

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL GRAMMARS OF SCHOOLING: EXPERIENCES OF
WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS, FEMALE, FIRST-YEAR ASPIRING MULTICULTURAL
EDUCATORS IN INTERCULTURAL URBAN TEACHING CONTEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL GRAMMARS OF SCHOOLING: EXPERIENCES OF WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS, FEMALE, FIRST-YEAR ASPIRING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATORS IN INTERCULTURAL URBAN TEACHING CONTEXTS

Eloise R. Cook

Enactment of social justice education is an important step toward rectifying pervasive discrimination woven into public schools and other American institutions. A social justice educator must develop diverse cultural competencies and also recognize oneself as a racialized participant in a system of racial inequity. The demographics of an overwhelmingly White teaching force and increasingly diverse student body creates both need and opportunity to understand the development of White multicultural educators.

This is a case study of two White, female, middle-class first-year urban teachers who had completed a social justice-oriented preparation program. Written reflections, interviews, and focus groups captured teachers' perspectives on their first-year intercultural, urban teaching experiences. Findings illuminated experiences with cultural disequilibrium, culturally relevant teaching, critical consciousness, learning to teach, relationships, and navigating institutional knowledge.

Teachers negotiated cultural disequilibrium by both seeking new cultural knowledge, and seeking or creating experiences more consistent with schooling they experienced as students. Culturally relevant teaching emerged through teachers' critiques of academic policy and practices that disadvantaged their students, yet were coupled with constraints that inhibited cultural synchronization in classrooms. Student achievement was considered a primary responsibility, but teachers were frustrated by accountability to fill perceived large academic gaps. Teachers simultaneously participated in and critiqued the dominant structures, stereotypes, and narratives in place in their schools

Teachers viewed themselves as life-long learners and valued foundational preservice experiences and school-based relationships to build knowledge of teaching. Teachers understood the value of relationships with families and students yet felt constrained in developing those relationships to enhance culturally relevant teaching practices. Teaching in a culture of high stakes accountability and monitoring stifled innovative teaching.

Implications for teacher supports during induction include preparing teachers to enter the induction process with an experience bank and foundational critical consciousness from which they can build in new contexts, providing opportunities for teachers to build community- and school-based knowledge and relationships as early as possible, and providing supportive mentoring that guides teachers' critical consciousness in their new school contexts.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The quality of teaching and learning in urban public schools has become an important focal point in improvement of the American education system for researchers and policymakers. With educational equity gaining momentum in reform discourses, tensions exist between social justice education, a form of education that requires an understanding of social identities and cultural power structures (King, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 2007), and increasingly standardized approaches to educating children (Sleeter, 2012; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005).

The hegemonic culture, defined by the identity markers through which American society is stratified, encompasses being White, male, straight, middle to higher socioeconomic class, and able bodied (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Most social institutions in the US, including schools, reflect the cultural codes of the hegemonic culture. Tyack (1993) notes that “most of the prominent policy makers in public education and most administrators of public school systems have been native-born, white, prosperous, male, and Protestant” (p. 11), and it is these social identity markers that became and remain the backbone of cultural codes in schooling. These codes are embedded in what Sánchez

(2008) identifies as classical and national culture. Classical culture is knowledge of “the most important human achievements throughout history” as they are organized into “different fields of knowledge such as literature, art, physics, history, mathematics, etc.” (p. 141). National culture is the set of experiences, skills, and knowledge that is common to a community of people, with the community often defined by “geographical territory, a language and customs” (p. 142). Children whose social identities and cultural codes are different from the hegemonic culture have historically been marginalized from many aspects of schooling (Darder, 1993), particularly those aspects that draw from classical and national cultural codes.

Many teachers entering the urban teaching force have not had opportunities to adequately develop awareness of issues surrounding their own social identities and cultural codes, potentially complicating the social justice education agenda (Darder, 1993; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Gay, 2010; Mazzei, 2008; Montgomery, 2001). This study seeks to understand how teachers are able to implement social justice education in intercultural contexts, where the teacher’s social identity mirrors the hegemonic culture and the students’ identities represent historically marginalized cultures, when the teacher has had explicit guidance in social identity, cultural awareness, and societal power structures during preservice teacher education.

Background of the Problem

Public education has long been touted as the great equalizer in American society: the avenue through which all children, regardless of the social class into which they were born, are able to gain the skills and knowledge to allow them to become socially mobile,

and to give them freedom to make decisions to shape their own lives (Sánchez, 2008). It is clear that this highly regarded outcome of public education has yet to be realized. In fact, the community into which a child is born continues to determine life chances. Measures of educational outcomes that correlate with long term life opportunities still indicate gaps in subgroup performance that are consistent with historical patterns of social hegemony and marginalization. The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in reading and math amongst 4th and 8th grade White and Hispanic students depicted a gap ranging from 18-26 points, and a gap of 24-32 points in reading and math amongst 4th and 8th grade White and African American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), a gap range that has persisted since the late 1980s (Sleeter, 2012). While some data shows limited or temporary decreases in the achievement gaps (Braun, Chapman, & Sailesh, 2010; Education Trust West, 2010; Sleeter, 2012; Thompson & Allen, 2012), it remains clear that public education has not worked as well as hoped.

With education researchers, policy makers, and school leaders fumbling to define, articulate, and measure what a “good” education looks like for students of diverse backgrounds, multiple reform initiatives have been implemented in attempt to ameliorate several perceived problems in public education, and specifically the public education of diverse urban school populations. However, Tyack and Cuban (1995) argue that there has been very little change in the “grammar” of schooling in decades.

Little has changed in the ways schools divide time and space, classify students and allocate them to classrooms, splinter knowledge into “subjects” and award grades and “credits” as evidence of learning. (p. 85)

Through persistence of these practices, they have come to characterize public education. It is generally expected, for example, that children will be divided into grades by age, curricula will span a single school year, and successful students will be promoted to learn with a new teacher each year. While we may sometimes come to realize that the structural norms embedded into American schools are socially created, too infrequently do we reflect on *why* those norms are, what social perspectives they represent, and whether or not it supports the educational outcomes that we desire or to which we aspire.

A Historical Perspective

In order to understand the urgency for the preparation of culturally relevant, social justice educators, particularly for work in intercultural urban schools, it is important to view the broader landscape of public education in the US. The current state of American schooling is steeped in a complex social and political history. Tyack and Cuban (1995) attribute current practices in public education to historical movements and efforts of groups of people to identify social problems, gain support for their views and proposed solutions, and then enact solutions through public education. “The more powerful and prestigious the groups, the more likely it is that they will be able to buttress their reforms with laws, regulations, and accreditation requirements” (p. 86). At the end of the 19th century, the all-inclusive one-room school houses desired in many communities were streamlined for efficiency, segregating children according to age and proficiency, segmenting curricula into year-long packages of learning, and limiting the work and expertise of teachers to a single grade. This division of students, curricula, and teacher expertise, it was reasoned by those supporting this movement, was as much egalitarian as efficient. With this structure in place, all students, regardless of gender, socioeconomic

status, or immigration status, would have equal access to the same education. All children would be held to the same achievement expectations, and the onus was placed on the child to simply learn the material as it was presented to all other students in order to pass the test and move to the next grade (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

By the early 20th century, this structure was already beginning to show problematic outcomes in urban schools. While the structure did work for the majority, nearly one-third of students were, in fact, held back as a result of low-achievement on the end of year tests. These “retarded” or “overaged” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 90) students were positioned as problematic and interfering with the efficiency that this system sought to create. These students were also largely from families of low socioeconomic and immigrant status.

People began to recognize that the graded school might have been efficient for the majority of students whose culture matched its requirements, but for the poor and immigrants the system seemed geared to produce failure. And failure, to the efficiency-minded educators of the Progressive era, was a waste. (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 90)

Rather than question the utility of the entire system, including the division and classification of students, curricula, teacher expertise, and testing processes, minor modifications have been made to the existing structure to force as many students through the progression of grades as possible, while preserving the actual structure.

Gradually, the graded structure became a hallmark of a “real school,” and progression from one grade to the next a hallmark of “success.” Schools tended to deepen their practices of categorization and segregation by beginning to use IQ scores as scientific measurement of a student’s genetically predetermined academic ability, and, therefore, socially just means by which students could be sorted and tracked for the

curriculum that was most appropriate for their predetermined destinies. Similarly, social promotion began to take root, granting promotion to students who had been held to lower standards of achievement than their peers but who needed to stay with their cohorts.

Many of these policies and practices continue today.

Legacies in the Contemporary Grammar of Schooling

In constructing this grammar, or structure of schooling that still prevails in urban elementary schools across the nation, we are often oblivious to the systems in place that continue to marginalize those students whose culture does not match that of the system. If a student is to achieve and be successful in school, the child must assimilate as closely as possible to the cultural norms and expectations of the dominant, hegemonic culture that shaped public education into its current state. Valenzuela (1999) recognizes the subtractive nature of this assimilation process amongst high school students, who felt that full assimilation necessitated release of their first culture, the culture that is shared in their homes, in their communities, and with their families. Navigating this boundary between the “public” space of school, and the “private” space of home can place stressors on students that induce active and conscious rejection of the dominant cultural values and norms that are represented through schooling, often through rejection of schooling itself. This is evidenced in the patterns of school achievement and success according to membership to hegemonic and marginalized cultures.

Toward Meaningful Reform

Still, in desperation to pinpoint and “fix” why achievement gaps persist, urban school reforms have neglected to examine the foundation that the current school system

was built upon, and the ways in which systematic marginalization has been woven into egalitarian efforts toward efficiency in schooling.

The answers... lie not in a proliferation of new reform programs but in some basic understandings of who we are and how we are connected to and disconnected from one another. (Delpit, 2006, p. xxv)

Urban school initiatives have focused on teacher recruitment and retention, teacher and school accountability, developing common standards, empowerment and inquiry, community supports, and more. However, absent from many of the local and national discourses surrounding reform initiatives is the intent of a “good” education and the assumptions that underlie our perspectives of “good.” Discussion lacks critical components about what we want students to know and be able to do, *and why*. Furthermore, absent from current systems of testing, accountability, and classification (e.g., disabled, normal, and gifted) used to measure teacher and school effectiveness is an understanding of whether the school system is meant to direct children to a genetically predetermined place in our societal structure, to make their own decisions about where they choose to enter our societal structure, or to critically examine our societal structure and work against powerful cultural norms that work to simultaneously privilege some and marginalize others on the basis of social identity.

Many curricula, school structures, and teacher preparation processes exist that perpetuate our current grammar of schooling, despite overwhelming evidence that schooling is simply not working for many children in urban areas. King (1997) posits that urban education contexts are qualitatively different from other education contexts, and, therefore, require specialized considerations. She suggests that

... educators in urban settings have to learn as much as they can about the perceptions and realities of the urban school experience in order to develop a

useful framework from which to guide the development of a knowledge and practice base for successful urban school teaching. (p. 182)

Urban classrooms are teeming with students who have life experiences different than, and unfamiliar to, many new teachers. The cultural lived realities in many urban areas include a relative prevalence of violence, poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, living with HIV and AIDS, welfare dependency, and crime. However, the coexistence of “strong cultural institutions, including the family, which provide love, hope, and self-determination” (King, 1997, p. 183) are often misunderstood and omitted from the culture of the school simply because they go unrecognized and undervalued. Martínez and Quartz (2012) highlight the strength of community organizations in the case study of a community high school in the Belmont Zone of the Los Angeles Unified School District. After 30 years of extreme overcrowding, dropout rates as high as 60%, and college entry rates as low as 10%, several community based organizations in this working class, largely immigrant community were able to form an alliance that drove reform of the local school, achieving structural and instructional changes that met locally identified needs.

In order to bridge the school context with the positive institutions of the local community, urban teachers must acquire tools to interrogate their beliefs about urban students, families, and communities, reexamine these beliefs within the lived context of the community, and challenge points of divergence (King, 1997). Urban teachers must develop a more critical practice that is grounded in the realities in which they teach. Preservice student teachers at Center X, a teacher certification program that has experienced success with preparing new social justice urban teachers (Quartz, Priselac, & Franke, 2009), are introduced to the community in which they will student teach by the parents who are members of that community, providing them with opportunities to view

and experience the community in different ways outside of the classroom. These and other social justice educators (Bergeron, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Noel, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2007) advocate an approach to urban education that not only promotes high academic achievement, but also includes teaching of values that critically examine social inequities and cultural power distribution at the community level.

The importance of this collaboration is underscored by the increasing cultural diversity in urban America and the growing student body in American schools that is also becoming increasingly diverse (Gay, 2010; Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 1997; Oh & Cooc, 2011; Sleeter, 2005; White, 2016). Large scale immigration from Latin American, Asia, and the Caribbean has important influence in the landscape of public schools. Over half of all students enrolled in American public schools in 2017 in pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 were children of color, and this is expected to continue to rise through at least 2026 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The current schooling system is charged with the challenge of educating students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds toward an increasingly uniform set of educational standards.

To meet this challenge, reform initiatives have also included a focus on cultivating an experienced, expert teaching force by increasing urban teacher recruitment and retention. Despite enactment of programs to support newly inducted teachers, teacher retention rates in urban areas remain disappointingly low, having a strong negative impact on the school community and resources (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Davis, Resta, & Latiolais, 2001; Hancock, 2009; Sawchuk, 2008). While many schools and school systems would agree that they want to recruit and retain quality teachers, it remains to be determined what teacher qualities should be recruited and how teachers should be

retained. However, a raised critical consciousness, or desire to change the social inequities reproduced in many schools, could provide teachers with a map that guides the direction of, and long-term commitment to, their work, particularly when they encounter challenging obstacles. This map serves as a guide to enactment of culturally responsive (Gay, 2003) and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) teaching. For example, though graduates of Center X, which is grounded in social justice education, are slightly less likely to remain classroom teachers after five years than the national average, they are three times more likely to remain in the same school during this time, thereby increasing the stability of faculty in their schools (Quartz et al., 2009).

Social justice in urban curriculum and pedagogy. Though concrete teacher skills and qualities that lead to effective teaching remain difficult to define, it has become clear that a one-size-fits-all approach to schooling simply will not work, even if the achievement standards are the same for all. Children's diverse funds of knowledge drive their interests (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and indicate a dire need for culturally relevant teaching that recognizes the range and wealth of knowledge that students bring to the classroom from diverse cultures. Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, and Moll (2011) encourage further examination of the processes by which diverse funds of knowledge can be transformed into capital, such as higher grades, better college enrollment rates, and increased civic participation. Research has begun to examine what changes must be made to practices of teaching and learning within our system in order to promote a system with a social justice education agenda, a system that graduates all children with equal awareness of, and access to the larger societal culture of power.

Multicultural Social Reconstructivist Education (MCSR) (Sleeter & Grant, 2007) expands traditional approaches to multicultural education by attending to the voices of historically marginalized cultures and using critical dialogue in order to transform relationships of domination within the cultural power hierarchy. Some of the key tenets of MCSR include viewing culture as complex, dynamic, and a product of power relations; using a curriculum that incorporates experiences, learning styles, and backgrounds of the students; and guiding students to examine and take action against instances of inequality in their own communities. Similarly, Multicultural Social Justice Education (MSJE) (Sleeter & Grant, 2007) advocates positioning diverse cultural perspectives as the backbone of the curriculum, while directly responding to immediate cultural social concerns.

In enacting such an approach to social justice education, Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy, which is a model of pedagogy that addresses student achievement, affirms students' cultural identities, and guides students to develop critical perspectives in order to challenge inequities and injustices in the society in which they live. Synergistically, Bergeron (2008) identifies culturally responsive curricula as those that "allow children to learn from a familiar cultural base" (p. 6) in order for new knowledge to fit into their schemas, and validates students' cultural identities by allowing them to learn and respect the heritage, history, and perspectives of multiple cultural groups. Teachers must, then, learn and teach the "cultural codes" of their students (hooks, 1993; Paris, 2012) while simultaneously ensuring access to larger cultures of power.

The urban teaching force. One key theme that emerges in this research is the importance of cultural representation and affirmation in the curriculum and pedagogy. The biculturalism that is described by Darder (1993) as the phenomenon experienced by people of color

who must survive in the midst of social institutions [such as schools] that... are defined by a system of both affective and behavioral standards that are in conflict with those of subordinate groups (p. 199)

can only be accomplished if those who tend to be marginalized by these social institutions grow up with a firm grasp of their collective historical identity. The curriculum, therefore, must represent the diversity of identities, perspectives, and histories of the students in order to affirm a bicultural identity.

In addition to curricular connections to represent and affirm students' identity, Woodruff (1996) states that

effective pedagogy includes the recognition that... socio-political, historical, and economic factors beyond the school impact what transpires in the classroom... School language and communication should contain links to students' home/community language and communication structures. (p. 280)

Therefore, teachers who join the urban teaching force must be committed to integrating students' cultural codes into daily classroom life. In order for this to be possible, the teacher must be familiar with the culture of the students she is teaching, beyond surface level cultural awareness. The teacher must understand the complex and unique social identities of her students, as well as collective historical identities, and how these identities influence who they are outside of school in their homes, local communities, and larger society, in order to understand who they are as they learn and interact inside of the school.

This presents a point of friction with the demographics of the current incoming teachers. It is well documented that teachers entering the urban teaching force are predominantly White, middle-class women (Chizhik, 2003; McBee, 1998; Milner, 2005; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005; Zumwalt & Craig, 2008). The demographics of the incoming teaching force presents a lack of cultural congruency with many of the communities in which these teachers are recruited to teach.

Challenges of cultural discontinuity. Some researchers are concerned with the cultural disparities that may exist between teachers and students in urban contexts, and highlight ways in which White teachers may fail to account for cultural differences in their teaching (Delpit, 2006; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Darder (1993) asserts that “even progressive white teachers still approach students of color from outside their cultural context” (p. 197). This often means that despite best intentions, many incoming White, female teachers lack the cultural awareness that is integral to culturally relevant pedagogy, and, therefore, may be limited in their ability to implement social justice education.

Teacher identity and social privilege. Incoming teachers who are White and are from middle class backgrounds have a social identity that has often put them in a position of privilege; they likely have never had to consider how social identity shapes their lives (Gay, 2010). In fact, it is likely that many do not see themselves as “raced” beings, and whiteness is not an aspect of their conscious identity. In Mazzei’s (2008) study with preservice teachers taking a course called “Diversity and the Learner,” Mazzei asked her students to write a list of self descriptors. Only two of the 23 White students in the class listed their racial identity as a descriptor. In this position of privilege, race only becomes

apparent when encountering a racial “other,” in which case, the “other” is perceived as a raced being with a raced identity. The cultural norms associated with whiteness are generally accepted as universal truths or realities. “White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1990, p. 31). While most white people can acknowledge that racism puts some “others” at a disadvantage, it is less likely to be acknowledged by white people that race puts them at an advantage (Delpit, 2006; McIntosh, 1990).

When cultural assumptions and “truths” have gone uninvestigated, problems can arise in intercultural social contexts, which have important ramifications for schools and schooling.

Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow “them” to be more like “us.” (McIntosh, 1990, p. 31)

Teachers who do not recognize knowledge and behaviors as social and cultural may develop deficit perspectives (Delpit, 2006) toward students whose knowledge and behavior patterns differ from their own cultural knowledge and behavior patterns, defining students’ knowledge and behaviors not as different, but as deficient.

Without recognizing and affirming the diverse funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), languages, and cultural behaviors as strengths rather than barriers to be overcome in a quest to become less like the perceived “them” and more like the perceived “us,” teachers may begin to doubt their students’ abilities to learn, doubt their own abilities to teach, or both. A teacher who views a student’s primary language of Spanish as a barrier to be overcome in order to assimilate into an English dominant school system will

encounter many challenges in eliminating Spanish from the student's school life; however, a teacher who cultivates the presence of Spanish in the classroom and school will help the student to develop biculturalism (Darder, 1993) to be successful in both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking contexts. However, a

move to activism emerges with recognition of oppression and privilege within our own selves and how one engages in practices within institutional structures [such as schools] that oppress and privilege others in daily life. (Knight, 2000, p. 171)

A teacher's understanding of her own identities, and the intricacies of power and oppression that are woven into her relationships with students and members of the school community, allows her to become active in reforming the oppressive structures, or grammars of schooling in her local context.

Teachers for reform of urban schooling. Effective, meaningful reform often happens from the ground up, starting with development of local practices and policies that meet context-specific needs (Martínez & Quartz, 2012). Teachers are uniquely positioned to play a vital role in ground-up education reform because they are living the day-to-day successes and challenges of teaching and learning in urban schools, yet also have important power to shape the ways in which they approach the challenges through their context-specific teaching practices, as well as advocacy and involvement in local policy development. These teachers must be able to teach against the grain, or counter to traditional grammars of schooling that have failed culturally marginalized students, in order to develop and/or implement culturally relevant teaching. Effective ground-up reform that is generated through teaching, therefore, requires that teachers themselves have developed a critical consciousness that drives their practice and work in schools. However, when teachers are not prepared for diversity in cultural knowledge and

implementation of culturally relevant teaching, and do not perceive the traditional grammars of schooling through a critical lens, teachers are likely to situate the problem of discontinuity between student and school cultures within the child and family, rather than in the schooling practices, particularly when the culture of the school very closely mirrors the uninvestigated culture of the teacher.

Challenges of urban teacher attrition. If teachers are to generate reform through their practices and involvement in local advocacy and policy development, they must remain in the work long enough to create change. It is estimated that nearly one quarter of all new teachers leave teaching, and as many as half of new urban teachers leave their original school within the first three years, with the highest proportion leaving the lower-performing schools (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wykoff, 2009). Boyd et al. (2009) begin to unpack racial patterns in teacher attrition, noting that White teachers in particular tend to stay in schools that have higher proportions of White students. Boyd et al. note that “effective” teachers (as defined by student performance on state tests) in high-achieving schools who transfer to low-achieving schools tend to lose “effectiveness” (as defined by student performance on state test scores). Although student test scores is a very limited measure of teacher effectiveness, this helps to underscore the idea that teacher effectiveness is situational and context-based. Since an effective teacher cannot merely transplant her effectiveness from one school context to another, it can be reasoned that a teacher must develop competency within a particular school context to become effective.

Teacher retention is important to urban school reforms. Not only are high levels of teacher turnover “costly in terms of student achievement, school funding, and financial

expenditures” (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008), but a stable faculty builds consistency for students, teacher expertise with curriculum and pedagogies, familiarity with school community, and allows for preservation of already limited school resources (Hancock, 2009). A teacher who is able to enact culturally relevant teaching must become competent in the cultural codes of the student and community, and this takes time, especially if the teacher does not share the same culture as the community in which she teaches. Increased teacher retention at a school means that the faculty is able to build stronger relationships and connections with the students and families of the school community. Furthermore, programs and school initiatives lack momentum and consistency when staff are not present to implement the full process (Boyd et al., 2009; Hong, 2012), meaning that schools with low teacher retention are always in a rebuilding state rather than moving forward, and often trying to build and rebuild a cultural bridge with the community rather than using and strengthening it.

The initiatives and programs designed to attract teachers to fill large numbers of vacancies in urban schools often target new teachers, with varying experiences with teacher preparation, including traditional teacher education programs and various alternative certification routes. Darling-Hammond (1997) problematizes this pattern by pointing out that the children who most desperately need high quality teachers continue to receive the least experienced and least prepared teachers, perpetuating cycles of low-quality education and social inequity. Ingersoll (2002) also urges a research and policy agenda focused on teacher retention, likening programs for recruiting teachers to pouring more water into a bucket with holes in it. If the teachers who are recruited are not

retained, schools and districts will constantly need to funnel scarce resources toward recruitment of new teachers, and will never reap the rewards of a stable faculty.

Raising critical consciousness and retention. In this study, critical consciousness is defined through three aspects: coming to question one's assumptions about reality; actively critiquing knowledge; and coming to understand ways that socially constructed realities and knowledge contribute to systems of power and oppression (McDonough, 2009). Seider and Huguley (2009) note that teachers as a whole tend to mirror the general public's belief that economic inequalities in the United States can be attributed to individual characteristics, such as laziness or hard-working; however, teachers who choose to teach in urban school districts are more likely to understand and attribute socioeconomic disparities to systemic inequalities rather than characteristics of the individual. An urban teacher's critical consciousness is often what attracts her to this particular teaching context. Therefore, if a primary reason that urban teachers enter the teaching force is to improve societal conditions (Seider & Huguley, 2009), it is possible that teachers who feel they are able to advance this belief system through their teaching, and in fact create social change, would be more likely to remain in the field of teaching, thereby increasing teacher retention in urban schools.

Paradoxically, large urban school districts are characterized by centralized bureaucracies, with reduced autonomy at the school and classroom levels, reducing opportunities for teachers to enact changes that influence the system they are teaching against (Quartz et al., 2008). In many ways, the nature of the urban school system places pressure on teachers to teach for uniformity rather than change. More must be known

about the ways that urban teachers are able to carve space for their beliefs and their teaching within a system that promotes uniformity in order to enact social change.

Statement of the Problem

Social justice education, an approach to schooling that “addresses societal structures that perpetuate injustice” and engages “individual and collective action [that mitigates] oppression” (McDonald & Zeichner cited in Philip, 2012), is an important step toward rectifying the pervasive discrimination woven into public systems and institutions in the United States. Philip (2012) argues that we cannot expect larger societal changes by simply preparing teachers to create caring classroom communities with relevant, engaging curricula (though these are important components); we must also directly acknowledge the racialized inequities in wealth, resources, and access amongst communities and their schools.

Therefore, in order for an educator to enact social justice education, one must not only develop a range of cultural competencies, but must also develop one’s own critical consciousness and learn to recognize oneself as a racialized being who participates in a larger system of racial inequity (Montgomery, 2001). Once participation in this system is acknowledged, teachers can choose how they wish to participate in, or against, that system, how that will be enacted in their teaching, and how they perceive their professional role in the school and local community.

Currently, policymakers spearheading programs designed to fill teacher vacancies in urban schools do not know enough about ways in which teacher candidates can be prepared to actively seek out cultural knowledge, including familiarity with the culture of

the students and understanding one's own social identity and location within the power structure, in order to teach for social justice (King, 1997; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). It is clear, however, that the absence of this cultural knowledge can be detrimental to all stakeholders. Research indicates that when teachers enter urban classrooms with inadequate preparation in this area, it can result in teaching that alienates students and strains teacher-student relationships, leading to high levels of teacher and student attrition and weakening of the school community (Brock, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999).

If a teacher lacks the deep cultural knowledge required to design culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula, the pedagogy and curricula by default become irrelevant. Students will struggle to assimilate new knowledge to their schemas since it will likely have limited immediate relation to their lives. This will do little to close gaps in achievement and graduation rates between children of hegemonic and marginalized cultures, despite teachers' best intentions.

An even more pernicious outcome of this situation is teachers' acquisition of a deficit perspective (Delpit, 2006). Teachers who approach intercultural teaching contexts from a privileged social position in which they have never needed to question their assumptions about the world often experience "cultural disequilibrium" (Bergeron, 2008) when they find themselves immersed in a school community culture that is different from their own. Teachers may hold tightly to their own cultural norms, using them as a ruler against which others are measured, perhaps viewing a student who speaks Spanish instead as a child who is deficient in English. Not only is this deficit perspective harmful to students' academic development and self-esteem, it is also detrimental to teachers'

perceptions of their own competencies as teachers. Teachers may find themselves teaching against students' cultural grains, without realizing it, and grow frustrated or resentful by the resistance and small amounts of "progress" they experience, when in fact it is assimilation, not progress, that they are trying to teach and measure. With frustration growing amongst teachers and students, the valuable teacher-student relationship becomes strained and disrupts that conduit through which learning occurs.

Teachers who are unable to ameliorate intercultural tensions are more likely to leave that school community, or perhaps even the teaching profession. As high teacher attrition compounds many of the challenges in urban schools, the focus must shift from ways to recruit and retain potentially culturally irrelevant, or ineffective teachers through incentives or supports, to ways in which teachers can be prepared to teach with a heightened critical consciousness and with cultural relevance for social justice education that will allow them to experience success as teachers and remain in intercultural contexts.

Rationale

In light of identified competencies of social justice educators, including critical consciousness and a desire to enact social change through teaching, there is a need to examine more closely the teaching experiences of first year teachers who have been explicitly guided in developing their cultural knowledge and identifying their own social location within a racialized societal structure during their preservice preparation. This will provide insight into the ways that this type of preparation shapes teaching, thereby informing the policy and practices surrounding the preparation of urban social justice

educators. Research must determine how this knowledge is enacted in the in-service stage of teaching, and in what ways it influences teachers to challenge and/or reproduce structures of schooling.

Because early teacher attrition rates are highest within the first year of teaching (Boyd et al., 2009), research must also focus specifically on first year teachers' experiences with "cultural disequilibrium" and navigating any feelings of disequilibrium to enact culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula while also working to deconstruct systems of inequity. Such a study presents an opportunity to respond to literature that emphasizes the challenges of being a White teacher in an urban, intercultural school, and avoiding a deficit perspective on White urban teachers (McDonough, 2009) by highlighting some of the ways that teachers are successfully negotiating challenges that they experience in their work in their first year.

Social justice educators must continue flooding the discourse surrounding diversity in urban schools with stories of their experiences with culturally relevant teaching. Lipman (1995) notes that the voices and stories of successful culturally relevant teachers must be stronger in the discussions surrounding urban education reform, serving to both describe for policymakers what successful teaching can look like and mentor other teachers in their practices. These stories of success must respond to the current rhetoric of urban school failure, which paints a negative picture of urban school contexts for both teachers and students. By strengthening the presence of successful urban schools in our social consciousness, the discourse that positions attributes of urban communities as challenges to be overcome by schools can begin to position attributes of urban communities as assets to teaching and learning. Not only must urban students begin to

learn that they are part of a successful education system that can prepare them for successful futures, but teachers must also be given reason to feel that they are privileged to be able to teach in richly diverse urban school contexts, eliminating the phenomenon of a “hard-to-staff” urban school because too few experienced teachers are willing to work under what they perceive to be extremely challenging conditions.

Purpose

This study seeks to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of first-year White, female teachers from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds who are teaching in an urban, intercultural teaching context. This study explores first year teachers who are graduates of a preservice teacher education program that is centered around tenets of social justice education and explicitly guides teacher candidates in social identity and cultural awareness. The preservice program provides teachers the opportunity to intensively explore, investigate, and discuss some of their assumptions related to social identity, including their own, and the ways in which social identity contributes to a societal power structure.

This study seeks to describe the ways in which these teachers perceive their experiences with students, and the classroom, school, and local communities, as they enact their understandings about social identity and cultural awareness into their teaching practices within an intercultural teaching context that provides space for them to question, deconstruct, and/or reconstruct other aspects of their cultural assumptions and identities. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how teachers’ awareness of social identities and positioning within a larger power structure shape teachers’ perceptions of

their work and their role as educators, as well as their commitments within the system of public education. Finally, this study presents space for two possibilities: to describe specific preservice preparation components that these teachers feel were important to shaping their current practices and perceptions of their work and school context; and to provide important counter-narratives to speak back to the dismal, dominant narrative of urban schooling through storytelling that highlights culturally relevant urban school teaching in order to reshape a more positive social consciousness of urban public schools that attracts teachers who are committed to this work.

Research Questions

This study describes the reflections, perceptions, and self-reported practices of two White, female, middle class first year teachers who are teaching in an urban, intercultural context, using a framework of culturally responsive (Gay, 2001) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These teachers have completed a preservice teacher education program at Northeast College (pseudonym), which is a preparation program that is centered around the tenets of social justice education.

1. In what ways do these teachers experience and navigate cultural disequilibrium in intercultural teaching contexts?
2. In what ways do these teachers enact culturally relevant teaching?
3. In what ways does critical consciousness shape these teachers' perceptions of their work and role in the school and local community, and larger society?

These research questions are explored through several areas of teacher practices that have been identified as important to culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching,

including classroom management (Greene, 2008; Ramsey, 2004; Sapon-Shevin, 2007), curriculum design (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Shujaa, 1995; Sleeter, 2005), collegial relationships (Haberman in King, 1997; Oakes et al., 2002; Ramsey, 2004), relationships with families of students and the local community (Nieto, 2010; Woodruff, 1996), and assessment practices and accountability (Jorgensen, Schuh, & Nisbet, 2006; Sleeter, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Tenets of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2001) and culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) provide a framework for understanding the ways in which teachers' perceptions, reflections, and practices represent removal of the structural barriers of contemporary schools that have long marginalized children with cultural codes different from the hegemonic. Through explorations of teachers' experiences with cultural disequilibrium, this study pulls from essential elements of culturally responsive teaching. First, it provides space for teachers to share experiences related to development of a cultural diversity knowledge base, including the "cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (Gay, 2001, p. 107) of students with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The cultural diversity knowledge base must be integrated into the curriculum, ensuring cultural representation in all subject areas, and pedagogical practices, ensuring access to the content through learning structures. Second, this study provides space for these teachers to share stories of experiences with "cross-cultural communication" (p. 110). This includes teachers' perceptions and understandings of

linguistic structures of various ethnic communication styles as well as contextual factors, cultural nuances, discourse features, logic and rhythm, delivery, vocabulary usage, role relationships of speakers and listeners, intonation, gestures, and body movements. (p. 111)

Three other essential elements of culturally responsive teaching, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building learning communities, and cultural congruity in classroom instruction (Gay, 2001), align with two key tenets of Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework for culturally relevant teaching: 1) high academic expectations and student achievement; and 2) affirmation of students' broader cultural identities. A third tenet of culturally relevant teaching is cultivating critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge social inequities in their local community and beyond.

The second research question for this study focuses specifically on teachers' enactment of culturally relevant pedagogy and is explored through the lens of three tenets: high academic expectations and students achievement; cultural synchronization; and cultivation and enactment of critical perspectives. The first and third of these three tenets pull directly from Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework for culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings' framework includes an additional tenet, cultural affirmation, and in this study, this tenet is narrowed to explore a specific way that teachers may affirm students' culture: cultural synchronization. Students who see authentic representation of their cultures in academics and social codes of schooling will experience cultural affirmation. Since teachers must play a central role in synchronizing students' home and school cultures, this study explores ways that first-year aspiring multicultural educators work to create authentic representation of students' cultures in their classrooms and curricula.

This study also explores ways that teachers are able to integrate their own critical consciousness into their perceptions of their work and role as social justice educators. This pulls from tenets of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013). Through their work, teachers may challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, injustices, and oppression. Furthermore, teachers may view themselves as change agents for social justice and equity.

Significance

This study provides potential implications for teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure processes that serve as pathways for teachers into urban classrooms. These first-year teachers' reflections, perceptions, and self-reported practices provide insight into how preservice identity exploration translates into dispositions, perceptions, and practices in intercultural teaching contexts. It also suggests implications for in-service supports for first-year teachers.

Furthermore, this study provides, through stories, examples of what teaching can look and feel like in intercultural classroom and community contexts. This provides an important window into the possibilities of social justice education and culturally relevant teaching for preservice and in-service teachers who are also committed to social justice education and searching for examples of this work in action.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Given the previously discussed socio-historical and political context of the American school system and contemporary struggles with reform in urban schools, it is important to know more about the ways in which the predominantly White, female, middle class teaching force enacts social justice education in the first year of teaching in intercultural urban schools. This review of literature first defines the purpose and complexities of models of multicultural and social justice education as a response to current reform movements. Then, this literature review describes the role of teachers in this work, followed by what is known about identity exploration and development in urban teachers promoting development of critical consciousness. This is juxtaposed with challenges associated with culturally *irrelevant* educators who struggle in intercultural contexts, and provides implications for a predominantly White, middle class, female teaching force. Next, stories of White teachers enacting multicultural education are discussed. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the need to learn more about ways that the preparation of culturally relevant teachers affects classroom practice in intercultural school communities through enactment of social justice education.

Models of Multicultural and Social Justice Education

Sleeter and Grant (2007) identify five forms of education with respect to bridging cultural dissonance. The first, “Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different” approach, focuses teaching on addressing differences between students and the grammar of the school,¹ with the goal of helping students to become adults capable of fitting into the larger societal structure. Schooling, then, closely mirrors the larger societal norms and structures. Instruction is targeted toward students who are from low socioeconomic families, racial or ethnic minorities, new to learning English, and students who have been classified into special education. The intent is to build on students’ experiential knowledge and learning styles to efficiently and effectively “catch them up,” enabling them to perform well enough on tests to pass through the grades and enter society as an adult with the basic skills and knowledge to allow them to participate.

The second approach identified by Sleeter and Grant (2007), the “Human Relations” approach, is intended to use schooling as a context in which positive feelings of social acceptance are promoted to reduce stereotyping and support students’ self-concepts. This approach targets all students, regardless of race, class, gender, languages spoken, or other social identity markers. The intent of this approach is to prepare students to enter the adult world with feelings of tolerance and acceptance of others co-existing in the societal structure.

The “Single-Group Studies” approach is meant to increase students’ knowledge about a particular group of people based on a social identity marker, such as race or

¹ The “grammar” of schooling refers not only to Tyack and Cuban’s (1995) structures that divide time, space, knowledge, but also the hegemonic cultural codes (Tyack, 1993) that are woven into school norms, such as expectations for behavior and communication.

sexuality, and to create a willingness amongst students to work for social change that benefits the identified group. This usually happens through teaching about a group's history of victimization and making members of this group more visible in the school community. This instruction is targeted toward either members of that group or everyone, with the intent of producing adults who will enter society prepared to recognize and work for equality for this group within the power structure.

The "Multicultural Education" approach, as defined by Sleeter and Grant (2007), uses schooling as a tool to promote equal opportunity, develop appreciation for cultural pluralism and alternative lifestyles, and support equity of power amongst groups. This approach targets all students, building on experiential knowledge, teaching critical thinking skills, and analyzing multiple perspectives and viewpoints. The intent is to produce adults who will enter society believing in equality and preservation of cultural pluralism within the societal structure.

The fifth identified approach, "Multicultural Social Justice Education," uses schooling as a tool to prepare students to work actively toward social structural equality. This approach is targeted toward all students, and situates academic content within contemporary social issues of inequity of multiple groups of people. The intent of this approach is to prepare children to enter the adult world to problematize and reconstruct the existing social structure in a way that serves the interest of all social groups.

Darder's conception of critical education (1993) integrates key tenets of Sleeter and Grant's (2007) Single-Group Study, Multicultural Education, and Social Justice Education approaches to schooling. In Darder's research on the education of Latinx students, she, like Valenzuela (1999), emphasizes cultivation of students' bicultural

identities and voices, allowing for greater flexibility in responding to social environments. Through development of a critical voice, students

... have at their disposal the consciousness to reflect critically upon collective and individual interactions with mainstream institutions, affirm the knowledge they possess, given their particular subject position in U.S. society, resist domination through explicitly challenging the implicit mechanisms of cultural subordination that dehumanize, disempower, and obstruct their democratic rights, and enter into relationships of solidarity as equal participants. (p. 202)

Darder advocates curriculum and instruction that is targeted toward the marginalized group of students with the intent of examining historical and contemporary patterns of disenfranchisement, to critically analyze these patterns, and simultaneously develop individual cultural pluralism so that a child enters society with the tools to access power while challenging and deconstructing the mechanisms that serve to marginalize certain social groups.

The Role of the Teacher in Multicultural and Social Justice Education

Darder (1993) highlights the vital role of critical educators in establishing the purpose and intent of a schooling context. She purports that even the most progressive White educators of students of color approach their students from outside of students' cultural contexts, understanding their students' lives from a framework of their own experiences, which often results in cultural conflict and dissonance. While it is generally assumed that what students of color need to achieve is exactly what all students need to achieve (i.e., competent, caring teachers; adequate learning materials; safe school environments; and involved parents), Darder challenges the assimilationist perspective that is reinforced through this thinking, and emphasizes the need to address barriers that are specific to the students' marginalized social identity status.

Darder's (1993) work with Latinx students focuses on multiple culture-based barriers and learning environment conditions that interfere with students' academic achievement, including cultural conflicts between school and home, language differences and inadequate bilingual instruction, persistent stereotypical attitudes despite proclaimed appreciation for diversity, and enactment of curricula that are disconnected from students' cultural values, beliefs, and experiences (p. 197). This unique set of challenges that arises in schooling contexts where the majority of students are in fact de-centered and marginalized in the curriculum, teaching practices, and general grammar of schooling is what makes teaching in urban areas qualitatively different than teaching in schooling contexts where the majority of students' social identities are centered in the curriculum and grammar of schooling, where school is simply a place where already learned cultural norms are reinforced.

An understanding of these complexities of teaching in urban areas may cause one to question what role White teachers from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds can play in ameliorating the dissonance between a grammar of schooling that has been created by, and has served to reinforce their own social identities, and the lived experiences of urban students whose identities are marginalized by that very same grammar. White critical educators successfully navigate this paradoxical situation by developing a deep understanding of racism and its impact on both individuals and society, while simultaneously becoming aware of their own culture and its role in an inherently oppressive system. While Darder (1993) asserts that even successful White critical educators often cannot participate in implicit codes of communication with their students through accurate interpretations of "mannerisms, gestures, nuances, and

particular linguistic styles, including tone, inflection, and pitch of their speech” (p. 217), these educators are able to enact curricula, pedagogy, classroom management, and teacher expectations that emphasize students’ development of critical thinking and voice, and a realized belief in students’ capacity to learn.

Identity Exploration and Development of the Urban Teacher

Initial years in the classroom provide time and space for outward and inward development of teacher identity. Conway and Clark’s (2003) study of identity development in six student interns surrounding their hopes and fears as educators as they completed a 30-week internship across two semesters indicated outward development of concerns, framed by Fuller’s concerns-based model of teacher development. Fuller’s outward model of development includes three progressive stages: in the first, new teachers are concerned about themselves in their role as teacher; in the second, teachers’ concerns shift to tasks and situations in their teaching and classrooms; in the third, concerns are focused on the impact of their teaching on students.

Conway and Clark’s work supports, yet complicates, this model of teacher development. While some may assume that expediting passage through these stages of teacher development will enhance teacher and teaching quality, Conway and Clark’s (2003) study questions this assumption and suggests that “the initial inward focus among Intern teachers is necessary, valuable, and reflects a move toward reflective practice as the professional self is constructed over time” (p. 745). While this outward journey can be begun during internship or student teaching phases of a teacher education program,

students of teaching must be given opportunities to linger in the initial stage, gaining a firm, yet malleable, understanding of themselves and their roles as teachers.

... [We] must shift the lens: Our efforts must first be focused inward, toward our own individuality as teachers. We cannot even begin to understand the needs from the cultural perspectives of the students who enter our classrooms until we critically examine and account for our own worldview. We must ask the questions, Why is this so? Why do I believe this? What in my experiences has formed and shaped my views? (Ford & Dillard, 1996, p. 237)

Indeed, exploration of one's own identity during first steps in a teacher's journey can provide a useful platform from which to grow as a social justice educator.

The Urban Social Justice Teacher

Darling-Hammond (1997) highlights the important role of teachers' work in restructuring the traditional grammar of schooling in order for teachers to teach for understanding, "that is to teach all students, not just a few, to understand ideas deeply and perform proficiently" (p. 5), and to teach for diversity, "that is to teach in ways that help different kinds of learners find productive paths to knowledge as they also learn to live constructively together" (p. 5). Social justice teachers must, therefore, bring more to their work than simply what may be perceived as "what all children need to achieve" (Darder, 1993). They must integrate understandings of unique cultural identities and power structures into their teaching practices (Gay, 2010).

Making learning accessible to children through relationships. The relationship between teachers and students is vital to making learning accessible to children (Lantolf, 2000; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). "Students' trust in their teachers helps them develop the commitment and motivation needed to tackle challenging learning tasks" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 134). Furthermore, developing strong understanding of

students as individuals allows teachers to center the learner in the design of curriculum and make decisions that best meet the learning needs of individual students. Darling-Hammond problematizes aspects of our current grammar of schooling in the ways that it interferes with development of caring, understanding relationships between teachers and students. For example, compartmentalizing teachers' work and responsibilities, with children moving to the supervision of other adults for lunch, recess, counseling, special programs, and/or pull-out academic supports, prevents teachers from developing holistic understandings of who the child is across multiple contexts. Furthermore, the structure of grade levels allows for teacher-student relationships to be cultivated for a ten-month period before the relationship is abruptly stopped, and a new relationship is begun with a new teacher.

Darling-Hammond (1997) further describes feelings amongst students of anonymity and invisibility in the absence of strong teacher-student relationship. These schools are characterized by pervasive mistrust of others and seemingly arbitrary rules and disciplinary practices (e.g., no gum, hats, do-rags, hoods, talking in the halls, walk in two straight lines) that are reinforced through authoritarian tactics. Cartledge and Kourea (2008) note that culturally responsive classrooms provide environments that are disciplined rather than punitive. They are rooted in beliefs about children's competence, preservation of self-esteem, and development of self-responsibility through awareness of natural consequences, promoting a much stronger pro-social school and classroom community in which caring relationships can develop between teachers and students.

Relationships with families. An important way for teachers to learn what they need to know about children in order to best teach them is to develop relationships with, and understandings about families and communities.

Where there are gaps in developmental preparation of the child or significant differences between norms and expectations of home and school, disjunctures result that can lead to school failure. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 145)

It is important for teachers to understand the ways that students' caregivers have begun to help the child develop the social, emotional, moral, language, and academic cultural tools and knowledge. This is achieved through authentic engagement with families and communities. Beyond involving parents in fundraisers, speaking with them at parent-teacher conferences, or inviting them to publishing parties, teachers must actively seek and use the knowledge that families have about their children that will be important in shaping a curriculum and classroom environment. Families also bring information about their hopes and dreams for their children, which should serve as a collaborative roadmap for where education from schooling and family are going as they converge.

Becoming Culturally Responsive

Responsive urban teachers are those who make a commitment and act to become familiar with their students and students' families, and who understand the culture and rhythm of the community in which they teach. While Nieto (2012) notes that a teacher does not necessarily need to live in their students' community in order to become a part of it, authentic participation in community events is essential. Woodruff (1996) notes that in contemporary urban contexts, teachers often make long commutes from outside of the community to work in the school each day. The physical distance between the communities in which a teacher lives and works frequently translate into dissonance in

understanding across community cultures. Not only does the long commute prevent teachers from spending time before and after school within the school community, but also teachers are less likely to run into families in casual settings outside of the school, such as the grocery store or library, creating a barrier to truly knowing and understanding the culture and values of the community in which they serve.

Families “can be powerful allies in bringing schools, students, and communities back into sync” (Woodruff, 1996, p. 279), and teachers’ inability to forge relationships with families in authentic, day-to-day contexts presents a missed opportunity. Therefore, a bridge must be actively built by the teacher who seeks to understand the culture of the community that is not her own. In his work with The School Development Program, a school empowerment model that works to close the gap between students, parents, and schools, Woodruff found that schools that sought to involve families in the daily functioning of the school, including decisions around policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and social life of the school, were more successful in developing positive, trusting relationships. These relationships proved to be the foundation for important student academic achievement and climate improvements within these schools.

Enacting Culturally Responsive Teaching

Bridging membership into the school’s local community is one important prerequisite for becoming a culturally responsive educator, and working to create synergy between school and community cultures. It is this knowledge and understanding harvested from the community that in turn allows an educator to enact culturally responsive teaching in her classroom. The challenge, however, can be changing a feeling

of cultural disequilibrium into cultural congruency between home and school cultures.

Bergeron (2008) notes that

[w]hile teacher education has predominantly focused on academic diversity through an emphasis on various learning and cognitive disabilities, ethnic and cultural diversity must also be effectively embedded into preparation programs. (p. 8)

In her single case study of a White teacher from the Midwest during her first year of teaching at a predominantly Hispanic southwestern school, Bergeron found that this teacher was successfully able to negate effects of cultural disequilibrium in her practice by building strong classroom community, promoting conversation for modeling and acquiring certain language and vocabulary, and integrating multiple languages into classroom literacy and communication. Successful instructional practices that were responsive to students' cultures included interdisciplinary curricula and thematic units, and built in opportunities for student choice.

Bergeron (2008) notes, however, that this teacher remained relatively unattached to larger policy issues that impacted her classroom, such as banned bilingual education and standardized testing. Bergeron concludes that while there was important translation of cultural understandings and experiences in this teacher's enactment of culturally responsive instruction in her own classroom, missing was a sense of advocacy for students within a political climate that ran counter to her students' needs.

Enacting culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995) takes the cultural synchronization that is a pillar of culturally responsive teaching a step further to suggest that a culturally *relevant* pedagogy is one in which academic achievement is addressed, but also one which affirms students' broader culturally identities while also developing critical perspectives that allow students to challenge societal inequities in and outside of

their school and local community. Ladson-Billings recognizes the problematic nature of defining student academic achievement by standardized testing performance; however, she also acknowledges that this is the reality by which teachers and students are judged in our current educational climate. Therefore, in her study of eight successful teachers of African American students, standardized test scores were used as one measure of student achievement, along with demonstrated ability to read, write, speak, compute, pose and solve problems, and other academic skills demonstrated within the classroom.

While these students were taught to play by the rules of the hegemonic culture responsible for the standardized testing system in order to perform well on these measures of achievement, Ladson-Billings recognizes that “culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (1995, p. 476). The dilemma created for students when academic achievement requirements are not congruent with their own cultural competencies are well-documented (Nieto, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billings’ study were successfully able to recognize cultural competencies in their students, and integrate these competencies into their teaching practices in a way that reaffirmed students’ culture by portraying these competencies in a positive light.

While simultaneously teaching and reinforcing competencies characteristic of both hegemonic and local community cultures, successful culturally relevant teaching also must help students to identify, understand, and critique current social inequities. Paramount to this tenet of culturally relevant teaching is that teachers themselves are able to recognize social inequalities and their causes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study engaged their students in political

activism around identified local community problems, integrating academic content and skills into local social activism.

Characteristics of a culturally relevant teacher. While Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework is useful to understand what culturally relevant pedagogy is, it does not describe who a culturally relevant teacher is. These teachers did not set out to enact a culturally relevant pedagogy; rather, their mindsets, attitudes, and dispositions cultivated a pedagogy that was culturally relevant. Ladson-Billings' research suggests that amongst this group of teachers successfully enacting a culturally relevant pedagogy, there was marked variation in surface level teaching styles. However, three broad commonalities amongst these teachers emerged from her research.

The first commonality was in teachers' conceptions about themselves and others. Teachers believed that all of their students were capable of academic success, contrary to what is often believed about students in low-status, marginalized communities. They also believed their pedagogy to be a process rather than a finalized state, always changing, and unpredictable. They also believed that teaching is an act of pulling knowledge out of their students, rather than transferring knowledge from themselves into their students. Finally, these teachers viewed themselves as members of the local community and believed teaching to be their contribution to their own community.

The second commonality was in teachers' beliefs about social relations. These teachers consistently used social interactions as a means to achieve the three criteria of culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers developed a classroom community of learners, encouraging students to learn collaboratively through formal and informal peer grouping. Teachers also maintained fluid relationships with their students and demonstrated

connectedness with all of their students. Teacher-student relationships were equitable and reciprocal, and students were put in positions where they were able to act as teachers in their classroom community.

The third commonality was in teachers' conceptions of knowledge. These teachers believed that knowledge is fluid, shared, recycled, and constructed, and that all knowledge must be viewed critically. The teachers themselves were passionate about knowledge and learning, and they provided scaffolding to help their students learn. They also believed that assessments must be multifaceted and include multiple ways to demonstrate excellence.

Preservice preparation of the culturally relevant educator. Becoming a culturally relevant educator requires more than solid content knowledge and a charismatic presence in the classroom sometimes believed to be the main ingredients to good teaching. It requires a mindset, a disposition, and set of genuine beliefs about cultures, social identities, and power relationships within the larger American society (Gay, 2010).

Unfortunately, many teachers entering urban public schools have not been afforded the opportunity to look carefully and critically at the norms, assumptions, and truths that define their cultural backgrounds, the ways in which they view their students, and how they perceive respective positions within the societal structure.

The world views of many... exist in protected cocoons. These individuals have never had to make an adjustment from home life to public life, as their public lives and the institutions they have encountered merely reflect a "reality" these individuals have been schooled in since birth. (Delpit, 2006, p. 74)

Teachers are often themselves the products of a traditional grammar of schooling-- a grammar that worked for them, that was comfortable for them, and is reproducible for

them. Because school was successful for these teachers when they were students, it reinforces beliefs about the need to reproduce their schooling experience for the children in urban schools, enacting the assimilationist perspective critiqued by Darder (1993).

Challenge of the culturally irrelevant educator. Though, as previously discussed, high teacher attrition can be detrimental to school improvement, perhaps even more pernicious is the prospect of teachers who do learn to cope with the discomfort of teaching in a culturally incongruent context without deeper interrogation of the roots of this discomfort. In these instances, teachers are likely to continue to reproduce the schooling grammars that have been successful in their previously experienced school contexts, anticipating similar results (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In these cases, teachers view the problem of students' low-performance not within the curriculum, assessment, or pedagogy, but rather within the child and families in the community.

When these privileged individuals-- and they are privileged, whether they realize it or not-- see others who operate from a different worldview, they can often comprehend them only as deviants, pathologically inferior, certainly in need of "fixing." (Delpit, 2006, p. 74)

When cultural difference is misunderstood, and teachers understand their students' abilities only within the traditional grammar of schooling and achievement, teachers may assume a deficit in student learning and knowledge, and be unable to recognize students' strengths as they are contextualized within their lived realities within their family and community contexts.

Delpit (2006) shares an example from her work with young children in which a young boy struggled to complete "the simplest" of math worksheets that were meant to provide practice with coins and combinations, yet he regularly used money in his daily family responsibilities within his community, such as making purchases at the store and

doing laundry. The decontextualization of this skill is an example of the many practices within the grammar of schooling present barriers for students who are unfamiliar with the mainstream ways of accessing the curriculum and showing competence.

When teachers resort to a cultural deficit or culturally disadvantaged model for interpreting dissonance between their cultural norms and those of their students, compensatory educational interventions are often implemented (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Sometimes this means watering down the curriculum to teach these students the “basics” that they appear to be lacking. Students receive remedial support services, are tracked into lower ability groups and classes, or become classified as disabled, further alienating them from the “mainstream curriculum” that is reserved for students with “mainstream competence” (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Furthermore, when students spend their days within a schooling structure that positions their family and community culture as deficient, teachers place students at risk for learning to view themselves as deficient and incapable of learning, in turn developing low self-esteem and low expectations for themselves and their life chances.

When self is perceived as object, the self becomes an object of hate. Hate from others is internalized into self-hate, or internalized racism... [and] self worth decreases. (Ford & Dillard, 1996, p. 233)

Other students may recognize their cultural alienation from schooling structures and practices, and grow to perceive school as an inauthentic contribution to their life goals and achievements, meaning that they may attend school because it is required, but do not fully engage with schooling because it has no perceived impact on who they will become and what their life chances are. Still others actively resist the subtractive schooling practices (Valenzuela, 1999) that are re-enacted through reproduction of traditional

grammars of schooling as a measure of self- and community- preservation, actively choosing the life chances that are presented through family and community culture.

The Possibility of Cultural Difference

If approached with an appropriate mindset, cultural diversity between teachers and students, and amongst all members of the school community, holds tremendous possibility for culturally relevant teaching and learning. To understand these possibilities, it is helpful to examine Delpit's (2006) analysis of the "culture of power," and how this relates to teaching and learning. Delpit identifies five aspects of the culture of power:

1. Issues of power are enacted in the classroom.
2. There are codes or rules for participating in power, that is, there is a "culture of power."
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
5. Those with power are frequently least aware of-- or at least willing to acknowledge-- its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (Delpit, 2006, p. 24)

One reason that the intercultural teaching contexts described in this study can be so powerful in redistributing social power lies in the very fact that most teachers entering urban public schools are already a part of the culture of power. Reflecting Delpit's third aspect of the culture of power, this means that as White, middle class women, these teachers know the rules of the culture of power, and have access to the culture of power, whether they recognize (or admit) it or not.

Reflecting Delpit's second and fourth aspects of the culture of power, teachers who know the rules or codes of the culture of power have the potential to serve as conduits through which their students who do not yet know the rules of the culture of

power can learn. Teachers who recognize these rules to acquiring social power can explicitly teach their students about these codes in a way that does not subtract or devalue the codes and rules of the culture in which the students currently live.

While this situation is ripe with *potential* for culturally relevant teaching and learning, an important prerequisite to actual enactment of culturally relevant pedagogy is teachers' development of a certain mindset with regard to perceptions about themselves and others, beliefs about social relations and interactions, and conceptions about the nature of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers must therefore, attend to Delpit's first and fifth aspects of the culture of power: understanding and acknowledging their own social location within the culture of power and the privileges this location affords them with respect to accessing power; and, how the power associated with different social identities influences power dynamics within the classroom.

An additional advantage to intercultural classroom contexts is that for teachers who have been privileged by having social identities that center them within the dominant culture (White, middle class, speakers of Standard American English), and, therefore, have not had opportunities to identify and analyze their own culture, this context holds up a metaphorical mirror (Sleeter, 2005) in which they are able to view themselves. Teachers of the hegemonic culture can be provided with an authentic space in which they can continue to develop awareness of their own social identity because in this context, their culture is no longer the norm. Increased awareness can help to de-center structures previously considered "normal," and the taken for granted grammar of schooling can be questioned and critiqued.

Cultivating Multiculturalism through Ideological Clarity

The shifting of worldviews and ideological assumptions that must occur for transitioning through different phases of heightened identity awareness involves transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997). Teachers must develop autonomous, responsible thinking through which they are able to fully participate in a democracy, as critical thinkers rather than receivers of current knowledge and understanding.

Transformative Learning

Mezirow (1997) writes that a person's frame of reference for perceiving and interpreting the world rests upon both points of view and habits of mind. Points of view are malleable and change more easily when a person encounters new experiences that challenge their current points of view. Habits of mind, however, are

broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of [cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological] codes. (Mezirow, 1997, pp. 5-6)

Less easily changed by life experiences, they are the lens through which points of view are constructed, reconstructed, and articulated.

Mezirow outlines four processes of learning with respect to a person's frame of reference. First, a person can seek experiences that elaborate on, and reinforce, existing points of view. Second, a person can establish new points of view through new experiences that serve to reinforce the existing frame of reference. Third, an experience can occur that establishes a new point of view that challenges the existing frame of reference. In this case, multiple experiences that continue to challenge the frame of reference may lead to a transformation of one's habit of mind. Fourth, a habit of mind can

be directly challenged “by becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias...” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7) and assumptions that frame our habits of mind. This type of transformation is relatively uncommon and difficult because “we do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). This fourth level of transformative learning, therefore, requires a more deliberate type of learning that does not rely on incidental day to day experiences and interactions.

Schulz (2010) writes that most people replace their existing theory with a new theory, either instantaneously or gradually over time, they are never without a “truth” to hold on to. “Rather than assess a belief based on its own merits, we choose *among* beliefs, clinging to our current beliefs until something better comes along” (Schulz, 2010, p. 186). Since people almost always have a “truth” to believe in, they are almost always living in a space where they believe themselves to be “right.” This space of “wrongness” is the absence of a “truth” or theory to hold on to. This happens when one is faced with a circumstance in which she comes to recognize the assumptions that frame her ideology, and realizes some or all of these assumptions to be fallible. With one’s current theories and truths, or frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997) unraveling, it is notably uncomfortable and disorienting to be unable to immediately replace the old truth with a new.

Creating an Uncomfortable Space for Preservice Teachers

If in teacher education we cannot rely on incidental experiences that happen in the lives of teacher candidates to alter their points of view in a way that will lead to transformative learning, we must then be deliberate in helping preservice educators to engage with Mezirow’s (1997) fourth process of learning by which they become critically

aware of the assumptions that frame their own habits of mind and ideologies. For students who are a part of the hegemonic American culture, abandoning the ideology that reinforces the notion that they are where they are in life purely as a result of hard work and dedication is indeed incredibly uncomfortable.

Several things can influence a person's ability and willingness to let go of a set of beliefs (Schulz, 2010). First, it is easier to let go of a set of beliefs if you have something to replace it. Second, beliefs in which a person is heavily invested are much more difficult to release. Schulz describes this as "sunk costs," meaning how much of a person's life is wrapped up in the previously held beliefs, and how willing they are to walk away from those aspects of their lives. Not only are students who experience this immediate rupture unable to grasp on to a new truth and forced to live in what Schulz (2010) describes as a state of "wrongness," but the nature of this type of rupture, having to do with issues of social and cultural identity, magnifies this discomfort.

To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment-- and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. (Delpit, 2006, pp. 46-47)

To recognize that within a social structure that continues to oppress some based on social and cultural identities, while privileging others based on their social identities (and not merely on hard work and perseverance), requires members of the hegemonic culture to simultaneously grapple with the new and unexpected identity of social oppressor.

Supporting Growth in the Uncomfortable Space

While bursting the metaphorical bubble in which one lives that had until that point prevented critically facing flawed assumptions in belief systems is an important

first step, a second important condition “is whether or not the people around us make it easy or hard to accept our errors” (Schulz, 2010, p. 198). Strategies have been identified to support learning through this uncomfortable space.

Images. Images can be a powerful tool in transformative learning. In the form of storytelling and use of metaphors, language can be used to spur creative thinking,

helping learners conceive of alternative ways of thinking and being, which can lead to the realization that what was once considered normal, natural, or just the way things are is really just one way of thinking and being among a vast range of possibilities. (Hoggan, 2009, pp. 5-6)

Hoggan (2009) suggests that storytelling allows for emotional, spiritual, and imaginal engagement with new ideas, creating deeper meaning-making. Incorporation of images through storytelling, literature, and language provides opportunity for preservice teachers to encounter “disorienting dilemmas” surrounding issues of social equity, drawing into question their own lived experiences and frames of reference.

Discourse. In Sleeter’s (2005) work in teacher education, she acknowledges the powerful opportunity that is presented through dialogue with others on different ideologies, and comparing these different ideologies to that which is reinforced by dominant society. It is through discourse that learners are able to hear and experiment with multiple points of view and work toward a mutual consensus or understanding that validates all points of view presented. If structures are in place to allow for this type of discourse, also important is the presence of multiple viewpoints in the discourse. These viewpoints may come from those who are engaging in discourse, as well as viewpoints brought to the discourse through reading or other experiences.

While some authors (Delpit, 2006) note the importance of creating a safe space in which participants are able to engage in this discourse free of judgment by others,

Leonardo and Porter (2010) problematize the tendency for public race dialogue to maintain a condition of “safety,” noting that

...the higher goal of understanding and fighting racism is exchanged for creating a safe space where whites can avoid publicly “looking racist,” which then overwhelms their reasons for participating in racial dialogue. (p. 139)

It is argued that when safety for White people becomes paramount in race dialogue, White privilege is being maintained despite the intent of the dialogue to challenge and critique racial privilege. Howard (1996) calls for mitigating these negative feelings by approaching the past and present with a new sense of honesty, as “facing reality is the beginning of liberation” (p. 329).

Relationships. Highlighted in the conditions for effective discourse is the nature of relationships amongst those engaged in discourse.

Sometimes people succeed in showing us our errors, and sometimes they fail, but only rarely does that success or failure hinge on the accuracy of their information. Instead... it has almost everything to do with the interpersonal forces at work: trust or mistrust, attraction or repulsion, identification or alienation. (Schulz, 2010, p. 193)

Hoggan (2009) highlights the important role of collaboration in engagement with new images, assumptions, and perspectives. Through collaboration, people can serve as “critical mirrors” (Brookfield cited in Hoggan, 2009) to allow people to see themselves and their worldviews as others may see and interpret them. This is a powerful tool in aiding people to understand themselves, their own realities, and their own truths as one of many possibilities.

Long-term Outcomes of Transformation

Schulz (2010) suggests that once the work has been done to critically examine the assumptions of a belief system, and those assumptions have been deemed fallible, one

cannot return to a state where they mindlessly accept the original belief system. The tendency is to remold the original belief system to integrate revised ideas about the basic assumptions, or to move on to a new belief system that encompasses the chosen assumptions. However, a true change in habit of mind is an ongoing process through which an individual continues to critically interrogate one's own assumptions that have accrued during many years (Hoggan, 2009). A disruption to a person's worldview is a starting place ripe with potential, but true transformation becomes a process.

Moving Forward as White Multicultural Educators

Howard (1996) asks, "What must take place in the minds and hearts of White Americans to convince them that now is the time to begin their journey from dominance to diversity?" (p. 324). As educators, it is important to face the reality that our nation is in transition, and we must work to accommodate a more diverse school system through inclusive, responsive teaching practices.

It took 500 years for our present curriculum to evolve, and in spite of its many fine qualities, it is still flawed and inaccurate and excludes most non-European perspectives and influences. (p. 329)

Howard calls for White multicultural educators to approach this transition with humility, understanding that their role in the process is a collaborative one, rather than "marching out in front with all the answers for other groups" (p. 329). In order to visualize what the possibility is for White teachers in multicultural education, it is important to recognize stories of successful White teachers who have navigated the unsafe spaces of critical self-reflection in order to mitigate the cultural divides amongst them and their students.

Stories of Successful White Multicultural Teachers

Obidah and Teel (2001) engaged in teacher research to learn about their own teaching practices through analysis of racial and cultural differences, and to attempt to respond to literature that suggests that White teachers cannot effectively teach students of color. Teel sought a partnership with Obidah, an African American educator who was an effective teacher with students of color, as defined by students' motivation to succeed, positive relationships between students and teachers, and engagement with lessons with little resistance. Students expressed feelings of being challenged, supported, and interested in the curriculum. Obidah's effectiveness was also shown in students' improvement in all skill areas and subject knowledge.

Teel found that she enjoyed teaching her African American students; however, she admits that in her first 14 years of teaching, she assumed that her low-achieving African American students could only benefit from a simplified version of the curriculum presented to her White students, and her teaching reflected this assumption. It was not until she began her doctoral studies that transformative learning through reading literature by African American and other scholars occurred.

Based on the literature [she] was reading and the experiences [she] was having in inner-- city schools, [Teel] began to believe that the strategies and materials used by their teachers-- not the students' shortcomings-- were the problem. (Obidah & Teel, 2001, p. 27)

Teel made a concerted effort to revise her curriculum and pedagogy, using

non-competitive classroom structures with effort-based grading, ...multiple performance opportunities, ...increased responsibility and choice, and...validation of cultural heritage. (p. 27)

While Teel did find some of her lessons to be increasingly successful, she noted through analysis of her own data collected on her work that she “lacked the connection” (p. 28) with students that she had observed between Obidah and her students.

Throughout the collaborative research process, Teel continued her transformative journey by dealing with difficult emotions that emerged from their work. What allowed these to navigate this emotionally uncomfortable space was a shared commitment to the outcome (developing more effective teaching practices), as well as mutual respect and trust. They found that trust “continues when one protects the vulnerability of the other while still holding high expectations for the other to grow” (Obidah & Teel, 2001, p. 99).

Through this relationship, Teel was able to view her pedagogy and language from a different perspective: one that forced her to recognize what she carried in her “invisible knapsack,” which Peggy McIntosh describes as “the invisible package of unearned assets which [one] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [one] was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (in Obidah & Teel, 2001, p. 51). Teel began to see the ways in which her racial and cultural positions of privilege were influencing the communications and relationships that she had with her students. Because of her position of power in the classroom, Teel’s (mis)interpretations of her students’ language and participation due to cultural misunderstandings resulted in deficit assumptions about students’ engagement, maturity, and motivation. When Teel’s co-researcher/mentor was able to help her gain cultural competence that her students possessed, she was able to reconstruct a new understanding and interpretation of students’ behaviors and interactions that helped her to see her students as engaged, mature, and motivated.

Paley's (2000) *White Teacher* highlights the importance of reflection on culture and biases. Paley writes about her work in her racially and culturally diverse kindergarten classroom, also working with an African American colleague. Her work began when the faculty in the school where she worked was confronted by a group of African American parents who had noticed differences in the way students of different races were treated in the school. Paley began to examine her own teaching practices, only to realize her tendency "to ignore anything about a child that was different or might cause him or her anxiety... [including] personal attributes and family circumstance" (pp. xiv-xv). Paley became committed to uncovering the hidden curriculum in her classroom by uncovering her identity, which had made these topics too uncomfortable to address or acknowledge in her work, strengthening her responsiveness as a teacher.

Beginning the Journey in Preservice Work

Several student teachers completing their preservice coursework and participating in group inquiry as part of their Master's Project reveal similar themes of the importance of reflection and self-discovery as a teacher learning to teach inclusively in heterogeneous classrooms (Oyler, 2006). In their own inquiries surrounding their student teaching experiences, these preservice teachers began the ambiguous work that moves teaching beyond the techno-rational approach, and although many questions brought to the inquiry suggested a desire to know what to do or how to respond in a particular situation, through discourse-based inquiry, these teachers

[journeyed] from technical to relational knowing; from propositional knowledge questions being at the base of their inquiries, to situated knowledge being offered as first answers. (p. 136)

Obidah and Teel (2001) made recommendations for teacher education programs to help prepare new teachers for diverse classrooms. First, the curriculum must address gaps in teacher candidates' knowledge about cultural histories other than their own. Second, teachers must have opportunities to reflect on their own cultural biases and assumptions. Third, teacher education programs should include field and community experiences, where new teachers come to know diverse communities, as well as develop ways to bring relationships with community members into their teaching.

Marx and Moss (2011) suggest that merely placing student teachers in intercultural school or community settings with guidance to reflect on such experiences is effective for some preservice teachers, but often it is not enough because the schools are themselves situated within a set of hegemonic norms that the preservice teachers have not yet learned to notice or question. In a preservice preparation program that uses study abroad student intern experiences to disrupt preservice teachers' understandings of their own cultural norms and ethnocentrism, through a single case study, Marx and Moss found that this study participant experienced "cultural differences that caused anxiety, miscommunication, and misunderstanding" (p. 40). Though this participant sometimes felt like an outsider in her school placement, she had an opportunity to view herself as the outsider, rather than viewing students as the outsiders in an American school context where her norms aligned with those of the other teachers.

This study found that full immersion in a new culture allowed the participant to experience and navigate cultural dissonance, an important skill of a culturally responsive teacher. This study also found, however, that the participant needed a cultural translator and intercultural guide, a role that was filled by a local university professor with whom

the participant took evening classes, underscoring the importance of guidance in the development of cultural awareness.

Pollock, Deckman, Mira, and Shalaby (2010) write about supporting teachers to answer the questions, “What can I *do*?” “What *can* I do?” and “What can *I* do?” as they journey toward social justice education. The question, “What can I *do*?” implies teachers’ “search for concrete, actionable steps” (p. 211) that can be applied to classrooms, accompanied by skepticisms about utility of theory related to racial inequality or difference. The question, “What *can* I do?” indicates questioning of the impact one educator can have on larger structural changes to social order, a key tenet of social justice education. The third question, “What can *I* do?” reveals insecurities in novice social justice teachers about their own readiness to do this work.

To assist with answering the question, “What can I *do*?,” the professor of the Everyday Antiracism class (EAR) explicitly guided preservice teachers to hold a conversation on three different levels: the level of principle; the level of strategy; and the level of “try it tomorrow.” This facilitated preservice teachers’ connections between larger theories about race and what those implications are for strategies that can be tried in the classroom. Strategies were then considered on an even more concrete level by connecting them to context specific challenges in their current classrooms.

The question of “What *can* I do?” is situated in the tension inherent in being forced to live and work within the system one is trying to deconstruct. When confronted with seemingly dichotomous ideas of antiracist teaching versus good teaching, or dismantling larger systems of inequality versus smaller everyday action as individuals, preservice teachers in EAR tended to understand these acts as either “both-- and” or

“either-- or.” Preservice teachers who took a “both-- and” stance tended to have higher senses of personal agency and possibility in their work, while those who took an “either-- or” stance tended to focus instead on what they were not able to do.

The third question, “What can *I* do?,” highlights the tension of looking at one’s own racialized beliefs and understandings of the world. Interestingly, the professor of EAR made explicit to the group that the focus of the class was not on developing preservice teachers’ awareness of personal racisms. This was because she wanted to eliminate potential defensiveness that would cause refusal to look at impacts of racism on children. Journal entries indicated, however, that these preservice teachers wanted to examine themselves and their racial beliefs more deeply, and in fact some used journal writing to do so. As was seen with the previous question, preservice teachers who took an “either-- or” stance indicated that they were not able to make antiracist changes in their professional spheres before first doing that work in their personal spheres. Preservice teachers who took a “both-- and” stance were invigorated by doing the simultaneous work of integrating antiracist thought into both their personal and professional lives.

It is important to note that regardless of whether these participants took an “either-- or” or “both-- and” stance to navigating this tension, there was an identified need for time and space to begin the self-reflective journey of racial identity development. However, preservice teachers who were successful in adopting a “both— and” stance not only felt comfortable, but invigorated by the tensions of existing within an unjust social structure while simultaneously working to dismantle it.

Implications for This Study

This literature suggests that culturally relevant teaching could serve as a powerful tool to begin to deconstruct some of the long-held structures, or grammars of schooling that have underserved students from marginalized cultures. Teachers are uniquely positioned to deconstruct these structures, and reconstruct a more meaningful, equitable education and schooling experience for all students. However, teachers are also positioned to reinforce the structures already in place if not provided with adequate preparation to recognize the need for and enact culturally relevant teaching.

One important component of preparing teachers to enact culturally relevant pedagogy is to support teachers' development of social identity and cultural awareness. For the majority of teachers entering the teaching field, as White, middle class women, exploration of one's own identity and development of cultural awareness can be a struggle, as their social identities may require disruption of previously held "truths" and ideologies. Research suggests that this inward journey can occur simultaneously with the outward journey of teacher development (Conway & Clark, 2003), and that this can be begun during preservice education. Research is needed, therefore, to explore ways in which these teachers who have begun the work of becoming multicultural (Ford & Dillard, 1996) during their preservice education bring critical perspectives of identity and culture to their work in intercultural urban teaching contexts, particularly in the influential first year of teaching.

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study describes the self-reported enactment of social justice education by White, female, middle class first year teachers who were teaching in urban, intercultural contexts after completing an elementary preservice teacher education program at Northeast College, a preservice program that is centered around the tenets of social justice education. Through prompted written personal documents, interviews, and focus groups, the study describes the reflections, perceptions, and self-reported practices of these teachers as they relate to navigation of cultural disequilibrium, enactment of culturally relevant teaching, and utilization of critical consciousness as a guide for the work of teaching.

Overview of Research Design

This study describes first year teaching experiences from the perspective of two White, middle class,¹ female teachers who were teaching in an intercultural² urban teaching context. Both teachers are graduates of a teacher preparation program with a social justice orientation. Because this descriptive case study seeks to understand the perspectives of the teacher participants, qualitative data was collected through multiple methods to provide several opportunities for participants to construct and share their meaning-making about their practice across time and in different social contexts.

Participants responded in writing to a series of six qualitative prompts over the course of 11 months, beginning in December of their first year of teaching. Five prompts collected open-ended data on participants' various experiences and perspectives, as told through stories and reflections, on one area of practice that has been identified as an important component of responsive teaching: classroom management (Greene, 2008; Ramsey, 2004; Sapon-Shevin, 2007), curriculum design (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martin & Van Gunten, 2002; Shujaa, 1995; Sleeter, 2005), collegial relationships (Haberman in King, 1997; Oakes et al., 2002; Ramsey, 2004), relationships with families of students and the local community (Nieto, 2010; Woodruff, 1996), and assessment practices and

¹ The researcher acknowledges myriad ways in which middle class can be defined, including income, education attainment, and sets of values. The income, education, and values that define middle class can vary across geographical locations. For the purposes of this study, it is most important that participants feel as though they were not marginalized on the basis of these characteristics, and were members of the dominant, or majority group in their geographical area. Therefore, rather than setting criteria for income, education, and values, this study asks participants to self-identify their socioeconomic background, allowing them to make the determination based on their context-specific experiences.

² In this study, the term intercultural is used to describe a teaching context in which there is a difference in racial or socioeconomic identities between the teacher and more than 50% of her students.

accountability (Jorgensen et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2005). The sixth prompt collected open-ended data on teachers' perceptions of success in their work over the course of the year.

After analysis of the written responses, participants were interviewed after each prompt to collect supplemental data on experiences shared, and to capture changes in their perceptions of experiences. Two focus groups were held in the seventh and eleventh month of this study, each focusing on participants' experiences with the teaching practices addressed in the three survey prompts prior to the focus group.³ Data collected through focus groups intended not only to capture changes in teachers' perceptions over several months, but also to infuse synergistic opportunities to recall and reflect upon experiences that previously were perceived as insignificant and were not shared in the written survey prompts and interviews.

Research Questions

This study seeks to describe the reflections, perceptions, and self-reported practices of these teachers using a framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) in order to address the following questions.

1. In what ways do these teachers experience and navigate cultural disequilibrium in intercultural teaching contexts?
2. In what ways do these teachers enact culturally relevant teaching?

³ In the original design for this study, all data collection was to be completed during teachers' first academic calendar year. Delays resulting from postponement of commencing data collection while seeking IRB approval, as well as minor scheduling delays during the data collection process, required that the final focus group was conducted in October of participants' second year of teaching. Questions and discussion prompts for this focus group maintained focus on their experiences during their first year.

3. In what ways does critical consciousness shape these teachers' perceptions of their work and role in the school and local community, and larger society?

These research questions were explored through several areas of responsive teaching practices, including classroom management, curriculum design, collegial relationships, relationships with students' families and community, and assessment and accountability practices.

Context and Participants

Because of the formative nature of a teacher's first year of teaching, and the high levels of attrition amongst first year urban educators, this study seeks to understand the perceptions of first-year urban teachers who are teaching in intercultural urban contexts to better understand the ways that they are able to enact key components of social justice education: navigating of experiences with cultural disequilibrium; teaching with cultural relevance; and understanding one's work as a teacher through critical consciousness.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were purposefully selected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) based on criteria that support the inquiry goals. Selection was based on their social identities, the contexts in which they are teaching, and their preservice preparation experience. All 2013 graduates of the elementary preservice program at Northeast College who self-identified as White⁴ were emailed a brief description of the study and an invitation to complete a participant screening survey (Appendix A) to determine

⁴ At the request of the program director, invitations to participate in this study were not sent to graduates who self-identified as people of color.

participation eligibility. Four women expressed interest in participating in the study, all of whom were first-year teachers in a Northeastern urban school district surrounding the college. One opted out of the study prior to beginning data collection due to concerns about privacy expressed by her principal. Another participant who opted into the study but did not complete several of the data collection components revealed during the first focus group that her current teaching placement did not fit the selection criteria for this study. Because it was unclear if her teaching placement during other data collection touchpoints did or did not meet selection criteria, all data retrieved from this participant was excluded from this study. The researcher did not explicitly exit this participant from the study; however, the participant did not follow up on participation opportunities following the focus group, and the researcher did not reach out with requests to participate. Two participants who met the selection criteria, Candice and Leigh, participated for the duration of the study, with 100% completion of all written survey prompts, interviews, and focus groups.

Social identity of the participants. To be considered eligible for this study, participants had to self-identify as White, female, and from a middle-class background.⁵ These identity markers were used because they represent the hegemonic culture within which most school norms and policies are constructed (Tyack, 1993), and these identities are reflective of the largest subgroup of the incoming teaching force (Chizhik, 2003; McBee, 1998; Milner, 2005; Zumwalt & Craig, 2008).

⁵It is important to note that the researcher is not suggesting that urban teachers must or should be White females from middle class backgrounds, but rather that these are identity descriptors of the largest subpopulation of new teachers. Since the focus of this study is not on ways to diversify the incoming teaching force, but rather to develop the capacity of those who currently wish to become teachers, this study focused on participants who are White females from middle class backgrounds.

Participants' teaching contexts. Because this study sought to capture ways in which teachers are able to enact key components of social justice education in their first year of teaching, all participants must have been first-year teachers at the beginning of data collection. Participants were also selected based on working in an intercultural teaching context. Because the teachers in this study were selected based on social identity markers that are congruent with the hegemonic culture of schools, more than 50% of the students in these teaching contexts had to have racial or socioeconomic identities that differed from the hegemonic culture. Therefore, in such an intercultural context, teachers are not positioned as the “norm” or dominant identity in the local, school, or classroom community. Furthermore, because this study sought to understand these teaching experiences in school that serve students with identities that have historically been underserved by public schooling, this study did not include participants who were teaching in elite or private school settings.

A final requirement of the teaching context was that it must be an urban school. This study recognizes both demographic and functional definitions (Smith, 2011) of urban areas. Demographic criteria consider permanence, large population size, high population density, and social heterogeneity. The functional definition of a city positions the area as a social hub that attracts many people for economic, political, or religious reasons. Acknowledging the functional aspects of what makes an area urban helps to create a more holistic picture of urban as a culture than the demographic definition alone.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) defines a metropolitan or micropolitan area as “a core area containing a substantial population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core” (p. 898). This

study, then, sought participants who were teaching in schools located within large cities, or the nuclei, of the major metropolitan areas in the United States (City Population, 2012) to account for the participants who completed this urban-focused teacher education program but moved to other urban areas to pursue teaching careers. It happened that both participants in this study were teachers in the same urban school district in the Northeast.

The teacher education program. All participants included in this study completed the teacher education program of focus. This is a graduate program that leads to either general education certification or dual certification (general and special education) for teaching in grades one through six, and graduates approximately 65 students each year. Regardless of certification paths chosen, all students in the program complete a year-long course in conjunction with two consecutive semester-long student teaching experiences. The course work that is completed simultaneously with student teaching provides opportunities for students to engage with readings, writing assignments, and class dialogue to develop critical perspectives on social identities (including their own), cultural awareness, and begin to unpack how this relates to their student teaching experiences, and schooling and education practices and policies in general. The second semester of the course work prompts specific consideration of these perspectives in curriculum design and lesson planning.

The program recognizes that social marginalization and exclusion from schooling has long occurred for students and their families along a wide range of social identity lines. This program's position statement (2008) purports a necessity to actively work to deconstruct structural ways in which students and their families experience marginalization based on race, ethnicity, social class, language, nationality, dis/ability,

sexuality, or religion. The program seeks to prepare new teachers for this kind of work by developing and strengthening theoretical tools to break out of traditional structures used to label and categorize students in many schools, and to see human difference as both natural and desirable. Specifically, the program aims to prepare its graduates to critique schooling practices that target marginalized children for curricula grounded in test preparation and focus on behavioral control. To this end, program coursework denounces a techno-rational approach to teaching, or learning to teach, and instead prepares teachers to accept and embrace the ambiguities in the work of teachers, and to develop commitments to responsive practices as teachers in the diverse communities in which they work. The program acknowledges the complexities of this work and recognizes that it may often be at odds with traditional conceptions of teaching as isolated work, delivery of prescribed curricula, or working with select subgroups of children based on labels and categories. The program's stance is that challenging these structures, or grammars, of teaching and schooling is a part of the work of teachers.

It is important to note, however, that successful completion of this program and its coursework does not require, nor could it measure, a student's adoption of, or commitment to bringing a critical perspective to her or his teaching practice. Successful completion of the program only requires that a student demonstrate developing awareness of critical perspectives and how these relate to education, schooling, and teaching. This study, therefore, is an important step in understanding how these teachers bring an acknowledged range in level of awareness and commitment to the program ideals to their work as teachers in urban schools. To better understand the range of awareness and commitment in study participants, participants were asked to share an autobiographical

assignment that was completed during the program that provided students an opportunity to articulate their understandings of their own social identities and how these identities influence who they are in their work and the world. One of the two participants in this study shared her autobiographical essay assignment with the researcher. The other participant no longer had access to her assignment, and was able to share an alternate autobiographical essay written at another point during her program that describes her beliefs about education and her goals for her classroom as a teacher.

Participant selection method. The participant selection process took place in November of 2013.⁶ The researcher contacted the director of the program in October of 2013 and received approval in November 2013 to distribute an informational email to all students who had completed the program at the most recent graduation points (December 2012 for dual certification graduates; May 2013 for single certification graduates). The email informed them of the purpose and nature of the study (Appendix A). It included a link that led graduates interested in participating in the study to an electronic survey that served as a formal initial screening of possible participants (Appendix B). The survey screening confirmed that the graduate 1) identified as White, 2) identified as female, 3) identified as having a middle class socioeconomic background, 4) planned to teach in an urban school, and 5) chose to participate in the study as described in the email. This screening survey was piloted prior to this study and led to changes in wording some questions. In question 1, for example, the sentence “If you do not check White, please go to question 8” was revised to “If you do not check White, you may skip questions 2-7.”

⁶ Participant selection was originally planned to take place July through September of 2013 but was delayed contingent upon IRB approval and additional review of IRB materials by the preservice program director.

Respondents who were selected as participants received an acceptance email (Appendix C) and IRB agreement form (Appendix D) to complete before proceeding. Respondents who did not meet study selection criteria would have received an email from the researcher explaining the selection criteria and why these criteria were integral to answering the study questions (Appendix E); however, there were no respondents who completed this portion of the screen that did not meet selection criteria.

Role of the Researcher

The above described methods of research are contextually bound and therefore, neutrality is not possible (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Based on the researcher's identity and positionality, the researcher used empathetic approaches (Fontana & Frey, 2005) to be an "advocate and partner... hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee" (p. 117). The researcher planned to elicit and highlight certain types of experiences of these first-year teachers, and use these experiences to sway the discourse surrounding urban schools, teachers, and learning.

Researcher identity. Because this study focuses intensely on the social identity of participants and the social identities represented in the contexts in which they teach, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge her social identities and the ways in which social identities may influence the research process. The researcher identifies as a White female from a working and middle class socioeconomic background.

Researcher background. It is also pertinent to describe the ways in which the researcher shares personal and professional experiences with participants in this study aside from social identities. The researcher began her teaching career as an alternatively certified special education teacher in an urban, intercultural teaching context. The

program through which the researcher became alternatively certified in special education neither provided nor required any engagement with social identity exploration or cultural awareness. Prior to applying to this program, the researcher had completed a four-year undergraduate degree in elementary education, and was in the process of finishing a 2-year graduate degree in reading. Neither of these degree programs provided nor required social identity exploration or development of cultural awareness. The researcher feels that she was ill-equipped to navigate the intercultural space of the classroom, school, and local community in her first year as a teacher, and the struggle to resolve the tensions that emerged in her work negatively impacted her feelings of success as a teacher in many ways. Because of personal involvement and experiences with the contexts being studied, the researcher used an iterative data analysis process, continuously returning to the data to help ensure that the findings reported were, in fact, grounded in these participants' words and experiences rather than the researcher's.

It is also important to note that following her career in this urban school, the researcher worked as an instructor in the program from which study participants graduated. However, her direct work with this program concluded before any of the present study participants began their work as students in the program. This experience does, however, give the researcher insight into orientation and components of the preservice program that participants completed.

Method of Data Collection

This study draws from tenets of postmodernism, recognizing that one “can only know something from a certain position” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 21). Embracing this

understanding, this study seeks to describe the position of first year teachers who, by completion of the preservice program, demonstrated developing awareness of systemic social privilege and oppression, and their own positioning within the culture of power. It is important to note that program completion requires only that these teachers demonstrate awareness of this ideology, not necessarily subscription to it. It is also important to note that these teachers may have entered the program with this awareness, or may have experienced transformative learning throughout the program to develop this orientation.

Rather than suggesting that there is an objective truth or reality that is lived in the classroom or school, this study acknowledges that a teacher's lived reality is constructed through interpretation of a context and experience, and the various realities that may emerge from a single contextual experience are largely shaped by the mindset, attitudes, and beliefs of those constructing the reality. This study seeks to describe ways in which teachers perceive their experiences with students, and with the classroom, school, and local community because it is the teacher's reality that guides her decisions and actions, and defines for herself her role and work within the education system.

To provide opportunity to highlight perspectives, this study placed an emphasis on storytelling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Storytelling allowed teachers to share their personal experiences about teaching in intercultural urban contexts, providing important space for the possibility of counternarratives toward the dominant discourses surrounding urban teaching and education.

The data collection cycles were designed to allow for the complex, non-linear inward and outward journeys that participants began in their preservice work and

continue into their first year of teaching. Cycles and methods of participant response were designed to provide multiple opportunities to reflect upon, and revisit and revise, their interpretations of their own experiences as they constructed meaning in their work.

Sequence of Prompts Across the Study

The sequence of survey prompts was designed to align with general patterns of teacher concerns across different points in the school year. Usually, teachers use the first weeks of school to focus on establishing classroom rules and routines that structure the daily management of the class and classroom; therefore, the classroom management prompt was distributed in November. The second survey prompt asked teachers to reflect on the experiences with colleagues. It was anticipated that by January, new teachers would have had opportunities to interact with other teachers on the grade, content coaches, school leaders, and other professionals in the building. In February, teachers reflected on the third prompt, and shared stories about experiences in working with families, structures for communication with families, and opportunities to interact with families through classroom and school events.

In May, teachers reflected on their work with curriculum design. By this point, teachers had nine months of experience with curricula and planning practices and had developed opinions about this work in their schools. In June, teachers shared the experiences with assessments, testing, and measures of accountability, a time that school cultures may change in preparation for upcoming standardized tests. In August following completion of their first academic year, the sixth and final individual prompt asked teachers to reflect on their own perceived levels of success as a teacher, including how

they defined their work and role within the school community and beyond. An overview of data collection prompts and methods is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Data Collection Methods

Method	Research Question 1: cultural disequilibrium	Research Question 2: culturally relevant teaching	Research Question 3: teachers' critical consciousness
Personal Document Survey Prompts 1-5: Classroom Management; Collegial Relationships; Relationships with Families; Curriculum Design; Assessment and Accountability	X	x	x
Personal Document Survey Prompt 6: Teachers' Perceptions of Success	X	x	x
Interview Follow up Prompts 1-5:	X	X	x
Interview Follow up Prompt 6:	X	X	x
Focus Group A on Prompts 1-3	X	X	x
Focus Group B on Prompts 4-6	X	X	X

Note. X denotes data collections prompts designed to collect data aligned with a particular research question, and x denotes a possibility of data collection aligned with particular research questions.

Personal Documents

Survey prompts allowed for participant creation of what Bogdan and Biklen (2007) call personal documents. Personal documents include any narrative written by a person that describes that person's actions, experiences, or beliefs. The documents are

meant to “obtain detailed evidence as to how social situations appear to actors in them and what meanings various factors have for participants” (Angell, cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 134). While personal documents are usually not solicited by the researcher, but rather are created spontaneously prior to conducting research, in this study, the researcher solicited specific participant-created documents through survey prompts (Appendix F) in order to ensure collection of data on topics of particular relevance to this study. Survey links were emailed each month in a correspondence reiterating agreements of participation and confidentiality (Appendix G).

Pilot of the survey prompts. Links to survey prompts were emailed to six program graduates who were White women in their first year of teaching, and teaching in intercultural contexts. Participants had the option of responding to up to all six prompts, or as many as they could given time constraints. Three of the six participants responded to the survey prompts by the deadline. One participant responded to prompts three and six; one participant responded to all six prompts; one participant responded to all six prompts, as well as a second response to prompt three. This generated a total of 15 responses. Of the 15 responses, two were completed five days before the deadline, three were completed one day before the deadline, and 10 were completed on the day of the deadline. Survey responses ranged in length from a few sentences to a well-developed paragraph (Appendix H).

Implications of the survey pilot for this study. Since almost all piloted survey prompts were completed within a day of the due date, this pilot highlighted the importance of a deadline in order for participants to prioritize this writing in their busy lives as teachers. Therefore, in the actual study, the email that provided the survey link

also included a survey deadline. Additionally, the length and depth of the written personal documents produced during the pilot presented vast space for the researcher to further explore through interview questioning. While the shared stories in personal documents provided a contextual platform from which to begin interviews, no submitted personal document included all types of data to be collected during the interview. This is reflected in the research design. In the actual study, all participants were asked to participate in an interview following each survey prompt.

Interviews

Upon reading personal documents created through surveys, the researcher followed up with individual participants through semi-structured interviews to gain clarification or engage in further inquiry within each topic addressed through personal documents. Semi-structured interviews were useful in eliciting certain types of information from all participants while leaving considerable latitude in wording and order of questions to be responsive to information already shared through personal documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Interviews were not intended to capture comparable data across participants, and “getting all the questions answered or all the areas covered is not the purpose of the interview” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 106). The purpose was to capture each participant’s current state of meaning making.

A general interview protocol was designed to frame the types of stories to be solicited from participants (Appendix I). As in the pilot of the interview protocols (Appendix J), questions and protocols were adapted for individual participants using the original protocol based on descriptions shared in participants’ personal documents (Appendix K). These participant-specific questions were used to seek deeper

understanding of experiences described, and in some cases, involved asking participants what roles they perceive culture or social identity to have played in specific shared experiences. This also provided additional opportunities for participants to explain their experiences or share stories verbally rather than in writing.

The opportunity to revisit the response topic a second time embraced the fluid state of participants' interpretations of their experiences. The intent was not to verify consistency in a participant's story from one point to another, but rather to give participants opportunities to describe more deeply, and when necessary, highlight contradictions in interpretations over time, in order to also capture evolving interpretations and meaning making as educators develop professionally, both inwardly and outwardly (Conway & Clark, 2003), in their first year of teaching.

Interviews were held by phone and at the availability of the participants. While Google+ or in-person interviews may have offered the benefit of visual communication and rapport (Hanna, 2012), telephone interviews provided participants with an aspect of anonymity, which has also been found to contribute to richer data when discussing sensitive or emotional topics (Trier-Bieniek, 2012), such as cultural identity and professional challenges.

Pilot of interview. The researcher selected one response for each survey prompt, ensuring that responses selected represented two responses from each of the three participants who submitted personal documents in order to evenly distribute the time commitment for participants in the interview phase. The researcher read each written response and used the response to inform modifications to the original interview protocol (Appendix J). Modifications included changing the wording of a question to clarify a

written response and new questions that emerged based on information that was shared in the response. Written survey responses did not share specific stories but rather focused on general areas of teachers' concern or focus, so modifications to the interview protocols included asking teachers to share examples or stories to explain their general written responses. Interviews ranged from 18 to 38 minutes in duration (prompt 1: 25 minutes; prompt 2: 22 minutes; prompt 3: 32 minutes; prompt 4: 28 minutes; prompt 5: 18 minutes; prompt 6: 38 minutes). Interviews extending beyond 30 minutes were continued as the participant chose to share additional stories.

Implications of the pilot interviews for this study. Participant-specific interviews were useful in guiding participants to elaborate on information shared briefly in personal documents. However, at times, the researcher wondered if reading portions of the written response back to participants may have put them on the spot to respond to something they wrote previously and may not have thought about since. Therefore, this study design included the researcher emailing the participant a copy of the written response prior to the interview, giving the participant the option to review it prior to or during the interview.

Focus Groups

Twice during the data collection phase, all participants were invited to participate in a focus group, during which additional questions related to emerging themes from initial participant responses through personal documents and interviews were explored. Due to the geographic locations of the researcher and participants, all participants were invited to participate via Google+. Videoconferencing has been noted as a useful tool in

connecting geographically distant participants while preserving “social presence” inherently required in focus group research (Gratton & O’Donnell, 2011).

The intent of the focus group was to further explore common themes that began to emerge in data as well as to provide participants with opportunities to socially construct meaning amongst peers, co-constructing meaning of their own experiences through consideration of the meaning constructed by their peers. Protocols for focus group A and focus group B were designed to establish a guide for the flow of storytelling around the sequential prompts (Appendix L). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that focus groups are useful to “promote talk on a topic that informants might not be able to talk so thoughtfully about in individual interviews” (p. 109). There can be synergy that comes from a group experience, stating that a group “possess the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 24).

The sequence of questions was designed to promote a context in which participants felt comfortable sharing experiences. Easier, less controversial questions appeared at the beginning of the protocol in order to help the focus group get off to a “fast, conversational start” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 42). Opening questions were used to get participants talking and to ensure that everyone was comfortable participating in the discussion early, and led to key questions that mirrored prompts used during the survey but included modifications or probes to gain further insight into participants’ current experiences and processes of meaning making. Ending questions were used to prompt participants to reflect on previous comments and bring closure to the conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Pilot of focus group protocols. A focus group was held with two program graduates in their first year of teaching in intercultural contexts (Appendix M). The focus group was held via Google+. Due to personal conflicts and technology issues, it was not until 45 minutes after the scheduled start time that both participants were successfully logged in to begin the discussion. Due to the semi-structured nature of the protocol, the researcher asked questions as they flowed in conversation, only occasionally deliberately directing the discussion to a new topic. For example, participants' introduction of themselves and their teaching contexts immediately led them to a discussion of their experiences and relationships with students' families, which was the third teaching practice listed on the protocol. While this did help to maintain authentic storytelling about what was most meaningful, it seemed that the structure of questions within each teaching practice provided too rigid of a framework and sometimes redirected discussion away from what was most important in teachers' minds to share about each teaching practice.

Implications of piloting the focus group. The piloted protocol was designed to lead teachers through each of three teaching practices. Within the discussion of each teaching practice, the protocol asked teachers to reflect on cultural disequilibrium, high expectations for student achievement, affirmation of students' culture, development of students' critical consciousness, and their perceptions of how this practice impacts larger systems within the school and community. The structure sometimes interrupted the flow of storytelling and assumed that teachers would have an experience with each of these areas that applied to every teaching practice addressed, and that teachers would discuss their work in discrete practices.

To address the rigidity of the questioning framework about each teaching practice, important changes were made to the structure of the protocol. The revised protocol (Appendix N) begins with key questions that prompt teachers to describe their experiences with, and stories of cultural disequilibrium, in each of three addressed teaching practices. Once teachers shared salient stories about each of the three teaching practices, the prompts guided them to think about the teaching practices discussed and describe how they relate to a tenet of culturally relevant teaching, one tenet at a time. Additionally, the final prompt in the original protocol that asked teachers to reflect on how they saw each of their practices influencing the school and local community, and larger society, proved to be confusing. Participants asked for clarification each time this prompt was presented. In the revised protocol, the prompt was presented only once, and asked teachers to first think about the goals that they had for their work as teachers, and in what ways their understanding of social identities shaped them. Further prompting asked teachers to explain how their goals were reflected in their teaching practices.

This revised protocol was piloted with two program graduates who happened to be co-teaching. By beginning the discussion with an overview of the teaching practices of focus, the revised protocol structure allowed for more open-ended storytelling within two areas of research interest: experiences with cultural disequilibrium; and culturally relevant teaching. In Appendix O, it is demonstrated that these participants were able to integrate practices of both curriculum design and assessment into their discussions of high academic expectations.

To account for logistical considerations with an electronic participation platform, electronically held focus groups during this study provided participants with a 30-minute

window of time during which to log in rather than the anticipated start time. Thirty minutes was a sufficient amount of time to account for people running late and troubleshooting any technology issues prior to start time.

Data Collection Timeline

Data collection spanned 11 months and began in December of 2013. The sequence of steps in data collection and analysis are outlined in Appendix P. Each response prompt was emailed to participants approximately two to three weeks following the previous data collection touchpoint as to complete data collection as expeditiously as possible to account for the delayed start to the data collection process, yet not overwhelming teachers with the demands of their time. Both participants submitted written reflections to the survey prompts by the due date, and no follow up reminders were necessary.

Within one to two weeks of receiving the written reflections, the researcher completed initial analysis of the submitted personal documents and began to identify themes and patterns, as well as individual counterstories to these themes and patterns, using these to create participant-specific interview protocols (Appendix K). Interviews were conducted within two to four weeks of when participants submitted their reflections, depending on participant availability.

Analysis of interviews and personal documents were used to finalize the protocols for focus group A and focus group B. Focus group A was held on May 4, 2014, and focus group B was held on October 26, 2014. Both focus groups were held by videoconference using Google+. The date and time were determined by sending participants a list of several potential dates and times and requesting participants to

respond with which dates and times fit their schedules. For both focus groups, a common time was found based on responses to the email.

Because the researcher wanted to be mindful of the demands on teachers' time, particularly in the first year, attention was given to the amount of time required of participants each month across the study, and dates were modified from the original data collection schedule accordingly. Table 2 shows the participation commitments for Candice and Leigh for each month during the study. The researcher tried to honor the spirit of the time commitment parameters of the original data collection schedule, which established that participants would not be asked to participate in more than two methods of data collection in one month. Because of the delayed data start, data collection windows no longer aligned evenly within months as originally scheduled, and some phases of the data process needed to move more quickly in order to keep the focus of collected data on participants' experiences in their first year of teaching. It is estimated that written responses required approximately 30 minutes to complete. An effort was also made to keep interviews to a maximum of 30 minutes, unless the participant chose to continue the interview. Focus groups required 90 minutes of participation in discussion, with approximately 30 additional minutes optional prior to the start of the discussion for arrival and greetings. Total time commitment for each participant was 9 hours and no more than one hour per month, with the exception of the two months when focus groups A and B took place, which required two hours and one and a half hours respectively.

Table 2

Participant Time Commitment

	Written Reflection	Interview	Focus Group
Dec. 2013	C/L	C/L	
Jan. 2014	C/L		
Feb. 2014	L	C/L	
Mar. 2014	C	C/L	
Apr. 2014			
May 2014	C/L		C/L
Jun. 2014	L	C/L	
Jul. 2014	C	C	
Aug. 2014	C/L	C/L*	
Sept. 2014			
Oct. 2014			C/L

*Due to scheduling issues, this interview with Leigh combined prompts five and six.

Methods of Data Analysis

Through storytelling, this study explores the reproduction of social organization (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in two ways: ways in which these teachers infuse the critical lens of their preservice course work into their own practices within traditional structures of schooling; and ways in which these teachers came to understand and define their own role as a social justice educator within larger societal structures of power. Specifically, this study seeks to describe the process by which these new teachers became critical of existing structures in their teaching contexts, how they came to define that context, and

how they negotiated, and perceived their agency within, the structures that reproduce the existing social order, through acceptance, compliance, resistance, or other.

Data analysis began in its earliest stages during transcription of audio-recorded data. While revisiting the interviews and focus groups, the researcher wrote memos (Appendix Q) to note emerging and recurring ideas and topics, attempting to capture what was coming through as important from the perspective of the teachers in this study. This was a useful step in trying to keep the findings of this study centered on teachers' perspectives. The researcher acknowledged the tensions in this type of study by entering with researcher-generated questions and recognized those questions as an externally imposed lens through which teachers' experiences would be filtered. While these questions were still used in the data analysis process, these memos were used to additionally capture aspects of their teaching experiences that they chose to emphasize.

Three themes emerged, in addition to the original research questions, in the data: learning to teach; valuing relationships; and, navigating institutional culture characteristic of their urban public schools. Looking across these three themes and the three research questions, six primary node titles were generated: Cultural Disequilibrium (from the study's first research questions); Culturally Relevant Teaching (from the study's second research question); Critical Consciousness (from the study's third research question); Learning to Teach; Relationships; and Institutional Culture (this node was originally titled "Status Quo," noticing the ways that teachers worked to stay within the boundaries of school expectations or push outside of them, and was renamed during the analysis process when connections were made to grammars of schooling (Tyack, 1995)). The Culturally Relevant Teaching node was set up with three subcategories according to the

tenets of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995): student advocacy and raising students' critical consciousness; cultural synchronization, a narrowed focus within cultural affirmation; and student achievement. The relationships node was also set up with subcategories to begin to analyze ways that teachers experienced relationships in their school communities according to relational nature. The subcategories of relationships explored were those with school leaders, colleagues and peers within the school, families in the community, and students. Institutional Culture was organized with two subcategories according to emerging themes of compliance and innovation.

The researcher reread each data source collected, including participants' written survey responses, transcribed interviews, and transcribed focus groups, and performed initial coding using NVivo software. Data pieces were coded according to meaning, so some pieces were short, and others longer, with a focus on preserving the meaning and context of participants' stories and reflections. Data pieces were frequently coded to more than one node, as stories shared by participants often touched on more than one of the six nodes. It is also important to note that the three nodes established through research questions and the three nodes that emerged through initial data analysis were not mutually exclusive, and content frequently overlapped.

Once all data had been coded according to nodes, the researcher performed line-by-line analysis to begin to generate themes and subthemes within each of the nodes. Line-by-line analysis generated a running record of key ideas in abbreviated format that were represented in the data set. The researcher then reread the record of key ideas and grouped them according to color-coded patterns of emerging themes and sub-themes. This process was repeated within each of the six original nodes.

The researcher intentionally worked to be thorough and complete with developing sub-themes that accurately captured and represented the perspective that teachers shared in the original data artifacts. Recognizing that it is difficult to remove oneself from the data analysis process, and that emerging categories are inherently shaped by the researcher's positionality, a cross-check step was used after determining the themes and sub-themes within each node. The researcher created "teacher statements" to test the truthfulness of the themes and sub-themes. The researcher wrote each of the themes using the sentence stem "Teachers believe that..." and then cross checked that statement with what she knew to be true of the stories shared by the teachers. Labels for themes and sub-themes were adjusted as necessary to most accurately reflect what teachers shared through their stories.

Next, the researcher organized all themes, sub-themes, and corresponding teacher statements on a spreadsheet to create a visual map of the ideas that should be reported in the analysis. Connections were drawn among ideas to help develop an organization for the report; however, the process of writing the report added an additional layer of analysis. Reassembling teachers' ideas into a cohesive retelling of key themes that emerged through their stories prompted additional connections between, and reorganization of, themes within the report, iteratively revising category names. The researcher attempted to keep most sections of this report centered on representations of participants' perspectives, using their words from stories and reflections to illustrate those themes. A separate section was written at the end of each node report to clearly denote the researcher's analysis, thereby acknowledging heavier influence of her positionality.

This was to delineate teacher's perspectives from researcher perspective as clearly as possible.

Trustworthiness

This study does not seek to produce replicable evidence that can be directly generalized to other programs that prepare educators for the myriad urban teaching contexts in the U.S. or globally. Findings are not intended as “recipes to follow on the path to some universal culinary perfection but rather possible ingredients to include in certain dishes in response to certain tastes” (Hyslop-Margison, 2010, pp. 816-817). For this reason, the design of this study does not detail the program, but rather provides space for participants to share components of their broader preparation that most significantly impacted their professional work.

Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that while components of this teacher education program can be replicated (such as assigned readings or questions to which teacher candidates responded through writing or discourse), contextual factors, including the teaching styles and personalities of program instructors, relationships between teacher candidates and their instructors, relationships between teacher candidates and their peers in the program, the social identities and background experiences of all those involved, and the myriad experiences in student teaching field work are all important influences to the transformative learning that may have occurred through the program and beyond, and these are not necessarily replicable. Kuhn (in Hyslop-Margison, 2010) notes that the “dynamics of human behavior and the agency driving that behavior” (p. 825) not only complicates generalizability between people, but also calls into question consistency of

behaviors and actions within a single individual between research points. Instead, the context in which these teacher candidates learned and participated is described with the understanding that the exact learning environment cannot be recreated.

The contribution of this research to the field is rather to highlight the possibilities of preparing teachers for enactment of culturally relevant, socially just teaching in urban intercultural contexts in the first year of teaching, done by providing a space for teachers to share their perspectives through stories about their work. Interpretations of these new teachers' stories by others, including my own interpretations reflected in the analysis and discussion of this study, provides insight into aspects of the preservice program that can be used to "season" other teacher preparation programs based on realities of particular contexts in which teacher candidates are learning, and the contexts in which they are being prepared to teach.

The trustworthiness in this study is achieved through a qualitative approach to triangulation. The data on participants' perceptions and experiences are collected through multiple methods; however, "exceptions" or distinctions that appear across data methods are not considered disconfirmation of the truth, but rather fruitful opportunities to reconstruct meaning (Golafshani, 2003). Pulling from tenets of constructivism, the data collected over time through different methods reflects that "reality is changing whether the observer wishes it or not" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603), and this research "values the multiple realities that people have in their minds" (p. 604). Systematic rereading of data throughout the writing and revision process will help to achieve what Wolcott (1990) refers to as "rigorous subjectivity," meeting the criteria of "balance, fairness, completeness, and sensitivity" (p. 133) to the realities shared by these teachers.

Presentation of Findings

The findings from this study are presented in the following two chapters. Chapter IV presents participants' reported experiences as they align with the three research questions; Chapter V reports teachers' experiences with the three additional themes that emerged from the data. While findings presented in Chapter IV and Chapter V are centered primarily on the words and experiences presented by the study participants, smaller sections of researcher analysis are woven throughout the chapters to preview for the reader which elements of teachers' experiences will be discussed further in Chapter VI. Chapter VI describes ways in which the researcher's analyses of teachers' reported experiences support and diverge from current research, discusses implications for supporting first-year teachers in enacting culturally relevant practices through induction and transition programs, provides a brief overview of how those implications fit with current supports available to new urban teachers, and concludes with implications for research based on a critique of this study and need for further research.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study represented through the theoretical underpinnings and design. The researcher acknowledges that her own experiences as a new teacher in an intercultural urban context, and as an instructor in the preservice program from which the students graduated influenced initial analysis of data and the direction of follow-up interview and focus group questions. While in some ways, the researcher's experiences might have helped to bridge communication between researcher and participants, as well as provided insights into experiences described by participants, it

is important to acknowledge that the tentative nature of the data collection design was susceptible to direction from researcher biases.

A second limitation of this study is that participants were requested to describe their experiences within a framework of six predetermined categories. The existence of these categories could in fact cause unnatural categorization or reflection on certain experiences that may not have otherwise held personal significance for these teachers. For example, if asked to more generally describe their experiences with the important aspects of their work, some participants may have not considered describing experiences related to classroom management if this were not a current concern in their work. However, the researcher believes that there is value to using this framework to systematically collect data across these identified aspects of responsive practice. The researcher also maintained an open, collegial relationship with participants to promote candidness in their responses.

A third limitation of this study is that the nature of a two-person case study limits the extent to which robust claims can be made, given the limited breadth of experiences represented. For this reason, the two perspectives represented in this data are not compared or contrasted to look for trends or points of divergence between participant experiences. Rather, the experiences of two participants across a year of research are aggregated into a single, deeper pool of data from which experiences can corroborate or counter existing research, or identify areas where additional research would be helpful in supporting teachers in similar contexts. These are discussed in Chapter VI as possibilities and opportunities in the education and professional support of White teachers in intercultural urban teaching contexts.

The fourth limitation is that the purpose and design of this research risks maintaining the White teacher at the center of teacher education and teacher education research, failing to highlight the importance of centering the unique and diverse experiences of teachers of color throughout teacher education programs and into their first years of teaching in urban contexts (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). While the intent of this study is to further explore ways to support White, middle class, female teachers, who are currently disproportionately overrepresented in the incoming teacher force, to be more successful in their work in culturally diverse, urban schools, this study is not meant to de-trouble this disproportionate overrepresentation. Research must continue to investigate ways to create inclusive teacher preparation programs that attract teachers with diverse identities and support their success in diverse school communities.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

This study seeks to describe the experiences of White, middle-class, urban teachers in intercultural contexts specific to cultural disequilibrium, culturally relevant teaching, and critical consciousness. This chapter reports the experiences and perspectives of two teachers, Candice and Leigh, on their first year of teaching in an intercultural urban context in each of these three areas across the year, as reported in written reflections (WR), interviews (I), and focus groups (FG) (Appendix P). Because one intent of this study was to amplify teachers' voices and stories as a means to learn more about their perspectives, each section below begins by depicting teachers' stories using their own words, and does not immediately compare their stories with existing literature or other voices. Rather, following their stories within each theme is a separate researcher analysis which previews the ideas that the researcher identified in their stories as salient with respect to supporting these teachers as multicultural teachers in their urban contexts. These ideas are then discussed further in Chapter VI as they connect with current research and present implications for teacher induction supports.

Participants

The following stories were shared by two participants from December of their first year of teaching through the following October of their second year of teaching. The stories shared and included here focus specifically on their perspectives and interpretations of their first-year experiences. Both teachers identify as White, female, and of upper-middle class background. Both teachers graduated from the same preservice program, yet were on different completion tracks and did not take any classes together during their time in the program. Despite finding teaching positions in their first year at schools only eight blocks from each other, these teachers did not know each other and met for the first time during the first focus group in this study.

Candice

I have realized that high quality education is truly the key to social progress and our country's future, and I feel compelled to be a part of this movement.

—Candice, autobiographical essay, 2013

Candice began teaching as a dually certified special education teacher. She completed her preservice program after the Fall 2012 semester and did some substitute teaching in the urban district before beginning her full-time classroom teaching position in the 2013-14 school year. Because of Candice's dual certification, her program was extended by an additional semester to complete coursework for earning certification for teaching special education in addition to general education certification. Coursework in the additional semester guides even deeper investigation into identity, especially as it relates to diagnosis and classifications of disabilities in school systems. In an autobiographical assignment completed at the beginning of this third semester, Candice

expressed her enthusiasm for having a diverse classroom in which she did not envision herself to be a “authoritarian” but rather a “co-learner” with her students.

Particularly regarding Special Education, developing a relationship and trust with each individual student is paramount in order to understand his or her strengths and needs, and be able to help him or her progress. It evidently takes an intuitive and caring teacher to help a child overcome his or her barriers.

During this study, Candice was the special education component of an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) inclusion first grade classroom at a historically underachieving urban elementary school. Candice described her Title 1 school as having a demographic of approximately 80% Hispanic or Latinx, and 20% Black or African American, with 94% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Candice co-taught with a female teacher whose culture, Candice thought, was more similar to that of the students than Candice’s. Candice’s co-teacher was also a novice but was not in her first year of teaching. Candice reported enjoying a positive, supportive relationship with her co-teacher.

Leigh

My goals include creating an inclusive, multicultural, socially just classroom environment that will reshape the ways my students think about themselves and their worlds, allowing all of us to bring about bigger societal and institutional changes as time moves forward.

–Leigh, preservice autobiographical analysis, 2013

Leigh began teaching with her certification in general education. She completed the program following the Spring 2013 semester and also did some substitute teaching in the district before starting her role as a full-time classroom teacher at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year. In one of Leigh’s coursework assignments, she was asked to write an autobiographical essay that explored her own social identities and analyzed how her own identities position her within the culture of power (Delpit, 2006). Her analysis

explains her “whitewashed” childhood schooling experiences, recognizing that her race was never visible to her because of that, and that because of cultural continuity, “as a White, upper-middle class woman,” she and school “meshed.” Leigh was explicit in her understanding that this cultural congruency is why school worked for her and opened doors to higher education opportunities. She also reflected on her experiences with her early childhood babysitter from El Salvador who, when reflecting in hindsight, attempted to assimilate to White American culture as closely as possible during their time together, omitting her own culture and language from their interactions. Leigh shared in her autobiographical essay:

Thinking of her now, I become conscious of how easy it is to trivialize and use tokenism when discussing students’ and their families’ backgrounds. I want my students to realize that I am not superficially interested in where they come from, but to show them that multiculturalism is important by its constant incorporation into the curriculum. I will seek ways to include students and their families holistically and often in my classrooms, not just when it suits the prescribed curriculum, but as part of a process of ongoing community and academic development.

During this study, Leigh was the general education component of an ICT inclusion fourth grade classroom at a historically underachieving urban elementary school that had recently begun to see improvements in student achievement scores. Leigh described her school demographics as matching the surrounding community: approximately 70% of students were Hispanic and most received free or reduced-price meals at the school. She co-taught with a male colleague who was a veteran teacher with 20 years of experience, with the majority of those years being at this school. Leigh shared that while she and her co-teacher had different teaching styles, she enjoyed having this relationship in her first year of teaching.

Experiences with Cultural Disequilibrium

When teachers shared stories about their experiences in their teacher roles in their intercultural school contexts, several different types of experiences with, and responses to, cultural disequilibrium emerged. Teachers' responses included explicitly naming cultural differences they were experiencing through comparison, identifying how systemic contexts turned differences into barriers, monitoring assumptions that they make about the community context, making deliberate adaptations to their own communication styles, and identifying some of their own needs for learning more about the local community context.

Comparing Cultures

The teachers commonly described their experiences in their school and community context in comparison to parallel experiences in their own White, middle-class culture and own experiences with schooling as a student. They experienced a large number of cultural differences, but also some commonalities, in their teaching contexts. "Urban education is a whole different species from the education I received," noted Candice as she reflected on the demands she felt in her role as teacher, which are discussed in the following sections.

Cultural disconnects. In comparing cultural experiences in their school communities to those of their own prior experiences, interactions with students' parents were frequently emphasized, specifically their experiences with communication. Leigh expressed that the relationships with parents were different from what she expected:

Other parents I've worked with, ... and I don't know if it's demographics, but ... parents are more like my parents, and I chat with them and stuff, and these parents are more like, you're the teacher, and I'll talk to you, but not really. (I3)¹

Both teachers expressed experiencing a disconnect with communicating and developing a partnership with parents that reinforced academics. Leigh shared a story about an experience when she tried to communicate with a student's mother about how to support her daughter's reading development at home. Leigh described attempting to communicate with the student's mother that she could ask her daughter questions about what she is reading when she reads at home. The mother responded that her daughter does not like answering questions and opted to instead just let her read. Leigh thought, "that's not helpful, but you can't really tell [parents] to do something they don't want to do." While teachers recognized parents' deference to the teacher as the expert and primary academic educator as a cultural factor, teachers expressed frustration and felt it presented a barrier to students making the academic progress teachers were hoping to see.

In addition to experiencing cultural disconnects with parents in communicating about their students, Candice also shared cultural disconnects with lifestyle choices and how she viewed those choices to impact the students in her class.

I constantly see parents behaving poorly in front of their children (cursing, smoking on school grounds, yelling, speaking negatively about teachers), and hear stories from their children of even worse behavior at home, yet they seem baffled when approached about their children's poor behavior in school. (WR3)

As discussed in upcoming sections, management of challenging behaviors and developing students' social and emotional skills were key concerns for Candice in her role throughout the year. In this case, not only did she experience the cultural influence

¹ Quotes from data are cited as interviews (I), written responses (WR), or focus group (FG) data. They are also cited according to the chronological order of that data piece. I3 indicates that this quote was taken from the third interview with Leigh.

from some students' caregivers as a barrier, but an almost counter-teaching of what she was working at in her classroom.

Cultural similarities. While teachers noted many of the cultural differences between the school-community dynamic in this context as compared to the contexts in which they were students, they also found commonalities, namely the caring and positive relationships between students and teachers. Leigh shared:

I went to a really wealthy public school that was predominantly White and Asian in the suburbs, so socioeconomically and racially it's ... very different, but I think my teachers were very caring, and at my school [where I teach], there are teachers who are very caring and want the best for their students, so in that sense, it's similar to what I had, with teachers and their relationships with students. (I5/6)

The familiarity with caring relationships between teachers and students is a hallmark of these teachers' work in their roles as teacher and is discussed later in this chapter. It is noteworthy, however, that these caring relationships are cultivated against a different back drop than what participants experienced as students, and their notions of care are situated in their cultural understandings of the nature of teacher-student relationships.

Teachers identified that their students are more likely to come to school without basic needs being met at home. Leigh shared that for a lot of her students, "...[Administration for Children's Services] is involved, and they're not getting dinner made for them, and they don't have clean clothes..." (I5/6) and while that was the case for a very small number of students in her school when she was a student, she identified that it is more prevalent, to the point of becoming a norm, in her class as a teacher. She added that this is part of what motivates her to want to be a good teacher and role model for her students. Candice noted that this contributes to her role being defined as more

than just classroom teaching, and including many additional hats in order to meet students' needs.

Identifying Systemic Cultural Barriers

Some cultural barriers identified by participants were attributed to larger systemic issues rather than the personal choices and attributes of the families. Teachers identified ways that the culture of poverty in which their students lived presented some barriers that they had previously not encountered. Candice noted, "I had absolutely no idea that this world existed and how complicated it was, and how it is so greatly impactful on students' educations." She reasoned how living in a culture of poverty shapes her students' worldviews in ways beyond not having access to tangible resources:

If they're living in that community and they're all from low income families, probably not having had higher education of any sort, it's just hard to understand how education can be your ticket to opportunity in the world, and I think that's what we're trying to teach the children. How important this is in your life and just having those disparate views just contributes to the big disconnect there because, [teachers are] all there in the building because we feel so strongly about the importance of education. (FGA)

Here she describes her belief that she is asking her students to learn and trust a different perspective on education that she is attempting to influence, which may run counter to their culture outside of school, and understands that developing this perspective and trust in her students is one of the hats worn by teachers in this community that was not required of teachers in her own schooling experience as a student.

Candice also noted systemic issues of mistrust between teachers and families that presented a barrier to effective partnering for students' academic success. She shared what it was like stepping into a system of beliefs established long before she became a teacher at the school, and how that set the tone for her engagement with families:

I would say at the beginning of the year, I came very open-minded and assuming the best, and almost immediately from the teachers, probably even before [I interacted with] the parents, there was a real sense of... mistrust for the parents... I feel like they were warning me from the beginning that parents are not very responsible, so we can try to do all these things, but we don't have cooperation at home so it doesn't matter. It was just, I got the virus in very beginning. (I3)

She also shared her thoughts that the mistrusting relationships between teachers and parents is a result of “really deep-rooted issues,” noting that “[m]any teachers misinterpret families’ lack of involvement as a lack of caring about their child,” which is further “complicated by the higher standards to which teachers are being held accountable.”

Monitoring Own Assumptions

Participants expressed tensions felt between their own beliefs about community lifestyles and recognizing the assumptions underlying those beliefs. Candice talked about her own assumptions with one process by which she attempts to work with parents: setting up formal meeting times.

... [I]nitially, I assumed that, of course setting up a meeting would demand that we would have that meeting at the time scheduled, and... as parents did not show up for these meetings, and it was a pattern, a repeated pattern... I went from assuming the best to assuming the worst. In that area. (I3)

Both teachers shared frustrations with unsuccessful attempts at building home-school connections through partnering with students’ parents. While initially taking the perspective that the shortcoming rested on the shoulders of the families, they also acknowledged ways in which their own cultural assumptions about what the home-school partnership should look like influenced their frustrations. Candice noted:

... when I criticize a parent for not be able to implement the structure at home with homework, well that may be just because they never have seen that before, or maybe that’s just not valued in their upbringing or their culture, whatever it

may be, so I have this awareness, and in the moment of frustration, it feels like it is a conscious choice of the parents we have, but then when I... take the time to think about it, I think that it is less of a conscious choice than it may seem in the moment because all of these other factors ... have contributed to them not being able to. (I3)

Adapting Communication Style

In response to some of the experienced cultural disequilibrium, teachers examined some of their own cultural communication expectations and considered adaptations that would be appropriate for building bridges for parent communication and student responsiveness in their teaching contexts.

Building bridges for parent communication. Despite frustrations with some unanticipated challenges in building partnerships with parents that support students' success in school, teachers remained optimistic about the possibilities of cultivating this type of relationship with parents across the year and made efforts to forge relationships through careful and deliberate communication efforts. Teachers were conscious about using communication styles to match students' parents' preferences, notably with language spoken. Leigh described using her basic knowledge of Spanish to facilitate communication.

I think being able to speak Spanish has been helpful. It makes the parent feel more comfortable. And for parents who don't have much English, we can kind of together, sort of have a conversation. (FGA)

Leigh added that when parents who speak Spanish want to have a conversation with teachers, speaking with someone who has familiarity with some Spanish seems to make parents more comfortable, yet she acknowledged that this “doesn't happen as much as it should.” Candice agreed that “the language barrier is huge” in trying to develop partnerships with families, adding that:

...when you have a parent there who wants to have a conversation, and I'm incapable of having that direct conversation, or even if I get someone to translate, there's just a level of distance between us. (FGA)

Building bridges for student responsiveness. Early in the year, Candice noticed a difference in communication patterns with her students. She shared:

I really think that my students have been primed to respond to certain ways that adults act, whether it's yelling or more direct language. It's totally impacted how I relate to my students... [O]nce I figured out that I can be direct without yelling, that was the solution, but definitely I can see that they are responsive to a certain type of language, and not the type of language that I'm used to speaking. (FGA)

She noted that in the beginning of the year, she phrased her statements as questions, such as "Do you think that's the right choice?" and learned that rephrasing the statement to "A better choice would be this" gained better student responses. Leigh shared a similar learning curve with finding a common and effective communication style with her students. "I think that my students are used to either not being talked to at home, or to being yelled at, so having normal calm dialogue all day long took some getting used to for them" (FGA).

Both participants expressed grappling with the norm experienced at their schools of adults yelling at children to gain compliance. Candice noted:

... initially, it really jumped out at me that teachers were yelling at students a lot more than I had seen at other schools. And a lot less negotiating or rationalizing things. A lot of just, you know, commands... which seemed very harsh to me at first... (I6)

Leigh reflected that she does not feel comfortable raising her voice "unless it's an issue of safety or severe disrespect," noting that though her co-teacher is "more of a yeller," she did not feel it would be an effective strategy for herself (WR1). Both teachers felt strongly about developing rapport with students that allowed them to manage their classes without raising their voices and, with consistency, were able to achieve this.

Building Contextual Knowledge

Participants anticipated, and in some ways prepared for, experiences with cultural difference as a teacher in an intercultural teaching context. However, anticipation and preparation did not fully assuage cultural disequilibrium, which revealed to participants that there is a steep learning curve to gaining necessary contextual knowledge of the school and local community.

Preparation for cultural difference. These teachers intentionally sought teaching opportunities in communities of culture different from their own. Despite teacher preparation that prompted deep consideration of these cultural differences prior to teaching, participants found that the transition into the school community was not seamless. “I think it was unavoidable that some of it was going to be shocking,” shared Candice (I6), “because I... had such different experiences in my own life.” She reflected that as a preservice teacher candidate, she did not fully understand how applicable discussions about her identity and its influence on urban teaching would be. “I just wasn’t aware of how significant that really was until this year,” adding, “I think just having that awareness in the back of my mind was hugely beneficial to my teaching.”

Understanding local cultural knowledge and norms. Though prepared to experience cultural difference, the teachers found themselves on a steep learning curve with understanding the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) students were bringing to school. Candice expressed the following about knowledge gaps she observed in her class of first graders.

Many of my students seem confused about fundamental and daily living concepts, which, in my opinion, should be discussed at home. For example, many of my students continue to be confused about when they attend school ... Many don’t

know the days of the week or months of the year. Most don't know their birthdays. They have trouble understanding relationships (sister, aunt, cousin, friend, neighbor, etc.) and positionality (above, below, in front of, etc.) ... (WR3)

Candice further identified that “having this prior knowledge would be hugely beneficial in [her students’] understanding of concepts taught in the classroom.” The lens through which she understood her students’ knowledge gaps reflected her own White, middle-class cultural norms for common knowledge in early childhood, which were further reinforced by the demands of the curriculum used in her classroom.

Similarly, Leigh found herself identifying her own knowledge gaps in understanding her students’ cultural knowledge. Leigh noted that students’ interactions with each other taught her that there is a deeper level of diversity in the community than she realized. She shared a story about a classroom incident in which students bullied another student by suggesting that student was likely infected with Ebola. She explained her surprise that “they’re obviously seeing all these differences that I’m not even seeing. So, maybe they are a more diverse group than meets the eye” (FGB).

Analysis of Findings about Cultural Disequilibrium

Teachers felt that “culture shock” upon entering their schools was inevitable because the cultural experience was so different than what they were used to. What is notable is how teachers responded to, and within, this disequilibrium.

Participants drew cultural comparisons to their own experiences with schooling as students, initially relying on their own cultural experiences as a point of reference. Differences that they noted, some of which are discussed above, led to a perception that parents’ behaviors did not support students’ success with school in ways to which teachers were accustomed, and often contributed to ascribing deficiencies (Delpit, 2006)

to students' caregivers. They also noticed positive relationships among school staff and students, a commonality to their own White, middle-class schooling experiences, yet these relationships were portrayed against a back drop of children not having some of their basic needs met outside of school, which is different than their own experiences.

While referencing these differences when identifying barriers that they found frustrating in their work, teachers were simultaneously able to activate aspects of critical consciousness to monitor the narratives they constructed about students' families based on their experienced culture dissonance. Instead of attributing these cultural differences that presented barriers, or challenges, to students' school success only to character shortcomings or community deficiencies (Delpit, 2006), their mindsets also allowed them to understand these experiences as small slivers of time within a much larger sociohistorical context, and inherently connected to a more complex system (McDonough, 2009). This is illustrated in Candice's reflection on recognizing that often her initial reaction is to assume parents are making conscious choices that negatively impact their children, but then she comes to understand that the situation is far more complex than that (I3). While this mindset did not provide a blueprint for, or alleviate frustrations with, negotiating those barriers, it did provide a perspective from which teachers perceived their work, which has important implications for how new teachers can be supported, as discussed further in Chapter V.

In response to some of the cultural discontinuity that they identified, teachers in this study sought ways to adapt to contextual needs, such as working across the Spanish-English language barrier and using more direct language. They thought carefully about what elements of their own communication were important to them, such as avoiding

yelling when communicating with students, and worked to be able to maintain that.

Both teachers in this study wanted to teach in this cultural context and were intentional about seeking opportunities to prepare for this through their preservice field experiences. Despite preparation for understanding the role of identity and culture in urban schooling contexts, teachers still found themselves surprised by cultural norms in their respective school communities. While it was helpful for them to have this mindset of broader cultural understanding as a foundation for interpreting their experiences, they also quickly saw that there was an abundance of context-specific cultural knowledge, such as their students' funds of knowledge and effective ways to build relationships with students' caregivers, that they would need to develop to do well in their roles. Teachers' perspectives on the context-specific learning process are discussed later in the following chapter.

Enactment of Culturally Relevant Teaching

As participants shared their experiences in the role of urban teacher, several of their stories aligned with the three tenets of culturally relevant teaching: advocating for students and developing their critical consciousness; cultural synchronization; and student achievement. Teachers did enact some elements of culturally relevant teaching, but stories that align with these tenets also illustrate challenges and barriers that teachers felt they were working against.

Student Advocacy and Critical Consciousness

Teachers shared stories that reflected ways in which they advocated for their students, with regard to both academic and nonacademic issues. At the same time, teachers' reflections also demonstrated ways in which their teaching supported development of students' critical consciousness and capacity for self-advocacy.

Academic advocacy. Teachers in this study expressed several critiques of curricula, instruction and assessment practices in their schools, and shared stories of working to navigate those critiques in their own classrooms. Leigh shared a frustration about being required to administer a state pilot test to her fourth graders that consumed an entire morning. She reflected that the test did not count, which the students knew, and teachers were not given the student scores to be able to use the data formatively. "I think it was a waste of instructional time, and there was no actual benefit to the students," she explained (I5/6). As a teacher in a heavily tested grade, Leigh noticed multiple ways in which the testing preparation requirements at her school led to inequitable access to rich instruction, noting that students who finished test prep early "got to actually do some science and social studies," while other students would do practice questions "all day long" (I5/6). Leigh felt that it would have been better for all of her students to have access to a more "well rounded" curriculum, but struggled to find ways to enact that belief among competing requirements.

Candice shared similar concerns about curriculum access with her first graders. Noting that her young students came to school with knowledge gaps in content that her school's curriculum assumed, she learned that her classroom instruction needed to move away from a one-size-fits-all instructional model. However, she felt tension between

doing what she believed was necessary for student learning and meeting the instructional expectations for her school, which was participating in a first-year pilot of the curriculum. Candice shared,

A lot of times I feel that I'm supposed to do what is expected of me in terms of the curriculum, and standards, but it just is not going to work for every student, and you have to be creative and get some other tools for them to use. (I6)

The demand of creating curricula that mirrored the standard curriculum yet met her students where they were in their learning, coupled with the tension felt knowing she was not enacting the piloted curriculum as written, caused stress that took a toll on her.

Advocacy beyond academics. As teachers in under-performing, closely-monitored schools, they felt the academic culture was oppressive and omitted many of the nonacademic learning that they believe should be experienced at school.

The entire day is expected to be filled with “rigorous” academic work, which is intended to help this underprivileged population of students to advance, however, I feel it is counterproductive. Lack of time for community building and social/emotional instruction leads to more challenging behavior. (Candice, WR1)

Teachers in this study found ways to advocate for their students' success within the school community in areas beyond academic achievement.

Behavioral supports. In light of student behavior perceived as a major challenge to positive school culture, both teachers in this study actively collected data to inform student behavior modification plans that would be responsive to student needs. Leigh shared her experiences with serving on a school data committee that was responsible for collecting and analyzing school-wide behavioral data and deciding “how to target specific students to get them assistance with their behavior challenges.” Leigh had two over-aged students in her class who, according to Leigh, due to struggles with the grade-level academic work, frequently talked or engaged in off-task behavior during academic

times. These students were involved in the tiered intervention system, which offered different types of supports for students across the school based on what teachers believed would best support their students. Specifically, Leigh's students received behavioral supports through out-of-classroom check-ins with other school staff, allowing Leigh to foster and leverage opportunities for her students to build relationships with other adults in the school. She monitored how her students responded to the intervention system and found it to be effective with meeting students' needs that were not met through day-to-day classroom management structures in place for their classmates who were several years younger.

Candice shared her concerns about how school-wide behavioral support practices were not necessarily in the best interest of her students, specifically with a young boy in her class who struggled to manage anger. Candice felt that the school prematurely considered removing the boy from her classroom and placing him in a self-contained classroom, a more restrictive classroom environment than her ICT setting.

I don't know how that would help his anger. I don't know how being in a smaller, more isolated situation is going to address that issue. So, I don't think that is the solution. I think the solution is that he needs a lot more intense intervention and strategies for dealing with anger issues... I am concerned about him being in the classroom around other students, but I don't think removing him from the classroom is a good solution either. I don't know what the solution is, but I don't think going to a more restrictive environment addresses the issue. (11)

Candice worked throughout the year to develop classroom-based, individualized behavior support plans to help her students participate in the classroom community, yet remained critical of the limited time the academic programs left during the school day to build a more robust and intentional classroom culture.

Collaboration with families. Teachers in this study shared several ways in which they perceived students' struggles in school to be a result of their experiences at home with their families and in their community. Their experiences were that some students' basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing were not being met, and many students were not supported in developing academic skills and knowledge required by the school curriculum. Teachers described several attempts they made to communicate to students' families about ways that families could more strongly support their students' school success. Attempts at communication included formal outreach such as scheduling meetings and sending home newsletters, as well as informal outreach by connecting with students' parents at school pick-up time. However, teachers in the study did not notice change in the ways most students' parents were supporting their school success, and this was interpreted partially as an outcome of miscommunication and mistrust. Candice was critical of the ways in which schooling success required her students, and their families by proxy, to "convert to Americanism," which may have felt like an unnatural shift within the Hispanic community culture, acknowledging the challenge many of her families faced with "[c]oming to a new country and just adapting to a new culture and not being able to have any of that at school" (I3). She added that this, coupled with challenges in communication due to the Spanish-English language barrier, created a situation ripe for mistrust of the school.

Teacher care. Through their advocacy for their students in academics and beyond, teachers shared that they care for their students, and ways in which they worked outside of the conventional role of teacher to ensure that their students received what they needed to reach their full potential. Leigh talked about attending evening events at her

school, such as a student talent show, to learn more about her students and show them that she cares who they are outside of her classroom. Candice explained the number of “hats” she wore as a teacher to her young students, including mom, nurse, and counselor. She described providing for her students’ basic needs, such as food, during the school day so that students were able to focus on academics. Knowing that some of her students were dealing with issues outside of school that were stressful for the children, she was bothered by ending the school year without confirmation that the issues were resolved and looked forward to seeing her students at the beginning of the next school year to find out how they were doing.

Teaching diversity and critical consciousness. While teachers in this study felt constrained by the curricula they were using and expressed that they did not have opportunities to intentionally engage students about diversity and critical consciousness as they had envisioned during their preservice preparation, teachers did find ways to integrate it into curriculum assignments and daily classroom life in small ways.

Equity and access. Candice shared ways that she explicitly integrated concepts of equity into classroom management practices and used that to teach and reinforce to students that everyone needs different supports to be successful, and everyone gets access to the supports they need.

[It] was a real struggle to get the majority of the kids to understand that some of the kids might not be... held to the same expectations necessarily, so ... it seemed unfair to the kids, and even if we had conversations about it... (FGA)

With consistency, Candice felt that her students began to understand how these differences were accounted for in the classroom culture. Candice’s management and academic differentiation practices relied on multiple individualized plans, and this

reflection illustrates how she prepared her students to apply the complex concept of equity to their lived experiences within their classroom.

Power and justice. Leigh shared ways that she integrated issues of power and justice into her curriculum where she could find flexibility to do so. She found that her students enjoyed social studies.

[W]e've been talking a lot about power, and right now we're studying women's suffrage... we've brought in some heroes for our culture that they know about [and have] become very invested in. People who have had struggles and... overcome them. Richard Wright, and they love Martin Luther King, and so they bring those people up themselves. (FGA)

By teaching social studies through the lens of power and justice, Leigh found that students were able to use their own understandings and interests to connect to the content. Leigh built in writing assignments in which students explored ideas of rules and fairness in their community and developed perspectives about the role of rules in a community and whether it is ever acceptable to break a rule. "Most [students] have decided that it's okay to break the law for... a greater purpose, but you can't just... go steal something if you're hungry," she added. Leigh then used this as a launching place for students to discuss things that they do not like about their school and local community. She guided students to identify things that they had power to take control of, and student enacted a campaign of action to keep their school cleaner.

Student agency. One way in which teachers in this study addressed critical consciousness was through raising consciousness and metacognition to guide students to see that they have the ability to make choices about their lives. Teachers in this study shared that one of their aims with their students was to provide a role model for a different way of communicating and behaving that students may not see on a day-to-day

basis in their communities. Through behavior support plans, teachers attempted to help students internalize metacognitive practices in which they monitor and make choices about their own behavior and responses to situations.

Teachers also aspired to expose their students to a variety of lifestyles outside the context of their classrooms to give students perspectives to consider for their own futures. Candice shared stories about exposing her students to concepts of different jobs and careers through school career days and helping her students begin to make connections to earning money, which she felt was a “foreign concept to some [students].” Leigh felt she had not found natural ways to bring up issues of socioeconomics in her classroom, but was planning to integrate this into an upcoming unit on countries around the world in which she hoped to address work that people do in different areas of the world.

Cultural Synchronization

Teachers in this study shared multiple ways in which the social and academic norms of the school and local community were discontinuous with the norms of their own White, middle-class culture and schooling experiences. Further discontinuity was described by teachers as tensions emerged between students’ funds of knowledge and the demands of the school curricula and assessments, and ways in which school structures called for parents to engage with their students’ schooling and academic experience. Teachers largely attributed the discontinuity to missing links within students’ living structures outside of school or their previous schooling experiences; however, teachers explained ways in which they attempted to mediate the discontinuity that they experienced through adaptation and integration, and development of contextual knowledge.

Adaptation and integration. Teachers in this study employed a variety of responses to the home-school discontinuity that they experienced. The following are some of the ways that teachers tried to synchronize students' home and school experiences through adaptations and integration.

Communication. Study participants identified communication differences as a primary point of cultural discontinuity. As shared previously in this chapter, teachers initially found that their students were not as responsive to their communication style, believing that their students had been “primed” to respond to more direct communication styles of their communities and other teachers in the school (Candice, FGA). Teachers adapted their language habits to include more directives and explicit descriptors of expectations, and students became more responsive. These teachers did negotiate the adaptation process with adherence to their own preference for avoiding raising their voices and felt that, with time and consistency, they were able build a bridge between the classroom communication norms that they envisioned for their classroom and the communication norms to which their students were accustomed.

Leigh also found ways to engage students in exploring vocabulary from different languages to normalize the experience of learning the English required of the academic curriculum.

I speak Spanish, a lot of them do, and my co-teacher speaks Italian, so now and again, we'll just throw out different words when we're transitioning, and they like it, like making fun of my accent [laughs], or they'll like repeat back what I said in Spanish, because they understand Spanish but don't always speak it that well. That's kind of like a fun way to remind them that I do know where they come from. (FGA)

Candice shared similar practices she uses to normalize multi-language development in her classroom, noting,

... when I introduce vocabulary words, I try to introduce the Spanish equivalent as well. Or sometimes if I'm reading one-on-one with a kid, I try to get bilingual books, or I can try to read some of the Spanish with them, and that's a fun experience. (FGA)

Curriculum and assessment. Teachers shared ways in which they adapted curriculum and assessment materials and practices in order to synchronize content and learning with students' cultural schema. Often, this involved identifying knowledge or skill gaps that served as barriers to students accessing the curriculum and filling those gaps. Usually this happened in the moment, as Leigh described her students' experiences with math word problems:

... something [about] the way the vocabulary is in the word problems is... confusing, ... we had a math problem about how many legs [farm] animals, cows and chickens, had. And there were a number of kids in my class who were asking each other, like, wait, how many legs does a chicken have? Is it two? And so, we've been doing a lot of farm problems since then where I've been putting visuals so that hopefully by the time they have to do it without visuals, they'll remember what all these different animals look like. And none of us anticipated that to be a problem... (FGB)

She also shared, "...it happens in our read alouds also, where I might think the vocabulary is simple enough, but then I realize that they've never heard the word before." Candice echoed this, explaining that her reading curriculum selects the Tier 2 and Tier 3 focus vocabulary of the lesson, but found that she needs to start with developing a base level of comprehension of the text through teaching many other vocabulary words before being able to deepen understanding through the vocabulary outlined in the curriculum. Candice shared that there often was not enough time to teach Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary in her lessons.

Candice shared ways in which she noticed content misconceptions developing during lessons as a result of mismatch between lesson vocabulary and students' current schema.

[W]e were learning about land forms, and I showed them a picture of an island, and multiple students recognized the island as the place where you go visit jail... I feel like that was one of those moments, that, it was a teachable moment that that was not necessarily jail, and that some people go visit people in jail, but not everyone goes to make them aware that not everyone has a parent in jail. (FGB)

Because teachers felt they were learning about their students' knowledge base and cultural schema as they were teaching, teachers felt that they made culture-based adaptations to curriculum through teachable moments within the context of a lesson, acting on their feet to be responsive to their students' learning needs.

Teachers also shared ways that they tried to plan for synchronization with contextual knowledge within the curriculum. Leigh shared how her students responded to her writing units:

For narratives this year, we did personal narratives instead of fictional narratives because we realized that our students were having so much trouble making up a coherent beginning, middle, and end. And it worked better. But then they didn't remember exactly what they said to people, and they... refused to make it up. We were like, no it's okay, you know how you talk. Just tell us what you think you said. And some of the kids couldn't do it. (FGB)

She added that she was initially concerned about students' capacity to do well with the nonfiction unit and was surprised to see how strong students' writing pieces were "because they're based in... actual things that they know." She described how she pushed students to add more details, which she felt they were reluctant to do perhaps because of cultural communication styles.

Candice shared her enjoyment of science and social studies curricula in her classroom because in these untested content areas, there were few requirements for instructional and assessment practices.

When I create an assessment, I have control over the content and presentation, and I can tailor it to my students. There is no need to teach to the test because I create the test after teaching. Because the questions are all based on taught material and are presented in ways that I know students can understand and respond to, I feel that they yield more accurate and informative results than standardized tests. (WR5)

The latitude that is afforded to her with designing the instruction and assessment allowed her to create materials relevant to the knowledge her students had developed using contextual language and representation of the concepts.

While teachers showed interest and capacity in making their curricula more synchronized with students' cultural experiences and knowledge, teachers felt that they were not doing this as often or well as they should. Teachers shared that they often found themselves surprised or unknowledgeable about the experiences and knowledge that their students bring to school with them, making it difficult to plan curricula in advance to leverage students' cultural knowledge. Leigh noted, "I want to learn even more about their lives and find more ways to integrate their experiences into the curriculum" (WR6). Teachers recognized that in order to be able to synchronize cultures for learning, they needed to deepen their own knowledge of local cultural knowledge.

Barriers to synchronization. While teachers intentionally tried to synchronize language and communication styles to support students' success, they also shared ways in which language differences and expectations built wedges within the community. In addition to the distance teachers felt when trying to communicate with students' families across translation, Leigh also navigated a school culture in which parents were explicitly

told (and corrected) by administrators to speak to their children in complete sentences. Leigh was concerned about how parents may have felt about their language being critiqued by the school leadership and how that might impact parents' willingness to engage with their children's education inside the school building.

School-based practices that may cause parents to disengage with their children's education inside the school were concerning to these teachers, and they perceived a need to inform parents about the expectations for parent engagement in American public schooling. Both teachers expressed that they want a stronger partnership with parents in supporting students' success and feel that parents' engagement and presence within the school would be helpful in informing parents about the social, behavioral, and academic knowledge required of their children at school. Despite identifying this as a missing link in the cultural synchronization process, teachers felt that this was beyond the scope of what they were equipped to do in the role of teacher in their first year in their schools.

Developing contextual knowledge. Supporting their development of local cultural and contextual knowledge requisite to designing and implementing culturally synchronized learning experiences for their students, teachers became immersed in the school community. Though their actions of immersion may not have been explicit and intentional strategy to be able to design culturally synchronized learning for students, teachers did feel a pull to become an involved member of the school community with a learner-stance, knowing that they needed to connect with others in order to learn.

Preparation for joining the community. Teachers shared ways that experiences in their preservice program prepared them for the actions they would need to take in order to build local and contextual knowledge in a new school, including placements in

lower socioeconomic communities, and assignments that required them to connect and collaborate with other professionals in the school.

[O]ne of the class projects was to basically collaborate with other adults and record the process, so... more creating something in the school. I really enjoyed the experience... I joined three other students, and we decided to devote time to having each of our classes socialize with each other. They were the same age but didn't interact with each other during the school day and all, so we created a program, and we had to collaborate with all the paras, and reserve a space with the administration... I think it was just a good exercise... to have to go and reach out to people and sort of take the initiative. That's certainly not my personality, so it was good to have to do that and get positive feedback from it. (I2)

Sustaining self in the community. It is important to note that when teachers remain in schools where they exist in a state of active cultural knowledge-building, they are also negotiating spaces of cultural disequilibrium. Teachers in this study found ways to sustain themselves and remain present in their learning while negotiating a sometimes uncomfortable space. Leigh spoke about the importance of “finding her people,” in reference to a group of like-minded professionals in her school to build a support network.

I met other teachers... who'd been there longer than me, who I got to know almost on purpose because they were now third- or fourth-year teachers who had chosen to stay at the school. So I felt like it was good for me to connect myself with them because obviously they were doing something that made it sustainable for themselves. (FGB)

Through their experiences, teachers felt that they had become authentic members of the school community, moving from “outsider” to “insider” roles.

Student Achievement

The third pillar of culturally relevant teaching, student academic achievement, is a concept and teacher skillset that teachers grappled with across the year. An initial

complexity with student achievement emerged early in the year as teachers worked to establish classroom culture.

Classroom culture and management. From the beginning of the year, the two teachers in this case study shared divergent experiences with establishing classroom culture and management strategies. Leigh's co-teacher established a clear and effective management style from the beginning of the year, and while Leigh did not agree with several of his management strategies, she found that the class was run orderly and students were engaging in academic learning, so she opted to not disrupt the established classroom culture. Candice and her co-teacher worked on strengthening classroom culture and management longer into the school year, and Candice shared that management of challenging student behaviors interfered with effective academic instruction earlier in the year. She noted:

...it took a very long time, but these [management] strategies are finally coming into place, and I'm seeing that the behavior is in a much better place, and we can actually get a lot more academic work done because the management is in line... (FGA)

Candice felt strongly about establishing a classroom culture where students enjoyed coming to school, and had opportunities to develop social and emotional skills within the classroom. Candice shared her concerns that overemphasis on rigorous academics would be to the long-term detriment of the students, leading to their disliking school and lagging in development of social and emotional skills needed for later success.

I feel for some of these kids and what they're expected to do based on the programs that we have to teach, and they just seem so far off from what the actual level of ability is that I feel like I'm more focused on encouraging them than what the actual benchmarks are, and having them enjoy coming to school has been the priority for me. I think at the first-grade level, they either are deciding that they hate school, or they love school, and I have just been trying to make school a lovable place to be... (FGA)

Candice used this belief to map her management style and guide responses to student behaviors, but did not feel that she was afforded the time necessary to proactively build the classroom culture she was striving for as a result of academic instructional time requirements. Managing challenging student behaviors continued to be an area of focus and energy expenditure in Candice's classroom across the full school year.

Academics. While recognizing that academic instruction and learning is situated in a broader classroom and community culture, teachers did understand and accept as a part of their role the cultivation of academic growth and achievement in their students. Honoring the diversity of learners in their classes, teachers in this study attempted to meet their students where they were, planning for differentiation and strategic small group instruction. Leigh shared:

...there's such a wide range of needs in our classroom, we now have them into like, four flexible groups. And it's just easier to work with them because we can just call whatever group we want. And the kids know, and we know, and it seems to flow very easily. (I2)

Leigh found the flexible grouping structures to be especially useful in teaching writing skills to students with different skillsets.

Candice also shared ways that she adapted her standardized reading curriculum when she found that it was not meeting many of her students' needs:

...[The curriculum is] aimed toward the higher students, and then you're supposed to pull back from there, depending on how the students are responding..., which I just disagree with. I feel like a lot of times whatever we're reading is so beyond their reading level that... it's just a waste of time because... you do a read aloud where the kids are just listening, which ends up being so redundant, because every lesson I end up reading the same text aloud for several weeks at a time. Then they want the close reading, where it's sort of like a choral reading, except that most of the kids, even after we've previewed some vocabulary,... cannot read it,... so we'll be trying to read as a whole group, and a few of them are reading, but most of them [are] just lost. They're looking around

and not engaged at all. And I just feel like that's a waste of time completely. For them, they're not learning; it's just too beyond their level, and it's not what they need... (I4)

She described ways that she and her co-teacher work to provide students with access to the text through reading instruction that meets them where they are.

[W]hat we do is really pick and choose aspects of each lesson that are appropriate for different groups of students. So while we might work with the same text, we have different levels of questioning that we ask in our small groups, or focus on a certain portion of the passage, or... we change the objective in the small groups based on whatever students need, but still use the same text. (I4)

Candice's instructional choices were aligned to her understanding of her role to support students' academic growth, even when the curriculum was not accessible to a child.

In addition to making instructional decisions within the implementation of the curriculum, teachers in this study also viewed it as a responsibility of their role to design new curricula that were stronger fits for their students. This often was the result of blending two or more curricula by selecting elements from different curricula that they felt would be most beneficial to their students. Leigh shared:

I do like that we have a mixture [of curricula] because it helps us when we plan to think about which elements of each one will best fit our students... [M]ost of our students aren't on grade level, so we couldn't really take any one curriculum just as it was. (I4)

She used instructional methods and tasks from multiple curricula to respond to students' knowledge gaps in order to facilitate students' academic achievement.

Teachers expressed that blending curricula was necessary to increase student access and achievement; however, they felt that the process for doing this was not without flaws. Teachers shared that they wanted more time to think and plan strategically about the curricula they were building, and that sometimes the results they were working with still felt incoherent and did not meet the learning needs of all students in their

classes. Additionally, teachers felt they disproportionately invested time in planning and providing instruction in the content areas that were tested, and therefore presented higher accountability for showing students' academic growth, to the detriment of student growth in untested content areas.

Measuring achievement. Teachers in this study were conscious of the ways in which standardized testing and achievement measurement influenced curriculum and instructional practices. Though critical of the narrowed curriculum content and repetitive test-prep instruction, Leigh found that in a strange way, her student's high rate of passing test scores felt validating. "...[I]t's weird. [laughing] I think because we had to spend so much time on it, that it was nice to see that the ways that we approached it actually worked" (I5/6).

Teachers in this study negotiated a balance between complying with seemingly arbitrary/unaligned achievement measurement procedures with meaningful data collection that informed their instruction. Though teachers were often unclear on the specific requirements for student achievement data collection at their schools, teachers did voice that they felt too much data was collected to be used informatively for instruction. Leigh shared, "I never really had the time to really delve in and see what the scores mean on any one assessment" before needing to move ahead to upcoming instruction.

Candice shared her evolving understanding of academic achievement and the ways in which it is measured.

I came into this year thinking that success would be pretty clear cut academic achievement on the students' part, ... [such as] increasing a certain number of reading levels, or having mastered certain standards. ... I thought that if I achieved results, then that would be successful. But I slowly learned that there's just so

many different factors that go into teaching and achieving results, that you can't have a standard expectation, or even have the same standards for all of your students, and all of these factors have to be taken into consideration. (16)

This illustrates the tension teachers in this study felt between wanting their students to perform at measurably increasing achievement levels, yet also realizing that teaching and learning happens within a more complex context, and much of the growth happening in their classrooms will not be evidenced on, or validated by, a standardized test score.

Family and community in student achievement. Candice noted “a strong correlation between kids with involved parents and academic achievement,” and both teachers articulated wanting more parents to actively engage with students’ mastery of academic content. Frustrated by limited success with cultivating this type of parent engagement, teachers seemed to accept responsibility for cultivating academic growth in the perceived absence of parental support of academic learning outside of school. Teachers made adaptations to homework assignments in anticipation of students being unable to receive instructional help from a family member, focusing the content of homework on review of previously taught skills and concepts for which students would not need adult support to complete. Teachers also recognized that the ways in which content, especially math, is taught through the curriculum are likely different than how many parents learned the content, and that more independent homework assignments would avoid confusion for both parents and students.

Analysis of Findings about Culturally Relevant Teaching

The following is an analysis of teachers’ enactment of culturally relevant teaching within each of the three tenets of focus in this study (Gay, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995):

advocating for students and raising their critical consciousness; cultural synchronization; and academic achievement.

Student advocacy and critical consciousness. Teachers identified multiple ways that the standardization of academic performance benchmarks, and curriculum and assessment practices unfairly impacted their students, often concentrating exclusively on a narrow academic content, and denying them rich, well-rounded instruction in all disciplines, as well as social and emotional skill development opportunities. These structures bothered teachers, yet in their role as first-year teachers, they were not comfortable actively disrupting most of these structures.

Teachers seemed to feel more confidence with taking action to advocate for students' behavioral supports, perhaps because there is not a pre-determined method for this, and teachers were usually constructing or co-constructing an intervention from scratch. In these cases, advocacy did not require them to deviate from a blueprint, as with an academic curriculum, and teachers may have felt more freedom with making decisions in these situations. It is also important to note that advocacy decisions made by teachers seemed to come from a place of concern about students' well-being, and a desire for students to get what they need to be successful in the school environment. Their stories indicated a high level of compassion for their students' lives in and out of school and genuinely wanting their students to have positive school experiences. However, these stories illustrated tensions with enacting authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999), as reflected in ways that teachers made decisions about, or for, students, and did not illustrate reciprocity in their relationships with students where the relationship itself is as the basis

for all learning. As discussed in Chapter V, teachers felt constrained in their capacity to develop strong relationships with their students throughout the academic year.

Teachers also expressed disappointment with the extent to which they were able to integrate elements of social justice education into their teaching practices. They explained their enthusiasm during their preservice preparation for designing curricula with a social justice orientation, and having rich discussions with their students about diversity each day. Teachers felt that, in practice, they had very little opportunity to do any of that. Teachers found some smaller ways to integrate issues of equity into the curriculum, and also built a classroom management system grounded in the concept of equity and inclusivity, yet overall seemed dissatisfied with how this went in their first year. It is likely that this is linked to teachers feeling tied to an existing curriculum and working to learn the content of that curriculum, nearly as they were teaching it, and feeling less capacity to do the design work that is not immediately required.

Cultural synchronization. Teachers attempted to synchronize aspects of home-school discontinuity that they recognized in multiple areas of their work. Analysis of teachers' stories indicated a tendency to start with the expectations of schooling, identify culture-related gaps in knowledge, and then fill those gaps in order to provide access to the curriculum or school-based customs. In doing so, elements of critical consciousness emerged, as teachers recognized that the norms and requirements of schooling represent systemic issues of culture-based power and oppression. Teachers were particularly critical of the near omission of students' Hispanic culture during formal academics across the school day. Teachers' understanding of the implicit power dynamic of language was

evidenced through their attempts at navigating the Spanish-English language barrier they and their students experienced.

Teachers worked both proactively and responsively to address cultural synchronization in their instruction. They felt that most of these instructional opportunities arose through “teachable moments” in which teachers unearthed a cultural-knowledge based misconception during a lesson, and they seemed to feel comfortable responding to these opportunities in the moment. Teachers did also make attempts to account for their students’ knowledge base in their planning, adapting content and assessments to correspond to students’ strengths. However, rudimentary contextualized cultural knowledge, combined with the task of learning the grade level curriculum content, prevented them from fully anticipating where content bridges would be required. Teachers’ identified that they needed to know more about their students to authentically build a culturally synchronized curriculum.

While teachers felt capable of making some culture-driven adaptations within the realms of their classrooms, they seemed less sure of their capacity for culture-driven adaptations beyond their classroom instructional practices. Cultural synchronization regarding language and communication with parents was identified as a barrier that felt insurmountable in their role as a first-year teacher. Though they identified this synchronized partnership as a key missing link for students’ success, it was deemed outside the sphere of what they could control. This raises important implications for supports that can be provided to new teachers to help them do their work well and is discussed further in Chapter VI.

Student achievement. Teachers accepted students' academic achievement as a primary responsibility of their role as teacher. Teachers spoke extensively about their work with academic curriculum design and adaptation to best create access to the grade level content, while also meeting their students where they are. They cared deeply about their students' academic progress. To this end, teachers found themselves paradoxically feeling validated by student achievement data from assessments they did not believe were administered through sound assessment practices.

However, teachers' stories maintained a perspective that academic achievement always occurs within a broader context that includes the culture of the classroom, and the learning that students gain from their families and communities. Teachers worked to cultivate academic classroom cultures and partnerships with families (all with mixed success) in service of academic achievement, yet maintained critique of the ways that their students' learning was measured and compared to students in very different contexts.

Critical Consciousness in Teacher Perception

Teachers in this study shared stories through which their critical consciousness was illustrated in each of the three tenets: questioning their own assumptions about reality; critiquing knowledge and challenging stereotypes; and identifying ways that socially constructed realities contribute to systems of power and oppression (McDonough, 2009). They also noted in their stories how their thinking changed across the year as a result of their experiences.

Acknowledging Assumptions

Study participants described many challenges and frustrations experienced throughout their first year of teaching. While many of these challenges and frustrations involved interactions and unmet expectations with other people or systems, teachers frequently managed their reactions to the challenges and frustrations by explaining how their own assumptions and expectations contributed to the situation. When explaining her frustrations with parents' level of support with academics at home, specifically helping with homework assignments, Candice noted that she was being "judgmental" and recognized that her White, middle-class cultural norms were influencing her assumptions and expectations for what parent support looks like (I3).

Challenging Knowledge and Stereotypes

When teachers entered their teacher roles, they stepped into an existing school culture with its own body of contextual knowledge, including cultural stereotypes that emerged through lived experiences in the school community or those brought in externally through conscious or unconscious biases. While teachers in this study illustrated ways in which they acknowledged how their own cultural assumptions shaped their interpretation of contextual situations, they also shared ways that they struggled to navigate the contextual knowledge and stereotypes that influenced their work.

One trial that teachers experienced in their work was managing challenging student behaviors in their classrooms. Candice shared,

... there seems to be an excessive amount of behavioral problems in every classroom in our school. Teachers generally feel that this is due to students' difficult lives outside of school. (WR1)

When searching for underlying causes of these student behaviors, teachers often referenced the deficit narrative of students acting out in school because of chaotic or traumatic living conditions outside of school.

Similarly, teachers faced difficulties with supporting students' academic achievement, and sometimes turned to familiar narratives about students' lifestyles at home contributing to an insurmountable knowledge gap that created a barrier to school success. Teachers referenced ways in which English language, vocabulary, and literacy were not reinforced at home in the ways demanded by the curriculum, and identified content-specific and general knowledge gaps that made the curriculum less accessible.

Beliefs about the culture of poverty also surfaced frequently as teacher made sense of the challenges they navigated in their role. As shared previously in this chapter, teachers expressed stories about their experiences that seemed consistent with beliefs about communities living in poverty not valuing formal academic education. Teachers also noted ways in which families seemed to benefit from the school and systems in nonacademic ways. Candice shared what she had noticed about many of the children receiving three meals a day at school and staying for extended care hours, and felt herself beginning to question what role and responsibilities the parents were expected to fulfill. This was coupled with her frustration toward the overwhelming range of responsibilities she felt herself absorbing beyond the traditional classroom teacher role.

Challenging Injustices and Oppression

While navigating and working among stereotypes and local (school-based) understandings of the challenges in their daily teaching, teachers in this study also identified, and were critical of, several of the systemic disadvantages that manifested in

their schools. Leigh acknowledged that schools are traditionally set up to expect a certain type and amount of parent involvement, and since the families of her students did not subscribe to that, her students were experiencing a disproportionate amount of challenges with meeting the expectations of school. Candice noted ways in which the system marginalized their schools among other schools in the district:

I strongly feel that it is unfair for [the school district] to have the same educational expectations for schools who serve underprivileged students as those who serve privileged students, due to the fact that our students generally have so many needs to be met. (WR1)

Both teachers identified ways that the system of public schooling was serving to perpetuate the social injustices that were causing the discontinuity challenges in the first place. Candice shared her discouragement with the ways in which the school culture and curriculum required students to speak in English at all times during the school day, despite serving a predominately Hispanic community, echoing Leigh's sentiments about her school telling parents how they must speak to their children. Though able to identify ways that the grammars of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) were creating issues of discontinuity for their students and families, teachers found themselves in a quagmire as additional pressures were applied to teach and document learning aligned to a specific set of academic standards.

Teachers as change agents. Teachers in this study viewed themselves as change agents for social justice and equity, but also felt that they did not enact this belief as envisioned as a preservice teacher. Candice shared,

I do think it's an awareness that we have, especially coming from [Northeast] just as a result of conversation all the time, ... we just naturally have that in our head, and it comes through in what we're doing, but I guess in terms of... really structuring it, I could do better. (FGA)

She recognized many of the challenges of her work as artifacts of the systemic discontinuity between the local cultural norms and the expectations of the school system, noting that educating “a mass number of people who are kind of resistant to the value of education” requires “a huge social change.”

While teachers felt that there was not enough being done to adequately address the systemic challenges with cultural discontinuity in their school settings, they did share stories about programs their schools were attempting to put into place to help teach families more about the norms and expectations of the school system, indicating a belief that parents could and would change the ways in which they engage with their children’s schooling experience. Candice was hopeful about a program at her school that supported students and parents who were learning English. She added that similar programs would be helpful that provide parents with an understanding of the education landscape across the country and within their city, including what happens in their children’s classrooms and why.

There’s just so much explanation that has to happen that I just don’t know if I have the means and the time to do this as one person, and maybe it’s because my first year, and I’m overwhelmed by everything else, and it’s something I can think about in the future [by] developing a team of people to work on this, but... it’s a little beyond the realm of what I can take all right now. (I3)

Candice’s perspective illustrates a tension between teachers’ beliefs that change should and can happen, and what they see as immediately within their sphere of control and capacity as a first-year teacher. Teachers’ stories depicted a stronger comfort level with addressing smaller issues of discontinuity within their own classrooms, and is discussed further in Chapter V.

Teachers' beliefs about their identity. Teachers in this study did share perspectives on how they believe their own identities influenced their experiences in their teaching contexts. Both teachers indicated that their racial identity shaped some of their experiences with students and with staff. Both noticed ways in which race-based cultural codes impacted their classroom management effectiveness. Candice shared how this was especially clear to her in the difference in how her students responded to her co-teacher, a difference that she attributed to racial and cultural commonalities between her co-teacher and the students.

I'm probably one of two, maybe three White people on the staff, and it certainly has come up as an issue, ... even the language and teaching styles are just so different. ... My co-teacher and I are very different in our styles... Her style is much more familiar to the students in the sense of what they're used to, and so they react to her quicker, but I'm more of... the one who wants to have a conversation about it, and really reflect on it [laughing], which I think to them is... weird sometimes because they're not used to it. (FGB)

Leigh, who felt that she worked on a more racially diverse staff, commented that it served as a good model for students to see that teachers of many races worked together as a staff toward a common goal of teaching the students.

Leigh also shared her belief that the identity of her co-teacher helped her experiences with managing a class of fourth graders who were considered by many in the school to be a "tough" group to manage. She noted,

While he and I manage the class as a team, his presence definitely alleviates difficulties I feel I would experience as a first-year white woman teacher--struggles I see others like me enduring at my school. (WR1)

Leigh shared that a combination of his male presence, veteran teacher status, and willingness to use "authoritative and often threatening language" with the students

preemptively yielded a classroom culture in which students did not present some of the behaviors she would have otherwise struggled to control.

While teachers shared their perspectives about how identity impacted day-to-day interactions with students, teachers did not feel that identity impacted the authenticity of the relationships they built with their students. Leigh noted:

I think because of who I am, I expected bonding with my students to be harder than it was because of the perceptions people (myself included) have about being a white person working with minority students. However, I felt like I grew to love, respect, and educate the students well, while they did the same for me.
(WR6)

Teachers shared stories that illustrated their genuine care for students' success in school, and also for their general well-being in all areas of their lives, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Teachers' perceived role in the community. Interpreting situations through the lens of critical consciousness necessitates an understanding of power dynamics and who benefits from those dynamics. Specifically, it is important to understand teachers' perceptions of their role as teacher in their communities and how they feel that fits into or creates a dynamic of service provider and beneficiary. Teachers in this study shared reflections that indicated beliefs that their students and families benefit from the opportunity to have a culturally different teacher than what is typically experienced in their communities. Candice shared that she believes she is providing her students with a new perspective on ways to communicate and manage conflicts, and she works intentionally to provide this model for her students. Leigh echoed that belief, noting:

I think it makes it more necessary to have good teachers because they need positive role models in their lives when it's something they might not be getting at home. Whereas other schools, it's more of a given that they might have role models in other parts of their lives... maybe not at home, but maybe through an

extracurricular or something. But a lot of these kids, I feel like it's home and school, and if home's not so good, then school needs to be good. (I5/6)

While teachers in this study believed that their presence as a role model for their students was beneficial to the community, they also believed that they benefitted by being a teacher in that community. Both teachers shared that they would not feel as fulfilled in their work if they were teaching in lower-need communities, suggesting that at least some of their work satisfaction stemmed from working to resolve social injustices and needs that they perceived in their local communities.

Leigh also shared some of the specific aspects of the community that she enjoys and benefits from experiencing:

... I really do like that it's a Hispanic community because I really do want to keep my Spanish up. So it's nice that I get to practice, and the kids think it's funny when I try to speak Spanish to their families... and it's pretty safe too. It's close to the subway. And it's nice to be somewhere where I know they really need good teachers. I'm hoping that the school keeps doing better so that it sticks around. (I5/6)

The reflections of teachers in this study suggested a belief that it was mutually beneficial for them to teach in their communities, affording benefits to their students and families as well as themselves.

Change across the Year

It is important to note that teachers' understandings and perceptions of their work through the lens of critical consciousness changed across the year as they layered their lived experiences with their understandings of social injustices in education that were developed during their preservice preparation. Candice reflected:

I feel that it was an evolutionary process of learning about myself, the school community (including staff, parents, and students), the complex... public school

system, and the even more complex social, cultural, and economic divides in our country – and how all of these affect daily learning in the classroom. (WR6)

Through the intensive focus in their preservice preparation on finding ways to teach against the systemic ways in which schools further marginalize students and families of color and lower socioeconomic status, both teachers began their teaching hopeful and ambitious to create change. Candice shared her perspective on how this changed once she began teaching.

I entered the classroom as an eager and idealistic teacher, but I quickly realized that there are countless and very real problems that make teaching incredibly challenging. These realizations often felt like disappointments and failures at the time, but in retrospect, acquiring a deeper understanding of the reality of being an educator in an urban and low-income community will allow me to better adapt my teaching according to the real constraint that exist. (WR6)

Through the challenges to her ambition and idealism, Candice believes she was better able to adapt to the realities of what the work in her community context would require.

One of these contextual understandings involved the historical patterns of family engagement within her school community, noting,

I have come to realize the depth of mistrust and general lack of understanding between schools (primarily teachers) and families, and I have begun to see that extensive social change must occur in order to change this relationship. (WR3)

Through the challenges, teachers' beliefs about social marginalization were deepened.

Beliefs about families and community. While teachers felt that their experiences as teachers deepened their understanding of systemic social injustices that exist within the school system, they shared that they were not immune to developing frustrations with some of the challenges they faced in their daily work. In some cases, some of the frustrations were situated with the local and family cultural norms. Candice talked about beginning the school year assuming the best of families and believing in a potential to

build unified partnerships with families despite the stories she heard from veteran teachers in her school. However, over time, and with building disappointment with her failed attempts to build partnerships with families and receive the supports from parents that she believed she needed, she admittedly became jaded and “judgmental” toward her students’ families. In doing so, however, she maintained an awareness of her own mindset, and named that her feelings were likely not accurate, and that her perception of the choices parents seemed to be making were likely not conscious and deliberate decisions on their part.

Beliefs about self and teaching. Teachers also defined and refined what successful teaching looked like as they meshed their preservice beliefs with the lived constraints and structures of the school and community in which they were teaching.

Candice reflected toward the end of her first year:

As I have gained an understanding of both logistical constraints in the school and school system, as well as the impact of poverty on a child’s education, I have had to modify my definition of success. My idealistic self had envisioned a successful school year as making an impact on every student by helping them grow academically and socially. I have had to adjust my expectations to a more reasonable and attainable definition of success. My definition of success is more focused on the process rather than the results. I feel that being a successful teacher means making thoughtful effort toward helping each student with his or her distinct needs. (WR6)

Candice shared stories about the ways in which she developed relationships with students and others to identify distinct needs and personalize responsive instruction or supports based on what she knew about individuals. In one story, she described working with a student who was “absent more than he was present.”

[H]e came in part way through the school year and was just way below the other students academically, and he didn’t have any disabilities. It was just a matter of being out of school. So we had all of these goals initially for what we could achieve with him, and it just wasn’t possible for him to get anywhere near that

based on the amount of time that we did have with him. ...So he didn't really do anything that we had planned for the whole class... I created all sorts of modified things for him, and I think that they were meaningful for him when he was present,... so, I feel like I did the best that I could with that student in particular.
(16)

Similarly, toward the end of her first year, Leigh shared that she considered her first year of teaching “very successful” because she “was able to engage, instruct, get to know, and enjoy [her] fourth grade students.” She also shared that she “felt very successful in building relationships, which is a huge part of the reason [she] chose to become an educator.” While she shared at other times during the year about academic growth and accomplishments, her stories about defining her success as a teacher seemed to center on her relationships and interpersonal connections within the school and community.

Analysis of Findings about Critical Consciousness

While teachers were not free or exempt from feeling frustrations from the challenges of, or unmet expectations from, working within a large system with many other diverse people, they did have a propensity to pair their frustrations with an analysis of their own assumptions and perspectives through which they viewed each situation, unpacking how their own assumptions imposed an expectation on others that may or may not fit within the realm of what they had the capacity to meet. This reinforces the researcher's analysis that the teacher's stories indicate that they did not solely view themselves as “saviors” for the students or community in a role to resolve deficits inherently in the school or local community, though teachers did identify multiple ways in which they believed their White, middle-class cultural presence was an asset to students. Awareness and analysis of their own assumptions permitted teachers to instead

situate many “problems” that they encountered as manifestations of cultural discontinuity, giving them a different perspective from which they respond. It is also noteworthy, however, that teachers most frequently shared the challenges associated with working in their school contexts and less frequently described assets or strengths of the contexts. In some instances, teachers were aware of this, noting that despite positive experiences, the challenges were what stood out to them and consumed their thoughts and energy (Candice, WR3).

Teachers’ worked each day within a school culture with its own social codes and knowledge base. Woven into school cultures are the narratives teachers create and reinforce about students and families based on their own interpretations of their experiences. Teachers in this study found several cultural stereotypes woven into their school cultures, perhaps formed and perpetuated by teachers who may have interpreted their experiences without lenses of deep cultural understanding. Teachers felt tension between hearing these narratives and then experiencing the narratives through that lens, while also interpreting the same experience through a critical lens. Over the course of the school year, teachers felt themselves becoming more persuaded by some of the school-based narrative versions of experiences than their own critical analyses. This may be an effect of becoming immersed in the school culture with limited contact points with other professionals who could have supported and reinforced using a critical lens. It holds some implications for how to support teachers into and through their first year of teaching.

Despite negotiating tensions with existing stereotypes about students and families, teachers remained aware of the systemic ways that instructional and assessment practices enacted a system of power that disproportionately oppressed their students. Teachers felt

more comfortable and capable of making smaller shifts toward equity within their own classroom practices than tackling larger systemic issues from their role as classroom teacher, yet acknowledged that these larger systemic issues served as major barriers to the success of their work.

Interestingly, despite describing high levels of stress and emotion throughout their first year of teaching in an intercultural context, teachers in this study reported personal fulfillment from teaching in a community where they are needed. Teachers also felt that while their cultural and racial identity differences were catalysts for some of the experienced challenges, they believed that these differences did not prevent them from building genuine, caring relationships with students and others in the school community. These beliefs, along with teachers' propensity to approach their work with a critical perspective, indicate that their satisfaction from their work stems not from "fixing" the community, but from working to provide and model alternate perspectives and cultural codes to help students bridge school and community-based knowledge and learning.

Conclusion

Teachers' stories as they relate to cultural disequilibrium, culturally relevant teaching, and critical consciousness illustrate important insights into how these teachers' experience their work as it relates to being multicultural educators. Their perspectives on their experiences have important implications for ways in which first-year, intercultural, culturally relevant urban teachers can be supported in their work. The following chapter describes three additional themes that emerged from their stories about their work, and Chapter VI discusses how the findings from this chapter match with current research,

implications for teacher induction and transition programs in urban schools, and possible areas for additional research.

Chapter V

SALIENT THEMES FOR TEACHERS

The findings discussed in the previous chapter illustrate teachers' experiences with respect to cultural disequilibrium, culturally relevant teaching, and critical consciousness. These findings were determined through culling the data for stories in alignment with the study's research questions. However, given that one purpose of this study is to amplify teachers' voices by providing space for them to share stories about what is important to them as they teach through their first years, of equal importance are the themes that emerged in their stories beyond what was initially asked in the study's research questions. The following themes emerged and help illustrate a deeper, more complete understanding of how these teachers experienced their first year of teaching: learning to teach; relationships; and navigating the institutional culture of the school and city system.

As in Chapter IV, these three themes are described respectively, first by using the teachers' voice and stories to describe each theme. Following each description is an analysis by the researcher that highlights some of the ways that teachers' stories shape implications that may be considered for teacher induction and transition programs. These

implications are discussed in relation to current research, as well as additional needs for research, in Chapter VI.

Learning to Teach

Teachers in this study entered their teaching positions with a Master's degree in teaching from a college that is well-respected in the field. In addition to several courses on teaching methods and investigating social inequity in urban public education, graduates also completed a year-long student teaching experience across two different classroom contexts. By many measures valued in the field, teachers in this study entered their positions as well-prepared beginner teachers. It is important to note that, despite a rigorous preparation experience, teachers in this study readily recognized their own skill gaps and continuously expressed a value for their own ongoing growth and development, evolving as a teacher in the first year and beyond. Teachers explained their experiences with continuing to learn to teach by embracing ambiguity, building on ways that they had been prepared to teach, and projecting ahead to how they envisioned teaching in the future.

Evolving by Embracing Ambiguity

A key driver behind teachers' value for growth and adaptability was the reported ambiguity in their teaching contexts in multiple areas of their work. With curriculum and instruction, for example, Candice shared that she felt like she was "in a weird in-between-state" with supporting the school's transition to a new curriculum, yet needing to figure out the details of how to bring in the new curriculum, while continuing to address student skill gaps that were amplified and not adequately addressed within the new curriculum.

She noted that there was a similar level of ambiguity around school assessment procedures:

The general feeling among teachers was confusion. We did not know what assessments to use and we struggled to understand much of the new curricula. Furthermore, administrators knew just as little as we did about the programs, so there was no one to turn to for help or guidance – an issue that continues to this day. (WR4)

Similarly, Leigh shared that she sometimes found it “stressful to work somewhere where the curricula organization is so new and in flux,” but was optimistic about the progress she made with developing curricula throughout her first year, and how that will provide a stronger building block for her work in following years.

Both teachers also shared that there was ambiguity across the staff about some features of the school-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) practices, specifically with awarding positive student behaviors with currency from the school-wide token economy. Teachers felt that in the absence of clear guidelines, teachers were implementing this system differently across the school, which resulted in some confusion for students and families. Despite inconsistencies, teachers in this study reported developing their own management systems that utilized the school-wide system to support their success.

Valuing adaptability. While embracing ambiguous situations and expectations, teachers in this study also identified a need to adapt and respond to unforeseen challenges in the moment. This adaptability was identified as instrumental to their success as a teacher. Candice shared that despite feeling like she knew what to expect as a teacher, she still found herself surprised by the “countless and very real problems” that make teaching challenging (WR6). Candice’s reflections illustrate how valuable adaptability was in

situations ranging from mundane glitches to intense student safety concerns. One mundane challenge related to her instructional responsibilities was availability of teaching materials, including photocopies for lessons, which she found to be:

... an extremely difficult thing to do... A lot of individual lessons were unsuccessful because materials I expected to be ready were not... I could view those as un-successes, but really it was a learning experience, and so now I know that [when] I can't get copies immediately, ... I need to adapt accordingly. (I6)

Candice also talked about developing her skill with anticipating and responding to explosive student behaviors in the classroom. In one reflection, she described learning to read a students' body language and facial expressions to foresee aggressive behavior. She was able to use proximity and language to de-escalate the situation to reduce the potential impact on students' safety. While teachers did express frustration and concern about the impact of these unanticipated challenges on their students, they also expressed that their ability to adapt mitigated some of the potential negative impacts and built their teacher skill set to be able to respond accordingly. Candice said, "I've learned that unpredictable circumstances are inevitable and flexibility is a key attribute in succeeding as a teacher."

Developing responsive skill sets. Teachers in this study valued being adaptive and responsive to challenges as they arose, and two learning processes emerged as instrumental in their ability to do so: utilizing resources immediately available to them in their schools to learn as they go; and using knowledge from prior experiences.

Teachers spoke about their experiences with "trial and error" to resolve challenging or ambiguous situations. Toward the middle of her first year, Candice reflected on her experience with finding her way to an effective classroom management system, noting "I feel like finally after many, many months of trying different strategies, I'm seeing the results of it." Leigh shared "...it took me a while to realize that you need

to have students repeat back the instructions because that's where the break down occurred sometimes," adding that, "we actually thought that the break down was the task..., but no, it was really about what to even do." (FGA) Teachers also shared multiple stories about ways that they adapted student assignments, instructional methods, assessments, and planning practices based on what they were learning from trial and error, and learning from those errors, indicating that reflection was inherently woven into their practices.

Building from prior successes. Teachers also shared a reliance on, and value for, their prior experiences that they brought with them into their teaching roles. Leigh shared how her previous opportunities to taste teaching provided her with a helpful understanding from which she built her classroom management practices as a first-year teacher.

I was student teaching in the fall last year in third grade, [and the cooperating teacher] had... really high expectations and a management system in place, and I kind of try to emulate... the calm way that she handled things. Then, before I got hired at this school, I substituted here, in May and June of last year, after I finished [graduate school]. So I was already familiar with the bee bucks system. As a sub, I had bee bucks to hand out. So I kind of already knew the way the school did things... (I1)

Similarly, Candice shared that though she did not feel fully prepared to effectively manage some of the "severe emotional issues" in her classroom from day one, it was helpful to have had a student teaching experience in which she was able to watch her mentor teacher handle challenging situations. She added, "I feel like I'm learning as I go," when it comes to managing individualized behavior needs and supports that would be difficult to predict and prepare for prior to knowing her students. She then reflected:

I was a para before going back to school. I worked with a student who had Downs Syndrome, and he had a lot of behavioral issues, and actually, I feel like I learned

the most about dealing with challenging behavior from that experience... (I1)

Teachers shared that a key way in which they were able to respond to unpredicted challenges in their work was through reflective trial and error, building from what they were learning through their mistakes, as well as what they had learned as possible solutions through prior experiences.

Creating change. In evolving their teaching practices in response to challenges and ambiguity, a tension emerged between seeing a need for and feeling comfortable creating change within their teaching contexts. Teachers expressed developing comfort with creating changes in curriculum and assessments as they saw a need, and being able to justify their decisions. Candice shared that since lessons in the curriculum are “complicated and unclear,” she usually creates her lesson plans “loosely based on the curriculum.” She and her co-teacher also made adjustments to the formal assessment system in response to practical demands and ambiguous expectations for assessment practices.

I think at a certain point in the year, maybe half way through, we decided to just try [the new assessment] out on a couple students, and... we liked the assessment a little better. The books were more reader-friendly to the kids. The fonts were bigger, the pictures were bigger... the recording part itself was very similar to [the previously used assessment], so that wasn't a problem in terms of the shift we were making. And... we had the whole kit right there, so if we needed more copies of something, the CD was in there, the manual was in there, everything was there, and with [the previous assessment], it seemed like we were gathering random materials and borrowing materials from other teachers. So it just seemed like a natural shift. (I5)

Conversely, teachers expressed feeling less comfortable creating change in the school outside their classrooms, even when they perceived a strong need for it. Teachers' experiences with the culture of assessment and data was one area in which teachers

shared critiques of their schools. Leigh shared the following perspective on professional development sessions:

... [T]he instructor repeatedly emphasized that even assessing in the beginning, middle, and end of one lesson is too little; assessment should occur constantly throughout a lesson. I agree that assessment should be ongoing, but I struggle with the expectation that we must demonstrate this with tangible evidence. (WR5)

Candice also shared her perspective that the quantity and types of data collection guidelines she felt required to adhere to were more about “adult accountability” rather than actually doing what was helpful for her to teach her students. Despite these critiques, teachers in this study expressed that they did the best they could to meet the school-wide guidelines and policies.

Preservation of self. While teachers valued adaptability and being able to adjust their actions to be responsive to the immediate demands of the school community, there were two key ways in which they expressed a value for preserving aspects of themselves in the face of potentially adapting. One way in which teachers expressed this was by hanging on to some teaching practices and beliefs about teaching in the face of perceived resistance or opposition. Both teachers spoke about their challenge at the beginning of the year with finding a management style that worked for both them and their students, while remaining adamant about avoiding the prevailing tone of management in the school that would require them to yell or raise their voices at students. Leigh described the complexities of working with a very veteran co-teacher who was highly respected in the school for his achievements and practices related to classroom management, yet remaining persistent in her belief in her own management style. She shared, “When my co-teacher is not present, I am still able to keep the students under control by giving firm directives, repeating instructions, and reminding students of expectations often.” Candice

shared that even when given feedback from her school leadership to be “more vocal” with the students, which she perceived to mean louder and more willing to raise her voice, she stayed the course with developing her own style with her students and felt that she was able to become an effective classroom manager without compromising what was important to her.

A second way in which teachers in this study expressed a value for preserving themselves was through learning to set boundaries for the time, energy, and money they were investing in their work outside of the school day. Both teachers shared that preparing for teaching required investment of a lot of time outside of school hours. Candice explained that it was a process to learn to create limits for this, lest it become all-consuming and lead to burnout. Leigh echoed this, noting the importance of intentionally keeping up with friends who are not in education. Candice also shared her struggle with making decisions about making purchases for classroom materials, expressing that it was difficult to make the decision when some of her great ideas for lessons could not be brought to fruition because the materials were not available in her school, and she could not shoulder the expense of materials for the class. This realization, however, cycled back to her value for adaptability:

I’ve learned that success is not necessarily correlated with the amount of time or money I spend on planning or materials. I’ve learned the value of teamwork in helping a child. I’ve learned that unpredictable circumstances are inevitable and flexibility is a key attribute in succeeding as a teacher. (WR6)

Through her mindset for adaptability and responding to circumstances that at first seem less than ideal, Candice’s reflections show how she navigates the tension between achieving what she wants for her students and over-investing her resources to the point of burning out.

Building contextual knowledge. Teachers in this study also shared their value for building contextual knowledge of their schools as a key component of being adaptable within that context. Teachers shared stories about their efforts to gain knowledge and clarity about school practices regarding curriculum, assessment, and management. In addition to seeking clarification and support with correct implementation, or implementation that aligned with the intentions of the school, teachers in this study also talked about the context within which these instructional practices were being learned and developed. Candice shared that her school was transitioning to a new curriculum and assessment, and this was the pilot year for that shift. She explained that while she wanted more support with best instructional practices with the new materials, she knew that the support was unavailable because it was new to everyone, including school leadership. Though that understanding did not alleviate all frustrations with lack of clarity, it did inform the ways in which she responded to the challenge of learning school-based instructional practices during the school's transitional phase. Candice shared ways in which she took liberty and ownership with curricular and assessment decisions in her classroom. She spoke about her work with the piloted literacy curriculum in response to content gaps that she identified:

... nowhere in the [new literacy] curriculum do they mention organizing your writing, so I realized that's an important thing that they need to know... how an information text is organized. I don't know if this is from [a curriculum I used in student teaching], but [I] knew there was some sort of... hamburger organization chart for information writing:... the bun's the introduction,... the meat lettuce and tomatoes are details and facts, and the bottom of the bun is the conclusion. You know... they just really hung onto that... (I4)

She also described her experience with making decisions about assessment of her students, grounded in her learning from coursework at Northeast:

I definitely came away feeling like there are so many possibilities for assessment, and there are so many things that can be considered assessment, even things that you're naturally doing, so I feel like, even though I disagree with some of the mentalities that are going on about assessment within the school, I feel pretty confident about the fact that there are other ways to do it, so I sort of have a goal in mind of going in that direction and sort of stretching the beliefs currently [in the school], but still doing what I'm supposed to do at the same time. (I5)

In addition to gaining context on instructional practices related to their role as teacher, teachers in this study also valued opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the urban teaching context, and how school and instruction intersected with their students' lives. Candice shared, "... acquiring a deeper understanding of the reality of being an educator in an urban and low-income community will allow me to better adapt my teaching according to the real constraint that exist" (WR6).

While these teachers did share an aspiration of entering teaching to make a difference and create change for their students, both shared reflections that suggested that they understood they were stepping into a system that was more complex than what they currently understood, and that deepening their understandings was going to better enable them to make the changes they wanted to see. To this point, teachers explained their decisions to take a more passive role in school change, yielding to a stance of active learner. Candice shared, "My role in the school community this past year has been more passive. As a new teacher, I did a lot of observing and asking questions." Teachers shared that this active knowledge gathering gave them both context and confidence to make more adjustments to their work in the upcoming year.

[It is] a little bit difficult this year, but it also makes me hopeful for the future because next year I'll have been there for a year, experienced this community, and I'll know what it's about, and know the kinds of people I'll be working with, and more about the school itself, the options that exist. So I think I'll be much more educated in my conversations with parents and I'll be able to plan ahead a little bit more. (I3)

In this way, teachers viewed their active learning in their first year as an investment in a longer-term commitment to their school contexts through which they could enact some of the changes they hoped to see.

Meeting expectations. It is also noteworthy that teachers in this study intrinsically cared about meeting the expectations of their role. This is exemplified through teachers' stories about the stress they felt when trying to implement assessment practices with fidelity, even when there were unclear expectations for the practices, or they disagreed with the expectations. Leigh noted that she "never really had the time to really delve in and see what the scores meant on any one assessment and actually use that information." Despite gaining no value from administering the assessment to her students, she continued the cycle of giving assessments as required by school policy, and then would "just kind of... tuck it into a binder" before "going on to the next thing."

While teachers explained that some of the expectations they were striving to meet were vague or implicit, others were quite explicitly outlined in the Danielson rubric, the tool that was used for performance evaluations in their schools. Teachers explained that though they are aware of what Danielson outlines for them to do, they do not always do it, for a variety of reasons. Leigh shared,

I kind of have the list of ways I can communicate [with students' families] from Danielson and all that. I know what I'm supposed to do, it's just a matter of I'm not always doing it. (I3)

While teachers often remarked cavalierly about "failing" to meet Danielson requirements, sometimes in a joking tone, recurring references to Danielson highlights this set of teacher behaviors and competencies as a benchmark to which teachers frequently

compared themselves, even when they knew they were not meeting a benchmark to its highest level.

In addition to the expectations outlined in the formal performance evaluation tool, teachers shared stories about feedback that they received from the instructional leadership in their school that caused them concern. Leigh explained how she struggled to implement the feedback she received from her school leader for her writing instruction:

I've been told that I need to model more when I teach, so I've done that on my own, but I haven't actually seen anyone model a writing lesson to their kids... so that would've been nice. (I4)

Teachers generally did their best to make adjustments and improvements as advised by instructional leadership, but frequently felt that they did not receive enough information or support to make the shifts in their practices as effective as they could be.

Preparation to Teach

The ways in which teachers in this study were prepared for their roles surfaced often in their stories about their experiences in their first year.

Merging theory and practice. Teachers in this study shared ways in which their work in their preservice preparation program prepared them for their work in their teacher roles, notably in the areas of instructional and assessment practices. Leigh noted that “at [Northeastern] we did do a lot of curriculum writing, like lesson plan writing, (I4)” and that experience was helpful in her teacher role in which she was expected to meet with her grade team each week to develop curricula and plan instruction. Candice noted that:

... student teaching experiences and just seeing a variety of tools used to help students, ... different anchor charts in different classrooms, and different ways to

present information, and ... exposure to a variety of ways to teach, has been helpful. (I4)

Teachers also shared that their schools were using different curricula than what was used during their student teaching experiences, and while learning the new curriculum was challenging, they valued being able to use knowledge of other, previously used curricula and instruction to augment the curricula they were using during this school year. Both teachers shared that the construction of curricula was challenging, and usually messy, but they felt that modifications were not only necessary, but possible given their own skillsets.

Teachers in this study also talked about negotiating a balance, and tensions experienced, between theory and practice through their teacher preparation program. In some ways, teachers felt that there was too much emphasis on theory in their preparation program, leaving gaps in their practical skill sets in the area of classroom management. Teachers explained that while they were exposed to practical classroom management strategies through student teaching, it was ultimately the classroom cooperating teacher who owned the set up and reinforcement of the management system, and as student teachers, they simply gained practice with using a system that has already been established. Candice shared early in her first year of teaching:

Classroom management has been one of my greatest challenges as a first-year teacher. Student teaching does not adequately prepare a teacher for classroom management due to the fact that, although the student teacher can share and uphold expectations, the mentor teacher is primarily responsible for developing these expectations and routines. I believe it is only when one becomes the primary classroom teacher that he/she can really experience and establish classroom management. (WR1)

Teachers shared that they felt unprepared to set up a strong management system in their classrooms from day one of school, and that this was a practical skill that they needed to learn as they went. Leigh commented that:

...[I]n grad school, a lot of it was... philosophical and not... really practical, and most of what I learned was from... actual experiences in the classroom... [W]e didn't really talk about... classroom management in such tangible ways as we could have when just taking courses at Northeast. (I1)

Leigh also noted that practice with skills for setting up class management systems, even in the form of role playing with fellow preservice teachers, would have been a helpful component of preparation to teach in this context.

At the same time, teachers shared a value for the contextual knowledge that they were able to build through their theory-based graduate work with identity and the sociohistorical context of urban schooling. Candice shared that despite not fully understanding the value of it during her preservice program, she highly values having that knowledge in the back of her mind now that she is teaching (I6). As described earlier in this chapter, the exposure to the theory underpinning inclusive education was woven into the mindsets of the teachers in this study, and served as a lens through which they perceived and made sense of their experiences.

Learning by doing. Teachers in this study shared that opportunities to do and practice their work were important to them feeling prepared to do it well. They named learning experiences through student teaching, specifically in communities similar to that in which they were teaching, as important to their preparation. Leigh explained that teaching students of a similar demographic gave her an opportunity to practice communicating with families across cultural barriers as a student teacher, which better prepared her for this aspect of her work as a classroom teacher. While classroom

management, and particularly managing extreme student behaviors, was consistently mentioned as a persistent challenge across the first year, teachers in this study did point to ways in which prior work experience, including that of paraprofessional, substitute teacher, and camp counselor, allowed them to develop a skill set from which they could build as a classroom teacher.

Learning by observing. In addition to getting practice with the work required of them as classroom teachers, teachers in this study also articulated a value for opportunities to learn by observing more experienced teachers do the work. As noted previously, Leigh shared that in developing her management style with her own students in her first year, she attempted to emulate the system of high expectations reinforced with a calm tone that she had observed in one of her student teaching placements. Teachers valued opportunities to observe multiple ways of doing something to build a bank of options to pull from in their own practices. Candice explained:

Every student teaching placement I was in, every one of them used the [same curriculum] model, but in terms of... materials used, every teacher had something different that they brought to the table, and that was really helpful, just having [that] in the back of my mind... I feel like I have different images in my mind for different topics, like the things I said with the hamburger... I don't know where I saw it or where I heard it, but I know that I've seen it used before and it was something useful... (I4)

Opportunities to observe more experienced teachers was valued beyond the preservice preparation period and through at least the first year of teaching. Both teachers in this study described ways that they appreciated, or would have like more opportunities for, observing experienced teachers' practices. Leigh described ways that she sought opportunities to observe other teachers in her school implement instructional practices she was trying to develop. She shared ways that she brought learning from other teachers

into her own practice, and wanted more opportunities to develop herself in this way.

I would have liked to see more modeling of certain lessons, because when you read them on paper, you might decide to do one thing, but then you hear about another class that did it another way, and you think, “oh that would’ve been great,”... I’ve gone in to see one lead teacher do some writing lessons, and that was really helpful, and I restructured one thing that I was doing. But generally, I haven’t really seen that much modeling since I’ve been teaching... (I4)

Leigh noted that aside from making the time to go observe other teachers in her school, the scheduling of instructional times within and across grades makes inter-classroom observations difficult. Candice also expressed value for opportunities to learn from more experienced teachers, including seeking resources outside of her school. She shared, “I love using Pinterest for charts. I just feel like there are so many great resources out there, so I’ve copied lots of other charts from other people” (I4). Teachers in this study believe and value that there are experienced, good teachers at work in the field who have figured out some of the challenges they are working through, and they sought those experiences as resources in their own development.

Teaching in the Future

In addition to sharing thoughts about the preparation received prior to their first year of teaching, teachers in this study spoke of forward-looking development in their career, illustrating not only a commitment to developing and improving, but also an intent to remain in the field of education as a teacher beyond their first year.

Refining practice. Through their stories and reflections, teachers shared that they hoped to use the lessons and knowledge learned during their first year to refine their practices for their second year, especially in curriculum, management, and family engagement (Candice, I3; Leigh, WR6).

Influence in the school community. While teachers in this study did share ways in which they made adjustments to practices within their own classrooms, teachers shared that they did not feel as though they had the capacity to influence larger changes in the school and schooling system in their role in the first year. Instead, teachers looked ahead to the second year to act on the ways they hoped to influence change after gaining contextual knowledge during the first year. At the end of her first year, Candice reflected on her observations and knowledge building:

I now feel able to actually evaluate those observations and answers and be more active and confident in my decisions. My goals for the year include: taking a more active role in the school and voicing my opinions; creating more efficient and organized systems in the classroom to make room for more teaching time; inviting parents to be more involved in their child's education and finding creative ways to do so; using curriculum as a guide and not getting caught up in the details; gaining clarity on the types of assessments to use in the classroom and how to use assessment to inform short-term and long-term instruction. (WR6)

Leigh shared that some of the confidence she felt at the end of her first year with voicing her opinion about change in the school community in the second year stemmed from the relationships she built in her first year. She explained that going into her second year, she would feel more comfortable going to her principal and asking directly about school practices that do not make sense to her.

Career pathways. When speaking about career ambitions, teachers in this study spoke about their long-term commitment to the field of education. Their concrete career trajectories for as far as they could see at the time of this study were to remain classroom teachers at their current schools and build expertise in their work. Toward the end of her first year, Leigh shared that her goal was “just staying at the school and hopefully getting tenure in a few years, and maybe sticking in one grade level for more than one year” (I2) in order to build on grade level content instructional knowledge. Candice shared that

through her work, she has learned that she has a stronger passion for the work related to children's social and emotional development than academics, and may eventually pursue a role that allows her to do more focused work in that area. Teachers also shared that though they had been warned about burn-out and longevity of teaching careers in their schools, neither had planned to leave the school or community in a predetermined timeframe. Instead, teachers spoke about the relationships in their schools that sustained them and kept them invested in their work.¹

Analysis of Findings about Learning to Teach

It is noteworthy that, despite receiving what would be considered strong teacher preparation by many measures, teachers approached their work as first-year teachers from a learner stance rather than an expert stance, which is consistent with what was reinforced in their preservice program. Teachers identified many ambiguities in the work of their role, and interpreted this as a necessity to learn more in order to be better able to do the work, not simply a dysfunction of the school community. This connects with an analysis noted above in which teachers did not approach working in the community from a “savior” perspective, acknowledging the importance of building their contextual knowledge base.

Teachers valued being adaptive and developing new skill sets for the demands of the job in order to respond to challenges as they arose. While their “figure it out as we go” ambition allowed them to move past many challenges, having an experience base to draw from, as well as a developing understanding of school-based contextual knowledge,

¹ At the time that this chapter was written, during the 2017-18 school year, both teachers were in their fifth year of teaching in the same schools.

seemed to provide teachers with a metaphorical map they could use to plot the path for *how* to best get past the barriers. This highlights the possibility that preservice experiences can help teachers build a relevant experience bank, and how teachers can be supported to remain reflective during their first year in order to metacognitively build their context-specific experience bank.

There is evidence in the stories shared in this section that teachers felt more comfortable making smaller, classroom-based changes that they deemed necessary, especially when they felt they could justify their decisions, with justifications often built from prior practical experiences or knowledge from coursework. Teachers self-reported that they were less likely to address larger, school-wide needs for change that they identified. Self-perceived capacity for change seems to be connected to teachers' familiarity with the context in which they are making the change. It is possible, then, that increased levels of contextual knowledge in the first year of teaching could lead to stronger feelings of capacity to address larger, systemic needs for change, from their role as teacher.

Also noteworthy in these stories is the way teachers made sense of their graduate coursework that focused on building theoretical knowledge of systemic injustices in urban public education. Teachers reported at the time of their studies, it was not immediately clear how it would be valuable in their day-to-day work as teachers, and once becoming teachers, they expressed regret that they did not have more practical strategies in their repertoire (especially for classroom management). It is seen throughout most of their shared stories, however, that their understandings of systemic injustices serve as a tool that they use to understand and respond to challenges in their daily work.

While this reinforces the analysis that the theoretical understanding were useful components of these teachers' preservice preparation (this is also explicitly noted by the teachers in other parts of this study), it also draws attention to how to blend the theory-practice dichotomy more intentionally during preservice preparation. It is important to understand how teachers could be primed during their preservice work on the applicability of theoretical knowledge in responding to issues in their daily work as teachers, potentially including opportunities for practice of this application during preservice preparation so that they feel more prepared with strategies from day one of teaching.

Relationships

A central theme that threaded through most stories that teachers shared was the significance of relationships in their work. Relationships that teachers reference most frequently in their stories fell into four broad categories: relationships with school administrators or others in a supervisory role; relationships with peer colleagues, especially their co-teachers; relationships with students' families; and, relationships with their students.

Relationships with Administrators

There were several ways that teachers in this study described and perceived their relationships with administrators in their schools. Guidance and mentorship was one way in which teachers approached this relationship. Teachers sought advice, guidance, and affirmation from their school leadership, and experienced this in multiple ways. Leigh noted of her first year:

I asked more questions than other new teachers. And the people, like administrators, appreciate that you care enough to want to know how to do stuff, and not worrying that it's going to make you look bad, and knowing that it makes you look better if you're showing this curiosity and confusion because you're a first-year teacher. It's almost arrogant if you act like you know everything when you don't. (FGB)

Candice shared this perspective, explaining that she “usually interact[s] with the principal and/or assistant principal multiple times a day to ask questions, share major concerns about students, and to seek help in handling severe behavior issues” (WR2). She added that her administration is “very accessible, visible, and involved in the school community.”

While teachers shared an appreciation of availability of their school leadership for these relationships, teachers occasionally felt disappointed by the guidance they received. Candice described a meeting that she had with her principal regarding support for student behavior:

One time I went to an administrator when I was really at a loss. Me and my co-teacher were really at a loss with what to do with this one student who was being violent, and we couldn't seem to do anything about [it]. And when we went to her for advice, she quickly made a phone call to make sure that he was on certain medication or something. I don't think he was on [medication], nor do I think he needs [it], so that was pretty much the end of that conversation, and I didn't think that was a solution to the problem. Maybe a quick fix, but not really a way to go about tackling a problem like that. (FGA)

While Candice did not feel that her principal's interventions always provided the appropriate supports for her or her students, she did value that the principal was a reliable “line of defense” in her management plan, noting that while teachers are expected to establish management systems within their classrooms, calling on the school social worker or psychologist as necessary, school administrators “are very willing to step in when needed (WR1).” Conversely, Leigh shared feeling less supported by the vice

principal supervising her work, noting that because her tone sometimes feels “condescending and snarky,” Leigh feels intimidated and does not attempt to talk to her often. Leigh shared a story about one interaction that contributed to this perspective:

I asked her the other day for a guided reading set, and she said, “I don’t have them ready yet. Sorry, you can come back on Monday,” and I said, “Okay, I’ll be back on Monday,” and she was like, “I know you’ll be back on Monday.” And I was like, “I don’t know what that means.” [laughing] She... says stuff like that all the time. (I2)

Despite this challenging relationship with her supervisor, Leigh felt generally optimistic about her relationships with school leadership staff. Speaking about her principal, Leigh shared appreciation for her strong communication, including weekly notices that include “shout outs” for staff members, affirming good work in the school community.

Teachers demonstrated their value for mentorship from their principals and identified additional ways that they would have liked more support from this relationship. Candice spoke about wanting stronger management of curriculum materials and resources.

I’m still so blown away that we’ve been allowed to go through this whole school year without a teacher’s guide for math, or some of the manipulatives... I think that we have to be supplied with all the materials in order to be expected to carry it out effectively. So I just wanted to emphasize the point that administration should definitely be a little bit more involved in making sure we have everything we need... (I4)

She also shared that even though the curriculum was new in the school that year, it would have been helpful “if there was someone designated as the leader, or question answerer, or someone to go to” (I4) with questions about instruction.

While valuing this relationship as a source of advice and guidance, teachers also shared issues that they experienced with the feedback they received from administrators and the feedback process. Leigh reflected on the consistency of the content of feedback

she received from different administrators, and noted, "...the vice principal thinks differently than the principal about what's lacking in the lesson, so I don't know" (I2).

The conflicting feedback she received from school leadership created a barrier for her in her development. Candice shared that she had a feeling that there were specific expectations that her school leaders had in mind, but "it wasn't clearly communicated" (I5), and led to unnecessary stress from trying to guess what the expectations were.

Clarity of expectations was something that teachers in this study seemed to expect from school leadership, even with repeated experiences to the contrary. Both teachers shared stories about events at their schools that were, from their perspectives, unnecessarily stressful as a result of receiving too little direction from school leaders. Candice explained how this impacted her experience with leading clubs at her school.

We have clubs this year, and literally the instructions were, it was written in the book that we look in in the morning, "Thursday afternoon you'll have clubs." And that was it. All the teachers had to somehow try to guess what this meant, and everyone had to pick a club, and divide up the students, and it has been... every week has been a disaster because there were no agreed upon, or clearly set out expectations for what this is supposed to look like. And we're all scared that we'll have an observation during the club too. So, it's supposed to be an enrichment opportunity for the students, a positive, and instead it's an added stress to our plates... A lot of this stress can be eliminated if something from up top was made clear. (FGB)

Leigh shared how she felt lack of clear communication from school leadership interfered with effectiveness of the school-wide behavior management system.

[C]ommunication between PBIS and administration and the teachers hasn't been that consistent or clear, so not everyone is using the bee bucks in the same way necessarily. We're working on getting better about that, but there are so many other things we have to think about all the time, that I feel like it's not as organized as it could be. (I1)

Teachers' stories demonstrate their preference for more prescriptive guidance on school-wide matters than what they received.

Teachers also indicated that the quality of their relationship with administrators influenced how comfortable they were with voicing their ideas and giving feedback to school leadership to support school improvement. Candice described her process of building this relationship:

I just felt very welcomed and part of the community from the very beginning, and I saw that other teachers were able to talk very freely and openly with [administrators]... anywhere at any time, and I was definitely hesitant at first. I felt a little uncomfortable approaching them about any question that happened to come to my head, but ...[it] made me feel a little more involved and connected, which made asking questions even easier. I guess the overall I just give credit to the administrators and being willing to be out there and seem sort of like an equal, not... hiding in an office somewhere. Their doors are always open, and teachers are in and out throughout the day. (12)

While Leigh indicated that her challenging relationship with one vice principal posed one barrier to this, her positive relationship with her principal led her to gain confidence with expressing her opinions over time. Looking ahead to her second year of teaching, she shared:

I think because it's not going to be my first-year teaching anymore, and because I did get along with my principal and one of the vice principals, I think I would be more comfortable with just going to her privately and just telling her [my perspective]. Because now I don't feel so nervous about everything as I did [in my first] year, so I would literally just go into her office one day and ask what's going on. (15)

Teachers seemed to take time to develop relationships with school administrators by asking questions to build contextual knowledge. The rapport built in doing so over time bolstered teachers' confidence in the types of topics they might broach with school leaders.

Relationships with Colleagues

Stories and reflections shared by teachers in this study illustrated the collaborative nature of relationships that they developed with other teachers and staff at their schools.

Teachers expressed valuing the informal, organic collaboration that developed out of need and proximity, specifically the collaboration that occurred with their co-teachers.

Candice reflected:

I would say that my most effective collaboration has been with my co-teacher... [I]t's just an ongoing conversation all day, every day about our students. And we really have managed to get along ... we just have very similar beliefs about our students, and moral beliefs, and that helps us work together in the classroom.
(FGA)

Leigh ascribed a similar nature to her relationship with her co-teacher, noting, "We really care about the kids. We spend a lot of time together... during our preps and out lunch just... figuring out what we're doing for them" (FGA). Leigh described a similar informal collaboration among her grade team, noting that her classroom often serves as the hub for this informal collaboration.

[B]ecause [my co-teacher and I are] already in our classroom, the rest of the team will just come to our room during down time. And usually they'll bring students with them because someone is always not in a prep or not at lunch, so we just have... the fourth grade community in my classroom all the time, trying to figure out what to do for these kids... (FGA)

Teachers valued and seemed invested in the informal collaboration and support opportunities, speaking appreciatively of the comradery generated through these relationships.

Teachers also talked about formal collaboration structures in which they participated at their schools. In some ways, teachers valued these opportunities, naming some of the unintended outcomes of those relationships to be helpful in gaining

contextual knowledge about the school and students. As she explained the work of the data committee that she served on, Leigh commented:

...[I]t's nice to be on the team with them because they have so much experience in teaching. And also, they're not on my grade level, so they have... different insights into my students that I wouldn't get just by talking to people that I work with every day. ... [T]hey know my students from when they were younger. And they see me struggling with a kid, and they're like, wow, look how much they've changed since they were in second grade. (I2)

In addition to the unintended collaboration and context-building opportunities, teachers expressed value for some of the intentional purposes of formal collaborations arranged for in their schools. Leigh appreciated the value of the school-wide PBIS system in which students needing Tier 2 support would be matched with other adults in the school with whom they would check in regularly about their behavior. Leigh felt that this was a valuable support for two of her students in this program, noting that building this network of support for the students gives them more opportunities to talk about issues they do not necessarily feel comfortable talking about with their classroom teachers. Leigh valued this collaboration in supporting students' success.

Conversely, teachers also described formal collaboration structures that were not valued, often because they did not efficiently meet the intended outcome of the collaboration. Candice shared that formal grade level planning meetings did not seem beneficial to her because she and her co-teacher had often already created their lesson plans through informal collaboration methods, and formal meeting time was used to inform the third teacher on the grade team what they would be doing, so the nature of the meeting felt less collaborative. Similarly, she found that formal collaboration with her school psychology team did not yield true collaboration. She explained her experiences with feeling that the school psychologist was not well informed about the students whom

they were discussing and that her own opinion was not given the consideration it deserved. Formal collaboration structures were only valued to the extent that there was an exchange of information toward an outcome that was perceived as beneficial.

Teachers also spoke about ways that they wanted more opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge with their colleagues, and explained that they had tended to isolate themselves in their own classrooms and within the close relationships they had built with their co-teachers. Candice explained:

I think we isolate ourselves a little bit... [W]e just tend to stay in our classroom and talk to each other about what we need to do. We have... two other first grade teachers but one of them teaches a bilingual bridge classroom with K and 1, so she's a little separate. But the other first grade teacher, she's a first-year teacher, and it's more like she comes to us with questions rather than having a collaborative conversation, so we definitely could work on branching out to work with other professionals in the building. (FGA)

Teachers identified specific collaboration structures they thought would be helpful to inform their work, including vertical structures that would allow them to understand continuity of academic content across the grades, and structures between classroom teachers and support service providers, such as speech and language, to understand what students are working to develop and monitor progress. In the absence of these formal collaboration structures, teachers in this study leveraged personal relationships and informal collaboration opportunities to gain contextual information. Leigh shared her challenges with finding time to talk with teachers on other grades, but added, "I have a friend on the second grade [team] that I know from Northeast, so I'll go down there, and I know all the second-grade teachers really well" (FGA). Teachers also described seizing opportunities to connect in the hall or at the door when service providers picked up or dropped off their students to learn about what their students were learning. Despite

working in these informal collaborations, teachers expressed wanting formal opportunities to do this to help with scheduling and time barriers that often interfere with informal opportunities to do this.

Valuing co-teaching relationships. Through their stories about collaboration, teachers illustrated their value for the wealth of knowledge that existed among their more experienced colleagues at their schools. This value was especially apparent in their descriptions of their work with their co-teachers. Leigh spoke often about the ways in which she benefitted from co-teaching with a 20-year veteran teachers and learning from his command of classroom management, style of parent communication, and approaches to instruction, sharing that, “he’s always been an ICT teacher, so he really has the system down for parallel teaching and co-teaching, and kind of flipping back and forth” (I2). Candice echoed the value for working with her co-teacher, describing an additional layer of emotional support that she found instrumental to her work, particularly as it related to navigating the challenges in her work.

I think we just spend so much time together, you know, we’re together throughout the day, every day... [W]e’re preparing at the same time and reflecting at the same time... I think we’re just... in an emotional space a lot of time, so I think we feel very connected... I think we’ve had some challenges this year, so we do spend a lot of time complaining, but I think we both find that to be a little therapeutic in terms of feeling like we’re in it together... [B]ut also a lot of times..., we’ll go home feeling a little bit defeated, but the next day, one of us will have had some sort of you know, rejuvenation. (I2)

Candice explained how she valued the opportunities for rejuvenation that exist in her relationship with her co-teacher. Both teachers also expressed value for the ways that having two teachers in the classroom allowed for instructional structures, such as flexible grouping and small group instruction, that allowed them to be more responsive to their students’ needs.

Cultivating co-teaching relationships. Though teachers valued their co-teaching relationships, they also shared that these relationships required intentional cultivation. They shared that their relationships centered around a common set of values about education and positive perspective toward their students, which served as a foundation, but differences, such as those in teaching styles, were also evident. Leigh explained:

I have a lot of strong opinions about education, and I feel like he's willing to listen to what I have to say. And he also has his ideas, but we kind of... make it work. And he's very calm about things, so I was kind of, "Oh my goodness, this student is really struggling at x, y, and z," and he's like, "It will be fine. We'll do this, we'll do that," like it will work itself out. He's also not the most organized person in the world, and I'm really, really organized, so in that sense, he really appreciates having me around, because I keep the classroom organized... [I]f we are parallel teaching and we need to know where the materials are, he... made the math materials, but doesn't remember where he put them. I feel like we kind of balance each other out in a way. (I2)

Leigh also shared ways that she and her co-teacher talked through differences in opinion about curricula. While her co-teacher was originally resistant to using a particular literacy curriculum, Leigh explained aspects of the curriculum that she felt would be useful to their students and was able to gain his agreement to using those elements. Leigh noted that her co-teacher respected that she was able to justify her opinion, providing reasons why she thought those aspects of the curriculum were good.

Working across identity differences. As teachers developed strong working relationships with their co-teachers, they shared ways that identity influenced their experiences, specifically in the area of classroom management, an aspect of teaching where teachers in this study explained that they struggled the most. Candice shared that her co-teacher's cultural identity was more similar to that of the students, and that her management style was also more familiar to students, leading to higher responsiveness to her co-teacher at first. Leigh shared her belief that her students also yielded a higher level

of respect and responsiveness to her co-teacher's management style because of his male presence.

As previously described, teachers also noted ways that social identity among school staff influenced their experiences at the school. Leigh shared that while students seemed to share a common racial and cultural background, the teaching staff was more diverse (FGB). She added that it is a positive attribute of the staff, enabling students in the school to see a model of diverse professionals working together productively. In contrast, Candice was one of a few White teachers on staff, with teachers mostly sharing the same racial and cultural identity as the students. Being in the clear cultural "other" in the school, she noted challenges that came with lower student responsiveness to her management style, and that it felt like an issue to her.

Seeking advice. While the co-teaching relationship was identified as a key relationship to building the support and knowledge-base teachers needed to do their work, teachers also shared the cyclic process of reaching out to colleagues for advice and information, in turn leading to relationships that led to more knowledge-building opportunities. Leigh shared:

I think I made more connections by needing people's advice. [My co-teacher] and I are always asking the math coach for help, and now the math coach and the literacy coach come to me to work on special projects that they're doing because I've built that relationship. So now I have someone in the building who is really there for me when I'm having trouble with math instruction because I asked her questions. (FGB)

This further illustrates teachers' valuing the wealth of knowledge that exists in their colleagues' experiences across their schools.

Practicing discernment. In school contexts full of experience and expertise, teachers learned to practice discernment as they sought and received advice. Candice

stated, “I think asking advice from colleagues is really important. I’ve also learned that I shouldn’t just ask advice from one person and follow it” (FGA). Leigh described exercising discernment in the management practices used by her co-teacher, explaining that he “was very loud” and “took away a lot of recess” for the class, which she felt was not appropriate given the age of the students (15). Leigh decided that, despite seeing her co-teacher’s management style gain student compliance and prompt them to meet high expectations, she would not espouse that management style, instead working to develop her own management style to be used in tandem in their classroom.

Similarly, Candice’s experiences through which she learned about students’ families from her colleagues led her to decide that the reality of the situation was more complex than their perspectives alone.

I have sat through several school-wide staff meetings in which dedicated teachers express their deep frustrations with families and their repeated and failed attempts to get families involved in helping their children. Many teachers have expressed that families do not take any responsibility in their children’s academic success and they place full responsibility on teachers. (WR3)

Candice shared that while she first rejected these statements by her colleagues, some of her own experiences as a teacher started to lend credibility to their perspectives. This tension is woven into many of the stories and reflections Candice shared throughout this study.

Relationships with Families

In sharing stories about interactions with their students’ families, three key areas of teachers’ interest emerged: parents’ involvement with their student’s success with schooling; cyclical mistrust between teachers and parents; and, communication or miscommunication that influences the partnership.

Parent involvement. The relationship between teachers and families was described in many ways to be ineffectively supporting students, and in some ways broken to the extent of damaging students' academic success. Teachers shared stories illustrating ways that they envisioned parents could engage to provide stronger support for their children, including following through on teacher requests for support at home, and attending school events and meetings more regularly.

Homework was one way in which teachers gauged students' support from parents at home. Leigh explained:

I just think they're not paying enough attention to their kids doing their homework, ... as a general rule. Some of the parents I know make sure their kids do their homework. Like half my class does their homework, and I think half of them are being told by their parents, do your homework. But we've told some parents they're not reading enough. They're not doing their homework. And it just continues. (I3)

Candice shared similar concerns with her students missing opportunities for academic reinforcement through their homework assignments. Both teachers adjusted the content of their homework assignments to review and practice previously taught content to reduce the amount of support students would need from an adult to complete it. They remained frustrated, however, about low homework completion and perceived that parents were not supporting students with a homework routine that required them to complete the assignments.

Candice also shared her concerns about attendance for several of her students.

Initially when I saw that attendance was really bad for some students, I thought maybe that there was some extenuating circumstances, and I was a lot more forgiving. [B]ut then after having conversations with parents about that attendance, and their excuse being that, like the weather wasn't good, and they weren't really sure if school was open, and obviously there are many ways to find out if school is open, I just feel like these excuses are not acceptable. (I3)

She expressed frustration with parents meeting the responsibility of getting their children to school because she felt she was held accountable for the students' academic learning whether the children were in school or not.

Teachers also expressed frustration with parents' lack of follow through on ways that they intended to partner to support students. Leigh passionately explained:

[The parents will] be like, "How can I help my kid?" And I'll be like, "You can do x, y, and z." And I'll ask, "Did you do x, y, and z?" And they're like, "No." I'm like, "You just asked me what you could do to help your kid!" (FGA)

Candice shared a similar perspective:

[I]t feels like there's a lot of talk and very little follow through... I can pretty much guarantee that any meeting I have set up with a parent is not actually going to happen at that time because most of the time they just don't show up, and don't say anything about it afterward. And we request meetings over really important issues, like being absent half of the time, or not doing any homework whatsoever, real concerns about whether or not they can go on to the next grade... (FGA)

While teachers shared that there was a small number of parents with whom they each had positive relationships, they felt a disproportionate amount of responsibility and accountability for students' academic learning.

As an early childhood teacher, Candice also shared concerns she had with gaps she observed in her students' basic knowledge, such as days of the week and vocabulary for family relationships, which she believed hindered students' acquisition of grade-level content knowledge (WR3). As a fourth grade teacher, Leigh shared similar concerns about vocabulary knowledge.

We're doing character traits now. And they have just a limited list to choose from, which... doesn't really matter, but it gets so boring after a while. Like they have 5 character traits that they know. So [I am] trying to teach other ways of saying character traits, but getting those visuals so they actually understand the nuances in different words. Because a lot of them don't really talk that much at home, or don't really talk with rich vocabulary at home. (FGB)

While accepting a role in teaching this vocabulary through her instruction, Leigh also referenced an expectation that this content could otherwise be taught through exposure to rich vocabulary in their conversations with adults outside of school. She also noted a larger systemic disconnect regarding the gaps in vocabulary and knowledge, noting “[I]t’s an expectation in our society that parents are involved and they’re having these conversations at home, but my students are not” (I3).

Inviting parent engagement. In describing their interactions with parents, teachers share several formal ways in which they have tried to engage parents by communicating to them what is happening inside the classroom, including newsletters, prearranged conferences, and curriculum nights. Teachers expressed frustration with lack of success with these attempts. Leigh explained:

[T]he fourth grade writes letters to the families because the school told us that would be a good idea. They’re written in English and Spanish, and they’re very thorough. They tell them... what websites they can go on at home, and... half of our students do have Internet, so they could, and they don’t. And we say if you have any questions, let us know. And then I’ll see the letter in the kid’s backpack when I put the one in for next month. And it’s just frustrating that I put in all this effort... (FGA)

Candice also shared that even more targeted attempts to reach out to parents by phone is usually disappointing, as phone numbers and contact information are not kept up to date, so teachers are not able to reach parents as readily as they would like.

Teachers shared that their most successful opportunities to communicate with families is through informal ways when they happen to see each other, which is almost always exclusively at school pick up. Candice noted:

[T]here have been parents where we will just informally meet at the end of the day, and they’ll ask a question about how the student’s doing, or I’ll just let them know something good they did that day, or something that we can improve upon, and those conversations have been good. It seems the parents who I see and do

come to pick their children up, when we have those exchanges..., there's just more opportunity to have effective communication. Unfortunately, a lot of these other parents, I don't see them that much... [I]t's more difficult to have that kind of conversation. (I3)

While teachers noted that this opportunity for informal communication with families was valuable, it did not present opportunities for engaging all students' families and did not fully meet teachers' needs for access to families.

Types of parent involvement. Amplifying teachers' frustrations about opportunities to engage with parents and gain their support for student academic achievement, is teachers' experience with parents astutely navigating school-based service systems to gain a benefit that they want for their children. One way that Candice saw this happen was with the behavior plan in place for a student in her class.

[A] lot of our goals throughout the day are to have [the student] be more a member of the class, and slowly she's gotten a lot better with that, but the mother really, throughout the year, has been very indirectly saying that she would like her to have a para or be in a smaller setting. [B]ut the way she's presented it is like she wants us to be the ones to say this, to make it happen, but we have not done that because we really didn't feel that that was necessary... I guess she requested having a para for her daughter a few months ago, and so suddenly... a whole ... IEP team had to do all sorts of observations and reports where we gave our opinion about whether or not there should be a para for the student. And we had a meeting, and... there was no opportunity to share any of that information. It was just decided in advance by the principal that she would have a para. So that was in place immediately. (I3)

While experiences like these fueled frustration, teachers shared other stories about ways that parents engaged in classroom learning experiences that teachers found beneficial. Leigh's class hosts Fun Fridays, an event to which parents are invited to play content-based games with students during the school day. She shared that students do get excited when their parents are able to come, but most parents are not able to, and students do not seem to have an expectation that their parents will be there. She added:

I noticed that they do like having other parents, like other grown-ups, around in the class. [T]his fun Friday, we were working on math games, and this one parent was helping this one girl play. And I think, it wasn't her parent, but she was happy to have extra help, so I think they like it. (I3)

Leigh shared that she also enjoyed having parents come on class field trips, explaining that it was helpful to have extra support with supervising the children throughout the day outside of the school building.

Understanding parent involvement. As teachers shared their experiences with different types, levels, and expectations of parents' engagement with their children's schooling experiences, teachers also shared their understandings about why parents may be engaging in the ways they were. One consideration that teachers expressed was possible cultural customs of parents to defer to the school professionals for their children's academic learning. Leigh noted it could be that school was "separate from family and community wherever they grew up" (FGA). Further considering cultural perspectives, teachers posited that within the culture of poverty, there are fewer expectations of the utility of formal education. Teachers also considered that parents may have had negative experiences with formal schooling themselves and are therefore deterred from active engagement within the school. Leigh explained:

I can only think of something that I studied in grad school that [parents] may not have had a positive experience with school and teachers, so they kind of defer to us as the authority figure. [They may] come because they know they're supposed to, but once they're there, they don't know what to do then. (I3)

Despite attempting to understand why parents may not be visibly engaged in their children's formal education, teachers also expressed genuine confusion about how parents spend their time during the days, and why they did not want to be more present in their children's daily school life. Candice shared how some staff at her school joke about

parents dropping off and picking up their children wearing pajamas, indicating that they had nothing productive to do during the day, but still did not consistently get their children to school on time or support their children's success in other ways. While Candice approached this situation knowing that it was more complex than it appeared on the surface, and seeking to understand more deeply, this was not a frustration that she was able to resolve by the end of her first year.

Mistrust. The cycle of mistrust characterized the parent-teacher relationship experiences shared by teachers in this study. Candice explained that though she had experienced positive parent-teacher relationships with a small handful of her students' families, "most of [her] response is centered around more negative experiences because they have had a more profound impact on [her] teaching experience as a whole" (I3). Candice described a cycle of miscommunication and unmet expectations between parents and teachers in the community, which led to deeply rooted suspicion of each other's motives and intentions that was in place long before they became teachers in the community.

Teachers explained intentionally making attempts to disrupt that cycle. Candice described hearing stories from colleagues about low expectations of students' parents, and consciously choosing to reject their perspective, dismissing their perspective as "jaded." Both teachers shared their optimism with building open lines of communication with families from the beginning of the year, including being intentional about making contact with parents for positive reasons.

However, despite efforts, both teachers described unwillingly participating in a cycle that seemed bigger than them, or what they had the capacity to change on a large

scale. Candice described multiple experiences that diminished her hope for building trusting relationships with her students' families. This was illustrated as she recounted one interaction with a parent of a child who presented extreme behavior challenges.

At the beginning of the year, a student's parents told us an elaborate story about their child never having gone to a new school before and how concerned they were about his academics. I later found out that he had previously been in several schools and had severe behavioral issues. When approached about the behavioral issues, the parents explicitly said that it is the school's job to fix them. (WR3)

Leigh shared several stories about ways that she requested parents work with their children on academic skills development at home, and despite agreeing to do so, did not sustain follow-through for more than a few times. "They're like, 'Okay, sure, yes I got it,' but then nothing actually happens. But they're not actually saying, 'No, I won't do that.' They just don't do it" (I3). Teachers explained that with repeated experiences of this nature, they learned to adjust their expectations to match their experiences, and unwittingly became complicit in this cycle of mistrust.

Communicating across language barriers. While teachers noted parents' inaccessibility as an important barrier to building open communication, they also spoke frequently about the challenges of communicating across the Spanish-English language barrier. Most students' families spoke Spanish as a first language, with varying degrees of proficiency in speaking and understanding English. Both teachers in this study spoke English as a first language; Leigh had a conversational level of proficiency in speaking and understanding Spanish. Teachers felt that language was a barrier to communicating with parents naturally and authentically, and even with the support of a translator, still created "distance" between teachers and parents (Candice, FGA).

Teachers attempted to work across this barrier, using translation or limited Spanish language skills in either formal or informal communication opportunities, which seemed to make parents “feel more comfortable” (Leigh, FGA). Leigh described how other teachers came to rely on her for impromptu translation needs when communicating with parents at dismissal. While she supported them as often as she could, she felt that translation was not available to teachers to the extent required.

Relationships with Students

In describing their experiences with building relationships with students, teachers’ stories illustrated these primary focus areas: ways in which they get to know their students, and challenges that they experienced in doing so; and, defining the role that they aspire to play in their students’ lives, which included becoming a trusted role model and developing students toward their full potential.

Learning about students. Teachers shared their interest in, and enjoyment with, getting to know students beyond their daily academic activities. To do so, teachers worked to find times during unstructured parts of the day to talk informally with their students to learn more about them and their lives. Leigh described a classroom behavior incentive that allowed students to earn the privilege to stay in the classroom during recess and do arts and crafts.

Usually they play alone a little bit, and then I go sit with them. I usually have to grade papers. So I’ll go sit with them while they’re playing, and chat for a bit, it’s just like more low key because our school is failing, and they’re so behind academically, I feel like the rest of the day is a constant do this, do this, like they do a lot of work, so it’s really nice to have them come up because I get to actually see them be kids and kind of like chat with them more casually. (I1)

Candice described ways in which she learns about her students by listening to what upsets them throughout the school day as she works to best resolve their issues, noting “I think it’s mostly being in the moment and getting to know the students as best you can” (11). In addition to finding opportunities to learn about their students during the school day, teachers described going to school events or seizing moments during bus rides on field trips to interact with students more informally and learn about what they are good at in areas other than academics. Leigh recalled,

...when I went to that talent show, all the kids were like, “You came! You came!” And I was like, “Well, you told me to come.” So I think... they knew that I cared about what they were doing. (15)

Teachers regretted not having time in the academic day for more informal opportunities to learn about students and for students to learn about each other. Candice expressed:

I’ve been depressed about it all year. 8:20 am we have on our schedule is when we start reading and writing, and that’s when the day officially starts is 8:20 am, so that leaves no time for even unpacking and getting ready for the day, let alone a morning meeting. And to me, that’s just a very sad, missed opportunity to have students be able to share with one another. (FGA)

Both teachers articulated ways that the demands of an intensive academic schedule, likely due to lower academic performance, interfered with opportunities for teachers to build meaningful relationships with and among students.

Becoming someone to them. Teachers’ stories illustrated how they cared about becoming a role model for their students and becoming an adult whom they could trust and depend on. They explained that part of their rationale for staying at the school was to build the accountability and trust that students feel toward teachers. Leigh explained,

I think that just helps all the students [to know we're] not going to just turn around and leave... Even if other people in their lives maybe aren't, I came back another year. I'll be back next year. (FGB)

Candice added that there was a large amount of teacher turnover at her school throughout the year, and children came to expect abandonment. She felt that teacher stability would lead to “an increased level of accountability and trust” (FGB), and that students responded differently to her once they knew she was not going anywhere.

In addition to being a stable presence in their students' lives, teachers also expressed aspiring to serve as a role model and to provide a different perspective to what they are exposed to in their communities. Candice spoke about noticing that many conversations between teachers and students in her school had a hostile tone, and she wanted to model for students how to resolve conflicts differently. She reinforced that through her management style, which prompted students to reflect on their own behaviors and understand alternate ways to respond to strong, negative emotions.

Teachers illustrated their genuine concern for helping students achieve success, not only in academic areas, but also in developing social-emotional behaviors that would allow them to be successful, engaged citizens in the future. In one story about a recent shift in behavior of one of her students, Candice explained that he had previously had “very little behavior issues” but had recently become “very aggressive, sensitive, and explosive.”

[He] has been suspended twice in the past two weeks because of extreme behavior problems. He's stabbed a student with a pencil, he's kicked and punched the principal, several experiences like this. His behavior is very unpredictable. He could be in a great mood one second, and all of a sudden his behavior is completely flipped. We ... are very concerned about what to do with this behavior because it has come on so suddenly. (I1)

Candice's primary concern in this situation seemed to be finding out what was causing the change in behavior so that the issue could be resolved. She focused far less on consequences and punishment that the student should receive as a result of his behaviors.

Analysis of Findings about Relationships

Teachers sought relationships with school leaders for advice and mentorship that helped them to build their understandings of the school context. This relationship cycled toward deeper understandings, as teachers felt that approaching school leaders with questions led to stronger relationships, which in turn created more opportunities to get advice and mentorship. These strong relationships served as pathways through which teachers built their contextual knowledge base. Weaker or strained relationships with school leadership yielded missed opportunities for teachers to gain information valuable to their practice.

It is also important to note that the flow of information in these relationships was from leader to teacher. Teachers shared stories about occasionally disagreeing with principals' handling of situations, yet not feeling comfortable sharing that with them. This is connected to findings discussed earlier about teachers not feeling that they have capacity to affect school-wide or systemic change. Teachers may feel that in taking on the role and identity of mentee in this relationship, there is little room to shift that role to occasionally assume an identity of "expert" who suggests new knowledge or ideas to the principal.

Teachers also sought and leveraged opportunities to collaborate informally with school staff, including cultivating personal relationships to inform their work and gain contextual knowledge and better serve their students. It is noteworthy that teachers in this

study valued the knowledge that veteran teachers in their schools had built through experiences in that context. While teachers did practice discernment in what they internalized from those relationships, teachers did not assume that older teachers' knowledge and practices were inherently outdated or irrelevant, even in a "failing" school community that had been externally labeled for poor practices. This reinforces previous findings that teachers recognize their work happens within a broader context, and place a value on understanding the context in which they teach. It indicates that teachers may subscribe to a belief that teaching the students is a community effort, and their work alone will not have as great an impact as working with the school community.

Teachers also recognized the importance of building partnerships with students' parents to create continuity between home and school for students. This is suggested through teachers' ongoing efforts to create stronger communication with families, and even through their emotional reactions to unsuccessful attempts at building communicative relationships. In digging deeper into what types of engagement teachers valued from their parents, responses indicated a perspective that strongly radiated from the standards and expectations to which teachers felt they were held accountable (e.g., filling vocabulary gaps to lead to higher academic performance). While teachers acknowledged that students often came to school without their basic needs met, teachers did not articulate an understanding that parents may be struggling with what they are held accountable to in their roles (e.g., reliable food and shelter), and may be leaning on the school system for support with that during the days. In fact, teachers expressed some levels of frustration with needing to meet those needs of their students during the day because it interfered with the academics.

Teachers further indicated an understanding of the importance of building relationships with their students to find out who they are as children, not just students. Beyond simply enjoying their relationships with students, they also recognized that deeper knowledge of who their students were would better enable them to teach the students through creating content relevance. Teachers identified time as the primary constraint to developing those relationships, citing requirements for intensive academic blocks across the school day. Similarly to how they described their relationships with parents, they felt demands of academic accountability cloud their perspective and judgment about the prioritization and nature of relationships with students.

Navigating Institutional Culture

This study initially sought to understand these teachers' experiences with navigating racial and cultural identity lines. However, learning and negotiating the unspoken culture of the institution of urban public schooling, which existed long before they arrived, also emerged as a centerpiece in their experiences in their first year. In previous sections, how these teachers built their contextual knowledge from within the institution was discussed. This section discusses ways in which the teachers enacted the tensions of compliance and innovation implicit in creating systemic change from within the system.

Compliance

In sharing their experiences with compliance as first year teachers in their school contexts, teachers expressed a focus in the following areas: clarity and origin of the

expectations of their role; accountability for meeting expectations; and, constraints and challenges that they faced in attempting to meet expectations.

Expectations. Teachers described working through an adjustment to the pressures and demands of being a classroom teacher, which proved to be a level of responsibility for which they felt student teaching did not fully prepare them. Candice explained that as a classroom teacher, the “realm of responsibility is just so much larger,” adding that when student teaching, the cooperating teacher was always there, assuming ultimate responsibility if something went wrong (FGA).

Clarity of expectations. Teachers in this study expressed that lack of transparency and clarity of the expectations they are held to as a source of stress and frustration in their work. Teachers feel like there are specific, high expectations that they need to meet, but those expectations are not consistently communicated. Leigh expressed that school administrators and instructional coaches, like teachers, “all have their own opinion” (FGB) on what are good instructional practices. She explained how she noticed that her own vision aligned more with that of her principal, but it became difficult when she received observational feedback from other administrators and coaches. She added that “they need to all... write up their expectations because if they’re not all on the same playing field, it makes it more complicated for the teachers.” Candice explained her frustrations with one formal observation:

[O]ne of my critiques on my observation is that I don’t have my anchor charts stapled together on a wall... in a big stack. Well, that’s one way of doing it, and maybe this one teacher that you view as highly effective does it that way, but I don’t understand how that makes it any better for the students. So there are very specific expectations I feel, and very high expectations, but no matter what I do, I don’t think I can ever fulfill them. (FGB)

Candice expressed here that the observation was the first time she was led to understand that stacking anchor charts is an instructional practice that her principal expected to see. She felt frustrated and deflated that she learned of the expectation in an evaluative process, exemplifying teachers' perception that there are specific, high expectations that they need to meet, but those expectations are not clearly communicated.

Teachers also noted additional frustrations with limited support and direction with some of the implied expectations. Leigh explained that she knew her school was out of compliance with document information on special education services in the centralized system, and added “no one knows how to use the [system], and no one will tell us” (FGA). Candice noted that there seems to be an expectation in her school that there is vertical collaboration to ensure curriculum alignment, but there were no clear directions to do so or structures put into place that allowed for the work to happen. She expressed her frustrations with “such high expectations” placed upon teachers without receiving the “materials, or the time, or the support to fulfill those expectations” (FGB).

Teachers also described ways in which they felt pressure to adhere to expectations against their professional judgement. This was a recurring thought as teachers described the processes by which they collected a lot of student assessment data, but were unclear about what they were supposed to do with the abundance of information. Leigh explained:

... we were always... told when to give them, and when they were due, and how they had to have been graded, and the amount of time. So I would always grade them and then... turn them in, [thinking to myself], “That’s gone.” Before I knew it, I had to write a lesson plan and turn around and do another assessment. So I never really had the time to really delve in and see what the scores meant on any one assessment and actually use that information. (I5)

Leigh attributed these intense practices for assessment and data collection to her school's priority focus on the assessment area of the Danielson rubric.

Though they shared a critical perspective of the guidelines provided in the Danielson teacher evaluation rubric, teachers felt as though this was the one primary source that clearly outlined expectations of their role. Even with the clarity of expectations, teachers felt the expectations were unattainable, unrealistic or inapplicable to their teaching contexts, yielding further frustration. Candice expressed:

... [I]t's like we wear so many different hats. Because they come in for the observations, and [see] us as the teacher, but we're also the curriculum writer, and the social worker, and the mom... but they don't... often reward us for doing all those other jobs in addition to the job that we're actually getting evaluated for. So I think there has to be more recognition that we actually have five jobs, but they're only seeing you through the lens of this one job... (FGB)

Leigh shared a story about leaving her classroom during a lesson to get a granola bar for one of her students who was too hungry to concentrate on academic work, and she wondered aloud if she would have done that if she were being observed and evaluated. She contemplated, noting that she knew it was the right thing to do, but may not have done it if she were being watched. Candice further explained her perspective about "how unfair this teacher effectiveness rating [system] is."

[I]f you're in a classroom where the students come from lovely home lives and they're not hungry, and they're able to share with their friends, of course you can probably get a better rating because you can focus your energies on the things that you're being rated on, but I don't think it's fair that we have the same rubric as teachers with a different population of students. It's just... a whole different species of education, I feel. And should be treated that way. (FGB)

Leigh explained her thoughts on the expectations that Danielson outlines for parent communication, including keeping phone logs and sending notes home, noting that she knows what she is supposed to do but does not always do it because it seems "a little

excessive” to keep track of “every time we say anything to a parent” (I3). Leigh had learned about effective and ineffective ways to communicate with her students’ parents, and the methods and documentation described in the guidelines did not match what she felt was realistic in her context.

Despite their critiques of the applicability of the rubric criteria to their teaching contexts, teachers’ stories indicated that it was a lens through which they viewed their own day-to-day work, and decisions that they made in their practices. In explaining her experiences with the data committee, Leigh referenced how her engagement would appear on, and be a measurable component of, her rating, so “for Danielson purposes, it was the thing to do” (I5).

Teachers also shared ways in which they felt tied to ineffective practices because of their Danielson rubric rating. Leigh spoke about wanting to keep her student assessment materials instead of turning them in to her principal so that she could have time to look at her student performance levels. Her principal was adamant about her turning the assessment materials in right away, so she complied. She explained her rationale for doing so as “partially because of Danielson because I knew it was part of my rating... so I [thought], I’ll just grade it and give it to her rather than worry about making her mad” (I5). Similarly, Candice shared a story about preparing for a formal evaluation, explaining how she had heard from other teachers that observers were docking points if they were not observed recording assessment data during the lessons. Candice created a checklist tool to use during her lesson for the primary purpose of meeting this teacher expectation, noting “I get a lot more out of being able to just observe a student and engage with them and internalize that than be worried about making some marks on a

page” (15). She recounted that while it was actually distracting to document student learning on her tool during instruction, she received a higher score on her evaluation as a result of showing use of the tool. Reflecting on the experience, she shared that it was more about adult accountability than helping students, reasoning that the checklist did not actually help her collect different data than should would have collected in her mind; it just made the process visible to her observer. She concluded, “I think that maybe there needs to be a shift in thinking about it more in terms of how it’s going to help students as opposed to how much we’re fulfilling our requirements as professionals” (15).

External pressure and monitoring. While the Danielson tool provides one set of broad criteria by which teachers’ performance is measured, teachers also felt pressure to meet an additional layer of expectations that were specific to their school contexts, such as specific instructional practices, implementation of school-based programs such as clubs, and ways that classrooms and bulletin boards should appear. As noted in other sections, teachers felt that these expectations reflected personal preferences and styles of those in leadership roles, and expectations were often not made explicit to teachers until it was pointed out as a shortcoming in their performance of their role. Despite lacking clarity of expectations, and even in cases where there were clear expectations that teachers disagreed with, teachers in this study expressed anxiety about the potential of being reprimanded by a school administrator for not meeting an expectation.

Candice spoke about feeling the pressure of being reprimanded for the quality of her lesson plans, despite sharing other stories about there being no clear or consistent expectation for what school administrators wanted to see in lesson plans. She shared that while she and other teachers on her grade team “want to get things done really

efficiently” (I2), they are also concerned that administrators are “going to collect [their] lesson plans” because they do not have tenure. Because of concern about what administrators might be expecting to see in those plans, Candice felt that the plans were completed with an extraordinary amount of detail, which sometimes interfered with efficiency. She also described the stress she felt with making adaptations to the curriculum or assessment used in her class because she was not sure what was expected by her administrator, illustrating an implicit desire to avoid doing something of which her administrator might disapprove:

It’s just tricky feeling like I want to do something different a little bit, you know, a little bit different than what the program is saying, but not wanting to have it held against me in any way. (I5)

Leigh shared a similar perspective regarding her compliance with school-wide assessment practices that she did not fully understand or support. While teachers did not articulate what a reprimand from an administrator would entail, or what the impacts of those reprimands would be, the idea of reprimands as a consequence for failing to meet school-based expectations remained centered in how teachers negotiated and made decisions about expectations as a first-year teacher.

Teachers also expressed feeling a similar type of pressure about meeting, or failing to meet, expectations from a higher level of authority; teachers cited “the city” or “the state,” referencing the respective departments of education. Teachers shared stories that illustrated ways that their school leadership reinforced a culture of unquestioning compliance to externally imposed expectations.

Candice shared how this culture of unquestioning compliance was reinforced through feedback she received from her administrators.

[A] lot of my feedback on my observations has been, “We don’t care if you do it like this, but just in case a district rep. comes in, you must have it this way.” So what’s the point? It’s just another example of putting on a show for an arbitrary rating, or whatever it is, that has nothing to do with the students, which is the reason we’re all here, so... it’s backwards thinking. (FGB)

Leigh explained ways that her administrators required her to prepare for external school reviews and audits. During the special education audit, she explained, “I have to now, even though I’m a gen. ed. teacher, I have to go through and read all the IEPs apparently and see what’s in them” (I2). Her stress was not that she was being required to read the IEPs of her students, as she shared stories at other points in the study about doing this as a natural part of the collaboration process with her co-teacher, but rather the timing and intensity of the IEP reviews being done in effort to meet an externally imposed expectation. She shared a similar story about preparing for an external state review:

... [I]t was just funny because... literally three weeks before [the review], they started having more of these collaborative, looking-at-assessments meetings. ... [E]veryone knows it’s a better way to do it, and we were like, “So now they’re making time.” [T]hey wanted to make it look like we’d been doing it the whole school year. So it was just interesting. (I5)

Leigh added that because it is a helpful teacher practice, she hoped that the school would continue making time for this even when they were not expecting to be observed by external reviewers.

Regardless of whether or not teachers saw these external expectations as valuable practices in their work, these experiences led them to connect their own day-to-day work to how their administrators were held accountable in external evaluation processes. In her stories about her work with curriculum design and planning, Leigh articulated that she knows and feels the pressure of how closely her work is being watched as a first-year teacher at a “formerly failing school that is being overseen by the city” (I5). While

feeling the stress under these pressures, teachers complied with the expectations implicit in the school culture.

Accountability and responsibilities of the role. Teachers spoke frequently about the stress and pressure they felt from trying to meet the expectations for all of the responsibilities they were held accountable for in their role. As discussed in an earlier section, teachers in this study felt a much higher level of responsibility and accountability in their role of classroom teacher than they experienced as a student teacher. This was an unanticipated adjustment for which they felt unprepared. Leigh explained that the biggest shift was:

...all the paperwork involved. ... [N]ow it comes down to making sure that I have all my lesson plans accessible, and I have all my assessments graded, and I have everything I need for every part of the day instead of just a few parts of the day.
(FGA)

Keeping up with traditional demands of the teacher role proved challenging and stressful for both teachers; however, context-specific demands added an additional layer of responsibility and amplified pressure applied through accountability. Candice expressed how difficult it was for her to be held accountable for a standardized, uniform benchmark of student academic achievement. She found this challenging while contending with multiple unique and extenuating circumstances, including gaps in the background knowledge that is assumed by the curriculum, social-emotional and behavioral skill gaps that interfere with students' engagement in classroom learning activities, and exceptional attendance issues in which students miss substantial amounts of classroom instruction. Candice explained how the pressures of this accountability fueled feelings of resentment toward people who could be more strongly supporting their work.

Teachers are expected to help their students learn at a certain rate and reach certain benchmarks, however, it is difficult to do so without parental involvement or supplemental academic work at home. While this lack of familial involvement may be due to different cultural views of education or the culture of poverty, teachers feel resentful toward families because they are the ones held accountable for children's learning. (WR3)

Additionally, teachers felt strained by the demands of blending and designing curricula that both taught students the necessary grade-level content while also filling skill and knowledge gaps, as opposed to simply implementing a curriculum that was selected and purchased by the school. Though teachers shared that they had experience with curriculum design principles and skills through their teacher preparation coursework, they did not feel that they had the content expertise necessary to piece together a comprehensive and cohesive curriculum for their grade level subject areas, and were frustrated by the demand to do this in their role. Leigh noted,

... the math coach will say, "Well wait, why did you make this decision?" And I'm like, "I don't know. I'm 25. I don't have a degree in math. This looked like a good idea to me. If you don't like it, then maybe you should be the one who's designing the whole entire curriculum." But she doesn't have time to do that either because she'd have to do it for every single grade. (FGB)

Despite feeling at times that they may buckle under the pressure of all that was asked of them, teachers expressed wanting to meet the requirements and expectations of their roles, even when there was not a clear connection to, or impact on, what they believed was most important for their students. Leigh shared an example of this through her story about complying with the external request that her students participate in a pilot test for writing (I5). Leigh maintained that this was a disservice to her students because of the loss of instructional time. However, teachers identified in their stories that they tend to be "rule followers" and have an intrinsic tendency to want to follow the rules that are laid out before them.

Constraints. Teachers identified several contextual constraints that they felt interfered with their ability, or ease with which they were able, to meet their role responsibilities. Time and resources available to them were identified in multiple stories. Teachers felt as though there was simply not enough time for them to complete all of their responsibilities well. Candice shared how difficult it was for her to feel like she is continuously working against the clock.

[I]t's personally frustrating that I feel like I can't... be the best that I can be, so it's difficult. It's an emotionally challenging job I feel, because it's so consuming, yet I feel like I'm never accomplishing anything because it's always the end [of time to work on something], and there's always something I can do better...
(FGB)

Teachers named specifically wanting more time to learn and develop the curricula they were using, and feeling frustrated when their time was not used efficiently during the school day.

Teachers also felt constrained by lacking support for development of professional knowledge they needed to do their work well. Curriculum design and lesson planning was a highly stressful responsibility in their role, and teachers reported feeling constrained by lack of guidance in making curriculum decisions. Blending and designing content area curricula was a challengingly open-ended task because teachers did not feel they had sufficient guidelines for what parts of the curricula were essential and needed to stay, and which could be replaced. As first-year teachers, they had not developed the professional judgment that a more experienced teacher would rely upon in doing this work. They did look ahead optimistically to their second year, noting that they would feel like they would have more flexibility in making those decisions after teaching the curriculum for a full year.

Teachers also indicated feeling constrained by some of the established norms within the context of their schools. Candice spoke about her belief that her students would truly benefit through a stronger instructional focus on social and emotional skills, and had concrete ideas about how she would like to do that through class Morning Meetings. She felt constrained, however, by the school norm to schedule the start of reading instruction in the first minute of the school day, and to schedule consecutive academic periods throughout the full day. Leigh shared a similar constraint with her ideas for reaching out to her students' parents to more actively build communication and relationships. She was reluctant to do this because her co-teacher had looped with this class of students, and together, she and her co-teacher were enacting communication norms that had been established by her co-teacher the previous year. While they believed that their ideas would be beneficial to their students, teachers were less comfortable with breaking established norms of their teaching contexts.

Innovation

While compliance was an important theme running through many of the stories teachers shared about their work, innovation also played a central role. Teachers spoke about innovation in two main ways: being innovative in responses to problems or issues that came up in their work; and, beliefs about developing their capacity for innovation.

Responsive innovation. Teachers explained many ways that they leveraged their creativity to resolve issue that appeared in their daily work. While curriculum design was a highly stressful responsibility of their role, as discussed previously, it was a place where teachers reported being able to creatively solve for instructional issues that arose within the contexts of their classrooms. Teachers created supplemental resources and

instructional practices to support students' access to a curriculum that was beyond their immediate reach. Candice explained her iterative lesson planning process, where she adapted a predetermined unit plan to create weekly lesson plans that were responsive to what students learned in the previous week, and the types of lesson activities that could be done in the upcoming week, including opportunities for small group instruction to provide students with access to the content (I4). Candice did express concern with the need to constantly blend and create curricula, noting that “it feels like we’re experimenting on the children. It’s going to take years and years to find something that’s now tweaked enough that we can use it over and over again” (FGB).

Teachers also shared ways that they created assessments to capture more accurate data on what students learned during a unit. Leigh explained that over time, she gained confidence with making changes.

Now, if I’m giving an assessment, I look at it more critically ahead of time if I’m not the one who made it, and I’m not afraid to change stuff... [W]e look at the standards a lot. If I know which standard I’m assessing, I don’t feel bad changing the wording or the order of things, if I know it’s still going to tell me if they know that standard. (FGB)

Teachers also described ways that they worked innovatively to respond to issues with management. Candice explained ways that she created individualized behavior supports for students that were tailored to their specific behavior challenges. She talked about locating behavior data collection tools to support her efforts to analyze patterns in student behaviors and designing behavioral support interventions.

Teachers also supported the use of the school-wide token economy management system, which had been established at their schools, but was not used as effectively as it could be. Candice explained that the “basis” of the program is in place and students “love

the idea of having a dollar to buy something with,” but because the school staff had not determined criteria for earning a scholar dollar, and the program was not implemented consistently, the program was not as impactful as it could have been (I1). Despite having a clear idea about how to improve this school-wide system, teachers did not share any stories about attempting to enact these changes.

Still more of teachers’ innovation was attributed to necessity. In the face of unclear expectations or directions, teachers felt they were often left to figure things out on their own. Candice noted that when designing behavior supports for students in her class who exhibit extreme behaviors, “anything extra I’ve done [for] behavior analysis is something I find on the Internet and just do my own for my own purposes” (FGA). She noted that “it would be great if there was ... a person to turn to [as] an expert in this area,” but was “left to figure it out” on her own.

Capacity for innovation. Teachers explained a few different ways that they bolstered their capacity to be innovative in their responsibilities. One of those was building familiarity and confidence in their work. Teachers articulated that they felt their confidence grew with experience, and learning from those experiences. Teachers explained that the aspects of curriculum design that they felt most comfortable with were those that built on what they had learned and practiced in their coursework in graduate school. While they more confidently made decisions to add to and supplement the curriculum they were using, they felt less comfortable removing parts of the curriculum because they lacked experience with the grade level content and sequence. Candice spoke about her experiences with adapting her reading curriculum, which her students struggled to access.

I think we can use supplemental things, like a lot of times I've used another text from our library that could somehow connect with the text that we're reading just to give it some variety, but the lessons themselves are very focused around the text that we're using for the unit. So it's hard to deviate from that, though I'm trying to figure out how to do that. (I4)

Leigh hoped that after working so much with curriculum planning this year, the lesson plans will already be in place so she can "spend the time differentiating it instead" (I4).

Teachers also shared their comfort with making adjustments to assessments because of experiences in graduate school coursework demonstrated that there is a range of ways assessments can be done. Candice (I4) knew that there were multiple effective ways to assess students, and she did not feel tied to a singular way of doing it. The importance of an experiential knowledge base underlying this confidence is also illustrated in ways that teachers expressed that they would feel more confident in making changes in their second year of teaching, after having experienced and learned from their first year.

Stories shared in previous sections of this chapter also illustrate how teachers actively worked to construct a contextual knowledge base that informed their decisions. Teachers described leveraging relationships with school leaders and colleagues to discuss issues they were facing and seek advice, acknowledging that others in the school held a wealth of experience. Teachers valued this contextual information in their work and seemed more confident in making decisions when they had more information.

The third way that teachers grew their capacity for innovation was through their willingness to try new things. Teachers believed that trial and error is an effective way to go about working out solutions to challenges. After implementing a successful instructional intervention for one of her students, Candice reflected, "I think it definitely

made me realize that thinking outside of the box for every individual student is necessary, and is justified.” As noted previously, Candice articulated tension she felt with doing this regularly, equating it to “experimenting on the children.”

Analysis of Findings about Navigating Institutional Culture

Teachers felt that there were unclear, undefined, yet very specific, high expectations that they were required to meet in their roles. There was also strong focus on systems that held them accountable for meeting these expectations that were equally unclear. These “high-stakes” external monitoring systems created an “eye in the sky” culture where teachers felt that their daily work was closely monitored for breaches of their responsibilities. Working within this system of unclear, high-stakes expectations and accountability was incredibly stressful to teachers, and in some ways created over-compensation of compliance at the expense of innovations that could have benefitted their students.

Conclusion

The themes discussed in this chapter, learning to teach, relationships, and working within institutional culture, emerged from the stories shared by teachers as some of the most important or influential elements of their first-year teaching experiences. By listening carefully to how teachers describe their experiences from their own perspectives, it is possible to better understand what teachers feel the need in order to do their work well. In intercultural urban contexts where teachers, such as those in this study, are simultaneously working through important identity exploration in their new cultural contexts, it is important to adequately support teachers so that they have capacity

to prioritize and engage with their and their students' identities. The following chapter describes how these findings, as well as the findings from Chapter IV, match with current research in each areas, and discusses implications for teacher induction and transition programs in urban schools, as well as possible areas for additional research.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the findings that emerged from two first-year teachers' stories across the six themes are further discussed as they support or diverge from existing research in each area. Implications for the urban teacher induction processes are considered next, followed by a brief overview of current induction processes to illustrate where there is space to integrate these implications. Next, a critique of this study identifies ways in which future studies could gather more data to illustrate a more complete picture of first-year teachers' experiences. Finally, implications for additional research are discussed.

Discussion of Findings

Several important findings emerged from the data aligned to each of the research questions of this study, as well as in three additional areas that emerged from the data as key themes of participants' voices on their experiences. First, I discuss ways that these first-year teachers sought cultural familiarity in their intercultural teaching contexts while also negotiating cultural unfamiliarity as they encountered cultural disequilibrium.

Second, tensions teachers felt with enactment of culturally relevant teaching practices are discussed. This is followed by complexities that emerged as teachers reflected on their enactment of critical consciousness. Then, I discuss the multiple ways in which teachers in this study shared how they have learned, and continue to learn, to teach. Fifth, the ways in which teachers in this study identified relationships integral to their practice are discussed. I conclude with discussion of the ways in which these teachers navigated, acquired, and mediated the institutional knowledge that existed in their school contexts.

Cultural Disequilibrium

Cultural disequilibrium is discussed in this study as relating to the culturally familiar and unfamiliar in relation to the teacher participants. Cultural familiarity refers to ways in which their teaching experiences match or fit comfortably with their own White, middle-class cultural schema, while cultural unfamiliarity describes ways that their experiences pushed against or created tension within their cultural schema. Teachers in this study experienced cultural disequilibrium in their work within both the school and local communities. However, their interactions in their relationships within the school community were described as more familiar and culturally congruent with their own prior schooling experiences than their experiences in relationships with people outside of the school, namely students' caregivers.

Seeking cultural familiarity. One way a novice teacher can mitigate cultural disequilibrium is by building a strong classroom community (Bergerson, 2008). Establishing a strong and consistent classroom culture perhaps affords teachers some control and predictability over their daily environment, even when integrating cultural elements different than their own. For teachers in this study, creating classroom culture

and determining how their management styles fit into the school and emerging classroom culture, particularly as compared to the management styles of their co-teachers, was a point of cultural disequilibrium early in the school year. Teachers in this study struggled with developing their own presence as “warm demanders,” characterized by “assertive discipline, caring relationships, and congruent interactional styles” (Ford & Sassi, 2012, p. 21). Ford and Sassi suggest that the characteristics of a warm demander are grounded in a shared race, history, and culture. Teachers in this study expressed that they did not have deep understandings of their students’ cultures, and it took time for them to build relationships with students before teachers found their footing with management.

Teachers in this study also shared their experiences with finding their own management style among colleagues who used a more assertive and direct management style. This connects with Ford and Sassi’s (2012) characterization of White teachers’ tendency to rely on positional respect, assumedly bestowed upon them as a teacher in the school, rather than expecting to need to earn students’ respect by being more authoritative and assertive. Ford and Sassi further note that the warm demander includes elements of “other mothering”: care for, and uplifting of, the community; and transmission of culture to the students. While teachers in this study did approach their management style from a place of care for their students, their limited cultural understanding precluded authentic cultural transmission and deep knowledge about the community’s efforts to uplift itself, and thereby the authentic care (Valenzuela, 1999) that would allow them to establish culturally relevant classroom culture and instructional practices from the beginning of the year. Ford and Sassi note that a shared race between teacher and students may, at first, provide teachers with more “capital as they draw on the cultural practices, history, values,

and traditions they share with their students” (2014, p. 45), affording teachers a position of authority to which the students more readily consent. It is further noted that White teachers must learn to navigate the cultural communication codes, responsively adopting what will work in their given context. Through judiciously adopting certain elements of their students’ culture, White teachers may instead stand in racial solidarity as a means to gain students’ consent to recognize the teacher’s authority.

While teachers in this study intentionally chose to teach in a community that is culturally different from their own backgrounds and specifically requested student teaching placements in low-income and Spanish-speaking communities, it is also common for people to seek relational interactions with culturally similar people. This was illustrated in Jester and Fickel’s (2013) study of mostly White preservice teachers engaging in a two-week intensive field experience in which they stayed in Alaskan Native communities to learn as much as possible about teaching in the community. While teachers in that study engaged deeply in learning about multiple facets of the school and classroom settings, outside of school time, they spent most of their time with the other White teacher candidates in their field placements, thereby preventing them from authentically engaging in community relationships.

This highlights the complexity of the process by which new teachers learn local knowledge while working within their feelings of cultural disequilibrium. “When we are cocooned in the familiarity of comfort, we are often either unable or unwilling to jeopardize our sense of equilibrium by tackling emotional risks” (Ohito, 2016, p. 455). Teachers in this study may have become cocooned in a new familiarity that the school faculty created, missing opportunities to gain local knowledge about culture and

communication codes that are transmitted to children, and how the community is working to uplift itself, which would have in turn better supported teachers to be able to stand in solidarity with their students and community.

Negotiating cultural unfamiliarity. While teachers in this study shared that, with persistence, they were eventually able to negotiate their presence within the school community, relationships that expanded beyond the walls of the school, specifically those with students' caregivers, remained more difficult to negotiate. Participants experienced tension in many of those relationships and attributed the tension to parents not supporting students to be academically successful in the school system. Children in a community are "socialized to develop skills necessary to become competent members within their cultural and linguistic communities" (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006, p. 303). This is complicated when, as in the schools of the teachers in this study, the cultural and linguistic attributes valued by the community are not congruent with the expectations of schooling and standardized academic performance. Teachers in this study approached students first from the lens of grade level academic expectations, identifying gaps in knowledge, before recognizing or validating the cultural language and knowledge that students brought to school. Teachers expressed frustration with the knowledge gap, sometimes sharing that filling or bridging this gap is an additional demand that they feel in their role as teacher to which, they anticipated, teachers in other communities are not held accountable.

While expressing frustration about the perceived role of caregivers in creating and perpetuating cultural discontinuity between home and school, teachers in this study also demonstrated capacity to apply a lens of critical consciousness when making sense of this

discontinuity. Teachers acknowledged that their experiences with families was a small sliver of a much larger sociohistorical context, and while it did not alleviate frustrations or provide a blue print for action, it was the perspective from which they approached their work. Research suggests that urban teachers are more likely to view inequality as a manifestation of systemic issues rather than issues with individuals and enter the field of urban education to remedy systemic oppression (Seider & Huguley, 2009). Findings from this study support that research, yet also call into question how new teachers are able to take action through their work to disrupt those larger systemic issues.

Teachers in this study worked to navigate identified cultural incongruencies to actively decide which issues of discontinuity were necessary and possible to reconstruct as first-year teachers, buttressing research suggesting that new teachers make conscious decisions about what elements of culture and communication norms they adopt and negotiate in their practice (Ford & Sassi, 2012). It is important to consider how teachers negotiate this because elementary students have higher motivation and academic outcomes when they perceive continuity between home and school cultures (Rouland, Matthews, Byrd, Meyer, & Rowley, 2014). Teachers in this study chose to work across the language barrier, especially with families, in similar ways noted in Bergerson's (2008) case study, including opportunities for learning and communicating in Spanish in the classroom, and using limited knowledge of Spanish to communicate with parents in attempt to demonstrate value for them and their culture.

A tension emerged for teachers in this study between navigating cultural dissonance and recognizing that many of their struggles were actually situated in a larger context that they did not yet fully understand. Teachers found it helpful to have critical

consciousness as a foundation to build from, but also found that they needed more contextual knowledge to truly understand the ways in which system issues of power and oppression were shaping their everyday experiences.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Teachers' experiences with enacting culturally relevant teaching revealed similar tensions between simultaneously problematizing inequitable instructional structures and practices in their schools, and lacking sufficient contextual and cultural knowledge to confidently disrupt those inequities.

Advocacy. Teachers in this study identified standardized instructional procedures, practices, or materials that disproportionately disadvantaged their students. This is counter to some research that suggests that though today's teacher candidates are more aware of diversity, they lack complex understandings necessary to teach students in culturally marginalized communities "primarily because they are blind to the structural and institutionalized inequalities of schools and society that shape students' access to achievement" (Lazar, 2013, p. 704). It is important to note, however, that although teachers in this study identified systemic inequities that impacted and were perpetuated by their daily work, they were less confident taking action to change this in their first year, especially when it required deviation from an external expectation or directive. When teachers did take action, it was more likely to occur when they found space to create where there was not already an established norm or structure, such as designing science or social studies lessons in schools where math and ELA were the externally monitored content areas.

Teachers' critiques of norms and structures in schooling practices that disadvantage their students show that they care that their students have access to equitable education. This supports Lazar's (2013) case study finding that teachers who chose to teach in challenging urban contexts were willing to go above and beyond their assigned duties to help their students be successful in school as an act of creating a more socially just world. However, teachers in this study were disappointed, and felt limited, in their capacity and opportunity to integrate social justice and students' self-advocacy into the curriculum. Teachers attributed this largely to the demands of learning the curriculum already in place, with no time to think about how to modify it appropriately in advance.

While skill sets and mindsets to identify and critique the systems of oppression and marginalization at work in daily schooling practices is an important foundation for student advocacy, findings from this study indicate a need to consider ways in which new teachers can develop or claim capacity to take action against these identified systems in their own teaching practices. Not only will this enhance culturally relevant practices that will benefit students, but also it will improve teachers' sense of agency in using their work as a teacher to create a more socially just world.

Cultural Synchronization. Though teachers in this study recognized that cultural discontinuity was rooted in a system of power and oppression, they still identified discontinuity in children's knowledge bases as it created gaps in what students needed to be successful in the school setting. Teachers worked primarily to fill those gaps in academic knowledge to promote students' success, supplementing with student cultural knowledge as they found opportunities to do so. While research shows students do best when their cultural knowledge and first language are centered in the curriculum, school

systems persist in using English as the basis for instruction, as well as other instructional structures and systems that perpetuate cultural marginalization of many students (Bergerson, 2008; Rouland et al., 2014). Lazar (2013) discusses the importance of teachers being familiar with students' funds of knowledge, the knowledge traditions of their homes and communities, in order to teach in "the third space," which encompasses the formal and informal learning spaces that occur in the classroom. Due to their own gaps in understanding of students' funds of knowledge, teachers in this study also struggled to disrupt the existing classroom structures to create a "third space" while teaching within them, despite recognizing and critiquing the impact on their students and contributions to systemic social injustice. Research shows that teacher candidates who completed preparation programs which approach teaching diversity through a single touchpoint (course or other program experience) sometimes feel frustrated by lack of guidance with determining how to apply that learning action in practice (Allen, Hancock, Lewis, & Starker-Glass, 2017). Though teachers in this study completed a preservice program that intentionally integrated diversity and inclusivity throughout the duration of the program, these teachers, too, voiced wanting more guidance on how to put their understandings into practice in their new teaching contexts. This indicates that even with preparation steeped in diversity and inclusion, a missing link connecting that experience with a new school-based context may need to be further explored.

While teachers shared reservations about disrupting school structures to address many issues of cultural discontinuity, teachers were more likely to take action on culture-based issues inside their classrooms and viewed the happenings inside their classroom as more within their sphere of control as a first-year teacher than the larger culture-based

issues in the school and community. This is likely, in part, because of the improvisational nature with which teachers in this study reported creating cultural synchronization with their students, addressing issues of discontinuity as they arose in the standing curriculum rather than critically analyzing curricula in advance to proactively reshape it for continuity. Deep knowledge of the curriculum was one barrier that teachers identified, finding themselves in a position where they were learning the curriculum as they were teaching it. Deep knowledge of their students presented another barrier. Because of the context-specific nature of this knowledge, it would be difficult for a teacher preparation program to prepare new teachers with this knowledge unless there was a direct partnership between the program and the school or district. It does, however, draw attention to the importance of programs that bridge preservice learning with in-service practices.

Culturally relevant teaching calls for students to be able to learn from a familiar culture base, which is complicated when teachers do not yet have a foundational understanding of that culture (Bergerson, 2008). While teachers in this study shared that they did not have enough familiarity with students' culture base, as the school year progressed and teachers learned more about their teaching contexts, teachers' developing cultural knowledge allowed them to notice and feel comfortable responding to teachable moments as they arose.

However, teachers also felt they were not able to adequately proactively adapt or design content culturally relevant curriculum because they had deep knowledge of neither the curriculum nor their students' culture. Leonard et al.'s (2009) case study of high school math teachers exemplifies the importance of teachers truly understanding their

students' culture and interests in order to plan for culturally relevant learning experiences. In that study, teachers planned a unit that they believed would appeal to their students' interests: an analysis of nutritional values of fast food, similar to the "Super Size Me" documentary. Teachers were surprised to find that their students actually shared very limited knowledge of McDonalds and other fast food restaurant chains, which detracted from authentic engagement in the academic work.

Ladson-Billings (2014) champions an evolving conception of what it means to understand students' culture and curricular integration with this culture, connecting her work with the framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy pushes for deep cultural understanding, rather than seeking superficial integration of the elements of culture most visible to outsiders in order to "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 73). This shift in language signifies an even stronger emphasis on a teacher's need to deeply understand students' culture in order to promote sustainment of that culture within the instructional context of the classroom. It is not enough to *allow* it, and it is not enough to understand some of the surface level features of the culture as supplemental resources to the existing curriculum. Instead, students' cultures need to be centered, and this is a challenge for a first-year teacher in an intercultural teaching context within limited familiarity with the local community.

Student Achievement. Lazar (2013) states, "Enacting social justice principles requires that teachers see students' fullest capacities and their own responsibility for nurturing them," which requires challenging the injustices that undermine students' opportunities to learn (p. 702). In the culture of high stakes testing and accountability that

exists in many school districts, including the district in which the teachers in this study taught, paying attention to standardized testing *is* culturally relevant, as these tests are the gateway through which students gain access to future educational and socioeconomic opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Leonard, Napp, & Adeleke, 2009). Teachers in this study accepted students' academic achievement as one of their primary responsibilities, but also perceived that the contextual and culture-based challenges unique to their communities placed an unfairly high amount of responsibility on their shoulders. This echoes other research findings in which teachers tended to attribute knowledge gaps to shortcomings of the home and community or students' prior schooling experiences (Lazar, 2013), rather than problematizing the nature of the curriculum and instructional practices.

Toom, Pietarinen, Soini, and Pyhalto (2017) note that lower senses of professional agency leads to higher levels of stress. In this study, teachers' limited sense of professional agency in addressing some of the challenges they experienced led to higher levels of frustration and stress in their work. While some of the limitations to professional agency may be superficially connected to mandatory adherence to standardized instructional practice (discussed later in this chapter), it is also likely that the paucity of resources, namely deep cultural knowledge of their students and deep knowledge of the curriculum from which they were teaching, contributed to the limitations on professional agency of teachers in this study.

Critical Consciousness

Teachers' enactment of critical consciousness in their first year of teaching was a complex, tandem narrative, in which they simultaneously critiqued and participated in the

dominant systems that marginalized their students. Teachers showed a propensity to pair their stories about frustrations in their work with an analysis of their own assumptions and perspectives through which they view each situation, unpacking how their own assumptions contribute to the tension in the situation. Teachers in this study recognized the inconsistencies in how their interpretation of their experiences fit within, and sometimes ran counter to, their beliefs about inequitable schooling as an institution that perpetuates power and oppression.

This meta-reflection allowed teachers in this study to understand that the challenges they were experiencing, as well as the solutions, were often more complex than they appeared at first glance. Allen, Hancock, Lewis, and Starker-Glass (2017) note the importance of critical reflection as a tool that teachers can use to overcome their biases in knowledge construction. Teachers in this study activated critical reflection regularly to analyze their perceptions of situations and remained cautious of conflating their experiences with stereotypical narratives. Allen et al. further posit that this critical reflection is a step along the path of developing toward cultural competence.

Teachers in this study actively critiqued some of the stereotypical narratives about students and families woven into the school's contextual knowledge-base, but found themselves influenced more by those narratives as the school year progressed. This could be a potential outcome of being immersed in the school culture with fewer opportunities for guided critical analysis of their experiences as compared to opportunities within their preservice program. While Lazar's (2013) comparative case study found the novice teachers either subscribed to stereotypical narratives about families and chaotic home lives or attributed circumstances to larger systemic issues of advantage and disadvantage,

teachers in this study did both, complicating an either-or perspective. This study may have captured the process by which teachers used critical reflection as a tool (Allen et al., 2017) to continue the work of unearthing biases as the biases surfaced in their work, and suggests that ongoing guidance with using a critical lens would be beneficial to long-term success with doing this.

Allen et al. (2017) discuss the necessity of teacher education programs to activate critical consciousness in teacher candidates so that they are prepared to understand the contexts in which they teach, noting that the accountability standards for teacher education programs provide checklist items of superficial learning about diversity that likely would not prepare teachers to understand the complexities in urban education settings, and worse, may reinforce mindsets and stereotypes about diverse student populations and communities. Findings from this study suggest that activation of critical consciousness is an important component of preparing teachers for service in intercultural urban schools, yet it may not alone be sufficient.

Gay (2003) cautions against teachers repeating the same narratives of underachievement in their school communities without actively trying to make sense of the context through a new lens that accounts for issues of systemic racism and other forms of marginalization, as this could stunt innovative ways to address student achievement. Ohito (2016) explored discomfort and politeness in preservice teachers' discussions about race, with some participants in her study sharing a struggle with the norms of remaining polite and preserving comfort in discussions about race.

McDonough's (2009) case study of a White, female teacher in an urban, racially diverse elementary school also found that while this teacher was comfortable talking about race

and issues of social justice among peers in graduate school classes, she was less comfortable with, and less sure of how to approach, engaging in conversations with other teachers in her school who were older and more experienced, particularly when it involved countering stereotypes and deficit perspectives. It may have been difficult for teachers in this study to navigate these spaces of racial dialogue with their colleagues, while attempting to maintain a “politeness” among colleagues, particularly when these teachers value the relationships with colleagues in their own learning.

It is also noteworthy that teachers in this study did not view their role as “fixing” (Delpit, 2006) the community but rather providing a model and support for an alternative way of engaging with school and education. This fits with Lovelace and Wheeler’s (2006) description of teachers as cultural mediators, validating students’ cultural communication and knowledge, while also serving as a conduit to that of the majority culture, which is replicated through most schooling practices. Teachers in this study were also aware of how schooling systems disadvantaged their students in a system of power and oppression, but they did not feel equipped to take on the larger systemic disadvantages. The happenings inside their own classrooms felt most within their sphere of control, though many of the instructional practices they employed felt externally imposed. There is tension between wanting to serve as a conduit through which children can gain access to the schooling system, while simultaneously critiquing the cultural inaccessibility of the system for their students.

Learning to Teach

Findings from this study indicate that teachers approached their work from a learner’s stance, and owned challenges they faced as manifestations of them needing to

learn more. Cochran-Smith (2012) discusses inquiry practices that distinguished two new urban teachers and their eventual success levels in their roles. Though both teachers struggled throughout their first year, the successful teacher regarded inquiry as a “stance” that was integral to teaching, while the less successful teacher viewed inquiry as an “add on” that she did not have time for as a student teacher, on top of the teaching responsibilities. The “quality and degree of resources” available to teachers to “promote and manage” their learning are important factors in development of professional agency (Toom et al., 2017, p. 127). Teachers in this study spoke of leveraging their relationships and proximity with their co-teachers, among other colleagues in the school, to talk about challenges and solutions for their students continuously throughout the day. They demonstrated a belief that there was always more to learn about how they could better serve the students in their class. This further illustrates this study’s finding that contextual knowledge influenced teachers’ comfort level with impacting change, and teachers were more comfortable creating change in the context of their own classrooms.

Another noteworthy finding in this study is that teachers drew from past experiences and their developing contextual knowledge to try out ways to navigate challenges. This is similar to Bergerson’s (2008) finding that a teacher with a foundational knowledge of curriculum and theory was able to make judgments about new curriculum approaches, deviating from those as she felt it benefitted her students. Lazar’s (2013) case study also found that teachers with strong backgrounds in service to communities and people in need, thereby being exposed to issues of social inequity prior to becoming a teacher, were likely to more fully embody advocacy aspects of social justice education. Teachers in this study expressed value for having the theoretical

foundation of systemic power and oppression in schooling, but wanted a stronger theory-practice blend so they were more prepared to apply the theory in their work as a teacher.

Relationships

In addition to confidence with building on prior knowledge, another condition that can lead to a teacher's willingness to try new things and take risks in developing teaching practices that will disrupt the structures of schooling that are not working for their students is the presence of a multi-layer support network (Bergerson, 2008). Teachers in this study shared ways in which relationships with other stakeholders in their schools contributed to their development of a multi-layer support network.

Relationships with administrators. Teachers in this study sought mentorship from school leaders, which led to a cyclical relationship in which they became better connected to the school, yielding even more opportunities to gain contextual knowledge. Strong principal support and guidance has a profound effect on teachers' successful induction and socialization into the school community, to the extent that it provides a model of professionalism; clarifies teachers' roles, duties, and expectations; and allows teachers to learn from their mistakes and triumphs (Bergerson, 2008; Craig, 2014; Wood, 2005). Findings from this study contribute to existing research by highlighting this relationship as a conduit through which new teachers gain access to contextual knowledge in this school community, especially policies and expectations.

It is also noteworthy that teachers' relationships with school leaders in this study were not reciprocal. Information flowed from leader to teacher, and teachers in this study did not generally feel comfortable sharing upward feedback, even when they had identified something that needed to change, or that was interfering with their capabilities

to do what they thought was best for their students. This is likely due to positional power dynamics coupled with new teachers' taking a learners' stance in their first year.

Teachers in this study articulated feeling more confident in the idea of approaching their administrators to question current practices or pose new ideas as they looked ahead to their second year in their schools.

Relationships with peer colleagues. Informal peer partners are an instrumental component of the multi-layer support system that helps new teachers acclimate to their roles, grow their practices, and develop professional agency (Bergerson, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2012; Toom et al., 2017). Findings from this study support that research; informal relationships with peer colleagues was one main avenue through which teachers in this study built authentic contextual understanding within their schools. This propensity for collegial collaboration to share professional work by solving problems and challenges together can be cultivated during preservice teacher education (Toom et al., 2017).

The potential for conflicting perspectives among peer colleagues draws into question the ways in which new teachers can be supported to maintain their critical perspective on the teaching practices in their schools, with an eye for disrupting the traditional structures or grammars of schooling that have historically marginalized the students in the community. Kolman, Roegman, and Goodwin's (2016) study of urban teachers in high need certification areas during their year-long teaching residency supports complicating the notion of learning through observation of other teachers in the school. Not all observed teachers were modeling inclusive practices, and while the teacher residents were able to identify and discuss the non-inclusive practices they observed, this was done within a strong support network of inclusive practitioners,

including strong mentor teachers and residency program staff, to help them process and make sense of the observed teaching practices. Teachers in this study valued the knowledge of experienced teachers, despite a “failing” school status that might suggest the school has not yet achieved practices in which all students have equitable access to education.

Relationships with students’ families. Teachers acknowledged an importance for having relationships with students’ families, though they were not successfully and consistently established. This supports existing research that suggests teachers recognize the importance of two-way communication with parents, yet identify written communication (one-way) as most effective, or even parent-teacher conferences with a one-way tone of teacher communicating to parents (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005). In working class communities, due to demands on parents’ time, such as working multiple jobs or nonstandard hours, among other factors, parents more frequently do not have relationships with each other compared to parents in middle class communities, which prevents them from more collectively acquiring power to gain influence in the school (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). This underscores the importance of teachers actively creating opportunities for parents to share their beliefs with the school. Teachers in this study identified informal communication as most effective because, despite language barriers, it was mutual communication that built toward trusting relationships. Teachers shared that limited time and opportunity to interact informally with all parents was a barrier to building strong relationships.

While teachers in this study shared stories reflective of dominant stereotypical narratives about dysfunction in communities of color and poverty with regard to

caregivers and the impact on their students' education, they also recognized there were larger societal factors at play, including the power dynamic that existed in "the cycle of mistrust" that characterized the relationships with caregivers in their schools. Teachers in this study acknowledged that there were issues of systemic oppression at play, but struggled to square that concretely with what they were observing and experiencing with their students' caregivers, indicating that perhaps missing from their "dispositional tool kit were understandings about the societal factors that impact some caregivers' ability to support their children's school achievement" (Lazar, 2013, p. 722).

Teachers expressed frustration with the gaps they were held accountable for filling in their role, but did not acknowledge the same for parents in their role. Jester and Fickel (2013) also found that White teacher interns in Native Alaskan communities who did not develop authentic relationships and connections within the community were likely to express deficit perspectives on parents' behaviors and engagement with their children outside of school hours. This suggests that time, alone, in a community does not give teachers ample opportunity to build the relationships with caregivers that will create a sustained, trusting partnership.

Joshi et al.'s (2005) study of intercultural understanding between White teachers and parents of students of color indicates that teachers consistently call for more parental presence in the school, such as attending events or other formally arranged meetings. However, it is unclear if these engagement opportunities allow teachers and parents to get to know each other in ways that build trusting relationships, or even allow teachers to observe how parents authentically interact with their children. Research shows that having multiple structured opportunities to interact with students' families can shift

teachers' perspectives on families' engagement in a positive direction, promote value for the unique knowledge caregivers have of their children, and create trust that leads to increased parent engagement (Murray, Mereoiu, & Handyside, 2013). Findings from this study support other research that suggests teachers must make conscious efforts to engage in community events and cultivate relationships in informal settings, and would benefit from guidance and structured opportunities to build these relationships.

Relationships with students. Teachers in this study acknowledged the importance of building relationships with students, noting that through authentic relationships, they are able to learn about students' cultural backgrounds. Research shows that this authentic knowledge of students' cultures is an important prerequisite to implementing culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Leonard et al., 2009). This study also found that new teachers did not feel there is enough time during the school day to develop these relationships with students to the extent necessary to implement culturally relevant practices during their first year. This suggests that new teachers must be supported in developing these relationships and cultural knowledge among competing priorities in their first year.

Relationships with additional stakeholders. Absent from this discussion of relationships with stakeholders is the mention of mentors from the preservice teacher preparation program. Participants in this study did not identify a member of their preservice community, either staff or students from their cohort, as a layer of their support system during the first year. While the writing prompts and semi-structured interview and focus group questions did not explicitly ask about these relationships, there were discussions in which these relationships would likely have been identified if they

served a strong presence in teachers' current experiences. It is possible that, while developing a strong foundation of critical consciousness in their preservice program, a missing link was continuity in applying that foundation in new contexts. This brings into question the role of teacher education programs and school districts in strengthening supports during the transition from preservice to inservice teacher so that teachers are guided to implement culturally relevant teaching in their first year.

Navigating Institutional Knowledge

Findings from this study suggest that unclear expectations, accountability processes, and "eye in the sky" culture led to an overcompensation of compliance that may have interfered with teachers' capacity for innovation to meet their students' needs. This is consistent with Leonard et al.'s (2009) case study of high school mathematics teachers enacting culturally relevant teaching that found teachers' "interpretation of school policy, real or imagined, constrained their behaviors and instructional decision-making" (p. 11). Teachers in Leonard et al.'s study considered classroom learning conditions that the students articulated would be helpful to them, such as listening to music during independent work time, yet teachers declined to do this because of their perceptions of school policy.

In Bergerson's (2008) case study, the participant showed comparatively little concern about external mandates. Despite the district's explicit policy banning instruction in Spanish, this teacher promoted first language use throughout the school day. The principal at the school in Bergerson's study took a strong stance against external mandates that interfered with effective teaching practices, perhaps insulating this teacher from the concerns of being held accountable to these mandates, and creating room for

innovation and risk taking in her teaching practices. This further suggests that in teaching contexts where new teachers feel they are held accountable and closely monitored for adherence to external mandates, they are less likely to implement responsive teaching practices that fall outside of those mandates.

While teachers in this study reported feeling less capable of taking action against some of the externally imposed structures and practices, they remained critical of the immediate impacts of these mandates on their students, as well as the ways that this contributed to larger systemic injustice. Similarly, the teacher in Bergeron's (2008) case study lamented the effects of testing and test prep in her own classroom, but in contrast, did not make connections to larger implications of testing mandates for disadvantaged students. Bergerson advocated for a stronger focus in teacher education program on local, state, and national policy to promote a broader critical understanding of the context in which they are teaching, allowing teachers a better capacity to advocate for their students, which is a hallmark of culturally relevant teaching.

In their study of beginning teachers' learning to provide differentiated instruction, De Neve, Devos, and Tuytens (2015) found a direct correlation between teachers' autonomy, described as the space to be self-determined and try out different ways of learning, and their self-reported changes in implementing differentiated instructional practices. While culturally relevant pedagogy, when used effectively, is itself the core instructional approach rather than an additive component to existing traditional instruction, it is possible that a clearer sense of autonomy in teachers' work may promote innovation within their work, and capacity and confidence to move away from traditional instructional practices in their schools that are not responsive to their students' cultures.

Implications for the Induction Process

This study highlights the tension that exists at the point in a teacher's career trajectory where they leave the preservice community that is steeped in critical consciousness and join an urban schooling system with its own inequitable "grammars" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), and contextual and cultural knowledge. Findings from this study reveal five potential implications for how teachers can be supported in transition.

Importance of Foundational Knowledge

The foundational knowledge that new teachers in this study brought with them into their teaching roles mattered. To prepare teachers for a successful transition into and through their first year of teaching, teachers should enter their induction process with a deep and developing critical consciousness, as well as a breadth of experiences in teaching practice, most commonly gained through multiple opportunities to teach and observe teaching in school-based field experiences.

In this study, critical consciousness as a foundational mindset informed teachers' interpretations of their experiences and helped them to remain committed to social justice education. Their critical consciousness provided a lens that both reminded them of the importance of critical reflection in their practice, and also allowed them to meta-reflect that their experiences in their role as teacher were situated in a broader context, much of which they did not yet understand. Teachers also benefitted from having a repertoire of prior teaching practices and experiences to draw from as they developed teaching practices in a new context. These two elements should be embedded into the preservice experiences to cultivate readiness for intercultural urban teaching.

Cultivation of Relationships with Students

Teachers in this study described ways in which they struggled, and worked to navigate the struggle, with developing relationships with students quickly enough to be able to leverage those relationships in establishing their classroom culture. In the absence of shared race, culture, and history, new teachers in intercultural teaching contexts should be supported in their transition to classroom teacher by providing opportunities for teachers to build relationships with their students early in the school year, or, more ideally, prior to the start of the academic year. This may involve structuring time for teachers to get to know the students in their classes outside of the school context in order to learn about who the children are in the context of their families and communities. Building these relationships would allow teachers to move more quickly into the “warm demander” (Darder, 1993; Ford & Sassi, 2012) role, facilitating a stronger, predictable classroom culture early in the year, and helping to mitigate cultural disequilibrium felt by the teacher and students alike.

Deep cultural knowledge of students would also allow teachers to proactively prepare culturally relevant learning experiences for their students, promoting their academic engagement and achievement. Provided that new teachers are also able to access their content curricula prior to teaching it, and ideally prior to the start of the academic year, as new teachers learn about their students, they can redesign curricula to align with the interests, values, skill, and knowledge of their students. Furthermore, new teachers’ higher levels of cultural knowledge gained through their relationships with students could also serve as a resource or tool (Toom et al., 2017) that builds new teachers’ sense of professional agency, releasing the pressure felt from working within

limiting constraints to meet student achievement standards, and increasing teachers' likelihood of remaining teachers at their schools.

Induction programs that facilitate opportunities for teachers to build relationships with the students in their class prior to the start of the school year would position teachers, particularly teachers with limited knowledge of the community that the school serves, to gain valuable knowledge that will set them up for success with establishing strong classroom culture, implementing culturally relevant instruction, and remaining committed to teaching at their schools. This presents a challenge in many large, urban schools, where teaching assignments and class rosters often change as late as after the first day of school. For the teacher induction process to allow for teachers to build relationships with their students, school-based coordination would require earlier determination of teaching assignments and class rosters.

Cultivation of Community Knowledge

Teachers who are new to a community need to learn the community knowledge base, including communication and cultural codes that are rooted in a shared history and future, in order to sustain their students' culture through their education. Knowledge of a community's history and collective efforts to lift itself up will allow intercultural teachers to stand in racial solidarity (Ford & Sassi, 2012). The benefits of this are at least threefold. First, increased feelings of solidarity may serve to mitigate cultural disequilibrium felt by the teacher as the teacher builds her or his local knowledge. Teachers in this study may have "cocooned" (Ohito, 2016) themselves within the cultural familiarity they more quickly found and established within their schools, leading to prolonged feelings of cultural disequilibrium when engaging with community members

outside of the school, namely students' caregivers. Second, a teacher with deep understanding of the community culture could possibly be better positioned to create the "third space" in their classrooms to support student learning. Teachers in this study shared that they often did not have the required cultural knowledge to proactively design responsive instruction, but rather relied upon in-the-moment adaptations to respond to cultural mismatches. Third, informal opportunities to interact with families and caregivers of students created through exploration of community culture could help build trusting relationships so that caregivers feel they have access to the school to share their unique knowledge of their children, further supporting a context that is ripe for culturally relevant teaching and learning. This may include regularly attending community social events, and spending time in community spaces, such as parks, places of worship, community based organizations, or stores and other places of business, where relationships are built with other adults in the community.

Cultivation of School-based Knowledge

Early cultivation of school-based practical knowledge related to new teachers' work would help to alleviate strains of the steep learning curve experienced by many first-year teachers. This may be especially important for teachers of students who experience cultural mismatch with many school practices, requiring teachers to responsively adapt for their students. For first-year teachers, beginning the school socialization process prior to the start of the academic year may provide a running start to classroom teaching that supports a smoother transition to the demands of their work.

Curriculum is at the heart of this. Teachers who have access to, and engage with, the grade level content curricula prior to the start of the academic school year would have

an opportunity to learn the curriculum prior to teaching it to students, better positioning them to make intentional shifts, or redesigns, toward more culturally relevant instruction. Furthermore, it would provide teachers with more opportunity to investigate what aspects of school-based instructional materials and practices are in fact mandated, and which elements over which the teacher has immediate control, increasing teacher agency.

Guided Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is not a final state of being, but rather a state of continuous reflection in new situations to deepen understanding. Critical consciousness is affected by context, and a person who is able to employ critical consciousness in one context may need support in another context (Marx & Moss, 2011; McDonough, 2009). Teachers in this study demonstrated mixed outcomes with applying critical perspectives to their teaching experiences, indicating that mentoring in this continuous reflection may be a necessary support across the first year. While teachers in this study were able to identify systemic inequalities reinforced by the traditional grammars of schooling, their critical lens was fragile. Reinforcement is important to maintaining this lens to create a habit of mind (Mezirow, 1997) that is less easily changed by their teaching experiences. This illuminates the possibility in opportunities for new teachers to receive support with guided application of critical consciousness, providing teachers with a stronger safety net for experiences with cultural disequilibrium and navigating deficit perspectives that may be embedded in the school's institutional knowledge. These opportunities can be created in partnership with multiple stakeholders, including the preservice program staff, school-based staff who are interested in rewriting deficit narratives in their schools, or

community members and organizations who work to build their community schools to server community needs.

There are multiple benefits to ensuring that teachers maintain critical perspectives as they learn to teach in their new contexts. First, critical reflection can be a means by which teachers develop cultural competence. Deeper understanding of student and community culture leads to increased opportunity for culturally relevant teaching and learning. Second, guidance with navigating spaces of racial dialogue with colleagues within the school could support new teachers in rewriting some of the deficit narratives that persist in the school's knowledge base. Similarly, this guidance can be utilized to discuss and critique any observed long-standing teaching practices in the school that may or may not be responsive to students' culture. Third, this mentoring could support in helping teachers identify which perceived structural constraints are, in fact, mandates to which they are held accountable, and which are simply perceived constraints within which teachers have latitude in their practices. Finding opportunity for increase autonomy in teaching can lead to innovative culturally relevant teaching practices.

Furthermore, findings from this study indicate a need to consider ways in which new teachers can develop or claim capacity to take action against identified issues of injustice in their own teaching practice and across the school, increasing teachers' sense of agency in using their work as a teacher to create a more socially just world. Purposeful mentoring throughout the first year by an expert in culturally relevant teaching could support new teachers to identify avenues within the school where they can speak back to problematic structures and practices that are not responsive to students. Collaborating with this expert mentor would help support new teachers to ensure that their ideas for

innovative practices within their schools are in fact aligned with the culture and values of the community. This leads to the fourth benefit of this type of mentorship: helping teachers to find opportunities for systemic impact from within the sphere of their communities. Urban teachers often choose their teaching contexts because of a passion to contribute to a more socially just world. Supporting new teachers to realize this passion is important to maintaining their commitment and belief in their work (Pollock et al., 2010).

Induction and Transition Programs

As teacher preparation and certification pathways diversify, several program models have attempted to address some of the previously discussed implications.

Induction Models

One induction model used in California¹ spans the first three years of a new teacher's career, and pairs teachers with a mentor who is an experienced, effective teacher and guides new teachers through teaching-standards-based reflection, self-assessment, and goal setting to improve instructional practices (Hoover, 2010). In this model, mentor teachers are relieved of their teaching duties for 3 years as they mentor a cohort of new teachers. This induction model has been found to be transformational in the sense that it supports new teachers to find agency and take ownership for growing their own teaching practices.

While this model did unearth some ways to support new teachers in their induction, it did not explicitly provide for teachers' development of culturally relevant

¹ This induction program was implemented in partnership with The New Teacher Project. This researcher is currently employed by The New Teacher Project but was not at the time of Hoover's (2010) study, and has never been affiliated with the partnership for this induction program.

teaching practices, nor did it intentionally guide new teachers to develop critical understandings of their teaching contexts (Hoover, 2010). This could be in part because the model was based on the California teaching standards, and culturally relevant teaching was not explicitly named in the standards at the time. However, in the absence of robust or clear requirements for teachers learning about diversity in practice, it is a moral imperative for teacher education programs to account for this (Allen et al., 2017). It is reasonable to consider that, while placing a new set of demands on mentor capabilities, guided mentoring in culturally relevant teaching practices could lead to stronger teaching and learning in urban schools.

It is also important to note that while the model prioritized creating time for mentor teachers to do their work well (e.g., relieving them of other teaching duties, holding weekly professional development opportunities for mentors), it did not account for how mentoring activities added additional demands to busy schedules of first-year teachers (Hoover, 2010). While mentoring is undoubtedly crucial during the induction years, it would also be prudent to center teachers' time as a key resource (Toom et al., 2017) for new teachers to develop professional agency.

While research has developed a set of promising features of induction programs, many teachers do not actually receive the supports outlined by their district programs (LoCascio, Smeaton, & Waters, 2016). Research has shown partnerships with university-based teacher education programs to be effective supplements to district induction programs (McGlamery, Fluckiger, & Edick, 2002), and that philosophical alignment among the teacher, teacher education program, and school is one condition that supports new teacher effectiveness (Bergerson, 2008), yet the practicality of these partnerships

remain unclear, particularly in large urban areas where many new teachers are inducted each year.

Residency Models

Teacher residencies attempt to respond to some challenges of university-based teacher induction programs, and often partner with school districts to explore localized solutions to challenges with recruitment, preparation, and retention of new teachers in the school district (Garza & Harter, 2016; Reagan, Roegman, & Goodwin, 2017). The Boston Teacher Residency (BTR)² is one such model. BTR boasts some important outcomes, including recruitment of a more diversified teaching force to Boston Public Schools, and higher retention rates across the first three years than teachers who enter the school district by other means (Solomon, 2009), though it is important to note the tuition and loan structure of this program place financial responsibility on teachers who exit the program prior to fulfilling a three year commitment. The model blends theory and practice in the sense that residents apprentice and observe in effective urban classrooms, yet engage in ongoing conversations to ensure that teachers are not merely replicating what they see, an important component of other teacher residency programs as well (Kolman et al., 2016).

It is important to further explore how structured guidance during teacher apprenticeship or induction into the district can inform teachers' critical perspectives, and influence the ways in which they build relationships in the community and enact culturally relevant teaching. There is a "need to develop teachers' understandings of the

² Boston Teacher Residency is affiliated with TNTP, and though employed by TNTP, this researcher is not affiliated with this residency program.

social, economic, and cultural factors that both undermine and support families in high poverty communities” (Lazar, 2013, p. 723) in order to support teachers in developing assets-based perceptions of their students and their communities.

Community-Based Partnerships

Jester and Fickel (2013) posit that adhering to teaching standards that are aligned with the literature on culturally relevant teaching practices, would counter the “separation phenomenon” that they unearthed in their research in Native Alaskan communities: the predominantly White teacher and intern group living separately from the community, creating a subcommunity of White teachers within that community, and preventing teachers from developing cultural competencies. It is recommended that urban teachers have structured opportunities to spend time in the communities they teach in, talking to community members, learning their perspectives on aspirations for the children and children’s life chances, building trusting relationships, and moving teachers to deeper levels of critical reflection (Gay, 2003; Murray et al., 2013; Seider & Huguley, 2009).

Research shows partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) as a promising way to facilitate relationships and promote family engagement in schools, de-isolating schools and schooling as a feature of community life that is distinct from other aspects of community life (Warren et al., 2009). It is important, however, that new teachers’ experiences with the CBO extend beyond simply spending time on-site, and include mediation that guides them to think critically about those experiences to avoid potential reinforcement of deficit perspectives or stereotypes. McDonald et al. (2011) found that effective mediation for preservice teachers required their CBO experience to be integrated into all program coursework that they were completing simultaneously,

guiding them to consider their experiences through multiple lenses of their course content. The CBO experience could not exist as an add-on to program experiences. They also found that prospective teachers' experiences at their CBO sites were shaped by the CBO director and staff, and how the staff conceptualized diversity. Strong CBO partnerships that support new teachers to develop community knowledge and relationships, and prepare them to teach in community schools, must, therefore, be intentional and may take time to establish.

CBOs and schools can also work to bring in community members to play parent-leader roles in the school, supporting “intentional efforts to change the culture of public education to create schools that incorporate the culture, values, and interests of the communities they serve” (p. 2242). When relationships are fostered among caregivers, and they are invited into the school to promote the school as a whole, not just their child, engagement is increased. Through this engagement, new teachers could have additional opportunities to learn from community members within the context of their schools. New teacher guidance and mentorship to leverage the power of community-based partnerships may hold powerful potential for the induction of effective culturally relevant teachers.

Implications for Research

There are several implications for research based on this study. First, a critique of this study explores ways that similar research could capture more diverse perspectives and stories to create a more complete picture of first-year, intercultural urban teachers. Second, further research on the themes that emerged from this case study would help to clarify implications for teacher education and induction practices.

Critique of this Case Study

There are several previously discussed limitations of this case study. One is that the purpose and design of this research risks maintaining the White teacher at the center of teacher education and teacher education research, failing to highlight the importance of centering the unique and diverse experiences of teachers of color throughout teacher education programs and into their first years of teaching in urban contexts (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). While the intent of this study was to further explore ways to support White, middle class, female teachers, who are currently disproportionately overrepresented in the incoming teacher force, to be more successful in their work in culturally diverse, urban schools, this study is not meant to de-trouble this disproportionate overrepresentation.

A second limitation is researcher identity and influence on data analysis. While iterative data analysis allowed the researcher to continuously to return to the data to help ensure that the findings were rooted in what teachers shared, it would be erroneous to claim freedom from researcher bias, as the researcher acted as an analysis tool in determining initial themes and data nodes. The researcher's bias as a White, female teacher from a working- and middle-class background, who began her teaching career in an intercultural, high-need, urban elementary school was an inherent lens through which the researcher interpreted the data. The researcher's own experiences shaped the interest and research questions themselves, specifically related to experiences with cultural disequilibrium and development of critical consciousness, as these elements were salient in her own first-year teaching experiences.

While the frameworks of cultural disequilibrium, culturally relevant teaching, and critical consciousness were useful in shaping and responding to research questions of interest to the researcher, and more broadly the field of multicultural education, it is noteworthy that these frameworks did not squarely fit with the stories teachers in this study shared about their work. Teachers did not explicitly describe their experiences as cultural disequilibrium, compare their own teaching practices against a lens of culturally relevant teaching, or discuss their own challenges with enacting critical consciousness in their teaching contexts. Therefore, to account for one of the identified purposes of this study, to amplify teachers' voices as they describe their own intercultural teaching experiences, an additional layer of data analysis was required to highlight the themes that emerged more naturally from their stories.

Another challenge arose in attempting to meet the identified purpose of amplifying teachers' voices as they shared their own stories. Tension arose between honoring teachers' voices and remaining consistent with the theoretical orientation of this study. While sharing stories, deficit views of the school and local communities sometimes emerged, as teachers were still in the process of making sense of their own experiences. While this did provide valuable insight on practices that can be implemented to support teachers, specifically guidance on critical consciousness, it does also present a challenge in that it provided space for repetition of deficit narratives or stereotypes about Hispanic communities or living in poverty. Because this study's design intended only to capture and amplify teachers' stories, it did not take advantage of opportunities to engage teacher participants in guided critical consciousness throughout the study, potentially documenting ways in which teachers were able to develop contextualized critical

consciousness through storytelling, while also supporting them to become stronger multicultural educators in their first year of teaching.

Another key critique of this study is that the nature of a two-person case study limits the extent to which robust claims can be made, given the limited breadth of experiences represented. This study was originally designed to capture the perspectives of three to six first-year teachers, yet limited participant interest, and in at least one case, a participant's teaching context that turned out to not match the purpose of this study, restricted the number of participants.

It is possible that the timing and duration of the participant selection window impacted the quantity of participants who opted into the study, and the possible motivations that potential participants opted out. The original study design included a participant selection window of July to September 2013. As implemented, due to delays in final approval from the teacher education program from which participants graduated, and thereby gaining access to the graduate listserv, the participant selection window did not open until November 5, 2013. Reminder emails were sent on November 23 and November 24, and the selection window closed on November 25, 2013. The researcher decided to shorten the selection window from the original design of the study so that data collection could begin as close to the start of the school year as possible.

Shifting the participant selection window to after prospective participants had started teaching, and their schedules and daily responsibilities potentially became more hectic, may have precluded some teachers from checking their personal email accounts during the shortened participant selection window and learning about the study. For those prospective participants who did see the invitation to the study, many may have already

felt overwhelmed by the demands of teaching and opted out of the additional demands of participating in this study. Furthermore, potentially inferring that this study was specific to graduates of this particular teacher education program, which explicitly and intensively focuses on diversity and inclusive teaching practices, prospective participants who felt themselves struggling in this area may have opted out of the study because they felt they were not able to contribute positively, or were uncomfortable sharing that they felt unsuccessful.

The number of participants in this study limited the breadth of perspectives represented. Taking this into account, the two perspectives represented in this data are not compared or contrasted to look for trends or points of divergence between participant experiences. Rather, the experiences of two participants across a year of research are aggregated into a single, deeper pool of data from which experiences can corroborate or counter existing research, or identify areas where additional research would be helpful in supporting teachers in similar contexts.

Another key critique of this study is that the delay in data collection processes meant that rather than capturing new teachers' experiences throughout their entire first year, data was not collected during the first three months of teaching, and extended past the end of their final day of teaching in the first year. While this did not disrupt the focus on first year experiences, it does present a gap in understanding during the initial months when cultural disequilibrium was likely at its pinnacle, and may have more heavily influenced teachers' perspectives and decisions. However, an unintended potential outcome of this is that, as seen in the data, participants were likely to project ahead to what teaching would or could be like in the second year, particularly in data collection

points that occurred after the last day of teaching in their first year. This gave the researcher a glimpse into teachers' reflections about transitioning from a more passive-observer role to a more active change-agent as they transition into their second year of teaching in their respective schools. It also allowed the researcher to capture participants' thoughts about longer-term career plans during a window (summer months between academic school years) when most teachers who plan to leave their teaching positions exit.

Another implication of this self-selected participant sample are that participant perspectives represented include only those who had the time, capacity, or motivation that outweighed the competing demands of their time. This presents potential bias in that the data does not represent the experiences of teachers who did not feel that they had the capacity to devote the required time to this study, which is important because time is one of the limited resources identified in this study that first-year teachers feel is a barrier in this work. It is noteworthy that time constraints discussed in this study include the demands of the teaching role itself, but do not address time demands and responsibilities that impact prospective participants' capacity to participate beyond the role of teaching, such as motherhood, keeping additional part-time work to supplement first-year teacher salary, management of health conditions, religious practices, or other. Therefore, data in this study reflects a bias that excludes perspectives of those who assume additional time restrictions in their lives outside of teaching, which has important implications for how that sub-group of first year teachers work within and against the barrier of limited time to do their work as a teacher.

In future research with similar study designs, the selection process might include an option for prospective participants to express interest, yet indicate that time constraints are preventing them from committing to engaging in the study. The researcher could then decide on a study design that could run parallel to the original study that may include data collection methods that reduced time demands on the participant, yet allowed for collection of data that could supplement the data in the original study.

To account for prospective participants who opted out based on their inference that the study was directly related to how well they were enacting the issues of diversity and inclusive teaching practices that were the focus of their teacher preparation experience, the selection process might be redesigned to further reduce perceived affiliation between the study and the teacher education program. This may include inviting participants from several different teacher education programs, while still ensuring that all programs from which graduates were invited do in fact intentionally and explicitly focus on developing teachers' critical consciousness. It may also be worthwhile to explore options for outreach to recent graduates that does not include use of teacher education program listserves, as well as eliminating references to prospective participants' graduation from a particular program. Communication might instead focus on their candidacy as a first-year teacher in an intercultural, urban school.

An additional key learning in implementation of this study is an importance of ongoing communication with the teacher education program(s) of focus to not only ensure a mutually agreed upon timeline for data collection, but also that the elements of the data collection timeline that require program cooperation remain salient to the program staff amongst the many competing priorities of running the program. Ensuring a

smoother timeline for implementation of the study would have allowed for a longer participant selection window within which participants could express interest, and also would have gained participant interest prior to the start of the school year when time demands likely became key determining factors. This could have potentially been accomplished by familiarizing and investing the program staff in the purpose of the study earlier in the study design process.

Further Research

Future research in the area of teaching induction and transition programs should further explore several avenues through which new teachers in intercultural, urban contexts can be supported. First, research should explore a range of ways in which new teachers can develop local knowledge, including community knowledge, knowledge of their students, and institutional knowledge of the school. Current induction and residency models seem geared toward preparing teachers with the institutional knowledge of the school or district early in their preparation. Community-based partnerships are ripe with opportunity for teachers to learn the culture of the local community. However, we need to know more about how these teacher preparation or induction elements can be combined, and layered with opportunities to build relationships with students. Exploration of these programs should seek to understand the extent to which teachers' knowledge in these areas influences a positive experience during the first year for the teacher and students.

Future research should continue to explore how critically conscious new teachers merge their mindsets with the dominant perspective in their schools among their colleagues. Research should include specific focus on guidance or mentoring that seeks to support teachers in several ways: to actively seek institutional knowledge in their

schools while consuming that knowledge from a critical perspective; to leverage relationships with colleagues and administrators to share their perspectives and promote schoolwide change; to identify ways in which their daily work provides opportunity to create large-scale change and a more socially just world.

Additional research should seek to ascertain if, in fact, increased autonomy in their work promotes teachers' innovation with culturally relevant instruction and teaching practices. Current research shows that increased autonomy is effective in supporting teachers to develop their own practice in several areas, such as differentiated instruction (De Neve et al., 2015), but we must know more about ways in which teachers are able to leverage this autonomy in their development of culturally relevant teaching. The value of this could be especially important in speaking back to increasingly pervasive, externally imposed requirements on teaching practices in the high-stakes accountability climate.

Conclusion

The five implications for practice discussed in this chapter highlight important areas in which we must explore ways to support new teachers to enter the classroom with stronger capacity for culturally relevant teaching in their first year. First, teacher must be prepared with experiences that build foundational skills and knowledge of classroom teaching from which they can adapt and build new skills and knowledge, and teachers must also have developed a foundational critical consciousness. Second, structures should be in place that allow teachers to begin building relationships with their students early in the year, and before the school year starts as possible, allowing them to build an instructional plan that centers students' interests and cultures. Third, structures should be

created to facilitate new teachers' knowledge building of community assets and culture. This knowledge will further support teachers to create instruction that sustains students' culture through their academic learning. Fourth, structures should allow for teachers to learn the school-based knowledge required to do their job well, including building supportive relationships within the school that promote growth, and internalizing the curriculum materials prior to teaching them in order to make appropriate adaptations based on knowledge of students and community. Finally, findings from this study indicate an importance for new teachers to receive guidance throughout their first year with applying a critical lens to their experiences, supporting them to make sense of their experiences as they align with their work for social change, including speaking back to deficit narratives that exist in their schools. Combinations of these supports may better support new teachers to re-think, and simultaneously work within and against, the traditional grammars of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) that marginalize certain communities of students.

Current induction models, teacher residency programs, and partnerships between schools and community-based organizations each provide elements of the five implications discussed in this chapter that reveal some promising outcomes for new teachers. Findings from this study support exploration of ways to incorporate these elements into a more comprehensive support model.

This study calls for additional research in three specific areas. First, we continue to explore teacher induction and transition programs that equip teachers with the knowledge of their students, the local community, and school-based institutional knowledge that they need to do their work well in the first year. This area of research

should seek to understand the ways in which teachers utilize this knowledge in their teaching practices across their first year. Second, research should deepen our understanding of how critically conscious new teachers merge their mindsets about students' cultures, their communities, and their capacity to be successful with existing ideologies within their schools, and how purposeful mentorship can support critically conscious new teachers to create social change within and beyond their schools. Third, research should explore if increased autonomy in teachers' work translates to innovative ways to enact culturally relevant teaching, and should seek to identify other key factors that contribute to teachers' success with this in a more autonomous teaching context.

Deeper understanding of teachers' experiences in these areas, coupled with innovative teacher induction and transition program provide promising prospects for culturally relevant teaching. With appropriate supports, new teachers in intercultural, urban schools can be prepared to provide effective, culturally sustaining education experiences for their students, and fulfill teachers' desires to impact change for social justice.

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Appendix A

Letter to Invite Participants

Dear graduate,

Congratulations on your completion of the [preservice program at Northeast College]. I am conducting research on the teaching experiences of a subset of first year teachers after graduating from this program. A goal of this research project is to respond to the literature that reports the challenges of being a White multicultural teacher in urban schools.

It is my hope that, together, we can illuminate some of the strong work that you, as first year teachers in these teaching contexts, are capable of, as well as describe some of the challenges along the way. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups held at different points across the year, you will have an opportunity to share your experiences and reflections on your work.

This study is not meant to be an evaluation of the program or of your preparedness to teach. This is an opportunity for you to amplify your voice in the discourse surrounding schools and teaching in urban communities by sharing your year-long journey as a first year teacher. I invite you to complete the survey to participate in this study, or to learn more about the nature of it by using the following link.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9D6FDW7>

Best,

Ellie Cook
Erc2102@tc.columbia.edu

Appendix B

Participant Selection Survey

Invitation to Participate in Study

Please answer each of the following questions. If you choose to participate in the study or have more questions, the researcher will contact you within one week.

1. What is your race? Please choose one or more. If you do not select White, you may skip questions 2-7.

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Other

Other (please specify)

2. Do you identify as female?

- yes
- no

3. What is your socioeconomic background?

- Upper class
- Upper-middle class
- Middle class
- Working class
- Lower class

Other (please specify)

**4. Will the 2013-2014 school year be your first year of teaching?
(Do not count student teaching.)**

- yes
- no

**5. Please mark the response that describes your teaching plans for
the 2013-2014 school year.**

- I have found a teaching position.
- I am looking for a teaching position.
- I do not plan to teach.

**6. Please enter the city and state in which you have found a
teaching job OR are looking for a teaching job. If you are looking
for a teaching job in more than one location, please enter all cities.
If you are not planning to teach during the 2013-14 school year, do
not answer this question.**

7. Are you interested in participating in this study of first year urban teachers?

- yes
- no
- I need more information before I decide. Please contact me at:

8. If you are interested in participating in this study, please enter your name below and the email address or phone number at which you would like to be contacted.

Done

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Check out our [sample surveys](#) and create your own now!

Appendix C

Participant Acceptance Letter

Dear [name],

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study of the first year teaching experiences of White, middle class teachers in intercultural school contexts. Based on your survey responses, you are an excellent candidate for this study, and I would like to formally invite you to participate.

This study will take place across the school year, collecting data each month from October 2013 through May 2014. In the months of October, November, December, February, March, and April, you will receive an email from me with a link that will bring you to a written prompt using SurveyMonkey. A different prompt will be given to you each of these months, and each prompt will ask you to reflect and write about your experiences with different aspects of your work as a teacher. It is estimated that each written response will take approximately 30 minutes. I will then follow up on each prompt with an interview that will take place by phone, Google+, or in-person. It is anticipated that each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. In the months of January and May, there will be no written prompts or interviews. Instead, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion to further reflect on your experiences with other graduates of your program. Each focus group will be held in-person or via Google+ and will last approximately 90 minutes.

I understand that your first year of teaching will be busy, and every effort will be made to preserve your time and accommodate your schedule. A total of nine hours of participation is requested across the year, with one hour in October, November, December, February, March, and April, and 90 minutes of participation in January and May.

I look forward to speaking with you in the coming weeks as you search for and solidify your teaching position, as well as to answer any questions that you may have about this study.

Again, thank you, and I am excited about this opportunity to amplify your voice in the stories of urban teachers.

Sincerely,

Ellie Cook
917-657-1737

Appendix D

Informed Consent and Participant Rights

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: You are invited to participate in a research study on the teaching experiences of White, female teachers of middle class socioeconomic backgrounds who are in their first year of teaching and are teaching in intercultural urban contexts. You will be asked to respond to six written prompts, participate in six audio recorded phone interviews, and participate in two video recorded focus groups that will document your experiences throughout your first year of teaching. The research will be conducted by the researcher. Interviews and focus groups will be held in-person, by phone, or by video conference, as agreed upon by the researcher and participant.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks and possible benefits associated with this study include deepening understanding of your own practice through prompted reflection, as well as contributing your story to the research surround intercultural urban teaching. The risks associated with this study include possible discomfort with personal reflections. The research has the same amount of risk teachers will encounter during professional communication about teaching practices and beliefs. If you decide during the study that you do not want to participate in some or all of the written prompts, interviews, or focus groups, you may decline or exit the study.

PAYMENTS: No monetary compensation is provided to participants.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: You have the option to participate in all data collection under a pseudonym. Data will be stored electronically on the researcher's personal computer that is password protected.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately nine hours of time across eight months. You will be asked to respond to six written prompts (one in each of six months), participate in 6 interviews (one in each of six months), and participate in two focus groups (one in each of two months). Written responses will take approximately 30 minutes each, interviews will last approximately 30 minutes each, and focus groups will last approximately 90 minutes each.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used for my dissertation. The research may also be presented at academic conferences, meetings, or published in academic journals.

Teachers College, Columbia University
 525 West 120th Street
 New York NY 10027
 212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator: Eloise Cook
 Prof. Karen Zumwalt, Sponsor

Research Title: Restructuring traditional grammars of schooling: Experiences of White, middle class, female, first-year teachers in intercultural urban teaching contexts

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (917)657-1737.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I () consent to be audio/video taped. I () do NOT consent to being video/audio taped. The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and members of the research team.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials () may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research () may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____
 Name: _____

Appendix E

Participant Letter of Non-selection

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The intent of this study is to document experiences of White, female, middle class teachers in their first year of teaching in an urban, intercultural elementary school. Because your initial survey responses indicated that one or more of these characteristics do not apply to you, I am unable to include your responses in this particular study. If you believe that this is in error, please contact me at erc2102@tc.columbia.edu. If you might be interested in participating in other studies in the future, please let me know.

Thank you,
Ellie Cook

Appendix F

Personal Document Prompts


Survey Prompt 1

Please complete this survey by December 8.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. What have been your experiences with classroom management? What systems of classroom management are in place in your classroom? In your school?**

[Done](#)

Powered by
 **SurveyMonkey**
See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).

Survey Prompt 2

Please complete this survey by January 12.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. What have been your experiences in working with colleagues? Who are the colleagues that you interact with most? Why?**

Done


Survey Prompt 3

Please complete this survey by February 28.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. What have been your experiences in working with families of students? In what ways do families influence the experiences in your classroom?**

Done

Powered by
 **SurveyMonkey**
See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).


Survey Prompt 4

Please complete this survey by May 16.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. What have been your experiences related to curriculum? What curricula are you enacting in your classroom? What is your planning process like?**

Done

Powered by
 **SurveyMonkey**
See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).

Survey Prompt 5

Please complete this survey by June 29.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. What have been your experiences related to assessments, testing, and accountability? How are assessments used in your school? What assessments have been valuable? How do you determine whether or not an assessment is valuable in your work?**

Done

Powered by



See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).

Survey Prompt 6

Please complete this survey by August 10.

*** 1. Enter your name or pseudonym.**

*** 2. Has this been a successful year? How has cultural and social identity shaped your successes and challenges this year? How are you defining success in your work? What has been your role in the school community? What professional goals do you have for yourself based on your experiences with teaching this year?**

Done

Appendix G

Monthly Personal Document Participation Letter

Dear [name],

Your written response to this month's written prompt is an important component of this study. Please view and respond to this prompt by the 15th of this month by using this link:

[insert link to monthly prompt]

It is anticipated that this will take you approximately 30 minutes. Please remember that your responses will remain confidential and that you may use a pseudonym if you chose to do so. If you did not opt to use a pseudonym at the beginning of the study but would like to do so now, please notify me by email.

I look forward to reading your reflection and following up with you in an interview later this month.

Sincerely,

Ellie Cook

Appendix H

Sample Personal Documents from Pilot

Prompt 1**J.**

Both [co-teacher] and I were trained over the summer in Responsive Classroom (by our principal) and really tried to adopt the First Six Weeks of School as much as we could to bring our students into the fold and build the community we wanted to see. Since then, we've adopted some behavior plans for our trickier students that include star charts and frequent break schedules. Both [co-teacher] and I LOVE responsive classroom but have found that it doesn't necessarily work for all of our students in terms of establishing the buy-in to respect the classroom community. We've opened Ross Greene's Lost at School many times in regards to two of our students and that has helped us bring students into the conversation. We've had half a dozen parent meetings around behavior and have found that in most cases, bringing parents in to help us get behavior on track, is very successful. Classroom management feels like a constant struggle. In January we are still practicing and re-doing transitions and how to walk through the hallways. Some of the routines of our classroom haven't clicked for some of our students and we continue to think about why that's the case.

Prompt 2**D.**

I have had mostly positive experiences with colleagues. I try to associate mostly with teachers who I feel do not speak about administration in the school so that I do not feel uncomfortable. I am closest with one teacher and one occupational therapist. We are all around the same age and I went to the same college as one of them. They are both very supportive and I can count on them in school. I have had an awkward relationship with my mentor due to miscommunications. She wears many hats in the school and is often in meetings. I now rely more on other teachers when I need advice.

Prompt 3**B.**

I am currently teaching in a 5th grade ICT class in an Pre K-5 school in the South Bronx. The majority of the students in the school are either Black or Hispanic/Latino, and many of the children speak Spanish in their homes. I teach in a neighborhood with poor and working class families, and 99% of the students receive free lunch. My students come from all different family backgrounds, some living with a single parent, some living in foster care, and some with relatives. During my first year in this school, I have experienced a wide variety of interactions with families. Throughout the year there have been several opportunities for families to come to school (i.e. [sic] open house, conferences, monthly Family Friday, Math Games Night). While most of my students' families came to conferences, very few families come to the other events. In fact the same few families come to several events, but others come to none. At our most

recent Family Friday, we had one family member come to our room. In addition to school-wide functions, my co-teacher and I also work with families more personally. We speak to families on the phone for a variety of reasons (positives, negatives, homework, etc.). We also have families come in for meetings with us, and we hold our annual IEP meetings. These more personal conversations seem to be the most beneficial way to communicate with parents and share information and observations about students. While we wish we could communicate with all of the families frequently, we sometimes have wrong numbers or the families speak Spanish, which makes it more difficult to speak regularly because I don't speak Spanish. The families that we communicate with more do tend to have a greater influence on the classroom and the overall work and behavior of the student.

Prompt 4

J.

My experience with curriculum has been varied as we've designed our own units of study and taken on ones that our district has handed to us. We are using Everyday Math and CLM Units (problem-solving/exploratory work) which is relatively concrete and gives us a lot of flexibility to differentiate. Two of our students are using Kathy Richardson's Do the Math as their math curriculum with Hillary. In Writing we started the year with a narrative unit of study where we used Lucy Calkins and had the freedom to do as we pleased. We are now in a Persuasive Essay unit that N----- has given us. We still adapt the lessons but it is much less work to do so then planning for narrative writing. We also have a lot of freedom to design curriculum in reading though we did try to follow a unit of study map to align with our grade level. This proved challenging because we didn't understand many of the lessons that were shared with us and ended up crystallizing the teaching point a bit more and paring lessons down so they would work for us. We have been given free reign in Science and Social Studies and have strayed from our grade level a bit. According to the Curriculum Coordinator for N-----, both of these subjects are influx so we didn't have much to go on. We've used units of study from the past to design our own curriculum doing an inquiry-based landform study and now rocks and minerals (alternating social studies and science). In terms of planning, we try to keep an eye fixed on the common core even though N----- hasn't entirely adopted it (NYC seems light years ahead in that regard). We meet on most Sundays to plan for the week and have each taken on units to do big-picture planning on our own with. It seems like we can only do some much together and have had to take on projects of our own that we then share with one another. We meet on the weekends and get to school two hours before it starts to plan. We try to leave school by 4:30 (for some balance) but then go home and are often on the phone or ghost-writing via google docs at night to prepare for the next day's lessons. We have shared plans (everything living in google doc) that acts as a script of sorts for the day.

Prompt 5**D.**

We use the Brigance Diagnostic Inventory. It is difficult to assess my students since they are mostly nonverbal and have a very difficult time focusing on a task. I have to use reinforcers for my students. Each student needs a different reinforcer based on his preference. I use the assessment to determine what I will be teaching each student and understand what they already know, need to work on, and how they are able to show me what they understand. I use picture symbols for as much as possible. My other assessments are informal. I watch the work that my students produce and assess based on the amount of prompting each student requires. Every student is at a very different level in my classroom. I often use rubrics that assess based on how long each student was able to attend to a task. My students frequently seem to understand something one day, but not the next. Teaching and testing at my school is a very slow process.

Prompt 6**B.**

Overall, I would say that this has been a successful year thus far. I define success in many ways, and in some of these ways I feel very successful and in others I feel less so. One way that I feel successful is in my communication with my co-teacher. I think constant communication and collaboration are essential for a successful ICT classroom, and my co-teacher and I do this very well. We plan together every night, discuss long term goals for our students and class, and we have developed a friendship as well. Our communication has allowed for a well structured and planned classroom, and has helped our students and class develop as a family. I also define success in terms of the progress that my students have made. While many of my students are performing below grade level standards in all subjects, this does not mean that they have not made progress. All of my students have moved up at least one reading level, and they have all gained a greater understanding of fractions in math and essays in writing. While tests at the end of the year might show that my students are behind academically, I know they have made progress. While in those two ways I have felt successful, I sometimes feel less successful when it comes to classroom management. When both teachers are in the room, most students follow expectations and are respectful to others. However if only one of us is in the room, or if our students go to the cluster teachers, they are often disrespectful to each other or to the teacher. As this year continues, and as I become a more experienced teacher, I hope to improve my classroom management so that students respect themselves and others wherever they are and whomever they are with. In addition to improving classroom management, I also have other professional goals that I am working toward. First, I am working to ensure that my instruction is effective and engaging and that my small groups are well thought out and fluid. My co-teacher and I are also working on improving class discussions. We want our students to take ownership and leadership of discussions so that our class is more student directed than teacher directed. We also want to make our discussions more open-ended and with deeper thinking questions. Finally, another goal that I have is working to ensure that students

with disabilities receive the services they need, are advocated for by teachers and families, and are in the settings that best meet their needs. While this goal starts in my own classroom with my students with disabilities, I hope to also work to make sure this is true for students throughout the school. While my primary role in my school thus far has been teaching my students, I am also in an inquiry group on differentiating instruction for students of all different needs, and I am on a committee to develop a system of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports in our school.

Appendix I

General Interview Protocol

Standard Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview to follow up on your written reflection this month. I emailed your response to you within the last few days in case you would like to refer to it while we talk. You don't need to if you do not want to, and it is fine if you have changed your mind about some of the things you wrote in your response. I will ask you some questions to guide the interview, but please feel free to share anything that comes to mind as we talk that you would like me to know. Is it acceptable to you for me to record this interview? I am the only person who will have access to this recording, and your name if you have decided to use a pseudonym, will be kept confidential. If at any time you would like the recorder turned off, or if you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. Let's begin.

Prompt 1

What are some of the specific whole class management strategies you are using this year?

How did you come to develop or adopt this management strategy in your classroom?

Do you feel that this is a successful strategy? How do you know? Can you share a story?

What is still challenging about this management system? Can you share a story?

What are some of the challenging behaviors exhibited by individual students?

What strategies have been successful in managing these behaviors?

What is still challenging about managing individual student behavior?

What prepared you best for the management needs in your classroom and school context?

What could have better prepared you? What supports do you still feel you need?

Prompt 2

What are some of the specific ways that you work with colleagues, or other adults, in your school building?

What have been some of the most rewarding collaborative relationships? What made this relationship or collaborative experience so effective?

What have been some of the least rewarding collaborative relationships? What made this relationship or collaborative experience so ineffective?

Are there adults in your school with whom you wish you had a stronger collaborative relationship? What would you hope to gain through that relationship?

What most prepared you for collegial collaboration in your school context? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 3

Have you taken any opportunities to meet with or communicate with students' families? If so, what are some of the reasons you have met/communicated?

What are the methods of communication that you have tried out? Which methods were effective? Ineffective? How do you know?

In what ways do families influence what happens in your classroom? Can you share a story?

How would you describe your relationship with some of the families of students in your class? Can you share a story?

What most prepared you for working with students' families in this community? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 4

What curricula are you using in your classroom this year?

Do you have flexibility in choosing or designing curricula? If so, how do you make these decisions? If not, who makes curricular decisions for your classroom, and how are those decisions made?

What is your planning process like?

What is working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?

What is not working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?

Do you feel that you are able to meet the needs of each of your students using the curricula you have in place? What are some of your successes and challenges with this?

What most prepared you for your work with curriculum in this school? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 5

What assessments or tests are used in your classroom?

How do you use these assessments or tests as a teacher? Can you share a story?

What do these assessments and tests mean in your work as a teacher? What policies surrounding accountability are in place for student assessment or test performance?

How would you describe the culture of testing and accountability in your school? In your classroom? Can you share a story?

What, if anything, do you feel is successful or effective about the culture of assessment, testing, and accountability in your school? What, if anything, is unsuccessful or ineffective?

What most prepared you for your work with assessments and testing in this school community? What could have better prepared you?

Prompt 6

Has this been a successful year for you? In what ways has it been successful? In what ways has it been unsuccessful? Can you share a story?

Do you plan to return to your current teaching position next year? Why or why not?

Do you feel that the culture of this school and the local community is a good match for you? Can you share a story that helped you know this?

What are your professional goals for yourself based on your experiences as a teacher in this school?

What are your longer term professional goals (5-10 years from now)?

Do you see yourself continuing your work as a teacher in this school? As a teacher in another setting? In the field of education but not teaching? Leaving the field of education?

What experiences are influencing your thinking about this?

Do you feel that you were prepared to teach in this context? What most prepared you? What could have better prepared you?

Appendix J

Sample Participant-Specific Interview Protocols from Pilot Interviews

Prompt 1

General Protocol

What are some of the specific whole class management strategies you are using this year?

How did you come to develop or adopt this management strategy in your classroom?

Do you feel that this is a successful strategy? How do you know? Can you share a story?

What is still challenging about this management system? Can you share a story?

What are some of the challenging behaviors exhibited by individual students?

What strategies have been successful in managing these behaviors?

What is still challenging about managing individual student behavior?

What prepared you best for the management needs in your classroom and school context?

What could have better prepared you?

What supports do you still feel you need?

Participant-specific Protocol

D.

In your written response, you mentioned the school-wide use of individual schedules velcroed to schedule walls. How did you learn about this practice in your school community? How is it working in your classroom?

Can you tell me about a student for whom this works particularly well?

Can you tell me about a student for whom this is not working? Have you experienced any challenges with implementing this system?

What other whole class management systems have you used?

You mentioned using smiley faces and choice time to support behaviors of three of your kids. Can you describe some of the challenging behaviors that you have been working with these kids on?

Has the smiley face system worked to resolve some of the challenges? Do you feel that this has been successful?

Are you continuing to experience challenging behaviors in your classroom?

Please describe these.

Have you tried any other strategies to manage challenging behaviors?

What prepared you best for the management needs in your classroom and school context?

What could have better prepared you?

What supports do you still feel you need?

Prompt 2**General Protocol**

What are some of the specific ways that you work with colleagues, or other adults, in your school building?

What have been some of the most rewarding collaborative relationships? What made this relationship or collaborative experience so effective?

What have been some of the least rewarding collaborative relationships? What made this relationship or collaborative experience so ineffective?

Are there adults in your school with whom you wish you had a stronger collaborative relationship? What would you hope to gain through that relationship?

What most prepared you for collegial collaboration in your school context? What could have prepared you better?

Participant-specific Protocol**J.**

You mentioned in your written response that you dedicate most of your prep periods during a week to meeting with other adults in the school, such as your grade team, coaches, and principal. Which of these collaborative relationships has been most rewarding to you professionally?

What made this collaborative experience so effective? Can you share an example of a particularly useful collaboration?

Which of these collaborations do you feel is least effective? Why? Can you give an example of an especially ineffective collaboration?

In your written response, you described some collaborative structures that you and your co-teacher have put in place. Can you tell me about how you set these structures for yourselves? What has been challenging about working with a co-teacher?

Are there adults in your school with whom you wish you had a stronger collaborative relationship? What would you hope to gain through that relationship?

What most prepared you for collegial collaboration in your school context? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 3**General Protocol**

Have you taken any opportunities to meet with or communicate with students' families? If so, what are some of the reasons you have met/communicated?

What are the methods of communication that you have tried out? Which methods were effective? Ineffective? How do you know?

In what ways do families influence what happens in your classroom? Can you share a story?

How would you describe your relationship with some of the families of students in your class? Can you share a story?

What most prepared you for working with students' families in this community? What could have prepared you better?

Participant-specific Protocol

B.

In your written response, you shared a number of ways that your school and classroom invite parents to participate, such as open house, conferences, monthly family Friday, and math games night. Can you tell me what each of these events look like in your classroom?

What are your goals for open house? What happened at open house this year? What do you think went well? What was not successful? By what means were parents invited to this event? Were you satisfied with parent participation?

What are your goals for conferences? What happened at conferences this year? What do you think went well? What was not successful? By what means were parents invited to this event? Were you satisfied with parent participation?

What are your goals for monthly Family Friday? What happens at Family Fridays? Can you share a story about something that has gone well? What has not been successful? By what means are parents invited to this event? Have you been satisfied with parent participation?

What were your goals for math game night? What happened at math game night this year? What do you think went well? What was not successful? By what means were parents invited to this event? Were you satisfied with parent participation?

What have been some of the most effective ways to get parents to participate in classroom events? Least effective ways?

You mentioned in your written response that parents who are in most regular communication with you have greater influence in your classroom. What are the ways that these families influence the classroom? Can you share some examples?

Tell me about one (or more) family/ies with whom you have developed a strong relationship. What were you able to learn about your student through this relationship? Has this knowledge about the student shaped how you work with her/him in the classroom? How?

You mentioned in your written response that language is sometimes a barrier to communicating with families. Can you give some examples of times that language has been a barrier? What strategies have you tried to manage the language barrier?

What most prepared you for working with students' families in this community? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 4

General Protocol

What curricula are you using in your classroom this year?

Do you have flexibility in choosing or designing curricula? If so, how do you make these decisions? If not, who makes curricular decisions for your classroom, and how are those decisions made?

What is your planning process like?

What is working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?
What is not working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?

Do you feel that you are able to meet the needs of each of your students using the curricula you have in place? What are some of your successes and challenges with this?

What most prepared you for your work with curriculum in this school? What could have prepared you better?

Participant-specific Protocol

D.

In your written response, you mentioned that you just received a curriculum map from your school that you are expected to follow. How much guidance has this map given you in your planning? How has this changed your curriculum from what you were teaching previously? What information does the map give you about what to teach? Is it enough? Too much?

How much flexibility do you have in designing the specific learning experiences, or day to day implementation of your curriculum?

Do you feel like you have been successful in meeting your kids' needs through this curriculum? Can you share an example?

Are there ways in which you feel like you have not been able to design lessons to meet your students' needs? Can you share an example? What do you continue to struggle with?

You mentioned working closely with students' goals from their IEPs. What are some examples of some ways that you have designed your lessons with these goals in mind?

You mentioned in your written response that you are finding it challenging to make a 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade curriculum accessible for kids with skill levels in the pre-K and kindergarten range. Can you share some ways that you have been working through this challenge?

What is your planning process like? Do you feel like you have the supports you need to plan effectively? What supports do you wish you had?

What is working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?
What is not working well with the curricula you are using? Can you share a story?

What most prepared you for your work with curriculum in this school? What could have prepared you better?

Prompt 5

General Protocol

What assessments or tests are used in your classroom?

How do you use these assessments or tests as a teacher? Can you share a story?

What do these assessments and tests mean in your work as a teacher? What policies surrounding accountability are in place for student assessment or test performance?

How would you describe the culture of testing and accountability in your school? In your classroom? Can you share a story?

What, if anything, do you feel is successful or effective about the culture of assessment, testing, and accountability in your school? What, if anything, is unsuccessful or ineffective?

What most prepared you for your work with assessments and testing in this school community? What could have better prepared you?

Participant-specific Protocol

J.

In your written response, you mentioned using several different formal assessments in your classroom. Which of these assessments help you with your planning for specific students? Do you feel that these assessments guide what you teach to kids? Serve as a way to document learning? Both? Neither?

Can you tell me about a time that you used your assessment data to plan a lesson or sequence of lessons?

Can you tell me about a time that you used your assessment data to show student growth? With whom was this data shared?

What informal assessments of student learning do you use?

In what ways have you used informal assessment in your planning for students?

In what ways have you tried to capture or document student learning through informal assessments? Have you tried sharing this information with others? Tell me about this experience.

You mentioned that you hate the MCAS because of the anxiety that it causes for students in your class. Can you share some examples of when you were aware of this anxiety?

What does this do to you as the teacher of these students?

Do you know exactly what the MCAS scores mean to the school evaluation? Who is evaluating the schools? What a good or poor evaluation means for the school?

Do you know exactly what the MCAS scores mean to you as a teacher? How do you expect the evaluations to be formed over the next few years? What do you think this evaluation actually means for your work as a teacher?

In your written response, you said that you see very little value in a test that excludes so many of your students. Can you tell me more about the ways that you see your students being excluded? Can you share about a specific student who you think will be excluded?

You mentioned in your written response that despite a “get on board with it attitude,” your school otherwise seems to be against the MCAS testing. What are some things that you have experienced that give you this impression?

What, if anything, do you feel is successful or effective about the culture of assessment, testing, and accountability in your school? What, if anything, is unsuccessful or ineffective?

What most prepared you for your work with assessments and testing in this school community? What could have better prepared you?

Prompt 6

General Prompt

Has this been a successful year for you? In what ways has it been successful? In what ways has it been unsuccessful? Can you share a story?

Do you plan to return to your current teaching position next year? Why or why not?

Do you feel that the culture of this school and the local community is a good match for you? Can you share a story that helped you know this?

What are your professional goals for yourself based on your experiences as a teacher in this school?

What are your longer term professional goals (5-10 years from now)? Do you see yourself continuing your work as a teacher in this school? As a teacher in another setting? In the field of education but not teaching? Leaving the field of education? What experiences are influencing your thinking about this?

Do you feel that you were prepared to teach in this context? What most prepared you? What could have better prepared you?

Participant-specific Prompt

B.

In your written response, you mentioned that communication with your co-teacher has been one of your greatest successes this year, especially with planning and building a classroom community. Can you tell me about a time that you were able to plan especially well together because of your communication? Can you give an example of how your communication helped to build classroom community?

You mentioned that you have formed a friendship with your co-teacher. In what way do you think this friendship has influenced your work?

You mentioned in your written response that you also feel successful because your students have progressed in academic performance. Can you share a story about one or more students with whom you feel particularly successful in your work?

You mentioned that classroom management is an area in which you haven't felt successful. Specifically, you said that your students disrespect teachers and each other when only one is in the room and when they visit cluster teachers. Can you tell me some stories about times that students have been disrespectful?

How do you feel that your social identity has influenced your successes with communicating with your co-teacher?

How do you feel that your social identity has influenced your successes with helping students to make academic progress?

How do you feel that your social identity has influenced your challenges with classroom and behavior management?

Do you feel that the culture of this school and the local community is a good match for you? Can you share a story that helped you know this?

Do you plan to return to your current teaching position next year? Why or why not?

You wrote that you have a few short-term professional goals for yourself: making instruction effective and engaging; creating more purposeful and fluid instructional groups; increasing student ownership over class discussions; and increasing advocacy for students with disabilities to receive the supports and services they need. Have you begun to work toward these goals this year?

What are some ways that you have been working on making your instruction effective and engaging?

What are some ways that you have been working on being purposeful and fluid in grouping students?

What are some ways that you have been helping students to take more ownership for their class discussions?

What are some ways that you have been improving advocacy for students with disabilities?

What are your longer term professional goals (5-10 years from now)? Do you see yourself continuing your work as a teacher in this school? As a teacher in another setting? In the field of education but not teaching? Leaving the field of education? What experiences are influencing your thinking about this?

Do you feel that you were prepared to teach in this context? What most prepared you? What could have better prepared you?

Appendix K

Sample Participant-Specific Interview Protocol

Interview with Leigh, March 9, 2014

Thank you for participating in this interview to follow up on your written reflection this month. I emailed your response to you within the last few days in case you would like to refer to it while we talk. You don't need to if you do not want to, and it is fine if you have changed your mind about some of the things you wrote in your response. I will ask you some questions to guide the interview, but please feel free to share anything that comes to mind as we talk that you would like me to know. Is it acceptable to you for me to record this interview? I am the only person who will have access to this recording, and your name if you have decided to use a pseudonym, will be kept confidential. If at any time you would like the recording turned off, or if you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. Let's begin.

You mentioned that your school is working hard to increase family presence, and that you noticed a big increase in parent turn out between back to school night and the first round of parent teacher conferences. What do you think contributed to this increase?

What are the methods of communication that you have tried out? Which methods were effective? Ineffective? How do you know?

What seems to be the impact on the class when parents come for field trips or Fun Fridays? Can you share a story?

How would you describe your relationship with some of the families of students in your class? Can you share a story?

You mentioned that you feel less comfortable reaching out to families as a first year teacher when co-teaching with a far more experienced teacher who does not reach out to families. Does this discomfort stem from concerns about breaking norms established by your co-teacher, concerns about reaching out to families as a first year teacher, or something else? Can you share an example?

What most prepared you for working with students' families in this community? What could have prepared you better?

Appendix L

Original Focus Group Protocol: Focus Group A

Focus Group A

Hello and welcome. Thank you for taking time to join our discussion of your experiences as first-year teachers. Today we are going to be discussing the three prompts that each of you have responded. I have had an opportunity to speak with each of you individually about some of the topics we will discuss today, and hopefully returning to these topics as a group will invite new reflections or memories of other related experiences that you have had. I will ask some questions to help guide our discussion, but please understand that there are no right or wrong answers. Is it acceptable to each of you for me to record this discussion? I am the only person who will have access to the recording. Your names will be kept confidential if you have opted to use a pseudonym as a participant in this study. Please participate in the discussion as you feel comfortable. If at any time during our discussion you would like the recording turned off, or if you would like to leave, please let me know. I'm interested in hearing from each of you; however, you do not have to respond to every question I ask. If you want to share stories and have conversation with each other about the topics we are discussing, please feel free to do that. I am here to ask questions, listen, and facilitate the discussion. Let's begin.

As we go around, please share where you are teaching and what grade or grades you teach. Also, briefly describe your school and the community.

How have you transitioned into full time teaching?

What have you found to be some of the biggest differences between student teaching and full time teaching?

How is classroom management going? (all)

Have you experienced any discontinuity in culture with your students or their families? If you have, can you share a story?

What has been challenging about cultural differences in this area? Can you share a story?

How have you approached these challenges? Can you share a story?

Have you found that your management style, plan, or philosophy include:

High expectations for academic achievement? Can you share a story?

Affirmation of students' cultural identities? Can you share a story?

Cultivating critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge

Social inequities in the classroom and beyond? Can you share a story?

Have any of you found that your work in this area contributed to the school? The local community? Our larger society? Can you share a story?

What have been your experiences in collaborating with other adults in the school? (all)

In what ways do your collaborative relationships support:?

High expectations for academic achievement? Can you share a story?

Affirmation of students' cultural identities? Can you share a story?

Cultivating critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge

social inequities in the classroom and beyond?

In what ways do you see your collaborative relationships with other adults in your school contributing to the school community? The local community? Our larger society? Can you share a story?

What opportunities have you had to meet your students' families? (all)

How has culture influenced your relationships with students' families? Can you share a story?

In what ways do your relationships with students' families support:?

High expectations for academic achievement? Can you share a story?

Affirmation of students' cultural identities? Can you share a story?

Cultivating critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge social inequities in the classroom and beyond? Can you share a story?

In what ways do you see your relationships with families influencing the school community? The local community? Our larger society? Can you share a story?

Have you had any other experiences as a first-year teacher that have been influenced by cultural differences? How did you manage these?

Have you had any other experiences that have helped you to have high expectations for your students' academic achievement? Helped you affirm your students' culture?

Have you had any other experiences with cultivating critical perspectives in students and helping them to challenge social inequities in the classroom and beyond?

Is there anything else, a story, advice, or recommendation, that you'd like to share?

Appendix M

Focus Group A Pilot Transcript

10:25- 15:34

L: We do like, two students share about their weekends on Mondays. And I kind of started stressing, like in the very beginning, like it could just be like having a meal with someone, like having a dinner. After break, I had gone away with my mom, um, but I, I let them all share something this time. Over 11 days, like, you did something, you went to the park.. and I just shared that I had a special meal with my mom... because I didn't want to stress what we were doing. I mean, most of them said, like, I went to the park, or I lost a tooth, and those are celebrations. It was cool. But, um, back to like the parents and collaboration, um... that has been the most challenging. Most, if not all, I have like three parents in my class that speak English. Um, two of which work at the school. And the one [inaudible] so we translate everything into three languages that we send home. And I always envisioned like weekly notes home, and writing home to parents, just like, you know, having that connection and having that like insight into their home and what's going on at home, they would write notes, so and so forgot his homework, whatever it is. The tiniest little things you just don't process. You can't just write, and if I do, it's up to either, sometimes I do if someone at home speaks English, an older brother or sister, but I'm not sure how it's getting back. Maybe the kid is ripping up the note. Which could happen whether it's in English or not, but just that constant... our teacher conferences are, we have a translator sitting with us also as well, and the Spanish speaking ones, I understand Spanish, like, I guess, I'm understanding what she's translating back, but the Chinese ones, I have no idea what is being translated back from those parents. I trust that

it's what I want, but between the languages, maybe it isn't getting back, and so there are often times that it's very confusing. And we try very, we send home all these reporting tools, and we just like work hard. We'll tell you why your writing is a 3. Some of the words were hard for me, so I'm sure some of the parents... I don't know. We're always looking as a school for new ways to get to them, to make sure their voices are heard, but that's a constant struggle. I do feel like I'm growing as like, an educator, and I'm you know, advocating for them and for their children. I definitely feel that at a school where we all spoke the same language I might, um, be able to reach them more, and be able to, I hope, I'm always thinking, I hope they understand what I'm doing and they're mostly like really really thankful. They all... we have struggled. Sometimes they come in in the mornings very upset and then it's, I'll go to the teacher next door, my principal tries to hire bilingual people, so that there aren't as many problems. So like I'll have to go next door, literally I'll start anywhere. Two day ago, something very very small, you have to show a card to get into the building, they have a card now for safety procedures, and you know it took five minutes or 10 minutes to figure that out. But I guess relationships grow in those understandings.

R: So how would you say, and A., chime in here, specifically, that culture has influenced your relationships with students' families, so, like what would you say the nature of the relationships are?

A: You mean like describe the day to day? It can vary. I mean I think it can be really positive relationships with parents, and I think in terms of culture, school, when I look back, parents striving to be very participatory in their children's learning, advocating for them, um, wanting to be extremely educated and knowledgeable about what they're

Appendix N

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group A

Hello and welcome. Thank you for taking time to join our discussion of your experiences as first-year teachers. Today we are going to be discussing the three prompts that each of you have responded to. I have had an opportunity to speak with each of you individually about some of the topics we will discuss today, and hopefully returning to these topics as a group will invite new reflections or memories of other related experiences that you have had. I will ask some questions to help guide our discussion, but please understand that there are no right or wrong answers. Is it acceptable to each of you for me to record this discussion? I am the only person who will have access to the recording. Your names will be kept confidential if you have opted to use a pseudonym as a participant in this study. Please participate in the discussion as you feel comfortable. If at any time during our discussion you would like the recording turned off, or if you would like to leave, please let me know. I'm interested in hearing from each of you; however, you do not have to respond to every question I ask. If you want to share stories and have conversation with each other about the topics we are discussing, please feel free to do that. I am here to ask questions, listen, and facilitate the discussion. Let's begin.

As we go around, please share where you are teaching and what grade or grades you teach. Also, briefly describe your school and the community.

We're going to start with thinking about classroom management. Can each of you discuss your classroom management style, plan, or philosophy? (all)

Have you experienced any cultural differences with students or families that have shaped your classroom management?

What has been challenging about cultural differences in this area? Can you share a story?

How have you approached these challenges? Can you share a story?

Can you tell us about a specific classroom management-related incident, and something that you learned from the incident?

Now let's turn to your experiences in collaborating with other adults in the school. Can each of you describe your experiences with collaboration? (all)

Have your collaborative relationships with colleagues shaped the ways that you negotiate cultural differences in your school community? If so, how?

Let's now think about relationships that you have with your students' families. Can each of you describe the types of relationships that exist with families? What opportunities have you had to meet and get to know families? (all)

What cultural differences exist between you and the families of your students?

How has culture influenced your relationships with students' families? Can you share a story?

In thinking about what we have discussed about your management style, your relationships with students' families, and your relationships with colleagues, how do your practices reflect:

High expectations for academic achievement? Can you share a story?

Affirmation of students' cultural identities? Can you share a story?

Cultivation of critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge social inequities in the classroom and beyond? Can you share a story?

Do you have goals for your work as a teacher that are shaped by your understanding of social inequities related to culture? If so, what are they?

Can you share a story that shows how your teaching approached one of your goals?

What challenges have you experienced with approaching these goals through your teaching? How have you worked around, or within, these challenges?

Is there anything else, a story, advice, or recommendation, that you'd like to share?

Focus Group B

Hello and welcome back. Thank you for taking time to return to our group to continue discussing your experiences as first-year teachers. Today we are focusing on the second set of three prompts that each of you have responded to. As with our previous discussion, I've had an opportunity to speak with some of you individually about some of the topics we will be discussing today, and I look forward to revisiting these ideas as a group to generate some new reflections and share some additional stories. I will ask some questions to help guide our discussion, but please understand that there are no right or wrong answers. Is it acceptable to each of you for me to record this discussion? I am the only person who will have access to the recording. Your names will be kept confidential if you have opted to use a pseudonym as a participant in this study. As before, please participate in the discussion as you feel comfortable. If at any time you would like me to stop recording, or if you would like to leave, please let me know. I'm interested in hearing from each of you; however, you do not have to respond to every question I ask. If you want to share stories and have conversation with each other about the topics we are discussing, please feel free to do that.

As we go around, please remind us where you are teaching and what grade(s) you teach. Please also describe for us what the grade structures are like in your school, including how many grades are in your school and how many classes are on a grade. (all)

What are your philosophies or practices with curriculum design? (all)

In what ways have cultural differences between you and your students come to your attention in your work with curriculum design and implantation? Can you share a story?

How has the difference in culture between you and your students influenced your philosophy or practices?

What challenges have you experienced with these cultural differences in curriculum design? How have you negotiated these challenges?

What assessments are most prominent in your work, and what are your feelings about these assessments? (all)

In what ways have you experienced cultural differences between you and your students in your experiences with assessment? Can you share a story?

How has culture influenced the ways you manage assessment and testing in your classroom?

What challenges have you experienced with these cultural differences in assessment practices? How have you negotiated these challenges?

In what ways have your practices with curriculum design and assessment supported:

High expectations for academic achievement? Can you share a story?

Affirmation of students' cultural identities? Can you share a story?

Cultivation of critical perspectives in students that prompt them to challenge social inequities in the classroom and beyond? Can you share a story?

Overall, has this year been successful? (all)

Think for a moment about your goals that you have for your work that are based on your understandings of culture, and systems of privilege and oppression.

[pause, provide think time] Do you feel that you were able to move toward your goals through your teaching this year? Can you share a story?

What do you see as some of the biggest challenges in achieving these goals? How have you negotiated these challenges? Can you share a story?

Have your goals changed since you began teaching?

How do you feel you were able to mesh with the culture of the school and local community? Does this school feel like a good match for you? Can you share a story?

Do you feel that you were prepared to teach in your current school? Is there anything that could have better prepared you?

Is there anything else, a story, advice, or recommendation, that you'd like to share?

Appendix O

Focus Group B Re-pilot Transcript

R: Thinking about your curriculum and your assessment practices, what are some of the ways that you think you hold students to high levels of achievement... through your curriculum design or your assessment practices?

H:... We... circle back to things if students haven't achieved, so like, with student assessment, in math, when they haven't gotten the concept, we revisit it either with small groups of kids, or individual, or whole class, so we're holding them to the standard of, you're going to have to get it eventually. We're going to push you to get it.

J: And I think we give opportunities, like, if they're not willing or able to do an activity, or anything in school at this point in time, they need to complete it later, so there's this flexibility piece, but the expectation that it's completed is there.

R: mm hmm

J: Consistently. Or we try to make it consistently. We have one student who if he doesn't complete his work, the policy is he does it after school with his mother. She comes in. So we've only done that once. But I just think that is about setting the standard and making sure [inaudible].

H: We also give them feedback in reading and writing and math, and it's very specific, like, I noticed you did solve this problem in a particular way, or... in reading and writing, we often name what they're doing, like, something that they're doing that shows a particular skill or strategy, and then we will try to give them some formative feedback as

well to try to push them on to the next... that'll be like, in their writing notebooks or their reading journals where they write about their reading.

R: mm hmm. Can you think of a way that your curriculum or assessment practices help to affirm their cultural identities?

H: hmmm...

R: Maybe even thinking about language?

J: I think we've been flexible with topics. I'm thinking of writing, and when kids aren't buying into a topic, it's not a hard and fast topic. We're willing to be flexible, so... we have one student who just, really needs to buy into it, is this something worthy of my time. I don't know if that's something cultural for him, but it's the idea that kids can choose, have some choice that we're sensitive to.

R: Can you tell me an example, with maybe that student in particular... something that he or she was able to buy into in writing?

H: He wrote, um, his friend was writing a story, a fantasy story, and he wanted to write it from another perspective.

R: hmmm... that's neat.

H: But the assignment was a narrative.

J: The assignment was a personal narrative, and in the fantasy, he was one of the characters, and so was his friend Caleb. He wrote 20 pages, which... for this student... that's just incredible.

R: Wow. That is incredible. So, through his fantasy writing, were you able to teach some of the key points that you were able to teach to the other kids around personal narrative?

H: Yeah. I think, he's a very strong writer. It was getting him to generate. That was the challenge, so I actually think he had a lot of the skills that we were teaching already. So part of it's, he's bored, he's checking out.

Appendix P

Sequence of Data Collection

Schedule of Data Collection Steps

	Written Response	Interview	Focus Group
December 2013	Candice, Prompt 1 Dec. 8 th	Candice, Prompt 1 Dec. 21 st	
	Leigh, Prompt 1 Dec. 7 th	Leigh, Prompt 1 Dec. 21 st	
January 2014	Candice, Prompt 2 Jan. 12 th		
	Leigh, Prompt 2 Jan. 12 th		
February 2014		Candice, Prompt 2 Feb. 9 th	
	Leigh, Prompt 3 Feb. 28 th	Leigh, Prompt 2 Feb. 9 th	
March 2014	Candice, Prompt 3 Mar. 2 nd	Candice, Prompt 3 Mar. 9 th	
		Leigh, Prompt 3 Mar. 9 th	
April 2014			
May 2014	Candice, Prompt 4 May 12 th		Focus Group A May 4 th
	Leigh, Prompt 4 May 16 th		
June 2014	Leigh, Prompt 5 June 29 th	Candice, Prompt 4 June 1 st	

		Leigh, Prompt 4 June 8 th	
July 2014	Candice, Prompt 5 July 7 th	Candice, Prompt 5 July 13 th	
August 2014	Candice, Prompt 6 Aug. 12 th	Candice, Prompt 6 Aug. 24 th	
	Leigh, Prompt 6 Aug. 9 th	Leigh, Prompts 5&6 Aug. 23 rd	
September 2014			
October 2014			Focus Group B October 26 th

Appendix Q

Sample Data Memo

Memo

Reed interview 5

Candice seemed very skeptical of the successful or effective aspects of the culture of testing and accountability in her school. Her tone and laughter indicated that she was trying really hard to positively frame a part of her work and school-based experiences that she did not feel was overall positive.

In Candice's description of successful aspects of the school culture, the part that she sounded most sincere about was that very young students were learning that testing was simply going to be a fact of their academic experiences, and it got students ready for it while they were still young. While Candice did note often her skepticism about the standardized tests that some of her students couldn't access, her stating that it was beneficial that her young students were becoming acclimated to the testing environment does align with (Ladson-Billings)'s assertion that culturally responsive teaching does not simply dismiss unfit tests but rather recognizes these tests as gatekeepers whether they are fair or not, and therefore, students of color must be taught to do well on these tests. Candice also seems to have found more confidence and wiggle room in taking ownership for the assessments she is giving to her students. She noted reading test questions aloud to students on a test that was not supposed to be a test of reading. She noted created a writing assessment for the beginning of her unit that was of higher interest to her students than the one that was prescribed by the curriculum