

ABSTRACT

Examining Effective Practices of Teachers in High Performing Title I Schools

Sherita L. Wilson-Rodgers, Ed.D.

Mentor: Brooke Blevins, Ph.D.

When looking at educational assessment data, too many Black and Latinx students perform below the national and state achievement level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, Table 5). This concern is not a new problem; Black and Latinx students' achievement gap has existed for over 50 years. As schools become more diverse across the country, teachers need adequate preparation to provide quality instruction to students from different races and cultural backgrounds. "Cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity is increasing in the United States as well as in the nation's schools" (Banks & Banks, 2016, p. 171). Cultural differences between teachers and students substantially impact many students' academic achievement. As student diversity continues to shift, research expands to help inform culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy as an instructional method that improves all students' academic achievement. National and local education officials seek to understand what is causing the academic achievement gaps and what is needed to close the existing gaps.

This study investigates the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy in public schools to help close the achievement gap. The purpose of this case study is to identify the systems, structures, and instructional practices teachers utilize on a high performing Title I campus to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential. This study examines one primary research question: What are teachers and school leaders at one high performing Title I campus doing to promote students' academic success? This qualitative single instrumental case study addresses a Title I elementary school staff experience where students' demographics are diverse. Still, most of the teachers are White. This research seeks to understand the impact of hegemony on student learning and to investigate the utilization of students' funds of knowledge during instruction (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Examining Effective Practices of Teachers in High Performing Title I Schools

by

Sherita L. Wilson-Rodgers, B.A., M.Ed.

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Brooke Blevins, Ph.D., Chairperson

Tony L. Talbert, Ed.D.

Nicholas R. Werse, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

—Jeremiah 29:11, *New Living Translation*

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DEDICATION

To my mother, thank you. The love and support you have shown and the life lessons you have taught me have made me who I am today. My biggest cheerleader, and for that, I am forever grateful.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

The achievement gap between White and racial minority students has been a significant focus of research for over 50 years. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test shows that Black students in elementary schools score lower overall than White students (Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001). The average fourth grade reading scores on the 2017 NAEP were 206 for Black students than 232 for White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). NAEP also reported that 37 percent of Black students scored below “basic” in math. In contrast, only 12 percent of White students scored below “basic” in math (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, Table 5). The NAEP data does not align with individual state content standards, so it does not represent what students learn in their respective states. As of the Spring 2019 administration of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), Black students who took the fourth-grade reading test scored 23 percent lower than White students (Texas Education Association).

As schools become more diverse across the country, teachers require preparation to provide quality instruction to students from different racial and cultural backgrounds. National and local education officials seek to understand what causes the gaps and how to close the existing gaps. Little research investigates what high-performing schools with high minority populations do to influence student academic achievement positively. This study adds to the knowledge about closing the achievement gap and culturally responsive

teaching. This investigation continues as achievement data across the country show a discrepancy across student groups.

Statement of the Problem

Title I campuses in the participating district are the district's academically lowest-performing campuses. The participating district consists of public schools in the west region of Houston, TX. The district has an enrollment of over 80,000 students. "Title I campuses are schools with large concentrations of low-income students that receive supplemental funds to assist with meeting student's educational goals" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The achievement gap at the participating district Title I campuses has remained an issue for the past three years. Most students enrolled at Title I schools are minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, but many educators are White.

Demographic differences between teachers and students in public schools can impact student achievement. Eighty percent of public-school teachers in the 2015–2016 school year reported their race as White, according to The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; see discussion in U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The NCES report also indicated that between 2000 and 2015, the percentage of White students enrolled in public schools decreased from 61 percent to 49 percent, and Black student enrollment decreased from 17 percent to 15 percent. However, Hispanic enrollment increased from 16 percent to 26 percent, and Asian enrollment increased to 5 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). When teachers and students are not from the same cultural background, this difference can impact students' academic achievement. Culture plays a vital role in many students' academic success. Due to White teachers'

predominance in public schools, White educators need to acknowledge the power and impact on student achievement. Howard (1999) notes that school leaders should:

... encourage White educators to look deeply into the nature of dominance, to understand as authentically as we can the reality of its tragic impact in the lives of our colleagues and students, and then to struggle and work together to create healing responses on the river of change. (p. 68)

Over the past 15 years, the participating district's demographics have shifted. In 2004, the enrollment of White students in the participating district was 60 percent, but that percentage decreased to 34 percent in 2019. Hispanic student enrollment has increased from 25 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2019, while Black student enrollment increased from 7 percent to 11 percent from 2004–2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Though student demographics have changed, the demographics of the teachers have not. Most of the teachers in the test district are White. Many teachers have difficulty designing and implementing instructional practices that their students find relevant and meaningful. This setting becomes a significant issue when students cannot interact with their content to master and learn gaps form. Teachers want the best for their students and desire to provide a quality educational experience, but they must first connect with their students.

This study seeks to empower educators to reflect on their beliefs and current instructional practices that impact all students' academic achievement. As leaders work to help students grow academically, support is needed to help educators gain a deeper understanding of who they are and how they contribute to the learning environment. Educators who acknowledge the differences and similarities between teacher and student culture can utilize it to provide all students with academic success opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative single instrumental case study explores how a high-performing Title I campus cultivates student academic success. The study findings helped identify which systems and structures contribute to high-performing Title I schools' success. I accomplished these goals by capturing the effective teachers' strategies and systems to ensure that other campuses can implement similar instructional strategies.

This study examines the following research questions: What are teachers and school leaders at one high performing Title I campus doing to promote academic success? What are teachers' and school leaders' beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on a Title I campus? What are the strategies and approaches teachers use on the high performing Title I campus to engage and empower students to succeed academically? What are the systems and structures used by campus administrators on the high performing Title I campus to support high-quality instruction?

Theoretical Framework

This study builds upon three theoretical frameworks: funds of knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. First, this study employs an in-depth analysis of how teachers utilize students' funds of knowledge when designing and delivering instruction. Teachers use students' funds of knowledge when implementing culturally responsive teaching theory. Wolf (1966) initially coined the designation "funds of knowledge" to mean "resources and knowledge that households manipulate to make ends meet in the economy" (Hogg, 2011, p. 667). Students' funds of knowledge serve as an asset to the learning environment when utilized effectively (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). Funds of knowledge

reinforce the importance of teachers developing more significant cultural congruence in their practice (Hogg, 2011; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). As educators work to embrace the skills and out-of-school knowledge that students bring to the classroom, this approach supports this effort. Teachers can capitalize on students' family and community resources as an integral part of classroom instruction.

The second theoretical framework addressed in the study is culturally responsive teaching, which effectively incorporates diverse students' experiences and perspectives into teaching practices (Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010). Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as

...acknowledging and understanding the influences of race, culture, and ethnicity in teaching and learning, and using the cultural experiences, perspectives, traits and contributions of different ethnic groups as instrumental tools for teaching academic and social knowledge, values, and skills to diverse students. (p. 619)

The culturally responsive teaching framework utilizes cultural connections within academic and social settings that empower students during their learning experiences (Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010; Vavrus, 2008). The successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching impacts students' engagement and motivation. By purposefully integrating their students' cultural backgrounds into the learning experience, teachers give students the opportunities to access the curriculum. For culturally responsive teaching to occur, teachers must set aside their own cultural biases and work to design learning experiences that engage students actively in their academic endeavors (Kozleski, 2010). Effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching fosters academic success throughout the learning experience.

Both the funds of knowledge and culturally responsive teaching theoretical frameworks are essential for educators to close the academic achievement gap. Funds of

knowledge and culturally responsive teaching work together to increase student achievement while keeping students focused on the educational experience. Finding the appropriate way to address culture and its impact on student achievement is necessary. The existing frameworks have five common principles: role of parents and families, fostering academic success, reshaping curriculum, cultural and linguistic competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Strong school leadership support of teachers and students is the center of the common principles. The principles value students lived experiences in the classroom setting and impact student learning experiences. When educators use students' backgrounds to design instruction, they make learning more relevant and accessible. The infusion of student culture into the curriculum makes connections with the community. To ensure students learn at deep levels, teachers must communicate high expectations for students while sharing control of the classroom with their students to engage students in learning actively.

Research Design and Methods

As the researcher, the qualitative research design approach chosen for this study provides an opportunity to learn about the participants and their lived experiences. Qualitative research begins with the use of theoretical frameworks that inform the study and enable the use of an inquiry approach to data collection of participants in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this qualitative research, the participants' perspective helped with understanding the role of teachers' and students' culture in academic achievement.

Case study research allows an investigation of a real-world case to understand the context conditions (Yin, 2017). For logical replication to occur, I utilized a single

instrumental case study. As the researcher in a single instrumental case study, the execution of a cross-case analysis of the data collected at a single site helps understand common practices that contributed to student success.

This qualitative single instrumental case study gathered information on the effective systems, structures, and instructional approaches utilized by the staff on a high performing Title I elementary school campus. I conduct three virtual interviews with participants, including the campus principal, instructional coach, and two Reading teachers. Following each interview round, I electronically documented the interview data and reviewed it to prepare for the next round of interviews.

Data collection and analysis happen simultaneously throughout the research process. As interviews are analyzed, I memoed and summarized ideas to determine emerging themes. I interpreted themes and categories as they are revealed and connect them to the literature review's theoretical framework. Upon detailed analysis, I reported the data with clarity to share a point of view in response to the research question, problem statement, and purpose statement

Definition of Key Terms

To fully understand the research conducted, critical vital terms are defined below. The terms are in alphabetical order. All terms below provided clarity to the problem and research.

Achievement Gap is defined by Ladson-Billings (2006) as a disparity in academic performance between different groups of students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to “a theoretical model that addresses student achievement and helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity while

developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate”
(Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2002) as the integration of students’
cultural values, experiences, and knowledge with teaching and learning.

Culture refers to the values, practices, and experiences of different groups that they apply
to understand the world (McLaren, 2003).

Funds of knowledge refer to households’ fruitful dialogue and activities that build an
individual’s knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Hegemony is leadership or dominance displayed by one group over others—a method for
gaining and maintaining power (Lull, 1995).

Race is humans categorized into distinct groups based on shared physical and social
characteristics that they communicate (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Title I schools are schools identified by the number of free and reduced lunch students
enrolled, making them eligible to receive supplemental funds to increase student
academic achievement.

Conclusion

The achievement gap that exists in education remains a focus for researchers. The
impact culture has on student achievement when the teacher and student are not from the
same cultural background plays a vital role in many students’ academic success. As
student diversity continues to shift, research expands to help inform and understand
culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. The study explores how to close the
academic achievement gap, a phenomenon that continues to plague our nation’s schools.
The purpose of this case study is to identify the systems, structures, and instructional

approaches utilized by the high performing Title I campuses that impact learning. An exploration of the literature surrounding current research-based practices educators utilize with diverse students can close the achievement gap.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review argues that further research and implementation of culturally responsive teaching in public schools helps close the achievement gap. This study examines the linkages between campus systems, instructional structures, and pedagogy that are in place to impact academic achievement at high performing Title I schools. As educators continue to work on closing the achievement gap, the focus is on using an asset-based model instead of a deficit model. In the participating district, some Title I schools are among the lowest-performing in the district, but other Title I schools perform well. Through the study, I examined what contributes to students' academic success at a high performing Title I school.

The following literature review examines six scholarly conversations. First, this chapter discusses the literature on the achievement gap to argue that modern pedagogical strategies still do not adequately address persistent racial inequities. Second, this chapter discusses the impact of desegregation on schools and its purpose to increase minority students' achievement. Despite the good intentions underlying desegregation, teachers still need more appropriate training to provide quality instruction to diverse learners. Third, this chapter argues the need for discussions of culture and power in public schools. Also, the cultural mismatch between the teacher and the student often exists. Fourth, the literature review addresses the research on culturally responsive teaching and its impact on the achievement gap when implemented in classrooms. Fifth, I explored the research

on culturally relevant pedagogy as a response to closing the existing achievement gap. This chapter concludes with a critical assessment of culturally responsive teaching to provide quality and meaningful instruction to students and close the achievement gap.

Achievement Gap

One of the most discussed issues in U.S. education is the achievement gap. The achievement gap remains as disparities in standardized test scores show that not all racial student groups are advancing at the same rate. Scholars began researching the achievement gap 50 years ago, yet it remains. The achievement gap between White and minority students now stands at about four years (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Lyman & Villiani, 2004). In this literature review, I argue that to close the existing achievement gap, all-district and campus administrators, teachers, and staff must focus on researching and implementing culturally responsive teaching to impact student achievement.

Researchers argue that the achievement gap exists before students enter their first day of kindergarten (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Latinx and Black students start kindergarten scoring lower than White students in reading and math. The entry into kindergarten is an essential foundational milestone for a young child. It is critical to ensure that quality instructional practices are in place in the early elementary grades to narrow the gap.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) standardized test reports a definite gap in the achievement scores of Black and White students (NAEP, 2017). White students perform at or above the national average, and Black students consistently perform below the national average. The achievement gap remains as large as in 1966 when the Coleman Report launched a national “War on Poverty” (Hanushek,

Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019). The average African American and Latinx 12th grader performed at about the same level as the average 8th-grade White student in reading and math (Nieto, 2010). The NAEP reported that the average 8th grader who is a student of color performed at about the level of the average 4th-grade student (as cited in Barton, 2004, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

On the state level, in Grade 4, Texas offers the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) in reading, math, and writing. Table 2.1 shows the relationship between the state averages for all students (Black/African American, Hispanic, Asian, and White) at the Approaches Level on the 2018 assessment. The Approaches Level percentage based on the number of questions a student answers correctly on the assessment. To score at the Approaches Level in both reading and writing, a student must answer 56 percent of the questions correctly.

Table 2.1

State Average on the STAAR 2018 Spring Test Administration: Grade 4 Approaches Grade Level Results

Content Area	All Students	Black	Hispanic	Asian	White
Reading	72%	59%	67%	88%	82%
Mathematics	78%	63%	76%	93%	85%
Writing	61%	48%	56%	85%	79%

Table 2.1 above presents the STAAR data of the study district in Texas. The district has an enrollment of over 80,000 students, 11 percent of whom are Black. Black students were the lowest-performing of all ethnic groups on each fourth-grade assessment. Black students scored 8 percent lower than all students on the math

assessment and 11 percent lower than all students on the state fourth-grade reading assessment. Black students' average was 10 percent lower in writing than all students in fourth grade that tested in the district. The statistics show a definite achievement gap between the ethnic groups across content areas that need attention to ensure all students learn.

James S. Coleman led the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study commissioned by Congress as a part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. For the study, Coleman and his team collected data from schools, teachers, and students during the fall of 1965 (Hill, 2016). The report suggested that the gap existed because of differences between families (Borman & Dowling, 2010; Coleman, 1966). Family background contributed to the achievement gap between America's White and Black students. "Their work indicated that the composition of a school (who attends it), the students' sense of control of the environments and their futures, the teachers' verbal skills, and the students' family background all contribute to student achievement" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 4). As educators work with diverse students in their classroom, incorporating students' funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004) into the learning environment impacts achievement.

There are also critiques of the Coleman report that argue that the effects of school social composition on student achievement matter. The social composition aspect that matters most is socioeconomic (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). To address the achievement gap in schools, a review of resources, structures, and practices continues and increased if necessary.

Ladson-Billings argues that the achievement gap is more like a national debt (2006). Race, class, and gender inequities have existed for years in this country. During enslavement, African Americans could not seek education, and universal secondary schooling for Black students in the South did not take place until 1968.

That debt service manifests itself in communities serving the poor and children of color... So, we must address the education debt because it has implications for the kind of lives we can live and the kind of education the society can expect for most of its children. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 9)

The education debt impacts current educational progress as students' lack of trust erodes the services teachers and administrators work to provide as they invest in helping students academically. Further research is needed to address why the achievement gap remains. Within schools, the quality of the teaching force (Darling-Hammond, 2000), teaching salaries (Lin, 2010), and the number of teachers with valid teacher certification (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007) are essential factors that affect student achievement and a focus on these factors is necessary when discussing the achievement gap.

Economic and social conditions, past and present, are residual effects and causes of our country's educational achievement gap. Though policymakers continue to equalize educational opportunities, society cannot overcome prejudice and discrimination, contributing to the achievement gap. "The achievement gap is a problem not only for African American students and their families and communities; it affects the well-being of the entire country" (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018, p. 15). The achievement gap is explained by exploring inequalities in schools and communities.

To understand children's underachievement, one must explore racism and economic and social disadvantages as contributing factors (Bowman, Comer, & Johns,

2018). The work to ensure that all students learn continues even though the achievement gap exists for years. Children are born with the ability to learn but need the exposure and experiences through interactions with a viable curriculum to bring their full potential to fruition.

More than fifty years ago, individuals across this country worked to bring attention to the achievement gap. Officials passed federal legislation as a means to address educational concerns. National, state, and local assessment data show that the gap remains though there has been a focus on the topic. In response, the federal government ruled to change the policy regarding segregated schools, which many felt would close the academic achievement gap.

Desegregation of Schools

The academic achievement gap raised a question concerning the segregation of schools. In May of 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal. The ruling overturned the separate but equal doctrine established nearly 60 years prior. The Brown ruling focused on Black-White segregation. In its decision, the Supreme Court did not specify precisely how to end school segregation, so little on the community level took place to achieve the goal of desegregation (Pruitt, 2018). Only limited integration occurred in the 1950s. In the 1960s, smaller school districts, especially in the southern portion of the United States, desegregated after the federal government threatened to withhold Title I funds from districts still discriminating by race. In the 1970s, some school districts used busing to achieve racial balance in schools. More than 60 years after the ruling, addressing the impact of desegregation remains a complicated endeavor.

Students' academic achievement in segregated schools was an integral part of the Coleman report. As reported by Coleman, in predominantly White schools, both White and Black students' academic achievement is higher than in predominantly minority schools (Borman & Dowling, 2010; Coleman, 1966; Reardon, 2016). The difference in the schools' socioeconomic composition where Black and Whites were enrolled was a significant contributor to academic achievement disparities (Reardon, 2015).

Desegregation increased White students' exposure to Black students; throughout the nation, White flight took form with migration to the suburbs. Desegregation began outside of the southern states first in residential housing patterns. Black students were reassigned to a different school to meet the integration policy. With the change in public school racial composition during the 1960s, White student enrollment at private schools in the South increased (Baum-Snow & Lutz, 2008). White flight to private schools decreased student interaction between students of different racial cultures in the public-school sector. Racial isolation in schools remained negatively impacting schooling and student academic achievement.

Modern Segregation of Schools

Racial segregation is related to socioeconomic segregation. In 2000, more than 70 percent of all Black and Hispanic students in the United States attended predominately minority schools (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) reports that 37 percent of Black and 31 percent of Hispanic students under 18 lived in poverty. Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be poor and likely to attend high-poverty schools, affecting academic achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

The ruling to end the segregation of schools did not provide districts or educators with the support to provide quality instruction to a now diverse school or class. The inequality in distributing resources to school communities serving the highly diverse neighborhoods remained (Borman & Dowling, 2010). Racial minority students are now able to attend schools with White students. However, most of the teachers are still White. As classroom student diversity increases, the sheer number of White teachers in the teaching field remains the highest (Picower, 2009). Teachers play a vital role in creating a learning environment that fosters academic achievement and opportunity.

The attempt to lessen the achievement gap by desegregating schools has not been as successful as educators would like. Due to the change in demographic composition and politics, desegregation support has declined in recent years (Rivkin, 2000). Though students bused to meet desegregation guidelines, their interaction with White students may have been very little and included instruction in separate classrooms. The impact on student achievement remains a focal point as schools encounter changes to ethnic culture and power as a part of their identity.

Racial Culture and Power

The cultural differences between teachers and students often create students' issues as they work to access the curriculum being taught and gain a deeper understanding of content (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The way an individual processes information aligns with their culture and upbringing. Some teachers work hard daily to educate their students but have not taken the time to get to know their students. As Howard (1999) concludes, when educators foster an environment that invites students

and colleagues to have an open dialogue about diversity, we begin to embrace the possibility of change and growth.

The topic of hegemony is often not discussed in education, but it plays a vital role in young people's education. "The dominant culture is able to exercise domination over subordinate classes or groups through a process known as hegemony" (McLaren, 2003, p. 76). Individuals of the dominant culture establish many school districts' administrative teams and curricula, so these districts' policies and practices often represent and affirm the dominant culture's values. When individuals from marginalized cultures then attend or work in these districts, they may struggle to understand or lack inclusion as a part of the organization. "In fact, our beliefs about how teaching and learning should occur and how we experience learning situations are mediated by cultural influences" (Gay, 2002, p. 617). Learning organizations often do not discuss power and race, as it impacts student learning—policies created in isolation from the students who have to adhere to them.

A part of the hegemonic power is the notion of White dominance. Not all White educators are fully aware of the nature of dominance and its impact on their colleagues and students (Howard 1999). Eighty percent of public-school educators are White. With the large percentage of teachers being White, many are from mainstream cultures, but the students that they work with are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Behaviors of culturally different students can be deemed strange by teachers who do not understand students' cultural backgrounds. Before change can occur, there must first be an acknowledgment of a problem. Many people do not understand the dominant culture's power because they are born into the culture; they may be unaware that their power is not available to everyone (Au, 2014; Howard, 1999; Lull, 1995). Awareness of one's

privilege and the way hegemonic systems exist is the first step in helping teachers begin the process of transformation. Until White teachers experience a situation different from the normal, their level of understanding cannot grow. The dominant White culture's lived experiences are different from those of the minority cultures (Howard, 1999). This power struggle must be acknowledged so that individuals can work together to create healing and effective change.

Failure to acknowledge and explore bias when discussing ethnic culture and power gives superficial treatment to the critical topic. Teachers should understand that the unspoken and spoken behaviors they bring to the classroom impact students. As teachers work with students from culturally diverse settings, they need to become aware of the attitudes that they bring toward their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This awareness is necessary to ensure that one's attitude integrates into instructional practices. Teachers must expand their social consciousness to reach the needs of all students. Sociocultural consciousness is a way of understanding people's ways of thinking, behaving, and being (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

As teachers work with students, they must reflect on their values regarding the importance of diversity, student culture, and student voice in education. Teachers' beliefs about children's culture should not be detrimental to the learning environment. Listed below are questions a teacher may ask themselves to check their values.

Do I respect diversity in American society?
Do I accept differences in individuals?
Have I ever rejected a student's answer because I did not understand her or his frame of reference?
Did I assume that the answer given by a student who used a slang was wrong?
(Drake, 1993, p. 265)

With the differences in access to power, teachers need to understand the social inequalities that exist throughout the educational system and the role that their biases play in the process.

Biases are present not only in teacher behavior but also in the curriculum. A curriculum focused on just the dominant culture and not on the diverse student population creates a bias that impacts student learning. The curriculum should help bridge school learning and the learning that students do in their lives outside of school (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). District and campus administrators should complete a full examination of curriculum materials to ensure that no stereotypical bias is present (Drake, 1993; Gay, 2002). A curriculum that only focuses on the accomplishments and contributions of high-profile groups but gives no attention to other groups and their achievements and service to society can create a divide between the students and the content that they are learning.

A tool that helps address and affirms all stakeholders' cultural values in a learning community is communication. Communication is the foundation of a learning environment. Building a dialogue cycle that allows all stakeholders' voices is critical for student success. Teachers of a different race from their students could experience a communication barrier due to cultural backgrounds. When teaching students from different ethnic backgrounds, communication can be more challenging (Gay, 2002). The cultural nuances embedded in diverse students' communication behaviors can be challenging to recognize and understand.

White educators who embrace being a part of the change must understand the need for in-depth conversations about multicultural education with students and colleagues. Howard states

...that the multicultural education process engages us in five key arenas of learning:

1. To know who we are racially and culturally
2. To learn about and value cultures different from our own
3. To view social reality through the lens of multiple perspectives
4. To understand the history and dynamics of dominance
5. To nurture in ourselves and our students a passion for justice and the skills for social action. (Howard, 1999, p. 81)

These arenas of learning are not just suitable for the multicultural education process but also for daily life. As educators work to increase student academic achievement, one approach that has been researched and utilized is culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Student Achievement

Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy focus on ways teachers design and implement practices and approaches that have relevance and meaning to students (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003). Educators make learning meaningful for culturally diverse students by addressing their academic and social needs. The tenets of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy embrace the belief that all students can learn. The achievement of culturally diverse students increases when instruction includes students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences, central to culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is an approach to teaching that seeks to enhance all students' success. Culturally responsive teaching directly responds to concerns about the academic achievement gap based on race and socioeconomic class. CRT aspires to unify democratic ideals and goals while being responsive to the culturally and linguistically diverse population (Vavrus, 2008).

Teachers' response to ethnic diversity when delivering instruction includes lessons and strategies inclusive of their students' lived experiences and society's current issues. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). With this framework, teachers support and incorporate cultural filters to increase diverse support's academic achievement. Gay (2002) outlines five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching. These elements include "developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction" (p. 106). These culturally responsive teaching elements support the assumption that when situated knowledge and skills within a student's lived experiences, they become more personally interested and learning more accessible. For example, students in economic classes studying current employment and unemployment rates for their city access the content from their understanding realm, making the learning real and relevant. Utilizing lived experiences allows students an opportunity to make a connection to the content taught.

Researchers in multicultural education argue that minority students' underachievement is due to the lack of culturally responsive teaching implementation with quality (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). CRT provides instructional scaffolding, which allows students to use their skills, knowledge, and experiences that they bring to the classroom to learn. CRT establishes approaches for students to find relevance in the content taught. Teachers must learn more about the community and support the children they are developing learning experiences (Moll et al., 1992). Culturally responsive teachers seek to understand these cultural differences to support students academically and socially (Vavrus, 2008). Teachers can lessen the cultural tensions by learning more about students and applying it to the curriculum.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the importance of incorporating students' lived experiences as a critical element in improving student achievement and engagement. Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to a "theoretical model that addresses student achievement and helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Developing a good fit between home and school culture so that students can achieve. "According to Ladson Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy must develop students' abilities in three domains: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness" (Martell, 2018, p. 64). Maintaining cultural integrity while obtaining academic success is the goal of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Common Principles of CRT and CRP

Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy provide support to teachers as they work to implement practices incorporating the intersection of culture and teaching. The existing frameworks have five common principles presented in Figure 2.1 that value students lived experiences in the classroom setting and impact student learning experiences. The common principles center on strong school leadership support of teachers and students as meaningful experiences occur. The following discussion examines each of these five principles, followed by the role of school leadership support to demonstrate how this model cohesively works to help teachers design instruction for student achievement.

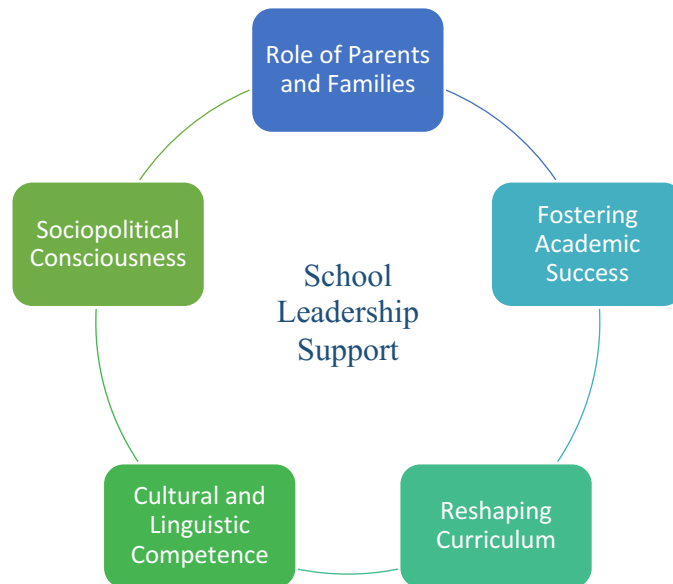


Figure 2.1. Five common principles of CRT and CRP.

Role of Parents and Families

Positive perspectives on parents and families are characteristics that both culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy see as a valued principle

to educating students (The Education Alliance, 2019). Parents are a child's first teachers. It is critically important that a partnership forms between parent, student, and teacher—a critical aspect of a child's educational progress is the constant communication between teachers and parents. Participation in school functions is not the only method to increase parent communication; parent communication of expectations and interest to their child is essential and impacts academics (Nieto, 1996).

Students come to schools as members of different cultures and communities. Through interactions with students' parents and families, teachers learn more about their students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). Students' funds of knowledge consist of culturally developed knowledge and skills essential for students' functioning and well-being. Household knowledge, social networks, and economic circumstances represent funds of knowledge that students bring to the classroom and impact learning.

Fostering Academic Success

Classroom instruction and learning experiences are vehicles for teachers to foster academic success. Culturally relevant teachers ensure that instructional delivery is inclusive to all students despite their cultural background (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Martell, 2018; Paris, 2012). Instructional design and delivery include ways students can access the content. According to Gay (2002),

...acknowledging and understanding the influences of race, culture, and ethnicity in teaching and learning, and using the cultural experiences, perspectives, traits and contributions of different ethnic groups as instrumental tools for teaching academic and social knowledge, values, and skills to diverse students. (p. 619)

Incorporating students' pre-acquired funds of knowledge adds meaning and purpose to what they learn and allows them to feel valued while learning. Through a collaborative learning community, fluid social relationships form that impact student growth. Students become community members who develop a shared, constructed, and critical conception of knowledge. Teachers believe that their students can grow academically and work to ensure it takes place through quality instruction.

Learning within the context of culture allows students to maximize their lived experiences to impact their understanding level. Minority students often feel that their cultural beliefs and norms are unrecognized in the majority culture. Utilizing students' funds of knowledge from their homes in lessons helps students feel like a part of the learning experience (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Culturally responsive teaching focuses on student-centered instruction as the method of delivery (The Education Alliance, 2019). Creating a learning environment where students are active participants in learning is critical to culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The responsibility of instruction is shared and encouraged as a community of learners work together to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum (Kozleski, 2010; Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). The community-oriented environment created by student-centered learning increases students' self-confidence and promotes student engagement. Teachers must create an environment that encourages and embraces all students' cultures. Learning happens in culturally appropriate situations.

Communication of high expectations is critical when developing a culturally relevant and responsive classroom (The Education Alliance, 2019). Communication with

students must be consistent and effective in helping students attain academic success (Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010). A learning environment that promotes genuine respect for all students provides the structure for intrinsic motivation to be successful.

The teacher becomes the facilitator and establishes a shared community-based experience through the learning environment development. Fostering expertise from both home and school cultures is a central component of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The teacher guides and advocates for students as they incorporate social, cultural, and linguistic experiences into the learning environment.

Teacher preparation is vital to bridge the cultural gap between teachers and students. The professional learning opportunities provided for teachers must address reaching diverse student populations. Students may be taught by teachers who may or may not have the same background as their own (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2017). Teacher preparation and training must include the cultural offerings of the student population's many ethnic groups across academic disciplines (Gay, 2002). Teachers' knowledge about cultural diversity must go beyond awareness and recognition to incorporating multicultural instructional strategies (Bartolome, 1994). Preparing teachers to teach children of diverse backgrounds is a pressing issue in education today and will continue for years to come.

Reshaping the Curriculum

When addressing the achievement gap, schools and districts must take a closer look at their curriculum (The Education Alliance, 2019). The curriculum must be relevant, engaging, and student-centered. It should include the students' background and culture and change students to utilize higher-order knowledge and skills (Gay, 2002). An

interdisciplinary curriculum facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge and allows students to use their strength in one subject to support new learning in another. Reshaping the curriculum must include the students' personal experiences to allow for meaningful connections between school and real-life experiences.

To ensure that students are academically successful, educators must utilize a quality curriculum. Ensuring that students can communicate effectively, think critically, and problem-solving should be a central focus of the curriculum and help students master content (Pardon, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). As mentioned earlier, culturally responsive teaching includes ethnic and cultural diversity content. The incorporation of multicultural content in curriculum and instruction addresses equity and excellence.

Culturally responsive teaching can be present in classrooms through three kinds of curricula: formal plans, symbolic curriculum, and societal curriculum. Formal plans are the curricula that anchor adopted textbooks and curriculum guidelines. State and local education officials approve this instructional plan. Though these curriculum plans and documents have improved over the years by addressing cultural diversity, there is still room to grow. "Culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality" (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Teachers' abilities to make this determination ensure the curriculum utilized incorporates diverse students' cultural attributes.

The symbolic curriculum includes images, symbols, and other artifacts that teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values. This instructional plan includes bulletin board decorations. "Culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power

of symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity” (Gay, 2002, p. 108).

The final curriculum that is often present in classrooms is the societal curriculum. The societal curriculum is the knowledge that individuals gather about ethnic groups from the media’s portrayal. James Banks (1993) identifies five types of knowledge: personal and cultural, popular, mainstream academic, and transformative academic that all have an interrelationship with school knowledge. “Popular knowledge consists of facts, interpretations, and beliefs that are institutionalized within television, movies, videos, records, and other forms of the mass media” (Banks, 1993, p. 8). Television, newspapers, magazines, and movies for many students are the only ethnic diversity source. Most of the media’s knowledge is not factual, but the message transmitted is too influential for teachers not to address.

Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Culturally relevant pedagogy supports the cultural and linguistic competence of all students. Students’ cultural practices are not only maintained but valued in classrooms and schools (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Culturally relevant teachers help students maintain their cultural competence by showing appreciation and celebrating students’ cultures while gaining knowledge of at least one other culture. Teachers view student culture as an asset to their school success (Howard, 2003). They look at students’ diversity as an asset to the learning environment and its impact on student achievement. Administrators, teachers, and staff understanding students’ culture, abilities, resilience, and effort support, creating learning opportunities where students feel valued and have access to content for retention and mastery. Teachers must successfully merge students’ cultural strength with

school learning, allowing them to go back and forth between their lives and the school's life.

Sociopolitical Consciousness

Learning is not just for the moment but for a lifetime. The instruction provided for students is not just for the four walls of the classroom but also for lifelong learning.

Culturally relevant pedagogy builds students' sociopolitical consciousness. Sociopolitical consciousness helps students learn, understand, and apply it to current societal issues and inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students gain the ability to take the classroom's learning and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems. Yosso (2005) shares the importance of schools examining cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities of all students that often go unrecognized and bring it into the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy seek to have students engage in a critique of the status quo and be critical consumers of the world. "CRT in education as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact education structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, 2005, p.74). It is essential to create an environment where the cultural knowledge deemed valuable by the dominant system is not oppressive but challenged to create an effective and equitable system.

Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy support society's inclusion in teaching and learning. Incorporating current events and culture of the student community to include society and make learning meaningful. Culturally responsive classroom practices focus on helping students see their heritage as part of their learning and sharing their cultural differences. These practices effectively use students' cultural knowledge and prior experiences to make learning more relevant and practical. The

frameworks focus on the importance of effectively bringing the community's culture into the school, allowing everyone to work together to increase student achievement.

School Leadership Support

Implementing culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy must involve a holistic approach from the top down in a school district. District-level leadership must demonstrate behavior that represents the importance of all students' learning and support for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as approaches to increase academic achievement (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). All district-level leadership's cultural proficiency helps create a positive climate where all stakeholders' diverse backgrounds are valued and nurtured (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Culturally responsive leadership aligns with and responds to the cultural, academic, social, and emotional needs of students and the school community (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive district leadership practices nurture positive relationships within the community and encourage school leaders to adopt and use the practices.

Culturally responsive schools have building leaders who ensure the nurturing of students' views from diverse backgrounds (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). Culturally responsive schools steward through school leadership that is willing to go through the process of critical self-reflection. Before cultural responsiveness within teachers and staff can occur, building leaders must understand their own identities. School leaders must help their teachers and staff through quality hiring and staff development to create a positive climate and culture. School leadership intentionality for the inclusion of the surrounding community helps build positive relationships among

students, teachers, parents, and staff to impact student achievement (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2018).

Culturally responsive school leaders promote a school climate inclusive of all students (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, ensuring that the environment promotes a vision for an inclusive instructional school. Leaders facilitate professional development to ensure that all staff and the curriculum are continuously responsive to all students. Leadership practices respond to the needs that accompany demographic shifts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Improvement of student outcomes occurs through the school instructional leader's job, developing and improving teachers' craft through cultural responsiveness. By fostering positive relationships with students, parents, and the community, leaders can maintain a school environment focused on quality education for all.

The five common principles of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy support the systems, structures, and instructional practices educators implement and monitor, ensuring that students can access content and perform academically at their highest potential. Strong leadership supports the effective implementation and utilization of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching in districts and schools. The common principles of the existing frameworks are useful in an environment that is responsive to the schooling needs of students of color (Khalifa et al., 2016). Leadership practices and expectations of a school climate that are welcoming and inclusive of all students are vital to student achievement.

Conclusion

The current literature on the achievement gap and methods to close it speaks to the importance of teachers getting to know their students and using the cultural background that students bring to the classroom to impact instruction. Using students' home culture as a foundation for extending children's thinking allows teachers to add meaning and value to the content (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018). Incorporating a students' home culture in their learning adds relevance to the academic experience.

Many of the campuses faced with academic achievement gaps are Title I schools. Title I is a federally funded program to support students enrolled in schools with a high rate of children from low-socioeconomic status households (Cronin, 2017). The funds provided to schools identified as Title I help ensure that all children have the necessary tools and resources to meet academic standards. Title I funds can support schoolwide initiatives and programs that increase academic achievement for all students.

The current research and system's strength acknowledge the existing achievement gap and funds available for Title I schools. Being able to address a problem starts with a willingness to say it exists. Literature and data support the current issue of the achievement gap.

Though there is much discussion about the achievement gap, there is not much research or literature to discuss how schools have overcome the gap and what system or structure they utilized to garner such achievement. The literature discusses what districts, schools, teachers, and students need to overcome the achievement gap. Still, there is no detailed research on how an organization has taken all the different pieces and put them together to conquer such a feat.

Much of the literature discusses the achievement gap and what is causing the issue. What needs further exploration and documentation is what high-performing schools, primarily Title I schools, are doing to close the achievement gaps. Researchers have identified the importance of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy as quality frameworks to help learning organizations increase student academic achievement. I researched a high-performing Title I campus to explore the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy on the campus. Through interviews and data, I gathered information to provide concise research on the systems, structures, and expectations used on the campus to increase student academic achievement.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction and Research Questions

The demographics of teachers and students across public schools continue to be mismatched and impact student achievement. When the teacher and student are not from the same cultural background, the impact on academic achievement may be harmful. Culture plays a vital role in students' academic success. "Cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity is increasing in the United States as well as in the nation's schools" (Banks & Banks, 2016, p. 171). With the diversity increase, teachers work to design quality instruction that meets all students' needs.

Over the past 15 years, the participating district's demographics have shifted. In 2004, the enrollment of White students in the participating district was 60 percent, and that percentage decreased to 34 percent in 2019. Hispanic student enrollment increased from 25 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2019, while Black student enrollment increased from 7 percent to 11 percent from 2004–2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Though student demographics changed, the demographics of the teachers have not. Seventy-eight percent of the study district teachers are White (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Many teachers in this district have difficulty designing and implementing instructional practices that their students find relevant and meaningful. The cultural difference between teacher and student becomes a significant issue in the classroom. When students cannot interact with the content due to the instruction's unrelatable nature of the instruction, learning gaps form. When the content and instruction provided to the student occurs in a

meaningful and engaging manner, students can utilize their existing funds of knowledge and apply them to the new learning. While many teachers want the best for their students and desire to provide a quality educational experience, they must first connect with their students.

The current study focuses on implementing culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy in public schools to help close the achievement gap. The purpose of this case study is to uncover the instructional approaches and strategies utilized by teachers on a high performing Title I campus to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential. The research goals are to help organizations and leaders first recognize the high performing Title I campus's success and then identify the systems and structures utilized by the high performing Title I campus that impact learning. The research data gathered helped design a purposeful plan of action with monitoring and progress measures to ensure that successful systems and structures can transfer to other campuses.

This chapter describes the methodology of this research study. First, this chapter explains how the chosen research approach provides valid data to answer the research questions that informed the study results. Then the data collection and analysis procedures are presented. Finally, this chapter concludes with ethical considerations and limitations to the research.

This study examines the following research questions:

1. What are teachers and school leaders at one high performing Title I campus doing to promote students' academic success?
2. What are teachers' and school leaders' beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on a Title I campus?

3. What are the strategies and approaches teachers use on the high performing Title I campus to engage and empower students to succeed academically?
4. What systems and structures are used by campus administrators on a high performing Title I campus to support high-quality instruction?

Researcher Perspective

My perspective is grounded in the transformative worldview that all students deserve a quality education to ensure that they are productive citizens of society. As schools become more diverse across the country, teachers need adequate preparation to provide quality instruction to students from different racial and cultural backgrounds. When the teachers and students are not from the same cultural background, the impact culture has on student achievement plays a vital role in many students' academic success. As student diversity continues to shift, research informs culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. Utilizing the existing frameworks of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, educators can develop meaningful educational experiences that include students' diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Through these meaningful experiences, students are equipped with knowledge and tools for lifelong learning and make a difference in society.

As a researcher, I recognize that my own life experiences play a significant role in this research. As an educator who held a variety of roles over 19 years in education, no matter what the job title is, the main goal always remains, ensuring that all students are safe and successful. As a current district administrator, I enjoy looking at campus data and improvement efforts as a part of my daily responsibilities. I have the privilege of collaborating with principals and teachers on Title I campuses as they work to increase student achievement. Educators' hard work and dedication to ensure all students can meet

their full potential do not go unnoticed. What is often shared is the negative perspective of Title I schools and how things are not working. There is work done by educators that have a positive impact, and this research explored those components. As a learning community, educators seek to learn and grow to ensure that the best practices and systems to increase student achievement stay a strong focus. Through this study, I collected documentation on the instructional systems, structures, practices, and approaches teachers utilize to promote student success and share with others. In my role, I can share the findings at the district level as we work collectively to support campuses with strategies to impact student achievement. At the campus level, I can share the findings with leadership and teacher teams to implement systems, structures, and strategies that increase student achievement.

Studying this phenomenon at my current place of employment has strengths and weaknesses. The relationships between stakeholders in the participating district are a strength of the study. The knowledge and understanding of the district's expectations and beliefs are also favorable as I work with the research participants. Knowing my role in the district may impact their openness in responding to the interview questions.

Theoretical Framework

This study builds upon three relevant frameworks—funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). The frameworks are transformative as they reflect that knowledge is not neutral and shows the power of relationships in society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These frameworks provide a structure for understanding effective practices and beliefs for increasing the academic achievement of students of color and low-income

students. The existing frameworks, funds of knowledge, and culturally responsive teaching have five common principles that focus on using students' lived experiences as a part of teaching and learning to impact academic achievement. The common principles center around strong school leadership that ensures the implementation of the existing framework through the learning organization.

The existing frameworks played a vital role in developing the research questions for this study. The roles, attitudes, and beliefs of educators are central to implementing the framework in the classroom. Past research suggests that incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices that focus on ethnically diverse students' cultural experiences and perspectives contributes to more effective teaching (Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010). With this understanding, I solidified the focus of my research questions on the systems (see research question four), structures (see research question four), and instructional approaches educators utilize to build a positive learning environment (see research question three) to increase student achievement.

The theoretical frameworks inform the research data collection. Through semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders, I investigated how successful teachers at a Title I school utilized the framework's practices to increase the engagement and motivation of students of color. Interview questions examined how teachers view the approach to culture and its impact on designing and implementing quality instruction in the classroom. The frameworks focus on individual and learning communities' beliefs and practices regarding incorporating students' backgrounds and lived experiences in teaching and learning. Hence, both large and small group interviews took place. For culturally responsive teaching to occur, teachers must set aside their own cultural biases

to create a learning environment that promotes active student participation and achievement (Kozleski, 2010). Small group participant interviews allowed for open conversation regarding design, implementation, and evidence of quality instruction that is real and relevant to student learning. Large group interviews focused on how a collaborative, supportive environment was created and maintained to ensure students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences are evident throughout the school environment. Effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy fosters academic success throughout the learning experience.

When analyzing the data gathered from the interviews, I used the five common principles to guide possible themes evident in the data. Responses to the interviews related to families' role, fostering academic success, and diverse curriculum were a few of the ideas aligned to the framework's common principles. Data analysis guided the frameworks and gathered evidence of successful practices participants utilized to increase student achievement. The interview responses' coding uncovered the emerging themes that inform the study results.

Research Design

I chose a qualitative research design for this study to learn from the participants and their lived experiences. Qualitative research begins with the use of theoretical frameworks that inform the study and allows the use of an inquiry approach to data collection of participants in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative researchers are interested in the experiences and how participants interpret the experiences. Gaining the participants' perspective is essential for this qualitative

investigation because it displays the teacher's role and its intersection with students' culture in the learning experience.

In a qualitative study, the research questions are broad and explain its phenomenon. Qualitative research questions allow for exploration of the general while presenting the participants' varied perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). When writing qualitative research questions, I focused on addressing the research problem through open-ended nondirectional questions. The research questions written for this study allowed exploration of the phenomenon.

This study specifically utilized the case study research design within the qualitative research tradition. Case study research seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2017). For logical replication, I used a single instrumental case study research. A single instrumental case study allowed me to work with a single site with multiple participants to gain insight into the issue studied (Stake, 1995). This research design method uses one bounded case to provide insight into the research problem. The Title I campus identified as the site has the principal, instructional coach, and three teachers as the participants. The campus's bounded case was determined by 2019 STAAR Reading data, representing high performance for the Title I campus. From the data gathered from participants, I then completed a cross-analysis to understand common practices implemented to contribute to student success. With the focus on process and patterns, a single instrumental case study allowed me to see how the participants' perspectives were similar and different (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative single instrumental case study allowed me to explore the staff's experiences in a Title I elementary school where students' demographics are

diverse. Through semi-structured interviews with each participant, I triangulated data to determine the successful systems, structures, and instructional approaches utilized to impact student achievement and answer the research questions.

Site Selection

The single instrumental case study is bounded around a high-performing Title I elementary campus in the participating school district with a majority White staff. The students are majority African American and Hispanic. The selection of the site for the research was data-driven. The site selection process started with looking at the 2019 state of Texas STAAR reading data for the participating district. I ranked the district's 41 elementary campuses from the highest percentage of students meeting the Approaches Level on the STAAR reading assessment to the lowest percentage of students to identify the highest performing Title I campus.

Title I campuses are schools with large concentrations of low-income students who receive supplemental funds to meet students' educational goals (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). Title I campuses in the participating district are the lowest-performing academically. The participating district is a public-school district in the west region of Houston, TX. The district has an enrollment of over 80,000 students. The student achievement gap at the participating district Title I campuses has remained an issue for the past three years. This Title I schools' enrollment is a high minority, low-socioeconomic students, but the educators' demographics are majority White.

The highest performing Title I campus is 30 years old, with over 90 staff members and almost 800 students. The campus offers Pre-Kindergarten through grade 5. As reported by the Texas Education Agency, the representation of campus demographics

for staff and students during the 2018–2019 school year in Table 3.1 below. The campus overall 2019 accountability rating by the Texas Education Agency is a B.

Table 3.1

Campus Demographics for the 2018–2019 School Year

Campus	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Two or More
Staff	5.5%	16.4%	76.4%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Students	25.2%	39.2%	25.7%	0.1%	8.6%	0.0%	0.9%

Participant Sampling

Upon determining the research site, I used purposive criteria-based sampling criteria to determine the study participants. As the researcher utilizing purposive criteria-based sampling involves selecting participants who can inform the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of participants for the research is a crucial step.

The study’s focus was on effective teachers’ practices on a high-performing Title I campus guided the process of participant selection. I ensured that teachers who participated in the study had high-performing data on the 2019 STAAR Reading assessment and had the student population aligned with the achievement gap data. From the literature review, the importance of school leadership support as teachers work to build a positive learning environment is a central part of increasing student achievement. The principal and instructional coach’s inclusion on the high-performing Title I campus was also vital in this research study.

Using the 2019 STAAR Reading data for the targeted district, I determined the highest performing Title I elementary campus. After choosing the campus, the following

criteria determined the participants—which grade level at the campus had the highest performance on the 2019 STAAR assessment. The teachers had the highest number of students scoring at the Approaches grade level. The teachers whose students’ data was high performing on the STAAR assessment on their grade level team and most of the students in their class are from Hispanic or African American cultures. Criteria also included a class size of at least 20 students for each of the teachers selected. The campus principal and the Reading instructional coach at the time of the 2019 STAAR assessment administration on the campus are also a part of the participant sampling.

To obtain access to the campus and teachers, submission of the appropriate district documentation and communication with the participating school district human resources and accountability departments took place. Upon approval from the district, I sent an email communication to the principal, instructional coach, and teachers to establish the study’s purpose, build rapport, and share the participant consent form (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

The data collection process outlined in Table 3.2 for this study involved conducting semi-structured interviews. I conducted three rounds of semi-structured interviews with the participants over four months. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes in length. In case studies, interviews are a guided conversation (Yin, 2017). The semi-structured interviews’ open-ended nature provided the opportunity for conversation, generating subsequent questions for further clarity and details.

Table 3.2

Data Collection Process

Semi-Structured Interviews	Details
First Round September 2020	Interviewee: Group Participants Focus: Build Rapport, background, experience, belief on the role of culture and race in teaching and learning
Second Round October 2020	Interviewee: Group 1: Teachers Group 2: School leaders Focus: Building a positive school and classroom culture, the role of collaboration and feedback
Third Round November 2020	Interviewee: Group Participants Focus: Artifacts that show how students' lived experiences incorporated into teaching and learning

First Round Interview

Before interviews took place, participants received an email with a timeline of scheduled interviews and a consent form that detailed the research study's purpose and the participant's role. The email also outlined the goals of the initial interview. The initial semi-structured interview focused on a rapport to be built with participants, gather information on the participants' background, and initiate a conversation about race by discussing its role in designing and delivering instruction. I utilized the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to guide the participant interviews. Questions for this round of interviews aligned with my theoretical framework's five common principles. The questions asked helped me determine the role of parents and community in designing

instruction, how the curriculum utilized included student culture and their lived experiences, and how educators foster student academic success.

Second Round Interviews

Before the second round of interviews took place, I completed an in-depth review of the participants' transcript to determine follow-up questions included in the next round of interviews for clarity or further details. Following the first round of interviews, an email thanked participants and prepared them for the next round of interviews—the second round of interviews held in two groups. The first group for the second round of interviews was the teacher participants interviewed. Questions for the teachers focused on including culture and students' lived experiences when determining instructional approaches to help students learn content. The second group interviewed included the principal and instructional coaches together. Questions to the school leaders focused on what systems and structures were in place on campus to ensure recognition and incorporation of students' culture and lived experiences are evident in teaching and learning.

Third Round Interviews

I concluded data collection with the third round of interviews. Before the third round of interviews, I asked the participants to review the transcripts from the first two interviews. The participants reviewed for accuracy and noted any concerns that did not represent their thoughts or feelings.

I asked participants to bring an artifact to the third round of interviews. Those artifacts included lesson plans, student work, and notes from classroom walk-throughs,

just as a few examples. This data collection method, known as photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002), ignites participants' memory and enriches the stories told. The artifacts helped the participants explain how they incorporated students' culture and lived experiences in instruction and lead to more descriptive data.

The data collection process provided ample time for participants to answer questions and share details in the virtual setting. The interviews' timeline allowed for a quality review of transcripts to further design questions aligned to the study's theoretical framework and purpose. As a part of the final round of interviews, participants included artifacts that allowed for rich data gathering aligned to the research questions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process unfolded in three phases, as shown in Table 3.3 below. I organized the interview data in electronic files on my personal computer. All electronic files were password-protected for data security. The file naming convention used the pseudonym of the participants to protect confidentiality.

First Phase of Data Analysis

The first phase of data analysis took place concurrently with the data collection process. In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis happen simultaneously (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis of interviews completed at the end of each round of interviews. As I analyzed the interview data, I started memoing (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and summarizing key ideas that emerged across the participant interviews. Before the second round of interviews, participants received a copy of the transcripts from their first interviews. I asked participants to review the transcripts and note inaccuracies that represented their thoughts or feelings. Participants' member checking the data helps

triangulate interview notes and interpretation (Stake, 1995). Member checking ensures validity and trustworthiness throughout the research process.

Second Phase of Data Analysis

Cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) took place during the second phase of data analysis. Through a review of the interview transcripts, I determined the coding of terms and ideas. “Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspectives” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018, p. 214). Descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016) provided nouns to describe the data’s topics. The codes allowed the data broken down into broad themes.

Third Phase of Data Analysis

A cross-case analysis was the final phase of the analysis. The cross-case analysis helped triangulate the data, increase validity, and determine the participants’ similarities and differences. Aggregating the data into smaller chunks of themes revealed commonalities across the interviews aligned with the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). After determining the categories and themes of quality relationships, student growth, and collaborative community revealed from the interviews, I interpreted themes and categories and made connections to the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review. Upon detailed analysis, I reported the data in response to the research question, problem statement, and purpose statement.

Table 3.3

Data Collection and Analysis

Date	Data Collection	Data Analysis
September 2020	Contact Participants Signed Consent Form Share timeline and intent of the research Schedule and complete the first interview with participants	Within-case Analysis: Review each participant transcript of the interview to determine subsequent questions and prepare for the next round of interviews
October 2020	Schedule and complete two group interviews: Group 1: Teachers, Group 2: School Leaders.	Cross-analysis of the participant's first two rounds of interviews to determine themes and coding.
November 2020	Schedule and complete final interviews with participants. Participants asked to bring an artifact	Triangulation of data from interviews to determine response to the research problem and research questions
Spring 2021		Interpretation of results and writing of findings: Chapters Four and Five

Data Validation

I ensured the reliability and validity of the study through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Creswell (2018) explained that qualitative researchers use triangulation to provide corroborating evidence for their study. This qualitative student collected data across three rounds of interviews. The coding of the three rounds of interviews utilized a pattern matching process to determine categories and themes, which provides validity through triangulation. To increase the study's reliability and validity, I created a database for organizing and documenting the data collected.

After the first and second rounds of interviews, I conducted member checking with the study participants by providing written analysis of the data collected from the previous interviews. Participants validated that their responses were accurate. I responded to participants' questions and concerns promptly.

Throughout the data collection process, I also participated in peer debriefing with my doctoral program peer working group members. I shared the data collection process, initial codes and categories from data analysis, and the next steps in the process. Peer provided feedback and possible next steps in the process. The data validation process ensured trustworthiness, accuracy, and validity of the data, supporting a study with solid integrity.

Ethical Considerations

With the research conducted in the district where I work, there were ethical matters that I had to address. All communication and scheduling of meetings took place via my Baylor email account to ensure that participants understood that I was not conducting the study as an employee of the district. Initial email communication to the participants focused on building a rapport to ensure participants would feel comfortable participating in the study and not feel like the district would judge their participation.

In June of 2020, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and the district research application submission for approval for the study took place. Included in the district research application was a participant consent form outlining the study's purpose, along with expectations for participant involvement and confidentiality. Participants were provided the consent forms before the start of the study and signed with no offering of compensation. Teachers included in the research risked revealing any dissatisfaction with

the learning organization. I created pseudonyms for the participants to protect their confidentiality, combining the first two letters from their last name and first name in the interview notes if used in printed or published documents. I ensured that all participants were aware that participating was voluntary and signed consent forms within the window of one week.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of the study, completing classroom observations was not possible. COVID-19 impacted the setting and mode of instructional delivery, so the safest option for data collection became virtual interviews with participants. The virtual interviews also impacted the rapport built with participants.

The data source for the research is also retroactive due to COVID-19. With schools being closed for the remainder of the school year in March of 2020, no state assessments took place. Due to the assessment cancellation, I used STAAR 2019 data to determine site selection and study participants.

As the researcher conducting this study and as a district administrator where the study took place, the campus selected as the research site is not an assigned campus to the researcher; the participants have seen the researcher in meetings and professional development sessions. Teachers may be apprehensive about participating in the study because of the researcher's role in the district.

A delimitation for this research study is the bounded Title I campus is high-performing, so the systems, structures, and instructional approaches may not be applicable across all campuses. The study participants also represent one content area, which is not a representation of all possible variables. Using only one content area may

impact the reception of district stakeholders' study results due to the sample size and representation.

Conclusion

This chapter described this study's single instrumental case study research design, research questions, site selection, participant sampling process, and data collection and analysis procedures. The purpose of this single instrumental case study is to identify the systems, structures, and instructional practices utilized by teachers on a high performing Title I campus to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential. The study adds to the knowledge of closing the achievement gap and culturally responsive teaching. National and local education officials seek to understand the gaps and what is needed to close the existing gaps. Chapters Four and Five provide the study results and the implications and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

The current study utilized a single instrumental case study to understand better the instructional approaches and strategies utilized by teachers on a high performing Title I campus to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential. The study intends to help organizations and leaders first recognize the high performing Title I campus' success and then identify the systems and structures utilized by the high performing Title I campus that impact learning. This chapter provides a series of data-informed implications for professional practice that advocate for structural change, professional development, and a mentorship program that is transferable and replicable for other campuses.

Through interviews with two teacher participants, the campus instructional coach, and campus administrator, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are teachers and school leaders at one high performing Title I campus doing to promote students' academic success?
2. What are teachers' and school leaders' beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on a Title I campus?
3. What are the strategies and approaches teachers use on the high performing Title I campus to engage and empower students to succeed academically?
4. What systems and structures are used by campus administrators on a high performing Title I campus to support high-quality instruction?

This study used the three existing frameworks, as described in Chapter Two: funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). These existing frameworks have five common principles that focus on using students' lived experiences as a part of teaching and learning to impact academic achievement. Figure 4.1 displays these common principles used to analyze the data to determine emerging themes.

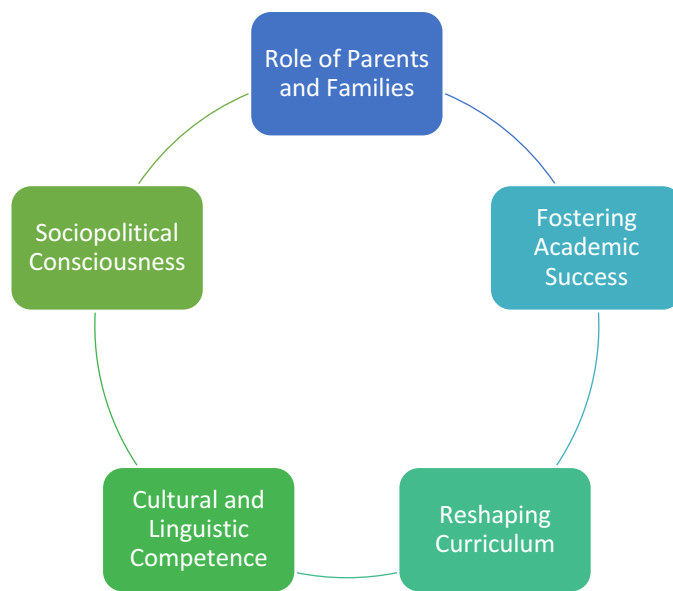


Figure 4.1. Five common principles of CRT and CRP.

This chapter discusses the study participants, the findings derived from participant interviews, and the findings as they address the research questions. First, I used pattern matching via coding to determine the emerging themes for each interview round. I analyzed the participants' responses to the interview questions matching words and phrases that became codes for the data with each round of interviews. From the codes, I then created categories of the codes. Once categorized, themes emerged that provided answers to the research questions and connections to the theoretical framework. I then

engaged in cross-case framework analysis to connect participants and identify emergent themes related to the study’s theoretical framework. Finally, I discuss how these emergent themes help answer the study’s research questions.

The Participants

In Chapter Three of this study, a thorough description of the participant sampling process appears. This narrative single instrumental case study focused on participants with high-performing data on the 2019 STAAR Reading assessment and a student population aligned with the achievement gap data. Participants also included the school leadership team members who provided support to them. I identified four participants who met the participant sampling criteria. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the participants.

Table 4.1

Participants

Participant	Position	Years of Teaching Experience	Years at Research Site
Clara	5 th Grade Reading Teacher	6	5
Debbie	3 rd Grade Reading Teacher	15	7
Brenda	Instructional Coach	29	4
Lisa	Principal	31	11

Interview Phase Results

I conducted three rounds of interview. From each interview round, there was a specific emerging theme. In the following section, I describe each round of interviews

and the themes that emerged. Table 4.2 provides a list of the themes from each interview round.

Table 4.2

Themes from Round of Interviews

Interview	Theme
Round I	Student ownership in learning
Round II	Quality collaboration
Round III	Building student confidence to reduce pressure

Round I Results

The purpose of the Round I interviews was to gather from the participants their stories on the work done by teachers, students, and campus leadership on this Title I campus to ensure academic success for all students. I wanted to learn the specific roles and expectations of teachers, students, and leaders on the research site and how that impacted the campus and classroom environment. The first interview was a group interview that included two teacher participants and two school leadership participants in a group interview. During this interview, I shared the purpose of the study with the participants, why I chose to collect data on this particular school site, and the criteria used to determine participants for this study. Participants shared their enthusiasm for being considered part of the research and their willingness to participate. The Round 1 group interview focus then shifted to the work done on this Title I campus by students, teachers, administrators, and staff. The participants shared their years of experience in education and how many years they have worked at the research site.

When asked about the students' role in building a successful classroom culture on this Title I campus, the teacher participants shared the importance of students' input in their learning. The inclusion of student voices and classroom instruction choices and activities increases classroom engagement and impacts student achievement. As Clara shared, "I know, it sounds pretty cliché, but I feel like the students really do need to take ownership of their learning." Both teacher participants shared how they communicated with their students that they do not know everything and value student knowledge and opinions regarding the learning experience. Debbie expressed, "They like to know that I do not know and that they get to teach me to like, I feel that sometimes they feel the teacher knows everything, and I don't. I am like, tell me more about it." When students can share with their teacher what they know about a topic, it builds student confidence and contributes to building a collaborative classroom environment.

I asked the participants what methods they used to get to know their students and build a positive learning environment. The teacher participants expressed that holding an open conversation with their students helps create a classroom culture where the teacher and students are teammates. Debbie shared that "just having direct conversations with the kids, making time to meet with them" helps teachers build a student-centered collaborative culture in the classroom. Though the work students encounter may be challenging, the teacher and student can work through it together, and the student can give input on what in the learning environment is working or not working as they learn and grow. Clara gave an example of student teamwork and support in her classroom by sharing that "in my class, I saw a kid go over to another one, and I had put a sentence [for] them on the board comparing and contrasting the genres. Another kid goes over, and

it is like helping the kid figure out.” The student support when working on complex tasks came from both teachers and students. Students helping their peers during instruction showed students’ ownership in their learning and the learning of others. Teachers were able to observe this behavior while also assessing students’ knowledge of the content. Students’ active participation in the classroom environment helps build a positive collaborative culture.

The teacher participants encourage students to take ownership of their learning by creating action plans to meet their goals. The teacher participants believe that when students have a voice in their plan of action to improve, students often rise to the challenge and are so excited to celebrate their growth. As Clara stated, “I am really big on them taking that ownership of this is what I need to go do to improve, and I feel like they’ve always really risen to the challenge.” With ownership in their learning, participants suggested that many students are even willing to encourage and share with their peers during the learning process.

Like teacher participants, school administrator participants shared the importance of teachers incorporating student voice and choice into their instruction. Lisa stated, “The students get to give input to the teacher. They have a lot of choices.” Lisa supports teachers as they give students options. Students can determine which books they want to read and give their teachers feedback on instruction. In her role, Brenda helps support teachers as they design instruction to encourage student voice and choice. Brenda offered many books that teachers can provide students access to when choosing reading-level appropriate books for their book club. The campus instructional coach offers teachers a

list of technology tools that students can use to create their product to demonstrate their mastery of content standards.

Round II Results

The second round of interviews focused on instructional teams' role and expectations on the Title I campus to promote academic success. For the second phase of interviews, I interviewed the participants in two groups to focus on instructional teams' work at a successful Title I school. The teacher participants interviewed as a group, and the school leadership participants interviewed as a separate group. High-quality collaboration emerged as the theme during this round of interviews. Collaboration amongst teachers and collaboration amongst students provides a vehicle for engagement and quality instruction.

Teacher collaboration takes place during weekly planning meetings. Teachers take the time to get to know each other to build trust and transparency. The conversations held during these weekly planning reveal individuals' strengths and weaknesses. Clara shared that "me and my partner that year, she was a first-year teacher, but we really worked hard to balance out each other's like strengths and weaknesses." The teacher participants shared the importance of having a stable relationship amongst members of their instructional team so that as the teachers work together, they can balance strengths and weaknesses while asking for support and clarity to provide quality instruction.

The collaboration amongst teachers focused on what was best for students. Teams implemented backward design as the instructional planning model. Beginning with the end in mind starts with identifying students' expectations for learning then building the

assessments and learning experiences that will allow students to achieve the desired learning goals. Debbie shared,

We like to know where we were going. So, we could get our kids there. It is very important that we know where our kids were. Just knowing where they were so we could get them where they needed to be.

A team could collaboratively reflect on their data once a content unit was complete by implementing this instructional planning model. Questioning each other based on their formative assessment standards data on students' success and struggles to build each other provides insight into how to deliver quality instruction to students. Clara expanded on the impact of having quality collaboration in place by sharing that, "just have this open discussion about like hey you scored higher here. What did you do, and like that bouncing ideas back and forth?" The transparency amongst the teachers was genuine and nonjudgmental, creating a positive learning community. This collaboration level allowed teachers to build their instructional toolkit from the strategies and activities shared.

With the relationship built between the teachers on the team, teachers were open to sharing their students to do what was best academically. Instructional delivery and placement are decided based on teacher data and student needs. Debbie explained that "if there was a TEKS that I was really strong on or struggling at, we kind of just shared ideas and strategies and then even share kids." The teachers' openness and honesty allowed for transparency and a community built on these are our students, not my students.

The school leadership participants supported the theme of quality collaboration as a tool that helped their school achieve academic success. The collaboration focused on building an inclusive campus culture that brought everyone together around the campus's mission and vision, addressing both what was happening outside and inside the

campus. Ann shared that as soon as she became the campus leader, she realized that “there were pockets of excellence within the building, but then they didn’t really collaborate.” She focused on changing that through using strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis with the entire faculty. She then moved the discussion to teams to help build the campus culture and expectations.

This round of interviews shed light on how teachers and staff were willing to work together to do what was best for all students to grow and learn. The trust and transparency amongst the instructional teams created a student-centered learning community. From this interview round, I was able to prepare questions for the next round. The final round of interviews allowed the participants to discuss the implementation and utilization of collaboration in the classroom. The interviews focus being instructional design and delivery.

Round III Results

The final round of interviews focused on instructional approaches, activities, and strategies used on the Title I campus to promote academic success. In this phase of the interview, the study participants interviewed together as a group. Clara immediately shared:

I think for me, it was taking the pressure off of it [STAAR testing]. I think that was the biggest thing: realizing they [students] can be successful and that it is not some big scary thing at the end.

Establishing a classroom culture that builds confidence while reducing pressure is the theme that emerged from this round of interviews. Brenda supported Clara’s claim by sharing that “they trusted her [Clara] that they knew that they would get the best from her. So, they were going to give their best back, whether it was a test or an activity in

their room.” Lisa further elaborated by sharing that “even kids that just really didn’t have any confidence they really thought they were great readers when they were with Clara.” The relationship formed between the teacher and the students helped develop a culture of confidence.

The ability for students to connect to the content helps to build student confidence. Lisa explained that the teachers

make those connections into their [students] personal lives like she would know what all of her kids like to read or figure out what they did if they weren’t interested. So, some kid who may be would be like; I am not reading she would find something they’d like to read.

Debbie, a 3rd-grade teacher, shared a slightly different response in terms of building student confidence. Third grade is when students take their first STAAR assessment, so they have not yet sat for state-mandated test administration. To help her students be successful and build confidence, Debbie shared, “it is helpful to turn things into games for them. Just anything to make it interactive with them. I thought sticks better that way and a lot of hand signals, a lot of songs and movement.” Lisa also shared how the discussion with 3rd-grade students revealed the need to build confidence and reduce stress due to fear. Lisa stated,

I did individually meet with third-grade kids about STAAR. They are so scared about the test. I meet with them individually and be like; it is not bad like you are making A’s over here with Miss Debbie; if you can, you make it with Miss Debbie, you are going to be fine on STAAR.

The participants valued taking time to talk with the students to understand their concerns provided information on where students were in the learning process and what they brought to the learning environment. The instructional design and delivery addressed

students' concerns while building confidence and understanding of the content from the information.

Each round of interviews provided a deeper understanding of the participants' role, work, and dedication to ensure all students' academic success. In the first phase of the interview, the participants' responses led to the theme of student ownership in their learning. High-quality collaboration emerged as the theme of the second round of interviews. In the final round of interviews, the participants stressed the importance of creating instructional opportunities that built student confidence that reduce pressure. The insight gained from the participants provided a lens into the teaching practices, systems, structures, culture, and community established at the research site that impact student academic achievement.

Cross-Phase Analysis

I conducted a cross-interview analysis using pattern matching and coding to identify common themes across all three rounds of interviews. Data analysis showed how the study results aligned with both the literature's themes and the study's theoretical framework. I identified three emerging themes of relationships, student growth, and community across the rounds of interviews. I conducted further data analysis of these themes based on the participant interviews and their connection to the research study in the sections below.

Theme I: Relationships

All the study participants recognized the role relationships play in students' academic success in Title I schools. Relationships between all learning organization stakeholders help create a positive school culture. All four participants communicated the

need to build relationships with students and set expectations to encourage them to work hard and rise to the occasion. Lisa stated, “if you build a relationship with them [students]. They’re 100% in for anything you have for them.” She continued saying, “if you build a relationship with a kid and you set high expectations, they’ll get there.” Participants expressed connections between building relationships and how that impacts the classroom environment. Clara expressed that,

I am a firm believer that like I honestly could probably teach my kids, nothing but that if they know that I care and they know that I love them and they love me and like we have that relationship that they’re already going to be way more successful.” Lisa shared, “I have watched both these teachers have relationships with kids that made a difference and their success and learning how to read and learning how to write.

The quality of the relationship built between student and teacher impacts student academic success.

At this Title I campus, building positive relationships with parents was also essential. When working at a diverse Title I campus, parents and families’ role is critical to the learning environment. Lisa shared that “When you work with different parents and different cultures, but at the same time when the kids come together, you have to help them learn how to respect each other.” The campus leader wanted to ensure that parents were an integral part of the school community. Building relationships with parents to learn what they felt was necessary for their student success provided vital information. Lisa stated, “Sometimes we have to pull our parents in, so like on our campus, it is really important to have people that speak Spanish. So that those parents feel comfortable with their first language.” The modeling of how to build quality relationships with parents and students started with the campus leaders.

Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy support teachers as they implement practices incorporating the intersection of culture and education. The existing frameworks of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy have five common principles that value students lived experiences in the classroom setting and impact student learning experiences. The common principles of parents' and families' roles and fostering academic success supported by effective school leadership are all addressed in the cross-interview analysis theme of relationships. The school leader modeled and set the expectation for her staff and students to form quality relationships. Lisa stated, "Lisa having those relationships with kids is number one, that the kids know that you love them." The Title I campus includes a diverse population to ensure that parents and families were comfortable in their first language to communicate about their child's learning was essential—the relationships formed between students and staff allowed for a quality conversation that influenced classroom instruction. Students felt loved and cared for due to the relationships formed and would work hard to be successful.

Theme II: Student Growth

From the relationships built on the Title I campus, the teachers and staff focused on ensuring that every student showed growth. Across the three interviews held, the participants discussed the importance of student growth and its impact on academic success. Lisa, as the campus leader shared, "And it was all just about growth. It doesn't matter where they come in. Just make sure you grow them at least one year or more." The belief was to meet students where they were and help them grow. Debbie shared an experience that she had with a student in her class.

[Debbie] thinks that a growth mindset is really important. It is interesting because when she said that 35 like I had a kid make a 20 something on their first test. ... Then the next one, they made like a 30 something and oh my gosh, they were celebrated more than the kid that made one hundred.

The growth celebrations helped students feel comfortable in the learning environment and open to working and sharing their progress with others. Brenda had opportunities to witness the celebration of student growth when visiting classrooms and shared, “And it was just really neat to see their growth and their excitement for when they were challenged with something new, and they tried it, and they wanted to share their celebration with you.” The growth celebration is for all students. Though not all students achieve the same caliber of grade on assignments, celebrating students for their individual growth increases student confidence as they continue to work through challenges.

The growth mindset was a campus-wide belief that was data-driven. Clara shared when discussing student growth,

I think that is one thing that we really did well as a campus because we were really data-driven. And so, like teachers always need the data. We were always talking to our kids just about like, Hey, you know, like I want to celebrate this with you or you did really well on this.

The focus on student growth applied to all students. Brenda shared, “We talked to the teachers about reaching all learners, not just our kids who are struggling. But how would we get the kids to move up that are in the GT [gifted and talented] area.” The celebration of student growth was authentic and helped reduce student stress and anxiety, creating confidence.

Academic performance data is a focal point at the national, state, district, and campus levels. The data on reading academic performance across the research district

shows Title I campuses perform lower than non-Title I campuses (Texas Education Agency, 2019). The research site's leadership and staff knew that increasing academic performance was a goal on campus; to meet that goal, there would have to focus on student growth. Effective school leadership support to teachers, students, and parents on meeting students where they are and celebrating their growth throughout the year fostered an academic success culture. Teachers and students knew where the students were based on data and worked together to grow and learn continuously.

Theme III: Community

Students, teachers, campus leaders, parents, and business leaders are valuable stakeholders to a campus community. Ensuring that the campus community is involved and aware of its goal and vision is vital. The campus leaders valued school stakeholders' voices and input from the very beginning. When Lisa took over as the campus leader, she immediately sought to bring everyone together in the school community to understand the campus vision and goals. Lisa shared,

so, we started work as an entire campus and teams to rewrite the mission and the vision statements so everyone would understand what we were trying, where we were headed, and what we wanted to do. And I think that really helped teachers understand the students as well as the community more because we had parents that gave input for that and the community members as well as business members.

When Lisa became the campus leader, she realized that the only communication that went home was in English. For a campus with a 40 percent Hispanic enrollment, Lisa recognized this was a problem. To ensure that parents were active members of the school community, Lisa provided communication sent home in English and Spanish. Lisa stated, "We started doing our communications in English and Spanish, even though it took extra time. So, then parents who only spoke Spanish started feeling a lot more comfortable and

coming up to the building and calling asked questions.” Being inclusive of the student’s language and culture on campus helps build trust and transparency. Having parents and families as active members of the school community build an open relationship between home and school.

Teachers needed to feel connected to their leadership and each other to have the necessary impact on student achievement. As a new instructional coach coming into the campus, Brenda felt, “it was all about building relationships, just like we have to do with our kids. I had to build relationships with the teachers for them to trust me.” With Brenda working to ensure quality relationships with teachers, the teachers built a professional learning community focused on supporting each other. Clara shared,

it is a community effort. So, like when I can’t think of a suggestion, I am like, Hey, I have a kid that’s really interested in this. I will go ask the other teachers, or the librarian was always really great at giving suggestions.

The trust and transparency amongst the staff and teachers created a supportive learning organization. Debbie stated, “support just from everybody from on your team, your partner, your team, your coaches, your admin, just support from everybody makes it a great school.” The camaraderie built from the level of support solidifies trust and creates a collaborative organization. Brenda shared, “that community in working with each other that they’re you are developing those relationships, not only with kids with your coworkers and that every kid, do not belong to just you.” A dedicated community was formed at the research site by building relationships and focusing on student growth.

The role of community in the learning environment is not just for the adult stakeholders but also students. Creating opportunities for students to play an active role in the learning environment impact academic achievement. School leadership valued

students' voice and choice in learning and supported teachers in designing instruction that allowed them to share their background, knowledge, and strengths in a collaborative environment. Students' culture and funds of knowledge are an asset to the learning organization.

The cross-interview analysis provides insight into the effective practices of building quality relationships, focus on student growth, and establishing a collaborative community as effective practices on a high-performing Title I campus. Implementing these practices is led by an effective school leader who ensures the systems, structures, and processes are communicated and monitored. The data collected from the interviews help determined the emerging themes and answer the study's research questions.

Discussion

The cross-interview themes help to answer the study research questions. Below, I provide each research question and then address how the interview participants responses help answer the questions.

Answer to Research Question 1

The first research question that I sought to answer was "What are teachers and school leaders at one high performing Title I campus doing to promote students' academic success?" To promote academic success at the research site, teachers and school leaders focus on creating a positive classroom culture and incorporating students' lived experiences in curriculum and instruction. Research question one presents a macro-level view, while research question three addresses explicitly the strategies and practices teachers utilize in the high-performing Title I campus. To answer this question, it was essential to know precisely what was done on the study site campus to help students

reach their full academic potential. The goal was to capture what campus staff felt they implemented to promote academic success. From the information gathered, I intend to share the processes implemented on this campus with others looking to increase their campus's academic success.

Establishing a welcoming, positive classroom culture where students can learn and grow helps students focus on academic success. This finding supports the common principles from the theoretical framework of promoting academic success, parents' and families' roles, and the need for cultural and linguistic competence. In answer to the first research question, Debbie shared, "mainly the classroom cultures important and I am letting the kids know that they are safe and comfortable and in a loving environment and that once they know that as the possibilities are endless in the classroom." The teacher participants shared how important it was to incorporate information from conversations with students, parents, and families to help classroom culture. The data collected supports the research literature highlighting the importance of having a classroom environment inclusive of students' cultural background and lived experiences (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). The participants ensured that the classroom culture was conducive for learning.

After establishing a solid classroom culture then the focus becomes the instruction of the content. This finding aligns with the principles of promoting academic success, reshaping curriculum, and cultural and linguistic competence in the theoretical framework. The research participants reshaped the curriculum to ensure students lived experiences and funds of knowledge are present in teaching and learning. From the literature, incorporating students' knowledge and experiences into the learning

experience helps students access the taught content (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Determining books and activities that bridge the learning from home with the teaching at school makes the content accessible to students (Gay, 2002). Teachers worked to create a learning environment that included material and resources that students found real and relevant. Brenda stated, “It was all about making learning accessible for the kid, and we wanted to make sure that our kids had high-interest texts you know that they could access and it was appropriate to them.” Being able to interact and relate to the content makes the standards accessible and learning engaging.

Answer to Research Question 2

The second research question was “What are teachers’ and school leaders’ beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on a Title I campus?” The teachers’ and school leaders’ beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on a Title I campus involved building quality relationships and setting high expectations, believing all students can be successful and collaborate across the learning organization.

From this research question, I sought to gather the participants’ emotions and feelings about working with Title I students. Though we often focus on what teachers do to educate students, I wanted to capture the participants’ thinking and mindset about educating students. I intended to determine the participants’ foundational beliefs and attitudes regarding educating students on Title I campuses. Ultimately, these results are shared with others to allow individuals and campus staff to reflect and determine if their beliefs and attitudes promote all students’ academic success.

Establishing relationships and setting expectations for students were foundational beliefs of those working on this Title I campus. The principle of promoting academic

success from the theoretical framework starts with acknowledging the students' cultural experiences. What they bring to teaching and learning aids in building a quality relationship between educator and student. Lisa states, "on a Title I campus, if you build a relationship with a kid and you set high expectations. They'll get there." Conversations between staff and students about life inside and outside of the school environment build quality relationships. So that all stakeholders are on the same page, communication about expectations and goals is essential (Gay, 2002; Kozleski, 2010). Genuine relationships with high expectations are powerful in moving a learning organization forward.

Teachers and staff on the Title I campus must believe that students can learn and are willing to establish relationships to help them grow to meet their full potential. To promote academic success, one must first believe that all students can be successful. With that belief comes the need to build a relationship with the student to understand the student better to utilize that information to make a learning experience that will be meaningful for the student (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). Clara explained, "the kids take ownership of their learning and then just learning to encourage and support each other because the way you know you know it is if you can teach someone else." The participants believe that students should have an active role in their learning and design instruction around a student-centered approach.

Each of the answers to research question two connects to collaboration. Individuals in the organization must work together to accomplish and achieve. The importance of collaboration supports the literature that speaks of everyone in a learning environment playing an active role, especially students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). "Culturally responsive teaching develops a sense of interdependence and feelings

of community in which students understand that their lives and destinies are closely intertwined, and feel it is a moral and political obligation to help each other learn” (Gay, 2002, p.622). Mutual support enhances the development of members of the learning community, which impacts the overall culture (Akinyemi et al., 2019). With the belief that in a student-centered learning environment where quality relationships with high expectations are evident and everyone focuses on all students can learn and reach their full potential academic achievement increases.

Answer to Research Question 3

The third research question is “What are the strategies and approaches teachers use on the high performing Title I campus to engage and empower students to succeed academically?” This question intends to explore what teachers created and implemented in their classrooms to engage students. In gathering the research about participants’ perceptions, I plan to share the strategies and approaches with other educators to build their instructional toolbox to design and implement instruction for all students to be successful.

Designing real, relevant, and engaging instruction for students impacts academic achievement. Clara shared,

I went online because with all the kids obsessed with among us that game on their phones and so I went online and found, I did not make it, but I found a template for an among us review game for the DLA [district learning assessment]. I do not think I have ever seen kids so into one of my review games in my life.

The participants shared how incorporating everyday things that are of interest to the students into their instruction helps make the content accessible to students. Debbie explained, “I realized that it is helpful to turn things into games for them like even like I

was even turning graphic organizers into games like the sequencing and making game cards for it.” The research participants shared their strategies and approaches to engaging and empowering students to succeed. Brenda from her role shared that teachers created

something that’s engaging for them [students] that it is going to hold their attention. It is going to hook them because just as a good author needs a hook, we as teachers need a hook to help the kids hang their learning on so they remember it; it goes back to all the lead4ward strategies that we use.

Instructional activities that students can take and apply later in a different context at a deeper level. Clara explained the teachers’ approach to determining appropriate strategies and methods,

whenever I am planning my lessons one, I really want to try to think about what may be the [things] students have been exposed to and then find ways to teach them more. So, like virtual field trips or things because a lot of our students come with like a very like limited background knowledge of things and so kind of exposing them to those and just opening doors for them to see something but then also presenting experiences where they can share where they come from and what they know and so kind of finding a balance.

Keeping a student-centered approach to instructional design and delivery helps teachers determine the appropriate strategies and activities to achieve academic success.

These strategies and approaches align with the five principles of parents and families’ role, fostering academic success, reshaping curriculum, cultural and linguistic competence, and sociopolitical consciousness in the theoretical framework. To effectively design and implement successful strategies for students, educators must be mindful of the background and experiences that students bring with them to the classroom (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Teachers must keep the content goal as a focus to determine the appropriate instructional sequence to get students to mastery. Educators view student culture and experiences as an asset to academic success (Howard, 2003). Teachers create opportunities that ensure the learning taking place is not just for a

moment but for a lifetime and connects to relevant societal concerns. Integrating meaningful experiences that meet the content learning objectives must be purposeful to ensure life-long learning.

Answer to Research Question 4

The final research question was, “What systems and structures are used by campus administrators on a high performing Title I campus to support high-quality instruction?” The systems and structures used by campus administrators on a high performing Title I campus focus on building a positive learning community. The campus administrator creates a positive learning community with quality relationships, high expectations for all, and purposeful professional development that builds educators as they work on designing and delivering high-quality instruction. This question’s goal was to gather the effective processes and procedures from a campus leader that is shared with others as they consider the work to make quality instruction a focus on their campus. The intention is to create a leadership network where the leaders share their work in a trusting environment to gather insight and feedback, creating a learning community focusing on success for all.

The fourth research question explores the systems and structures campus leaders design and implements on their campus to promote high-quality instruction. The campus principal leads the work to establish a positive learning community focused on students having an active role in the organization and being academically successful. As the campus leader, Lisa determined the campus needed a change in its systems and structures for high-quality instruction and learning. Lisa stated firmly, “It was really mainly about systems and structures. When I got there, there wasn’t a lot in place, so I

had to step back and say, what do we do?” Lisa shared, “So there was a climate and culture shift that had to be set for everyone. It really wasn’t just students and community. It was also the expectations for the staff.” The campus administrator focused on ensuring that having a positive campus culture was included in the campus mission and vision. All stakeholders had an active role in its development.

To have a positive campus culture, the campus leadership invested time and finances to teach the staff how to work collaboratively. Lisa and her leadership team implemented professional development sessions that would support creating an environment where teachers formed relationships with their instructional team so that they could work together to design quality instruction for students. Lisa discussed,

We did strength finders with the whole staff so that everybody understood their strengths. We started that with the leadership team and then spread it out to the whole staff. So that really helped them focus on their strengths and understanding how they contribute.

Building a learning community with shared understanding with the adults created a strong foundation transferring to the students.

As the school leader, Lisa wanted to ensure her teachers understood the importance of building relationships and setting expectations for students, so she had her staff trained in Capturing Kids Hearts. Lisa expressed, “for the students with capturing kids’ hearts, we really wanted teachers having an understanding that if you build those relationships with kids, then you can set those expectations.” Lisa introduced Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a focus on the research site. PBIS supports the work of student culture, and the focus was “be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn. So, it was three R’s. So, that was something that we started teaching students,” as shared by Lisa. The campus leaders were willing to try something new to

meet students where they were and build them to their full potential. It took collaboration across stakeholders to move the campus mission and vision forward.

Effective school leadership supports the five principles in the theoretical framework. Lisa demonstrates strong leadership by outlining the need for robust systems and structures on the research site to create a campus culture that promotes academic success. A campus culture fosters practices to ensure students' inclusion in all learning organization components (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2016). The systems and structures shared by the campus leader align with the literature on effective school leadership. They lead the campus to ensure alignment with and respond to students and the school community's cultural, academic, social, and emotional needs (Khalifa et al., 2016). As the campus leader, there must be effective communication of your mission, vision, and expectations while gathering stakeholders' voices and valuing their opinions. The campus leader must understand the campus diversity and incorporate students' lived experiences into the campus culture (Khalifa et al., 2016). The campus leaders must be mindful of the curriculum, resources, culture, and societal impacts of teachers and students to determine the necessary processes and procedures to create a positive learning environment.

Implications

Evidence from this study provided three implications for the research district to support the work and communication across the district of effective teacher practices at Title I campuses. Structural change, professional development, and a mentorship program are the implications from the research study. The simultaneous execution of the three implications in the research district supports the work to increase teacher instructional

practices while increasing student academic achievement. The implications and recommendations for the district are in the following sections.

Implication 1: Structural Change

The themes gathered from the data analysis support the consideration of an organizational structural change in our district leadership. Currently, the research district has a federal programs department that ensures spending of federal funds that comply with grant guidelines. We currently do not have a district-level position supporting Title I campuses or either non-Title I campus with the research themes. To ensure that the emerging themes from the research are being addressed, implemented, and monitored at the district level, I would suggest adding a coordinator position to align with the research themes and the district mission and vision.

The proposed position, The Coordinator of Cultural Growth and Equity, would support the learning organization in aligning the values and beliefs of the district with the importance of building quality relationships in a culturally diverse environment, ensuring student growth for all students, and effective collaboration within a professional learning community. As mentioned in the literature review, having district leadership that demonstrates behavior representing the importance of all students' learning and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as approaches to increase academic achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). Ensuring district and campus leaders understand how cultural proficiency helps create a positive climate where all stakeholders' diverse backgrounds are valued and nurtured (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). The coordinator would create a strategic plan that addresses diversity, equity, and community engagement in this role—serving as a resource for district and campus

leaders concerning creating professional development opportunities, courses, and curricula aimed at teaching and learning to think critically about cultural diversity and its impact on relationships, student growth, and collaboration. The coordinator can help leaders understand how the interactions with students' parents and families, teachers help learn more about their students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). This position serves as a liaison between the district, schools, and community developing strong relationships to support diversity and inclusion.

Implication 2: Professional Development

A critical responsibility within the position of the Coordinator of Cultural Growth and Equity is to develop and facilitate professional development for the research district. There is currently a professional development department in the research district that the coordinator needs to collaborate with to effectively implement the purpose and vision of relationships, student growth, and collaborative communities related to diversity, equity, and community engagement. To better develop cultural competence and culturally sustaining teaching practices, the delivery of quality professional development to all learning organization members must occur (Peters et al., 2018). The professional development sessions will help educators learn and understand ways to help students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices. The professional development plan created by the coordinator will include clear goals and objectives for the work. The plan will also include action items, timeline, individuals responsible for implementation, and success criteria.

The purpose of the professional development sessions will be to ensure that stakeholders remain current with diversity and inclusion roles in building relationships,

student growth, and collaborative communities and their impact on schools and students. Stakeholders should have an opportunity to question their own biases through professional development opportunities (Peters et al., 2018). Sessions will need to be interactive, engaging matter inclusive of research-based practice and storytelling of stakeholder experiences. The professional development should include hands-on experiences of culturally responsive teaching as an immersion technique so that stakeholders can apply the learning in a different setting (Peters et al., 2018). The professional development opportunities would seek to provide stakeholders information and resources for continued growth and learning to advance the learning organization.

Implication 3: Mentorship Program

With the knowledge gained from the research participants, I see a need to establish a new mentorship program in the research district. “Mentoring programs create a learning environment that is more sustainable than many trainings solutions it is based on connections between people instead of events” (Labin, 2017, xi). The current district-led mentorship program supports partnering a zero-year experienced teacher with a veteran teacher on the same campus. From my data analysis, administrators and teachers on Title I campuses would benefit from a mentorship program to learn and share their experiences, systems, structures, and strategies. The relationships formed from mentoring partnerships creates a collaborative community which the interview participants revealed is vital to effective teaching and learning. The mentorship program ties back to the organization’s culture that focuses on investing in its stakeholders’ professional growth (Labin, 2017; Zachary & Fischler, 2014). Administrators and teachers see how the school district is willing to invest in their development impact the organization’s culture.

Administrators. The mentorship program for campus administrators would partner zero to three-year experience principals of Title I campuses with veteran principals of Title I campuses. A Title I campus responsibilities are slightly different from a non-Title I campus due to campus enrollment and funding regulations. Partnering Title I campus principals together provides a professional learning network for the administrators to share and work together on Title I documentation, campus expectations, and instructional focus. The three functions of mentoring: support to manage processes, vision to encourage movement, and challenges that stretch and push help individuals involved grown and reach their goals (Zachary & Fischler, 2014). Having the support to navigate uncharted situations throughout the leadership experience will help build the leader and support the campus.

Teachers. The mentorship program's teacher component would create a professional learning community across the Title I campuses in the research district. The purpose of the mentorship program's teacher component would be to share effective teaching practices, systems, and structures that impact academic achievement. Mentoring programs provide a great solution to addressing many pressing issues (Axelrod, 2019; Labin, 2017). Expectations for the program participants, criteria for selecting participants, and the program goals would be created at the district level and communicated at the program's launch. Based on interest, teachers on Title I campuses across the district will apply to be a part of the mentorship program. Administrators on the campus can also suggest to teachers that they apply based on evaluations. The mentorship program helps create a positive consultative partnership across the learning organization (Labin, 2017).

The mentorship will provide the mentor and mentee partnership a support system outside of their campus to problem solve situations, share instructional practices, and brainstorm instructional approaches. Mentoring leaves a positive and enduring impact and provides outstanding development (Axelrod, 2019). A safe, caring environment where teachers can take their problems and find support in determining solutions.

Conclusion and Summary

In this chapter, I introduced and reported the findings from the data analysis. I analyzed each round of interviews to determine themes. These interviews were analyzed using pattern matching, coding, and categories. Following the three rounds of interviews, I conducted a cross-interview analysis to compare the interviews with the theoretical framework and emerging themes from the analysis. The discussion of the research questions of the study utilized the participant's interview responses. From the data analysis, I provided three implications for the research district to consider in support of campus staff working to increase student academic success.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

For over 50 years, significant research has focused on the achievement gap between White and racial minority students. The 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported the average fourth-grade reading scores was 206 for Black students and 232 for White students (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Based on the 2019 Spring administration of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), Black students who took the fourth-grade reading test scored 23 percent lower than White students (Texas Education Association). The data shows the gap remains as research continues.

National and local education officials seek to understand the causes of the academic achievement gaps and develop viable solutions for closing the existing gaps. As U.S. schools become more diverse, it is imperative to provide teachers with adequate preparation to provide quality instruction to students from different races and cultural backgrounds. The literature supports the implementation of three theoretical frameworks as a way to close the academic achievement gap: culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and students' funds of knowledge as tools to increase academic achievement and support with closing the academic gaps. Educators who incorporate students' funds of knowledge when designing and implementing instruction make the content real and relevant (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy

embrace the belief that all students can learn and focus on ways teachers design and implement practices and approaches that make learning accessible for students (Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003). This study adds insight into viable ways to close the achievement gaps through the utilization of effective practices.

The purpose of this research study is to identify the systems, structures, and instructional practices utilized by teachers to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential on a high performing Title I campus in the Houston region of Texas. The knowledge gained from the participants provides insight into effective practices implemented by teachers and administrators on a high performing Title I campus. This research highlights the instructional strategies, structures, methods, and approaches on a Title I campus that teachers utilize to promote student success is documented and shared with others.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Four participants (two reading teachers, the campus instructional coach, and the campus principal) from the research site participated in three semi-structured interviews over three months. Round one was a group interview with all four research participants that focused on the participants' backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs about the role of culture and race in teaching and learning. The second round of interviews involved two smaller group interviews in which I interviewed the teacher participants together and the school leadership participants together. Questions during this round of interviewed focused on building a positive school and classroom culture and the role of collaboration and feedback. The final round of interviews was again a group interview with all four

research participants in which participants shared instructional strategies and activities they utilized to meet all learners' needs.

The data analysis process for this research study took place concurrently with the data collection process. Upon completing each round of interviews, I started memoing and summarizing key ideas to determine questions and the next steps for the next round of interviews. I conducted a thorough review of the interview transcripts and created codes and categories from each round of interviews. I organized the codes into broad themes for each round. The final phase of the data analysis process consisted of a cross-interview analysis. During the cross-interview analysis, I triangulated the data to determine similarities across the round of interviews. Aggregating the data into themes showed the commonalities across the interviews aligned to the study's theoretical framework and research questions.

Summary of Key Findings

Three key findings emerged from this research that shed light on best practices for promoting student success at Title I campuses. First, there is a need for high-quality relationships between all stakeholders within the learning community. Second, student growth is essential to increase academic performance while valuing student ownership in their learning. Finally, developing a collaborative community creates a positive learning environment where everyone supports growth and learning. The formation of quality relationships takes place by learning from the school community's students and families. In this study, campus leaders and staff focused on building relationships by scheduling purposeful time to have conversations with students to learn more about them. Providing continuous communication with parents and families in their home language to share

campus information also helps build relationships. From the relationships formed, students feel safe and cared for in the learning environment. High expectations are established and valued by students and parents as they work towards academic success.

Secondly, in this high performing Title I school, campus leaders and staff focus on student growth to increase overall academic performance. Teachers and staff analyze student data throughout the year to determine how students are performing academically. Based on each student's current academic performance, the student and teachers work together to determine their growth goals and action steps to achieve them. Celebration of student growth is a part of the campus culture and positively impacts the overall learning environment.

Finally, a vital component of a high-performing Title I campus is a collaborative community. Each stakeholder of the campus plays a role in student academic achievement. The school leaders modeled and shared the campus mission and vision with the community to create trust and transparency. Teacher planning meetings created a space for open and honest conversations where staff could design quality instruction. Creating a student-centered learning environment across the campus provided students with voice and choice in their learning.

Informed Recommendations

Based on the research findings, I have three recommendations for the district in which this research took place. The first recommendation is to create a district-level coordinator position focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Having a leader that can discuss the real issues with diversity and equity while making meaningful discussions is vital (Kotter, 2012). The Coordinator of Cultural Growth and Equity will create a

strategic plan to help the district and campuses address diversity, equity, and community engagement. As research and literature continue to grow on culture, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the schools, having a district leader who stays abreast of the information and then determines the best means to get it out to the entire organization is critical.

Culturally responsive leaders implement systems and structures representing the importance of all students learning and support for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as approaches to increase academic achievement (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). The coordinator will serve as a resource to district and campus leaders as they work to implement plans that address cultural diversity and its impact on relationships, collaboration, community, and student achievement.

The second recommendation is to develop purposeful professional development that addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion across the learning organization. The Coordinator of Cultural Growth and Equity and the district professional learning department could collaborate to design learning opportunities for district and campus leaders that align with the district mission and vision while addressing cultural diversity and its impact on relationships, student growth, and collaborative community. Gay (2002) discusses the importance of having a knowledge base regarding culture and diversity and its implications for curriculum and instruction. Ongoing professional development opportunities throughout the school year provide educators access to knowledge of and support in implementing culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy, two frameworks that support increasing academic achievement for all students (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2002; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). The

engaging and interactive professional development opportunities can provide stakeholders growth and learning on current information and resources on diversity and inclusion to build relationships, increase student growth, and collaborative communities to move the learning organization forward.

The final recommendation is the creation of a Title I mentorship program for administrators and teachers. Mentoring programs are a valuable resource to the organization because they build connections between people who create the learning environment (Labin, 2017). Administrators' mentor pairing can provide a learning network to discuss Title I campus expectations, documentation of funding allocation, and instructional focus. Teacher mentor pairings can help create an opportunity to expand the learning community across the district Title I campus. Teachers will have a platform to share effective teaching practices, systems, and structures that impact academic achievement. Creating a positive motivational environment through fair treatment, acknowledging accomplishments, and camaraderie affects employees' engagement levels (Fullan, 2008). The mentorship program provides participants support while working through challenges and concerns as they continue to deliver quality instruction.

Findings Distribution Proposal

The research study's findings and recommendations aim to support the work of campuses as they create systems and structures to increase academic achievement for all students. Establishing a time and place to gather a target audience of district leadership to share the research study findings is vital. The timing and effective communication of the findings can impact administrators, teachers, and staff.

Target Audience

The sharing of the research study's findings and recommendations will be with a target audience who are part of the research district's leadership team. The district leadership team members who will receive the information from the research are: Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents for Elementary School Leadership and Support, Chief Academic Officer, Executive Directors of Curriculum and Instruction, and Elementary Title I Campus Principals.

Proposed Distribution Method and Venue

During a scheduled meeting with the target audience members, I will share my research study presentation. Invitations extended to the research participants to attend the research presentation. The presentation will include the study's purpose, culturally responsive theoretical framework, description of the research site, the research participants' role, research findings, and recommendations. Throughout the presentation, I will provide session participants with opportunities to process the information, interact with each other, and ask questions. At the end of the presentation, the target audience can discuss possible next steps based on the information provided and feedback.

Another method for distributing these findings is through the meetings I hold with campus leadership teams for the schools I support in my current role. In my current role in the research district, I work with a few of the districts identified Title I campuses. Through scheduled meetings from our Title I department with campus leaders or my sessions planned to discuss individual school improvement plans, I can share the current study research findings as a tool to help campus leaders and staff grow and move student academic achievement forward.

A final way to distribute these research findings is through a journal article publication. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) publishes a journal and holds a yearly summer conference. Components of the current research would benefit the NAESP audience. A journal article submission based on the current research findings for consideration for the NAESP publication would help Title I school leaders as they work to increase academic achievement. Along with the journal article, completion of a conference proposal to further share and discuss the research and its findings at the summer conference.

Distribution Materials

I will provide a copy of the presentation to the presentation attendees. The materials include a one-page document with an overview of the research, the research findings, and recommendations.

Conclusion

This study began with the premise that implementing high-quality, researched-based teaching practices on Title I campuses positively impacts student achievement. Those effective teaching practices align with the five common principles of the existing frameworks of culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and funds of knowledge.

Interviews with the study participants provided insight on current practices on a high performing Title I campus. Having an effective campus leader that supports the practices of building quality relationships, focusing on student growth, and establishing a collaborative community creates a learning environment that positively impacts student achievement. The findings aligned with the research literature and confirmed the

importance of culturally responsive teaching practices as a driving force in increasing student achievement. All four participants provided examples and details of how culturally responsive practices created a student-centered learning environment focused on increased achievement for all.

Current school and district systems and structures often do not support educators in learning and implementing effective practices to the depth and complexity needed to increase learning outcomes. Sharing the research findings with district and campus leaders, along with providing possible next steps to ensure all educators in the district gain further professional development and understanding about effective culturally responsive teaching practices such as incorporating students' funds of knowledge into instruction, cooperative learning, and integration of real-world situations and working with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students are needed to ensure that all students experience academic success.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

The following questions are a few of the three semi-structured interview questions. Discussion focuses on the participants' experiences regarding designing and implementing instruction when working with students from Hispanic and Black cultures; each participant will influence the discussion's direction.

- Tell me about your background.
- When and where did you begin teaching?
- What made you want to be a teacher/educator?
- Why do you choose to teach at a Title I school?
- Describe your role as an educator in student achievement.
- What role does culture play in the learning environment?
- Describe your student's role in the culture of learning in your classroom.
- What methods do you use to learn more about your students' backgrounds and experiences?
- How does the background of your students impact your instructional design?
- What makes a teacher a good teacher?
- What instructional approaches and strategies do you utilize with your students?
- Do some approaches and strategies work better than others? If so, why?
- What things do you or have you done in your classroom that has facilitated your students' success?

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

Baylor University

School of Education

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Examining Effective Practices of Teachers in High
Performing Title I Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Sherita L. Wilson-Rodgers

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research:

This study investigates the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy in public schools to help close the achievement gap. The purpose of this case study is to inform stakeholders of the instructional approaches and strategies utilized by teachers to help students master content and reach their highest academic potential. The goals are to help organizations and leaders first recognize the success of high performing Title I campuses and then identify the systems and structures utilized by the high performing Title I campuses that impact learning. The research data gathered will help design a purposeful plan of action with monitoring and progress measures to ensure that successful systems and structures can transfer to other campuses.

Through my research, the intent is to empower educators to reflect on their beliefs and current instructional practices that impact all students' academic achievement. As we help students grow academically, we also help educators understand who they are and how they contribute to the learning environment—acknowledging the differences and similarities between teacher and student culture and utilizing it to provide all students with academic success opportunities.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will participate in several activities, which include:

- **Three interviews with the principal investigator relating to your experiences teaching and supporting diverse students at a high performing Title I school**

We expect you to be in this research study for 5-7 months. During this time, scheduled interviews will occur during an agreed-upon day and time. Each interview will be 45-90 minutes long. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed at a later date. There is no data collection on your students or colleagues. In all printed and published materials, a pseudonym replaces your name. If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to sign the consent form before conducting any study procedures.

Audio recording:

We would like to make an audio recording of you during this study. Your identity will remain confidential on the recording. We will label these recordings with a code instead of your name. The key to the code connects your name to the recording. The researcher will keep the key to the code in a password-protected computer/locked file. Following the completion of the study, the researcher will destroy the recordings. Audio recording is required for this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you should not be in this study.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no risks to you for taking part in this study to the best of our knowledge. You may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. School personnel and teacher educators may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study, as it may help to prepare future teachers for successful careers.

You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you want to take a break or stop the interview.

You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics asked. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Confidentiality:

The 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 this study's records confidential by using codes and keeping all research material in a password-protected computer and locked file cabinet. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

The authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

Questions or concerns about this research study

You can contact us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our email addresses are listed below:

Principal Investigator: Sherita L. Wilson-Rodgers, sherita_wilsonrodge1@baylor.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brooke Blevins, brooke_blevins@baylor.edu

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:

- Your rights as a research subject
- Your concerns about the research
- A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop 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 you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent.

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy of 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

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