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and careful observance of their classes, to create an atmosphere where students felt comfortable sharing and engaging with one another and teachers and staff. Table 3.6 illustrates the applied culturally responsive teaching strategies employed by participants, and the outcome from application of these strategies. Participants created safe learning environments for their students by being aware of their own biases and creating an avenue to have open conversations about issues of interest or concern to students. The participants did this by reflecting on the activities created and thinking ahead on the activities they were planning through a desire to showcase their students' prior knowledge and interest.

While the participants focused on different strategies, they each had their student’s best interests in mind. Table 3.5 shows which tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy the participants initially used. During the first two professional development sessions the participants chose culturally responsive teaching strategies in the self-awareness tenet and critical consciousness tenet. The participants wanted to move toward building relationships with students and increase student participation in learning by giving them a problem to solve.

Table 3.5

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Self-Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Building rapport		Problem-based learning
Gamifying instruction		

After the second round of data collection, the participants continued to work on the culturally responsive teaching strategies they had chosen, and they noticed a difference in their students’ behaviors. The theme that emerged from the second round of data collection was the theme of building relationships. Participants noted that building rapport and building relationships made the most significant impact on their students. By setting clear expectations and consistently holding students accountable to these expectations, students participated more because they felt like their teachers truly cared about them.

During the third and final round of data collection, the participants discussed more positive changes they had observed with the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Each participant expressed how having solid relationships with the

students has resulted in more positive parental contacts. One of the participants shared that they had begun to shift their mindset and look at each student's skills in the classroom, rather than their deficits. The teachers reported creating a welcoming environment as these classroom connections are built with students. The participants shared how building relationships and incorporating the students' interests also created a more collaborative learning environment. Participants who used the gamification of instruction strategy and review reported an increase in student engagement and saw an increase in classroom assessment scores.

Many of the participants chose to use learning rotations, or centers, which resulted in increased student engagement and greater student rapport. Participants shared that for the learning centers to work, teachers need to have a strong relationship with students and be consistent and clear when communicating expectations. Participants reported that each culturally responsive teaching strategy worked for them but believed that building solid relationships was crucial to the success of these strategies. Participants shared that there can be no learning without the student's buy-in.

Professional development session and CRP tenets. During the professional development sessions, the participants shared what strategy they were implementing and how it was working. The cohort supported each other in their discussion and did not look to the facilitator for answers or comments. I took notes on what the cohort discussed. The consensus of the cohort was that the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategy did improve students' overall engagement.

Table 3.6 illustrates what culturally relevant pedagogy tenet was taught at each professional development session.

Table 3.6

PD Session and CRP Tenets

Session	Self- Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
1	<p>2 x 10 strategy -easy to implement</p> <p>Using games to increase engagement</p> <p>Sal was worried about giving up control.</p> <p>Petunia had more students participate because she was not talking at them</p>	<p>Participants discussed how it was difficult for them to reflect on their bias and privilege as being middle class</p>	<p>Why did we not do projects sooner?</p> <p>More planning and monitoring initially but became student centered quickly.</p>
2	<p>Participants shared how building rapport has decreased the number of discipline referrals in math class.</p> <p>Sal and Gill implemented using student interests and names in classwork and homework.</p>		<p>After hearing discussion from PBL, Molly started doing learning rotations. This has helped her differentiated her instruction.</p>
3	<p>Follow-up from using student names: students preferred their teachers name instead of theirs. It is too embarrassing (street cred)</p>		<p>Molly reported that Learning centers are going well. Students like working in small groups. They feel like they are getting more of their teacher's attention.</p>
4	<p>Relationships are getting stronger with the students.</p> <p>Fewer students are falling asleep during class.</p>	<p>Molly and Gill used virtual field trips to build background knowledge.</p> <p>Molly's class was learning about sea creatures, and they went on a virtual field trip to the SC aquarium.</p> <p>Gill did a virtual fieldtrip to the Edgar Allen Poe Museum in Maryland.</p> <p>Students loved it!</p>	<p>Students are completing more assignments because they are relevant to them.</p>
5	<p>When using student names in example keep it positive</p>	<p>Bellatrix (school counselor was a guest speaker) to discuss how to manage emotions. Girls' attitudes were rude, and they completed a self-reflection exercise.</p>	<p>Students are becoming more independent in their learning. They still cannot remember to bring a pencil, but they are asking their peers for a pencil instead of the teacher.</p> <p>Community of problem solvers</p>

Participants were drawn to the self-awareness tenet to build strong relationships with their students. In session two, the participants discussed their successes in implementing the self-awareness tenet. Building relationships with students and using their names in examples slowly increased student engagement. Participants that choose to incorporate problem-based learning were ecstatic with the results and could not believe that it took them this long to use this strategy.

These results and reactions, in turn, encouraged other participants to attempt center or rotation-based learning. Table 3.6 continues to illustrate that at session three teachers shared their experiences with the self-awareness and critical consciousness tenets. In session four a couple of participants had taken virtual field trips to build background and to get information and perspective from another expert. Session five was a celebration where the participants shared their thoughts on what they had learned, reflected on all the positive developments, interactions, and growth that had been achieved by their students using the culturally relevant teaching strategies. At the culmination of this fifth and final meeting, the mandate from all participants was to keep up the positive work and continue to create a community of problem solvers.

Second Cycle Coding

During the second coding cycle, the same two themes emerged as from the first coding cycle: building relationships or rapport and creating safe environments. I collected and analyzing data using triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I triangulated the observations, observation follow-ups, and response journals to ensure that building relationships or rapport and creating safe environments were valid and reliable themes. Due to the constraints of the safety protocols around Covid-19 only four of the original

seven participants were able to participate in this phase. The participants focused on building relationships with their students by using rapport building strategies to learn more about the students in their class. As the teachers learned more about their students, they were able to create activities that focused on the prior knowledge of the student to create a classroom environment in which students felt safe to try new things. The classrooms became socially and intellectually safe for students because the teacher had taken time to learn about the class and created an environment in which students wanted to work. This was evident by the increase in the number of hands raised and the natural conversations students were having with each other. Participants created safe learning environments for their students by being aware of their own biases and creating an avenue to have open conversations about issues that concerned their students as supported by the self-awareness culturally relevant tenet. While the participants focused on different strategies, they each had their students' best interests in mind. To do so, participants had to consciously address and move past their own internal biases.

Table 3.7 illustrates the themes that emerged from the instrumental case study and its relationship to the culturally relevant pedagogy tenets. Throughout the series of professional development sessions, participants had the opportunity to choose culturally responsive teaching strategies to fit their teaching styles.

Table 3.7

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Themes

Self-Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Relationships	Positive Parent contact	Creating safe environments
Community of learners	Student-centered/driven	High Expectations

Participants worked to create a learning environment that would benefit their students and increase student engagement. Table 3.7 illustrates that the participants utilized strategies to support a culturally relevant and responsive classroom by operating under one of the three core tenets of CRP.

These themes created a rich description of the dedication the participants had for their students. Each participant vowed to create a positive relationship with their students by building rapport and incorporating students' interests and knowledge to create a safe environment where each member of the class felt like they belonged. The participants strived to create learning opportunities that were student driven coupled with high expectations. As table 3.6 illustrates, participants choose culturally responsive teaching strategies that supported Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy framework. These culturally responsive teaching strategies along with the support of the culturally relevant pedagogy framework created an atmosphere where learning becomes more student centered based on the participants taking time to get to know their students and implement the students' interest as engagement increases in the classroom.

The themes that emerged from this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was building relationships, creating a community of learners, student driven lessons, creating safe environments with high expectations. By the end of the professional development series all seven participants had engaged in building relationships with their students. As the participants built relationships with their students, they did it in a way that was relevant to the needs of their class. Some participants did this by utilizing a 2x10 strategy that gave them the opportunity to focus on the student for two minutes for ten consecutive school days, while others had students to write personal letters, or get to

know your activities. As the participants-built relationships with students and began creating activities that were both relevant to the students and the curriculum they began to foster a community of learners by creating lessons that were student driven. The students were taking responsibility of their learning because the activities were of interest to them as well as they were seeing the funds of knowledge the students had. As the instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) continued the participants shared that including the expectations on the directions or rubric increased the content of the project. Students knew exactly what was expected of them and strived to meet the demands. The participants shared that as the relationships continued to grow between the teacher and student, they also saw an improvement amongst classmates. The participants attributed this to activities being engaging, relevant, and the students felt listened to.

Discussion

This instrumental case study examines how teachers understand and apply culturally relevant pedagogy in a rural, economically disadvantaged, low-performing middle school. This instrumental case study seeks to understand participant teachers' knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and how they applied and reflected on culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms. My research question is designed to elicit in-depth insight into the teachers' perspectives of CRP and to align with the instrumental case study design (Stake here, 1995). My research question asks: while participating in an ongoing professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, how do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply these strategies in their classrooms? I employed Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP framework to drive the research

and identified three emerging themes. The themes I noted from the CRP professional development are building relationships and rapport, creating a safe and welcoming environment for students to learn, and high expectations for learners. In this discussion section, I connect the themes of my findings to the thematic analysis.

Study participants desired to be aware of their biases and how they might remove them and implement a strategy in the student's best interest (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each participant wanted to work on building rapport with their students, but not all the participants started here. Building rapport is the first tenet of the CRP framework, self-awareness. Wage (2018) points out that students from poverty may have more difficulty forming relationships. The participants wanted to make building relationships and rapport a priority (Brafman & Brafman, 2011). Gill chose to start with a cooperative learning strategy in the critical consciousness tenet but quickly realized that he needed to focus on building relationships with his students so he could create activities that were more relevant to the students. In Darling-Hammond's 2006 research, she discusses that it is vital to understand the person and find a way to nurture that person. Each participant created a way to do this: some used the 2x10 strategy, while others made a space for students to share about themselves. As the student and teacher bond formed and strengthened, they moved toward building instructional activities based on student interest and choice.

As the participants worked to establish strong relationships with the students in their classrooms, another theme emerged, creating a safe and welcoming environment for students to learn, and creating a safe and welcoming environment as part of the cultural competence tenet of the CRP framework. Hands (2014) shares that students' sense of

inclusion is directly affected by a lack of community and belonging perceived by their parents within the school. Participants in my instrumental case study saw a change in their students' parents' perceptions because parents felt their voice were included in conversations about their students. As parents learned more about their students and their families, participants realized that their classrooms became more welcoming environments. Study participants shared that their students felt their voices heard because the participants were using the knowledge that they had gained from building relationships with their students (Gay 2010b; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Kazol, 1992).

Creating a safe and welcoming environment is a crucial step in supporting learners, especially in their growth towards becoming dependent and independent learners (Hammond, 2015). Participants discovered that having a culturally safe classroom environment allowed students to feel comfortable exploring their learning in a safe and supported environment (Hammond, 2015). Participants' focus on building relationships and rapport with their students created safe classroom environments in which students became partners with their teachers and peers (Yeager & Walton, 2011).

The final theme that emerged from the research is that the participants created high expectations for their learners through the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies. As Hasson et al. (2010) & Hammond (2015) share, trust must be fostered by listening with grace and responding without judgment. The participants took time to build rapport and relationships with their students and create a safe environment for students, which manifested into a classroom of high expectations. This final emergent theme of high expectations was made possible by the participant's consistent use of building rapport and relationships with students. The participants shared that the

expectations they set at the beginning of the year were the same but what changed is that students were now meeting expectations, where they were not at the beginning of the year. Participants reflected that this change in meeting expectations is attributable to students beginning to see participant teachers as allies. The results experienced by participants is due to taking the time to build necessary student-to-teacher relationships (Ladson-Billings, 2009 & Gordon, 2004). During this time, students began to engage more in lessons due to increased teacher direction geared more towards students' interests and needs. Additionally, the learning center strategies employed provided students the opportunity to collaborate with their peers and solve problems that were relevant to them. The use of learning centers served to increase student engagement and refocused students to want to hold themselves to higher standards.

The fluid nature of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995) proved to be the most appropriate framework for the participants and the study because participants could start where they needed according to the needs of their students. Due to participants recognizing the need to build strong relationships with students, participants chose to first engage with the first tenet of CRP, self-awareness. After creating these strong relationships with their students, participants felt more confident trying different strategies to move their students from being passive learners to active learners. As the participants became more self-aware and started building relationships with their students, they created a community of learners because the participants were focused on their students. Having established these relationships, participants were able to develop activities relevant to their classes' needs and create a cooperative learning environment.

Participants shared that as their students continued to practice cooperative learning activities, the students were able to start driving their learning.

Implications and Recommendations

I use the instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995) to understand how educators in an economically disadvantaged rural school apply culturally responsive teaching strategies through the support of the CRP framework. The seven study participants worked diligently to provide the best possible educational atmosphere for their students. Only four of the seven participants were able to fully manage the obligations of the research due to quarantine and safety protocols initiated in response to the global pandemic Covid-19. Four of the seven participants participated in semi-structured interviews, observations, response journaling and five professional development sessions. These participants took the first step in creating a classroom community that was built on relationships and student-centered learning. The other three participants worked just as hard to make a positive impact on their students' lives by creating strong relationships.

During the first semester of the school year when this professional development was introduced and implemented the participants changed the lens through which they looked at students' performance. Their lens changed from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset and their students' experiences evolved from a deficit view to a funds of knowledge view. Participants unanimously shared that building relationships with their students was the key to creating a more positive classroom culture and in creating a community of learners. The participants shared how having these positive relationships helped change their view of their students. Participants noticed what skills the students

have and how they can build upon those skills to assist their students in being the best academic version of themselves.

Implications

An implication of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is that the participants' use of culturally responsive teaching strategies works for all students in their classroom not just students from economically disadvantaged homes. Culturally responsive teaching strategies coupled with the culturally relevant pedagogy framework created a classroom environment of inclusion in participant classrooms that was previously missing. Participants shared that the students no longer saw their peers as smart or slow based on grades but began to see one another through a more wholistic lens. The participants shared that working in small groups made their students more self-aware of their strengths.

CRP is an appropriate framework to use for this research due to its fluidity and utility in bringing the student's culture and perspective into the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The CRP framework is divided into three tenets which allowed study participants to interact fluidly among the tenets. Toward the end of the research study, participants visualized how these tenets come together to create a cohesive environment for students and teachers to learn and grow. Culturally responsive teaching strategies allowed participants to learn techniques to help them better support and teach their students. The professional development sessions that served as the case for this instrumental study were conducted in an instructor-centered and facilitated manner. This approach was intentional because I wanted to create an atmosphere where teachers felt safe exploring new approaches to working with their students. Based on the fluid nature

of CRP tenets it was a great opportunity for the participants to choose what strategies they wanted to engage with based on the needs of their classroom and themselves. The participants in this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), were new to the use of CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies and while one started at the critical consciousness tenet, he immediately suspended that activity and focused on the self-awareness tenet so he could later create an activity that was relevant to the students.

Recommendations

As an educator, I feel more schools can benefit from the consistent use of CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies, not just rural economically disadvantaged schools. A recommendation for schools is that they start slowly. Schools should determine the staff's knowledge of CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies, and create a fluid platform that allows staff to start at the point of the needs within their classrooms. Next, ensure that school staff can ask questions anonymously. I did not have an anonymous way for participants to ask questions, and I may have missed some opportunities for great discussion and clarity. Another recommendation is to create a safe environment for collaboration and discussion to happen. Throughout the professional development sessions, I used open-ended questions such as: how are the strategies working in your classrooms? These open-ended questions encouraged participants to openly share their experiences and perspectives. Participants facilitated their discussions by building on what their colleagues were saying. While this was not the direct intention of the professional development, it was a happy result. The facilitation of these professional development sessions was an extension of what was happening in participant

classrooms by building relationships and involving participants in professional development that was of interest to them.

Another recommendation I have for schools that would like to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies is to do a one-time, three-hour professional development meeting. At this meeting, schools can define what culturally responsive teaching strategies are and how these strategies, if consistently applied to classroom lessons, can build stronger relationships between teachers, students, and parents, and create a community of learners. After this one-time meeting, do short follow-ups with staff at monthly staff meetings. This will give the meeting participants the opportunity to share how the determined strategies are working for them and offers a chance for collaboration. I make this recommendation because time is a precious commodity in the lives of school staff. If we want our schools to move forward to culturally relevant teaching strategies for our students, we need to find a way to increase the implementation of these strategies but not the overall teacher workload. For the future of our students, I would like to see teachers and other school staff participate in self-reflection exercises that will help them objectively view the lens through which they teach and notice the unconscious biases that each person carries.

My overall recommendations for this research are to give the staff an opportunity to self-reflect, be heard, ask questions, and be themselves. That is what building a community of learners is all about, and culturally responsive teaching strategies are a tool that can help us achieve the goal. There is a need for continued qualitative research in the areas of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, especially in rural economically disadvantaged areas.

Conclusion and Summary

This research explores how educators in rural communities can use culturally responsive teaching strategies to support student learning in economically disadvantaged rural schools. The participants in this study found that through the consistent application of culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom, a positive academic and social environment in which student engagement and achievement increased was achieved. Through this research, participants discovered that building relationships with their students had the most significant impact on their engagement in activities. The participants shared that they were better equipped to introduce more strategies after building these relationships. Participants also stated that students were more engaged in learning centers because they were more involved in their learning and able to talk with their peers when they did not understand a concept whereupon the teacher was able to redirect, clarify, and achieve student comprehension more effectively. Rather than waiting for solutions to be presented, students were also found to achieve greater participation in creating and finding solutions on their own. Study participants also found that building rapport with students and transitioning to learning centers fostered greater critical thinking among students, and lowered levels of surface thinking and a diminished sense of learned helplessness among students.

The research was conducted through an instrumental case study in a rural economically disadvantaged middle school. Participants engaged in a series of five professional development sessions to learn what CRP is and what culturally responsive teaching strategies are. Through these professional development sessions, participants learned, explored, applied, and understood culturally responsive teaching strategies to use in their classrooms. The use of the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy offered a

framework for participants to work through to create learning opportunities for their students. Throughout the semester, the participants shared that building strong and positive relationships affected the students in each classroom. The students felt more engaged because they felt their teachers cared about them. The teachers began to make positive phone calls to parents to strengthen the bond of these burgeoning student relationships. As the participants consistently used culturally responsive teaching strategies, they noted that students were completing more assignments because they saw their interests represented in the curriculum. Participants shared that the use of collaborated learning centers created an inclusive atmosphere in their classes as students were able to recognize their own academic strengths and those of their peers.

The participants shared that through the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies and the fluidity of the CRP framework they were able to meet the needs of their students in their classes. The participants shared that they were successful because someone was checking in with them and supporting them as they learned these strategies. The consistent use of these strategies will help create a community of learners by building strong relationships with students, families, and the school community. For study participants, building relationships was clearly the most significant theme discovered throughout the professional development and classroom implementation phases of the study. Participants created more engaging activities, decreased negative student behaviors, and increased overall student participation through the rapport and relationships fostered through the implementation of these strategies.

The themes that emerged from the use of the CRP framework in this study are relationships, a community of learners, student-centered learning, high expectations, and

a safe environment for learning. The participants determined that relationships between themselves and their students was an important factor in creating a classroom of learners. As the participants continued to build relationship with their students, they used information collected about the student's interest and created activities and learning opportunities that were relevant to the student and therefore creating a community or classroom of learners. The participants shared their expectations with their students during activities and through clear expectations that set the students up for success on the activities. With the expectations set by the participants the students made the classroom a safe learning environment. The students learned how to communicate with their peers and their teachers. These themes demonstrated the importance of culturally responsive teaching strategies and how consistent use in the classroom can positively impact schools in economically disadvantaged rural communities.

Parents in these economically disadvantaged rural communities entrust that their students are learning in a manner that is appropriate and differentiated for their child's needs, but often this is not the case as many of these students are not able to take advantage of preschool or daycare opportunities (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). However, by using culturally relevant pedagogy to guide learning, teachers are learning how to give students a voice and become independent learners and critical thinkers. Culturally relevant pedagogy asks the user to self-reflect and know themselves and then create a safe environment for students to explore through their personal and cultural lens. By knowing the value of one's voice, one can critically analyze and question the status quo and transform the outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

Students and teachers in an Eastern North Carolina (ENC) economically disadvantaged rural middle school are faced with different challenges than their peers in non-economically disadvantaged schools. Most often, there is a disproportionate lack of resources allocated to rural schools in economically depressed areas over their more affluent and often urban counterparts. This lack of resources can be the lack of instructional materials, lack of funds to implement needed programs, or a lack of relationships between teachers and students (Azano et, al. 2020). A concern that is becoming more evident in schools is the lack of relationships between teachers, students, and the community due to the growing difference between cultures and the ability to relate to a variety of cultures in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Being taught in an economically disadvantaged rural school is not an excuse for low academic scores, but it is a barrier (Wages, 2018). To increase relationships between teachers and students and create a cooperative learning environment, teachers must be equipped with a toolbox of instructional strategies to help them bridge the cultural divide. The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to seek understanding on how teachers in a local, rural, economically disadvantaged, low performing middle school understand culturally relevant pedagogy, apply culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. This instrumental case study explores the central question: While participating in an ongoing professional

development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, how do teachers in an economically disadvantaged, rural middle school reflect on culturally responsive teaching strategies and apply these strategies in their classrooms?

The literature review demonstrates a need for culturally relevant and responsive teaching across all school settings. Some schools across the country are attempting to adopt culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to increase relationships and create an atmosphere where students are collaborative learners who can make informed decisions about the world around them. The literature discusses that students need to be viewed from a funds of knowledge (FOK) lens (González and Moll, 2002), and this lens is a cornerstone in culturally relevant and responsive teaching. One of the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy is to instill a desire to be successful and to excel in the student. To assist in accomplishing this goal, building a teaching staff that is culturally proficient is a step in the right direction to begin addressing cultural divides in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is a way for the teacher to become aware of their culture and the culture of students in their class (Gay, 2000). Awareness of the student's culture allows the teacher to choose materials relevant to the student's needs. Gay (2000) points out that culturally responsive teaching to diverse students needs to be both inclusive and celebrated in the classroom. This inclusivity translates into a transformation of empowerment for the student and the ability for the student to take control and ownership of their learning.

There is a lack of literature concerning the use of culturally relevant and responsive teaching in economically disadvantaged rural schools. The breadth of literature concerning CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies centers on the

urban school environment. There is a need for further qualitative research on applying CRP and culturally responsive teaching strategies in economically disadvantaged rural schools.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) to seek understanding on how teachers in a local, rural, economic disadvantage, low performing middle school understand culturally relevant pedagogy, apply culturally responsive teaching strategies, and reflect on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classes. The case was defined as a series of professional development sessions which occurred over five months. Each month, the participants—a school counselor, two special education teachers, three English language arts teachers, and a math teacher and I—would meet to discuss the culturally responsive teaching strategies used and how these strategies worked in their learning environment. During the professional development sessions, I engaged with the participants to consider using culturally responsive teaching strategies and how to incorporate these strategies into their classrooms. I followed up each professional development session with a data collection tool such as classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, or response journals to provide a thick, rich description of the case.

The culturally responsive teaching strategies taught to participants during professional development sessions support the culturally relevant pedagogy framework. The culturally relevant pedagogy framework focuses on creating a culturally relevant environment through use of three core tenets: self-awareness, critical consciousness, and cultural competence. The strategies taught during professional development sessions supported these framework tenets. Participants chose which strategy they wanted to use

in their classroom. As participants consistently applied their chosen culturally responsive teaching strategy, they were able to choose another strategy and continue to build a culturally responsive classroom.

I collected data for this instrumental case study through three observations, three observation follow-up discussions, two semi-structured interviews, four response journals and field notes. I analyzed the information multiple times to identify themes from the participants' experiences with culturally responsive teaching strategies. During observations, I noted the participant's body language and voice intonation. In the follow-up discussions with the participants, I mentioned these notes and allowed them to share what they were thinking at that observational point. While reviewing transcripts from interviews, I highlighted vital details about using culturally responsive teaching strategies. While reading the response journals, I highlighted crucial information on the use of the strategy and the concerns they had with implementation. The data collected and analyzed resulted in the following themes: building relationships, creating a community of learners, student driven lessons, and creating safe environments with high expectations.

The data for this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was coded and analyzed using a priori assumptions from the CRP framework. Data collected from the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies that was collected during observations, observation follow-ups, semi-structured interviews, response journals, and field notes were coded via the three tenets of CRP. The tenets and their codes are as follows: self-awareness (SA), cultural competence (CC), and critical consciousness (RW). I organized the collected data and analyzed it throughout the professional development series. I

categorized the data by observations, observation follow-ups, semi-structured interviews, response journals, and field notes. Analyzing the data this way allowed me to the opportunity to see how the participants were interacting with the culturally responsive teaching strategies and what tenet of the CRP framework they were utilizing.

Summary of Key Findings

The phenomenon of this instrumental case study is to understand and implement culturally responsive teaching strategies in an economically disadvantaged rural middle school. The key findings of this phenomenon are that participants who used culturally responsive teaching strategies consistently created a strong rapport with their students and created a safe and welcoming environment for students to learn. Another critical finding that emerged as teachers and staff consistently used culturally responsive teaching strategies was the achievement of high expectations. Achieving high expectations emerged as a theme later in the data collection and analysis procedures because teachers and staff needed to first create strong bonds with students and help them feel safe before holding students to high expectations.

Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP framework supported the strategies provided to the teachers. The three tenets of the CRP framework are self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. When choosing their first strategy, the teachers and staff initially focused on the self-awareness tenet. Using the self-awareness tenet, some teachers and staff used techniques such as the 2 x 10 to build relationships with students while other teachers and staff had students write a letter. Teachers and staff gamified their instruction to help to engage students and increase participation.

The second tenet of Ladson-Billings’ (1995) CRP is cultural competence. To create cultural competence in the classroom, participants looked for ways to increase students’ background knowledge by bringing in guest speakers, digital field trips, and gallery walks. These techniques leveled the playing field for students who lived in poverty and had no opportunity to travel or meet people beyond their teachers and family members.

The final tenet of Ladson-Billings’ (1995) CRP framework is critical consciousness. Participants chose to use classroom techniques such as project-based learning and learning center rotations to allow students to explore and create a sense of ownership around their learning. Participants stated that using project-based learning and learning centers as teaching strategies helped their students move from passively waiting for the teacher to give them the answer to actively looking for the solution on their own. The participants noted leveraging these strategies removed the learned helplessness barrier for some students. Table 4.1 illustrates the key findings from the instrumental case study that the CRP framework and the culturally responsive teaching strategies support.

Table 4.1

Summary of Key Findings

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Self Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building rapport • Incorporating and using student vocabulary • Using students’ names or teacher names in examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being aware of one’s own culture in relation to the students’ culture • Invites public speakers (experts in their respective field for various events • Utilizes digital field trips to engage students in new opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student centered • Problem-based projects • Use of small groups and learning stations to help solve problems

Informed Recommendations

After analyzing the response journals, observations, follow-up questions, field notes, and interviews, I identified ways in which this research can support the school administrator and teaching communities. The first recommendation I would offer is directed at school administrators, which is to allow time for teachers and staff to build relationships with their students. Time spent building relationships with students is essential to create a rich learning environment through student and teacher engagement. To this end, teachers and staff need permission to be themselves and have authentic conversations with students to engender this environment.

Germane to teachers, my recommendation is to feel comfortable making decisions for their students. Teachers and staff need to feel like they have control in their classrooms to explore culturally responsive teaching strategies to reach their students where they are at, not just where we want them to be. The research showed how teachers who participated in learning rotations and project-based learning enjoyed greater student engagement. The engagement came from the students' ownership of their knowledge, not the teacher. Teachers were allowed to create lessons that fit the needs of the student first and the standards second, without mitigating or lowering the expected standards.

When creating a community of culturally responsive teachers and learners, the final recommendation is again centered on school administrators, which is to create an atmosphere where teachers and staff feel welcomed to attempt new teaching strategies. Teachers and staff need to feel supported as they start a consistent routine and know that they are not being judged because, on that day, the strategy did not work. Culturally responsive teaching strategies do not replace educational standards but are a systematic way for more effectively teaching the standards. This research joins other bodies of work,

and it supports how culturally responsive teaching strategies can be implemented in all school settings and populations to increase student learning. Educators need to feel comfortable making decisions in their classrooms that support the students' needs, and culturally responsive teaching strategies directly support this need.

Findings Distribution Proposal

I plan to share findings from this instrumental case study with key stakeholders and provide a written summary and oral presentation. The research was conducted through a professional development format, and the participants participated in five sessions between August and December of 2021. The presentation to share findings will be approximately forty-five minutes long. I will use a slide show software for the presentation to create a visual display. The presentation will occur at the research site in the school's conference room with the key stakeholders, school-based administration, instructional coach, and participants.

Target Audience

The target audience for the instrumental case study results are the building principal, the participants, school counselors, and the curriculum coaches. These stakeholders are essential in making decisions that have a positive impact on the students' learning experiences throughout the school. This audience will have the opportunity to listen to a presentation on what the participants learned about the three tenets of CRP and how they applied culturally responsive teaching strategies that supported the three tenets. After an overview of the professional development sessions, the stakeholders will learn about the strategies the participants chose and how these strategies, when consistently

applied, created a more positive classroom culture by building relationships and creating a community of learners.

Proposed Distribution Method and Venue

In this section I offer an overview of how I plan to distribute the findings. I will initially present the findings to the key stakeholders at the research site, school administration, instructional coaches, and participants. The school-based administration will be able to decide if they would like other instructional staff present. For the presentation, I will create a visual presentation to support the oral presentation. During this time, I will share what culturally responsive teaching is and the teaching strategies that encompass culturally responsive teaching and CRP.

Presentation components. I will create and use a slide show presentation to present the research findings to the key stakeholders at the research site. The slide show presentation will be an overview of the information the participants received during the professional development sessions and the data collected from these sessions. The purpose and goal of the CRP professional development is to present information on culturally responsive teaching strategies, culturally relevant pedagogy, and examples of culturally responsive teaching strategies to the participants so they can explore, understand, and apply these strategies in their classrooms.

In addition, I will share the following to outline my perspective and positionality as the researcher: as a child, I attended a school very similar to the research location. During these formative school years, I experienced first-hand the drastic difference in educational resources made available to rural schools serving an economically disadvantaged population compared with those serving communities of middle-to-upper

class populations. Like most rural, economically diverse schools, the public schools where I was educated did not receive the same quality or number of materials (i.e., outdated, or abused editions and not enough books for all students) that schools in adjacent townships received (Edwards, 2021).

Next, I will share what culturally responsive teaching is, the strategies presented to the participants, and how these strategies support the culturally relevant pedagogy framework. I will then focus on the importance of the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy: self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Staff and students both need to have self-awareness. This allows each participant to address their bias. We will then discuss cultural competence, which is where participants begin to understand their limitations. Within this discussion we will consider that it is important to bring in outside voices to be the experts. In the realm of critical consciousness, I will discuss how students need collaborative learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs and interests. Lastly, I will share the themes from the research: building relationships, and creating learning opportunities for students to engage with, such as learning rotations, and problem-based projects. The distribution of findings will conclude with a short question and answer session.

What is the goal of culturally responsive teaching? With the consistent use of culturally responsive teaching strategies, every student can increase their engagement and create a community of learners within the classroom and throughout the school. Teachers will view students with a funds of knowledge lens rather than a deficit lens, encouraging greater engagement from students and families. According to Haberman (1991), the current educational system supports a culture of poverty by emphasizing rote

memorization and lecturing. As teachers' perspectives begin to change, students start to see the value in what they are learning and the need to own and invest in their education.

Conclusion

Not every student learns the same or comes to school for the same outcome as their peers. Through this qualitative instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) participants used the three tenets of the culturally relevant pedagogy framework to explore, understand, and apply culturally responsive teaching strategies. Throughout this study, participants created a welcoming and more culturally relevant learning environment for the diverse student population at this economically disadvantaged rural middle school in ENC using culturally responsive teaching principles, techniques, and strategies.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey

1. What do you know about Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies?
 - Nothing, please tell me more.
 - I know a few strategies; please tell me more.
 - I know and implement a few culturally responsive teaching strategies in my classroom, but please, tell me more.

2. What strategies do you implement?

3. What strategies would you like to know more about?
 - Building Student Rapport
 - Creating a community of learners
 - Incorporating peer teaching/ jigsaw/ cooperative learning
 - Inviting guest speakers from the community or student interests
 - Use of student vocabulary and interests when explaining or describing
 - Including the names of students and their experiences into examples

4. Would you be interested in participating in a professional development learning that is culturally responsive teaching strategies and how to implement them into your classroom?
 - Yes
 - No

APPENDIX B

Self-Reflection Journal

1. What culturally responsive teaching strategy did you implement?
2. How did it go? Good, bad, ugly?
3. Explain

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What culturally responsive teaching strategy did you implement?
 - a. How did it go?
 - b. What went well?
 - c. What were some challenges?

2. Do you feel comfortable applying new strategies to your teaching?
 - a. How did the students react to the strategy?
 - b. How long did you use the strategy before it felt comfortable or natural?

3. How can I better support you between our PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT sessions?

APPENDIX D

Observational Field Notes

Field Note Form 2

Name of Participant _____

Site _____

Today's Date _____

Site Sketch:

Descriptive Notes

Reflective Notes

General:

Facial Expressions:

APPENDIX E

Educational Study & Research Form

PROCEDURE 5230-P

EDUCATIONAL STUDY AND RESEARCH

Please describe the proposed study involving school students or school personnel for which assistance and participation is requested. Please be as specific as possible regarding the numbers of students, parents and professional staff who may be involved in this project. A preliminary planning conference may be helpful depending on the magnitude of the project.

1. Principal Investigator(s): Emily C. Caldwell
2. Title of Research Study or Special Project: The Impact of Quality Professional Development in the Areas of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Case Study in an Economically Disadvantaged rural middle school
3. Purpose: The purpose of this case study was to describe how the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy –building self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness in partnership with culturally responsive teaching strategies— could be used to improve student engagement in an economically disadvantaged rural school.
4. General Methodology: Qualitative Study
Series of Professional Development
 - 4 participants (convenience sample)
 - Meet 5 times face to face
 - Interest survey

- Semi-structured interviews
- Reflection journals

5. School Involvement:

- Number of Students Needed: N/A
- Selection Process of Students:
- Time Required of Students: N/A

6. Administrative Involvement (Principal, Central Office):

- Specific Groups: _____
- Tasks: _____
- Time Required of Administrators: _____

7. Teacher Involvement:

- Specific Groups: Four volunteers
- Tasks: Participate in a semester long (August – December) Professional Development on Culturally Responsive Teaching strategies
- Time Required of Teachers: 5 hours and 35 minutes total (August – December). Professional Development: Meet five times face to face for 45 minutes (3.75 hours). Semi-structured interviews – two times for 30 minutes (1hour). Reflection journals – google form five times 10 minutes (50 minutes)

8. Student Involvement:

- Number of Students Needed: N/A
- Selection Process of Students: N/A
- Time Required of Students: N/A

9. Equipment, Facilities, or Auxiliary Services Required: Classroom to conduct face to face professional development

10. Home or Parental Involvement:

- Permission Form: N/A

- b. Other: N/A
- c. Time Required of Parents: N/A

11. Evaluative Instruments to Be Used: (Please attach a copy)

12. Written Communication: (Please indicate purpose of communication below and attach sample letters and memos.)

- a. Parents: N/A
- b. Teachers: Consent
- c. Principals: _____
- d. Other School Personnel: _____

13. Timelines of Activities: (Please include all activities involved in this project. Be as specific as possible and indicate who initiates which activities).

The professional development has five steps in the data collection process.

August

Step 1: Create and distribute a cultural proficiency self-awareness survey to the entire teaching faculty at the research site. The survey was created using a google form. This form was used to create a baseline for the study and determine what strategies would be best taught, novice, intermediate, or expert. Once participants were identified the researcher met with the PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT cohort and reviewed over the different data collection tools that were utilized. (Researcher created and participants complete)

September

Step 2: The reflection journal, with the reflection questions that the participants answered prior to step three. (PD cohort)

September and October

Step 3: Semi-structured interview (Researcher conducts)

September - December

Step 4: Observational walk throughs (Researcher conducts)

September – December (each PD session) (Research conducts)

Step 5: Create a visual to identify the culturally responsive teaching strategies that were effective in supporting the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy (Researcher and PD cohort collaborate)

14. Research Assistant(s): N/A
15. [REDACTED] Intern Supervisor: N/A
16. Special Conditions or Restrictions: This research is a requirement for my dissertation in Learning and Organization Change at Baylor University.
17. Plan for Publication or Use of Results: The results from this research will be used to answer my research question. In what ways do teachers in a middle school, economically disadvantaged, rural school apply culturally responsive teaching strategies during instruction to increase engagement?

-
18. In What Ways Might the Proposed Research Be Considered Relevant to General Educational Objectives? To [REDACTED] in Particular?

The research from this qualitative study will help to determine effective culturally responsive teaching strategies that will increase student engagement. The purpose of this case study set out to explore how culturally responsive teaching strategies can increase student engagement in a rural middle school economically disadvantaged school. The study used the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy to support and direct the culturally responsive teaching strategies learned during the five-month professional development. Data will be gathered using reflection journals, semi-structured interviews, observational walkthroughs, and culturally relevant pedagogy visual identifying supportive teaching strategies. The data will be triangulated by summarizing, identifying codes, and placing these codes into recurring themes. During the PD I will share the data using the culturally relevant pedagogy visual to identify which tenet; self-awareness, cultural competence, or critical consciousness is impacting student engagement. In Chapter Three this study will reveal which culturally responsive teaching strategies will increase student engagement.

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY OR SPECIAL PROJECT

I agree to furnish [REDACTED] a copy of the results or this research study or special project.

Emily C. Caldwell Ed.D
Candidate

Signature of Person Making
Request

Sarah S. Pratt Ph.D.

Signature of Supervising Professor

July 13, 2021

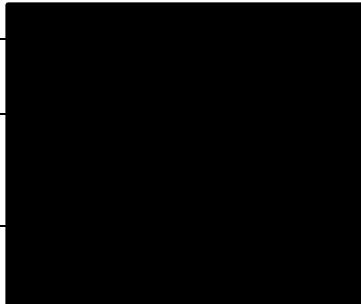
Date

July 13, 2021

Date



Email Address

Baylor University – School of
Education


(For Office Use Only) Project Approval

Project Approved: _____

Project Disapproved: _____

Referred to: _____

Signature of Superintendent/Designee: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Baylor Consent Form

Baylor University
College of Education

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: The Impact of Quality Professional Development via culturally responsive teaching: Case Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Emily C. Caldwell Ed.D Candidate

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

Important Information about this Research Study

Things you should know:

- The purpose of the study is to describe how the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy— building self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness in partnership with culturally responsive teaching strategies — could be used to improve student engagement in an economically disadvantaged rural school.
- To participate, you must be a teacher in at [REDACTED] middle school.
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a professional development based on the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies to identify if student engagement increases, during the initial mandatory teacher workday and then prerequisite meetings will occur during professional learning community once a month and each session will take 45 minutes, in the instructional coaches classroom, and participants will reflect on the use of the taught culturally responsive teaching strategy and discuss how the strategy was useful and if engagement was improved. This professional development will take five months to complete. Professional development will meet face to face one day a month.
- Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

More detailed information may be described later in this form. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research study.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe how the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy— building self-awareness, cultural competence, and critical consciousness in partnership with culturally responsive teaching strategies — could be used to improve student engagement in an economically disadvantaged rural school.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) professional development that will meet five times for 45 minutes each between August 2021- December 2021.

August – Mandatory teacher workday

Complete a survey on culturally responsive teaching Strategies. This form will be used to create a baseline for the study and determine what strategies would be best taught, novice, intermediate, or expert. Once participants are identified the researcher will meet with the PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT cohort and review the expectations of the professional development, the different data collection tools that will be utilized, and answer any questions.

September – December

- Participate in monthly 45 minutes professional development after school
- Create a visual to identify the culturally responsive teaching strategies that were effective in supporting the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy
- Observational walk throughs

September and October

- Complete reflection journal
- Semi-structured interview

How long will I be in this study and how many people will be in the study?

Participation in this study will last for five months, August 2021 – December 2021. I am looking for four teachers to take part in this research study.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

There are no anticipated risks from participating in this research.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

The possible benefits of this study include increase student engagement in your classroom and increased confidence in teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds.

How Will You Protect my Information?

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by creating research codes that will be used to identify descriptive information. Each participant will be assigned a code that only the researcher knows. This will create anonymity for the participant and the information collected during the research process. Every effort will be made to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

The following people or groups may review your study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

- Representatives of Baylor University and the BU Institutional Review Board

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your individual results are discussed, your identity will be protected by using a code number or pseudonym rather than your name or other identifying information.

Is it possible that I will be asked to leave the study?

The researcher may take you out of this study without your permission. This may happen because:

- The researcher thinks it is in your best interest
- You can't make the required study visits
- Other administrative reasons

Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your withdrawal.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Emily Caldwell

Phone: 

Email: 

Or

Dr. Sarah Pratt
Email: Sarah_Pratt@baylor.edu

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Baylor University Institutional Review Board
Office of the Vice Provost for Research
Phone: 254-710-3708
Email: irb@baylor.edu

Your Consent

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX G

List of Teaching Strategies

Table G.1

Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies

Self-Awareness	Cultural Competence	Critical Consciousness
<p>Building rapport 2x10 strategy Creates an atmosphere of trust</p>	<p>Guest Speakers</p>	<p>Learning stations or rotations</p> <p>Nondirective teaching model – building capacity for self-instruction through personal development</p>
<p>Use of student vocabulary</p>	<p>Digital or virtual field trips</p>	<p>Problem based learning Social inquiry model where students learn how to solve problems through academic inquiry and logical reasoning</p>
<p>Integrate interest and names</p>		<p>Calling on each student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the expectation randomly, raised hand, strategic (popsicle stick or popcorn) • Turn and talk
<p>Uses games to engage</p>		<p>High expectation for student giving wait or think time No opt out</p>
<p>Different types of non-digital free time</p>		

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