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The focus of this qualitative research study was to examine the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices after participating in monthly year-long culturally relevant pedagogy and Common Core professional development. Culturally relevant pedagogy is the use of "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2002, p. 29).

The study described the experiences and practices of teachers before and after their participation in culturally relevant pedagogy professional development. Teachers were asked to describe in rich detail their interpretations, perceptions, and practices related to how they teach and build relationships with their students and parents, and their attitudes toward students of color and students experiencing generational and situational poverty.

The participants were staff members at an elementary school in an urban school district in the southeastern region of the U.S. Participants were interviewed and completed a pre-and post-survey.

The study describes the benefits of the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development from the perspective of the study participants. Barriers that hindered study participants from implementing culturally relevant pedagogy are highlighted as well. Based on these findings, recommendations for further study and policies to support educators as they learn and implement culturally relevant pedagogy are provided.

WHO AM I?: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY AND THE QUEST TO
TRANSFORM TEACHER BELIEFS THROUGH
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As I rush down the road to attend commencement to receive my third degree, my body is manifesting a host of emotions. Tears have been rolling down my face all morning. Every achievement, every recognition, and each time I attend a commencement, my life's struggles replay in my mind. Throughout my life, I have been told and have experienced how hard it is for children—especially African American males—to overcome challenges relating to dysfunctional family life, poverty, inequality, and inequity. With all of these elements paving my pathway through life, I have wondered, “What makes me the outlier to the statistics that indicate the odds were stacked against me to excel? Why was able to graduate from high school, college, and graduate school, and then obtain a doctoral degree?” Despite the obstacles presented during my lifetime, I have reflected on and discovered the most significant factor that positively impacted my life. In the following sections, I will provide layers of my childhood experiences that have birthed this study.

There sat the little boy, peeling back the curtain and lifting the blinds from his perch on a tattered, striped tan and brown suitcase. The little boy got excited every time he saw lights, the signal of an approaching car. One by one, each car passed the trailer where he lived. The little boy sat thinking about all of the things he could be doing like shopping with his mother and brother on this Friday evening. After all, this was usually

the time of the week when his mother treated them to a fast food dinner if she worked a full week in the sewing factory. The little boy gave up this opportunity to wait for his father. His father had promised to take him to New York for an adventure-filled weekend. As the hours rolled by and the arranged pick up time was missed, the little boy thought of his dad disappointing him again. He should not have been surprised; yet, the little boy felt alone and rejected. He cried himself to sleep on his make-shift bed of a suitcase, his head cradled in the window sill. When the little boy's mother returned home with his older brother, she saw what she knew would happen. Her beloved child was once again abandoned by his father. This is my story; I am that little boy.

Bennis (1994) says, “. . . you need to understand the effect that childhood experiences, family and peers have had on the person you've become” (p. 62). I knew rejection by and disappointment from my father too well. These experiences left my mother to fill in and serve in the role of father. Being an African American male, I needed my father and that is not to say anything about my mother's ability to serve in her role as a parent. However, as it would be expected, I always needed my father to affirm and confirm who I was and that I mattered. For the next 25 years of Christmas holidays, I metaphorically sat on that suitcase awaiting the arrival of my father. It took until I was 34 years old for my father to hug me, kiss me on my cheek, and say, “I love you.” These feelings of abandonment and rejection were burdens that negatively impacted my emotional state from childhood into adulthood.

I am one of two African American males in my family and I was reared in a town with a population of approximately 2,500 people. My parents were divorced before I was

one-year-old. My father graduated from high school. My mother did not graduate from high school partly because she was pregnant with my older brother as a 17-year-old. I have other half siblings by my father; however, I rarely saw them. My mother was there and attempted to make sure whatever I needed and asked for—within reason—was provided.

During my childhood and before I attended public school, my mother remarried and our lives were stable for a while. We moved from our maternal grandmother's house into a mobile home my mother and step-father were financing. The trailer became our new home. After being married for eleven years, my mother and step-father divorced. By this time my mother was unemployed; most factories had relocated elsewhere or had shuttered their doors and gone out of business. My mother applied for government assistance to help "ends meet." It helped, but not enough. Financially, I saw us go into a downward spiral which led to our home being repossessed. My mother was devastated that her valiant attempt to provide a home was unsuccessful. She wondered how parental assistance from our fathers likely would have changed the outcomes of what happened to us. Money was usually scarce especially during our middle and high school years.

As a young student, I always found safety, peace, and success in school. I was able to find stability at school because I excelled at learning. While my mother's role was to provide for us financially, my responsibility was to succeed in school. My mother's involvement as a parent was limited because of her negative experiences in school and her inability to know how to support me while I was in school. She would participate if I asked her to attend school activities and events. She would also get

involved whenever my teachers asked her. No matter my mother's involvement, I always wanted to graduate from college and make her proud.

The role poverty played in my life was so profound that I did not know in some cases that people could live differently. For instance, I received free lunch every year while in school and my classmates and I thought it was strange for a person to have to pay for meals at school. In my mind, I thought that my few friends who had to pay for lunch had done something wrong to have to pay for meals. That is the degree to which poverty shaped my worldview. It became a factor that we had to deal with so often. It was a common community trait from what I could see.

Even though we received government assistance, known as Welfare, there was not enough money to pay all the bills. My mother had to prioritize and determine what was important. Sometimes she paid the electric bill first and waited to pay the gas bill. Other times she did the opposite. There were times she had to decide if she would pay the gas bill so we could have heat for the winter or make the monthly payment on the trailer. Having no heat in the winter would make living there unbearable. While in high school, I remember leaving the trailer park where we lived knowing my mother had decided to hold off on making the trailer payment for months. I looked back wondering if that day would be the day we would get evicted from our home. I recall reaching the top of the hill on my walk home from school and being happy to see we still had a home; they had not taken our trailer. I felt this pain throughout my time in high school. Sadly, the creditors repossessed our home during my high school senior year. Regardless of my home life, I was usually able to take my mind off my problems, as challenging as they

were, and focus on getting two hot meals and doing my school work. Even though I was familiar with some facets of poverty, this was another reason I had to change my life for the better. Hence, I continued to see education as the ticket out of poverty for me and my mother. I recall many of my classmates having similar financial situations. We all looked alike from my assessment as a child. However, our paths in life have been different.

In the county where I lived, there were two ends of the county which were referred to as East and West. There were schools on both ends of the county that were referred to as Northampton County High School-East (NCHS-East) and Northampton County High School-West (NCHS-West). The Northampton County School Central Office was located in the middle of both communities. As I attended different competitions and games and heard people talking, it was evident that there was a difference in the two communities and schools. There were often comments about East being the more affluent part of the county and that is why they received better things such as better schools first. I recall this being one of the first times that I felt I was being treated unfairly as it pertained to a significant issue. Coupling that with all the history that we had learned about the enslavement of Africans and the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, I knew this was not fair. I felt I, too, deserved opportunities and “things” to improve my way of life. I wanted our lives and schools to be equal to those living in the East area of the county. As a matter fact, I felt as though we were owed more and deserved equitable treatment in order to advance to where they were since they had been given the advantage previously. To be candid, this unfairness produced an

anger that was another motivator for me to excel in school. Many times—based on all the challenges that I faced—I asked myself the question, "Why would I keep on and not give up like some of my peers?" One of my favorite poems motivated me to continue.

Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
 It's had tacks in it,
 And splinters,
 And boards torn up,
 And places with no carpet on the floor—
 Bare.
 But all the time
 I've been a-climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's,
 And turnin' corners,
 And sometimes goin' in the dark
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So, boy, don't you turn back.
 Don't you set down on the steps.
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
 Don't you fall now—
 For I've still goin', honey,
 I've still climbin',
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair (Hughes, 1995, p. 30)

The poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes is both a reminder of my struggle and the voice of motivation in my life. It speaks to the need to persevere. The voices that I hear most of all as I close my eyes and recite the poem are the voices of those who encouraged me to succeed. This encouragement was heard over the nagging chants of personal rejection, family dysfunction, poverty, and inequitable and unequal educational opportunities I experienced. Those who I see as heroes and heroines are those who rescued me from my plight and empowered me with the emotional, academic,

and financial tools I needed to overcome life's challenges. These ambassadors of hope were past teachers who connected with me by creating learning opportunities that aligned with my life experiences and interests. As a child, I had no idea what this connection was called. However, I knew it when I felt it. It made me feel safe, fearless, capable, and empowered. While a graduate student, I learned these teachers used many elements of what I now know to be culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is described by Gay (2002) as "using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse student to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29). Teachers who connected teaching and learning with my lived experiences helped me to answer the question, "What helped me to succeed despite factors that were barriers for my peers and others in the past?" When I reflect on the practice and behaviors of the teachers who stand out among the many teachers I have had, they believed in the three propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy:

1. Students must experience academic success;
2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence;
3. Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160)

Problem Statement

What occurs in the field of medicine to determine the course of actions for patients should be similar in the field of education. For instance, in the medical field, no matter where the patient comes from or what the illness is, the health professional collects information relating to the patient's medical backgrounds, current health status,

family backgrounds, and any allergies to medicines. Additionally, if the patient's health issues will cause harm to others, that information is needed. Thereafter, the health professional determines the best course of action, either independently or in collaboration with another medical specialist, based on information gathered and the best established medical practices. From my experience as a patient, the full process of assessing illnesses and identifying treatment involves asking questions, analyzing reports and studies, establishing a good rapport to build a trusting relationship with patients, being knowledgeable of the field of medicine, and understanding and communicating the advantages and disadvantages for potential treatment options. Some administrative procedures may be similar; however, a plan of action for addressing the needs to each patient is based on diagnosing the needs of each individual.

From the medical exam room to the school classroom, data analysis, diagnosis, and intentional practices to prescriptively address the needs of students within K-12 public school classrooms across the nation is just as—if not more—important. Subsequently, schools should be held to the same high standards and provide every student the opportunity to attain academic success regardless of gender, race, religion, sexuality, or socio-economic status.

The demographics of schools in America have changed since they were initially created. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2000) predicted that by 2020 our nation's public schools will be comprised of 44% students of color. Additionally, it is predicted that by 2050, our student of color population will be the majority, totaling 54% (NCES, 2000). With this increase in students of color and the

disparity in African American and Latino student achievement when compared to Whites, researchers and practitioners must determine with haste what can be done to ensure that students of color gain their academic footing so they are able to graduate, contribute to society, and pursue the happiness stated in the Declaration of Independence. Haycock (2001) notes African American and Latino students who are graduating from high school have the same reading and math skills as White eighth graders. The academic disparity that exists cannot be ignored. Tatum (2006) indicates African American males display culturally-specific coping mechanisms including failing to avoid violence, evading self-disclosure, and disconnecting from academics. The lack of awareness on the part of teachers and administrators causes African American male students to be disproportionately retained and expelled (Tatum, 2006). Also, African American males are twice as likely to be retained and are three times more likely to be expelled than White males (Kirp, 2010). Likewise, Losen and Skiba (2010) assert the loss in instructional time is one negative side effect of suspensions which perpetuates the achievement gap. Students of color and students experiencing generational and situational poverty are also among those who receive suspensions on a regular basis (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

The Schott Foundation for Public Education released data noting 47% of African American males graduate from high school compared to 78% of White males. Based on reading scores for eighth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment, 37% of White males were proficient versus 8% of African American males (Kirp, 2010). This should not be a surprise based on some schools' avoidance of—

or poor attempts—to close the achievement gap. Kirp (2010) asserts that African American males do not enter school on the same academic level as White males, which suggests the need for earlier learning opportunities.

Haycock (2001) notes the achievement gap has been the focus of many researchers in order to improve the educational opportunities for children of poverty and color. The U.S. Department of Education defines the achievement gap as the difference in academic performance among ethnic groups (SEDL, 2011). Stearns (2002) asserts that the significant difference in academic achievement between White and African American students is the primary motivation for furthering achievement gap research.

While factors contributing to the existence and perpetuation of the achievement gap have been discussed by practitioners and researchers, a silver bullet to address this national dilemma does not exist. The glaring need to provide students of color with an adequate and appropriate education so they, too, can compete and succeed like their White peers is essential. Accordingly, Wong (2007) notes teachers have the most significant impact on students. This assertion causes educators to examine our practices as practitioners to determine what we can do differently to more efficiently educate students who are culturally diverse.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Previous research proposes that teacher expectations and perceptions either positively or negatively impact students' academic achievement (Badad, 1993; Cooper & Good, 1983; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). Neuwirth (2003) mentions teachers need to learn as much information about the varying cultures

and ethnic groups that their students represent in order to maximize their success in school and beyond. Since the achievement gap is a national issue, it is imperative to determine if providing teachers with professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy will improve their effectiveness in educating students; and, thus significantly decrease the achievement gap.

As an African American male educator who has experienced challenges that could have crippled my success, I understand the need for teachers to connect with their students in order to engage them in lessons and experiences that align with the students' lives. Even though there is not one best strategy for teachers to use to combat the achievement gap and to reach and teach students, it is imperative that teachers are equipped to address the needs of culturally diverse students in our schools today. I can personally attest to the powerful effect teachers had on my development as a result of their connecting with me. Their knowing and understanding my background, culture, and interests were essential in motivating me to enjoy learning, developing a positive self-image, and excelling in school.

Since my teachers who were African American and I shared the same culture and similar experiences, it would seem likely that they would be able to easily connect with me and with other African American students. Students who connected with teachers learned and grew in environments that prompted achievement. Not all teachers were able to master such connectedness. Over time, I observed that other equally capable African American students did not excel as I excelled. Unfortunately, most students of color will

not have the majority of their teachers being from their ethnicity or race. Boser (2014) indicates,

Teachers of color can serve as role models for students of color, . . . and when students see teachers who share their racial or ethnic backgrounds, they often view schools as more welcoming places. (p. 3)

For some time, America's schools have been experiencing side effects of the significant gap that exist between students of color and teachers of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

The data from year to year regarding the percentage of students of color as compared to the percentage of teachers of color shows the gap remains large. For example, in 2011, 34% of the America's population represented people of color and 41% of K-12 enrollment were students of color even though only 16.5% of K-12 teachers were teachers of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). This obvious mismatch exists and we cannot ignore the fact that the academic performance of students of color is better when they are taught by teachers of color (Boser, 2014).

Research Questions

The imbalance in the percentage of teachers of color versus students of color will result in students of color more frequently engaging in learning that does not represent their culture or relate to their everyday lives. Additionally, since there is cultural incongruity between White, middle class individuals and people of color, offering professional development on culturally relevant pedagogy to all teachers would increase the likelihood of teachers connecting with students of color. This highlights the importance of professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy for

those who Wong (2007) asserts are the most significant factor to help students succeed—teachers. By providing all teachers professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, especially since all teachers will encounter students of different backgrounds, cultures, and interests, the odds of educating students more effectively will be increased. In the same manner that millions of dollars are allocated to train and prepare soldiers for war and to keep the peace, funding should be allocated to prepare teachers to educate our students to face the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

It is essential that practitioners assess the pre- and post-knowledge, perceptions, and practices of teachers when they engage in professional development. This assessment will help practitioners determine whether the professional development experiences are helpful in increasing student achievement. Examining the outcomes of professional development will help determine how funds should be allocated to fund future professional development efforts.

This study will examine how professional development influences teachers' perceptions and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. The research questions are:

1. What are teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy?
2. How do teachers report themselves as practicing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
3. How does professional development influence teachers' *understanding and implementation* of culturally relevant pedagogy?

4. What contextual barriers hinder teachers' culturally relevant teaching practices in schools?

Addressing these questions will provide teachers, school leaders, and researchers a better understanding about whether professional development is useful in changing teachers' perceptions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

The focus of this research study was to examine the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices after participating in monthly year-long culturally relevant pedagogy and Common Core professional development. This section elaborates on the relevant literature regarding professional development, cultural relevant pedagogy, and multicultural education.

Professional Development

Definition and Importance

Darling-Hammond (2010) contends,

For the United States to make progress on its long-standing inequalities, we will need to make the case to one another that none of us benefits by keeping any of us ignorant, and, as society, all of us profit from the full development of one another's abilities. (p. 328)

This quotation communicates the need for the nation to recognize that one of the ways for us to improve is through equipping educators with the skills they need to prepare students to address the challenges of the 21st century. As a matter of fact, on a national survey, 890 teachers believed improving professional development would yield increased teacher effectiveness (Archibald, Cogshall, Croft, & Goe, 2011; Powers, Kaniuka, Phillips, & Cain, 2016). Teacher quality and student achievement are impacted by professional development (Powers et al., 2016; Reitzug, 2002). Even though lowering class size and

raising teachers' salaries have received attention and are thought to be both reasonable and significant actions to improve student achievement, Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) indicated that money used for professional development was more effective in increasing student achievement.

Guskey (2000) defines professional development as “processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (p. 16). In a review of professional development literature, Reitzug (2002) mentions there is a wide array of processes and activities that can be involved in the design of professional development to enhance the learning of educators to improve outcomes of students. DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2006) argue professional development is “a lifelong collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of individuals, teams, and the school through a daily job-embedded, learner-centered, focused approach” (p. 217). Powers et al. (2016) explored the educator-facilitated professional development, the types used, and their effectiveness. They found that the craft knowledge of experienced teachers proved invaluable in improving their effectiveness and self-efficacy. Even though definitions of professional development imply there are a broad number of activities and ways to achieve staff development, Reitzug (2002) notes that most educators think about workshops and in-service experiences even though they do not represent the full spectrum of professional development activities. These notions of professional development are usually thought of because these are what most educators have encountered most frequently in the area of professional development (Sparks, 1995a; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Reitzug (2002)

suggests most professional development of these types is “limited, fragmented, one-shot, or short term and pre-packaged” and it is “training over problem solving” (p. 289).

Similarly, traditional professional development sessions are

. . . a gathering of teachers, usually after a long day of teaching or on a jam-packed workshop day, who sit and listen to an expert describe a new methodology, approach, or instructional material that they typically do not believe relates directly to their classroom situations or teaching styles. (Mertler, 2005, p. 15)

Knight (2009) states,

How teachers view professional learning in their schools on any given day will inevitably be shaped by how they have experienced professional learning in the past . . . history can be a major roadblock to implementation. (p. 508)

Based on the changes in student demographics and the societal and global needs, professional development is even more important in order to prepare students for life beyond their K-12 school experiences (Trehearn, 2010).

Little (1993) indicates that most educators participate in few professional development opportunities throughout the year that are sponsored by their school or district and most of the time these opportunities are unrelated to each other. Also, these activities are probably planned by the central office and the activities represent many options. However, they still fail to address the specific needs of individual schools and use a multitude of variables to determine what should be the focus of professional development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The types of offerings and the level of effectiveness are so low, professional development,

“communicates a relatively impoverished view of teachers, teaching, and teacher development” (Little, 1993, p. 148).

If teaching and learning were simple, exact, and predictable, limited professional development would be able to prepare educators appropriately. Teaching and learning are more of a fluid complex process between teachers and students that must be facilitated by the teacher based on reflection and analysis of the current learning that connects to prior knowledge and future learning (Little, 1993). The complex nature of teaching and learning does not align with the usual professional development experiences of educators and is therefore unable to produce positive outcomes for schools. Furthermore, due to the complexity of current reforms, demands, and accountability, professional development must help to create professional learning groups which promote collaboration and collegiality among teachers, who must function as intellectuals rather than technicians (Demonte, 2013; Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003; Little, 1993; Wei et al., 2009).

Andragogy

In order to properly understand effective professional development, it is important to be knowledgeable about the adult learning theory known as andragogy (Knowles, 1990; Merriam, 2001). According to Knowles, andragogy is defined as the “theory of adult learning based on the assumption that adult learners learn differently from child learners” (Knowles, 1980, p. 24) and “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1990, as cited in Merriam, 2001, p. 5).

There are five assumptions of andragogy that describe adult learners as someone who:

1. has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning;
2. has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning;
3. has learning needs closely related to changing social roles;
4. is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge; and
5. is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Merriam, 2001, p. 5).

Also, a number of researchers stress the importance of learning to include autonomy and free choice in addition to learning being based on educators' intellectual and work needs (Brookfield, 1986; Dewey, 1966; Friere, 1972; Gulati, 2004; Merriam, 2001).

Types of Professional Development

Training. Since there are a number of professional development experiences, the following section will list some professional development options. Training is the most commonly used type of professional development. Direct instruction with a lecture component, modeling, simulated skill practice, coaching, presentations, workshops, and consultation are typical training methods (Reitzug, 2002). As it relates to impact on teacher learning, there were two reviews of literature on professional studies that suggested training provides little impact on teaching, because there is limited time for teachers to apply learned concepts and demonstrate progress or mastery (Prebble et al., 2004; Southwell & Morgan, 2010).

Embedded professional development. Among the professional development delivery methods, embedded professional development provides opportunities for

learning within educators' normal routine work. Embedded professional development is one of the delivery models that meets the guidelines of being effective (Demonte, 2013; Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003; Little, 1993; Wei et al., 2009). The numerous activities that are involved in embedded professional development consist of "inquiry, discussion, evaluation, consultation, collaboration, and problem solving" (Reitzug, 2002, p. 291). In addition, embedded professional development is useful when staff members may need experiential learning when new roles, structures, and tasks are being introduced and implemented within schools or organizations (Mayer & Lloyd, 2011).

Professional development networks. Professional development networks are becoming an emerging professional development delivery option as well. Networks involve a group of educators from different schools, locally, nationally, or globally, who collaborate frequently to share their observations and practices on a topic or educational philosophy. Powers et al. (2016) found in their research that veteran teachers valued being able to observe high-performing teachers and then discussing instructional strategies observed. The format of the interaction can be designed to fit the needs of participating schools or educators (Wei et al., 2009). Since the schools and educators involved in the professional development network can vary in distance and have differing school schedules, Pennell and Firestone (1996) mention communications can involve meetings in face-to-face, cross-classroom or cross-school visits, professional institutes, critical friend groups, and a number of technology-supported communications. Consequently, it has been found that networks positively impact the professional development of teachers (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Wei et al., 2009).

Professional Development Schools

Due to the partnerships and the important roles schools and universities play, Professional Development Schools (PDS) are on the upswing among the varying types of professional development choices. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) indicates “Professional Development Schools (PDSs) are innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P–12 schools” (NCATE, 2014). PDS teachers and student teachers, who participate in PDS, collaborate to improve student teaching experiences in addition to enhancing PDS teachers and staff professional development (Lieberman & Miller, 1990; NCATE, 2014). The expected improvements occur as a result of intentionally planned activities such as teacher study groups, curriculum writing, peer observations, workshops, and school-based collaborative research (Nalumansi, 2011).

The Impact of Professional Development

In the event that data are analyzed and observations are conducted to help determine what must be done to improve schools, professional development must be designed to target areas of need. When pondering the purposefulness of professional development, Reitzug (2002), in review of professional development literature, states “teacher knowledge, teacher attitudes and beliefs, teaching practice, school-level practice, and student achievement” (p. 292) are key elements to be addressed. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that the teacher knowledge and skill dimensions affected by professional development relate to the content or content standards and skills to deliver instruction, classroom management, and assessment. This also includes

developing and enhancing teachers' ability to reflect on their practices during and after instruction while being equipped to use newly acquired knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and students (Demonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003; Little, 1993). Smylie (1995) contends, "In order to change practice in significant and worthwhile ways, teachers must not only learn new subject matter and new instructional techniques, but they must alter their beliefs and conceptions of practice, their 'theories of action'" (p. 93). Change in beliefs and attitudes must occur after a change in practice as teachers see noticeable changes in student outcomes that are connected to teachers' change in practice (Guskey, 1986; Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003).

Effective Professional Development (Outcomes)

Eight principles. The level of intentionality of the professional development and how it is designed based on desired outcomes is important as well. In order to maximize the effectiveness of professional development, experiences must incorporate certain principles that have been gathered by several professional development researchers (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Reitzug, 2002; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Reitzug (2002) notes that these principles are a result of consensus discovered in literature about professional development, although only a small portion of the existing literature is actually empirical research. The eight principles that Reitzug (2002) submits as being key elements to effective professional development are:

1. Decisions about professional development should be made within schools rather than at the district level (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).

2. Professional development must be focused on instruction and student learning (Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).
3. Professional development initiatives must take place over an extended period of time (Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).
4. Professional development activities should model effective pedagogy (Wei et al., 2009).
5. Professional development workshops must be supported by modeling and coaching in order to attain a higher degree of effectiveness (Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).
6. Professional development should focus on communities of practice rather than on individual teachers (Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).
7. Effective professional development requires that continuous inquiry be embedded in the daily life of the school (Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009).
8. Principals and other school leaders must provide proactive support for professional development and the initiatives upon which it is focused. (pp. 302–313; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009)

Principles 1, 2, 7, and 8 will be focused on based on their similarity with the professional development experiences of the participants in this study.

Principle 1 emphasizes the importance of professional development decisions being made by school personnel instead of district level personnel (Wei et al., 2009). The idea of the cookie cutter approach to offer, design, implement and evaluate professional development has little value because school personnel from school to school differ based on years of experience, backgrounds, and other factors. Little (1993) states that top-down decision making processes alienate teachers. Since Wong (2007) indicates teachers are the most significant factor in a student's success, teacher buy-in when selecting professional development opportunities is essential.

Even though the perspectives of school personnel are valuable when designing professional development, Sparks (1995a) contends there are other factors that should be considered as well to determine professional development needs, such as assessing

students' needs and learning outcomes (Edge, 2014; Guskey, 1986; Guskey & Sparks, 1996; Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003; Kana'iaupuni, Ledward, & Jensen, 2010; Reitzug, 2002). Furthermore, connections between classroom instruction and students' experiences, along with school-wide organization and culture should guide professional development decisions (Little, 1993; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Consequently, professional development experiences developed based on student learning goals and challenges that exist at individual schools have been found to be more effective than those professional development activities that are implemented with no regard for each school's individual personnel needs and student outcomes (Reitzug, 2002; Sparks, 1997; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Certainly, school personnel feedback and participation in making professional development decisions are paramount. However, only having school personnel feedback and buy-in may not garner district level support.

As we highlight what should be the major factors to determine professional development in schools, we must look at how the experiences will positively impact the schooling for students. If we intend to improve student learning and achievement, we should heed the research of Joyce, Wolf, and Calhoun (1993), who were unable to find an instance where positive student outcomes occurred without student learning being the target of professional development (as cited in Reitzug, 2002). Furthermore, Sparks (1997) proposes two targets for professional development for educators: (a) identifying and meeting the needs of students, and (b) understanding what students must be prepared or taught to do (Wei et al., 2009). In other words, professional development should be connected and result in measurable student outcomes (Demonte, 2013; Vega, 2015).

Sparks's proposal differs from what might be common to professional development experiences for educators wherein school and district personnel preferences are the focus (as cited in Reitzug, 2002). In order for schools to reap positive outcomes in student achievement, teacher content knowledge and pedagogy must be the focus of professional development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Sparks, 1995a, 1995b, 2002). Moreover, professional development must focus on curriculum and standards (Sparks, 2002). Cohen and Hill (1998), discovered that standardized assessment scores were higher when professional development targets school improvement initiatives.

Principle 7 stresses the need for continuous inquiry as part of the daily life of educators (Reitzug, 2002; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). This is definitely a shift in thinking about professional development. In most cases, professional development has been viewed as a session where educators attend professional development activities away from their workplace. However, effective professional development is characterized by involving teachers learning and doing while working collaboratively with their peers on a day-to-day basis (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Sparks 2002; Wei et al., 2009). Smylie (1995) argues schools will not make the advancements needed until emphasis is placed on schools as places for teachers to learn and not just places for them to work. Collaboration is a characteristic of schools where inquiry is expected, modeled, and supported, which allows time for discipline inquiry, redesign of leadership roles, and on-going networking (Lieberman & Miller, 1992; Vega, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Accordingly, Meier (1995) points out "continuous dialogue, face to face, over and over, is a powerful educative force. It is our

primary form of staff development” (p. 109). Sparks and Hirsch (2000) contend inquiry-centered professional development improves teacher learning and schools far more than attending sit-and-get workshops. “Transformed” is how Little (1993) describes what takes place in schools when teachers do peer observations, discuss their instructional delivery, and work together to address school challenges.

Berman and McLaughlin (1978) highlight the importance of the proactive support roles principals and other school leaders provide when professional development decisions are determined, implemented, and assessed, which is the eighth principle (Wei et al., 2009).

The norms and expectations that are held for professional growth and the extent to which a culture of inquiry develops in a school are directly related to the words, actions and decisions of principals and to the structures they develop in the school. (Reitzug, 2002, p. 313)

Also, the ways teachers are expected or how time is allotted to share with colleagues about workshops contributes to the culture of inquiry that exists in schools (Reitzug & O’Hair, 2002; Vega, 2015). Additionally, when teachers are allowed to be active participants, planners, and supporters of professional development, the initiative was more successful (Diaz-Maggioli, 2013; Reitzug, 2002; Vega, 2015). Methods to demonstrate support include, but are not limited to, evaluating teacher performance with implementation of professional development initiatives, providing opportunities for teachers to communicate, sharing of practices throughout school, observing peers, and networking with other colleagues in other schools and roles (Archibald et al., 2011; McLaughlin, 1991; Meier, 1995).

Levels and Dimensions of Multicultural Education

The practices of research participants are organized according to Banks's levels and dimensions of multicultural education (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Banks (1999) describes a hierarchy of approaches, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, to integrate multicultural content into curriculum (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004).

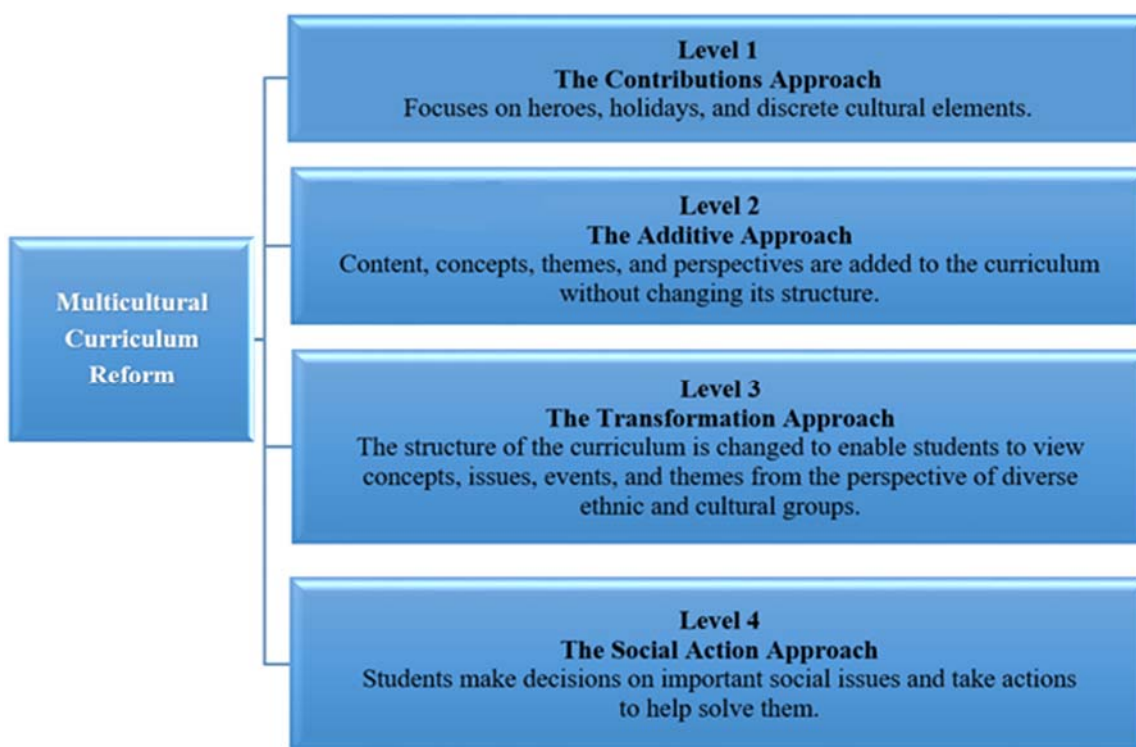


Figure 2.1. Levels of Multicultural Curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Banks's first level of multicultural education is the contributions approach (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Within the contributions approach, curriculum focuses primarily on the integration of content about ethnic and cultural groups. However, the depth of the content is limited to holidays and celebrations. The

contributions approach is more commonly used in primary and elementary grades (Banks, 1999, 2012; Saint-Hilaire, 2014).

The next level is the additive approach (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). The use of cultural content, concepts, and themes are incorporated into the curriculum (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). “The additive approach is often accompanied by the addition of a book, a unit, or a course to the curriculum without changing its framework” (Banks, 1999, p. 30).

Both approaches, contribution and additive, possess different elements to introduce cultural content without challenging the basic curriculum framework (Banks, 1999). The integration of people, current events, holidays, celebrations, ethnic groups, and women occurs when the contribution and additive approaches are implemented. However, integration of cultural content at the contribution and additive approach levels usually mirror the norms and values of the dominant culture instead of the cultural communities represented by the people, events, holidays, and celebrations being studied. Accordingly, the ethnic groups and women who are integrated into the curriculum are those who share the values of the dominant culture (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Banks (1999) mentions that those who challenge the majority culture’s norms and roles are not considered for inclusion into the curriculum at the contribution and additive approach levels.

The next level, the transformation approach, unlike the contribution and additive approaches, changes the primary purpose and principles of the curriculum thus encouraging students to analyze topics, concepts, problems, and events from different

perspectives and points of view other than that of the dominant culture (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). The integration of concepts, events, problems, and people from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives is one of the main goals of the transformation approach (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Exposure to multiple perspectives from varying ethnic groups allows students to hear different voices when they study concepts, events, and issues (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008). The transformation approach also helps students to question the perspectives of their teachers regarding concepts and problems, and to create and justify their accounts of events and situations. Additionally, students are asked to analyze concepts and history from the point of view of all people associated with the topic. Banks (1999) comments that a major focus of the transformation approach is “to teach students to think critically and to develop the skills to formulate, document, and justify their conclusions and generalizations” (p. 33). An example of the transformation approach would be a teacher asking students to read an assignment and develop their own thoughts about historical events and challenges instead of accepting that of the dominant culture, textbook authors, and that of their teachers (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004).

The fourth level of multicultural curriculum is decision-making and social action. This approach engages students in an extension of their learning beyond the transformation approach. The decision-making and social action approach promotes students’ personal, social and civic responsibility and action as it relates to topics, issues, and challenges that are a part of the curriculum (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks,

2004). Consequently, after students have studied a particular topic, they might do additional research on the topic and serve as advocates to promote a positive view of a certain ethnic group. Also, some students may extend their learning through additional action-oriented research, projects, and presentations.

The five *dimensions* of multicultural education somewhat parallel the previously-discussed levels, but also differ in some respects. The five dimensions of multicultural education are shown in Figure 2.2.

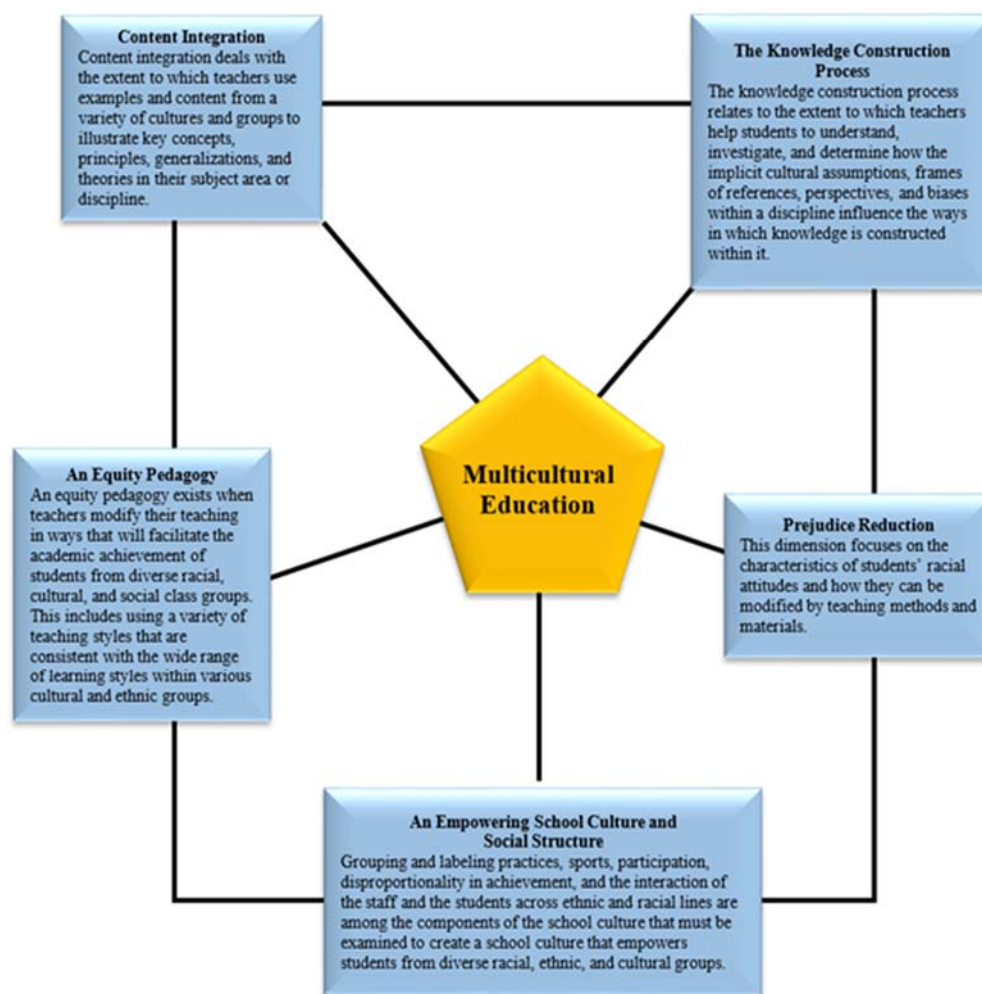


Figure 2.2. The Dimensions of Multicultural Education (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Content integration is the first dimension and focuses on how educators use a variety of learning activities, data, examples, and information from diverse cultures to teach the key concepts and topics outlined in the curriculum (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Learning activities that illustrate this dimension are the use of books, stories, and resources from other cultures to introduce and provide an understanding of curriculum topics. Content integration is viewed by many educators as the sole meaning of multicultural education (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Due to this misconception, some teachers, such as mathematics and science teachers, find it difficult to incorporate multicultural education into their subjects (Banks, 1999; Banks & Banks, 2001; Banks & Banks, 2004; Grant & Chapman, 2008a). At this level, and with such narrow scope of multicultural education, language arts and social studies appear to be subjects that are better suited for multicultural education integration (Banks, 1999; Banks & Banks, 2001, 2004). However, mathematics and sciences can also be infused with elements of multicultural education by including biographies of mathematicians and scientists of color and others from different cultures who are notable (Banks, 1999; Banks & Banks 2004; Grant & Chapman, 2008a).

Knowledge construction is the next multicultural education dimension (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Within the knowledge construction dimension, teachers help students to understand information that is provided in the curriculum and how that knowledge may be influenced by factors like race and ethnicity (Banks, 1999; Ogletree & Larke, 2010). Additionally, students becoming critical thinkers, as a result of being able to understand topics and concepts from the perspectives of numerous cultures and groups

other than authors who present information, is the goal of this dimension (Banks, 1999, 2012). A learning activity that would be a prime example of this is having students rewriting stories from the viewpoint of another character or person of another ethnicity or race.

The third multicultural education dimension is prejudice reduction. The decrease of prejudices and racial stereotypes in an effort to increase democratic practices is the focus of the prejudice reduction dimension (Banks & Banks, 2004). This is done more effectively through the collaborative work of all staff members. Evidence of this dimension being implemented is the display of images and text of diverse groups. Also, the prejudice reduction dimension is apparent when realistic and relevant views of people from different races and cultures are elements of student learning (Banks, 2012).

The equity pedagogy is the fourth dimension and involves the use of a variety of teaching techniques, inclusion of students' family and community cultures, and establishing high expectations and goals for all students to succeed (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Of course, the teaching strategies used are those that improve the academic achievement of diverse students. Strategies used within this dimension are arts, such as singing, drawing, and dancing, in addition to storytelling, movement, and creative play. Other activities that fall within the equity pedagogy dimension are incorporating student choice, music, differentiation, journalism, cooperative learning, and discussions (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004).

The last dimension of Banks's multicultural education framework is empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). The dimensions

mentioned previously do require the engagement of other staff members in addition to the classroom teacher. The collaborative work of all staff members is needed to effectively implement the empowering school and social structure dimension. This dimension focuses on areas outside the classroom in order to address how stakeholders relate to one another and analyze factors that impact the school's overall effectiveness (Banks, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004). Elements that are necessary in this dimension are providing students appropriate instruction so they can learn the basic skills needed and holding teachers accountable for delivering such instruction. Additionally, principals are expected to exercise their ability to be instructional leaders, disciplinarians, and evaluators of the extent to which students are learning basic skills (Banks, 2012; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). The empowering school culture and social structure dimension is even more obvious when schools find new assessment techniques, establish goals for all students to achieve, and involve students, who are not members of the privileged student groups, to be more actively engaged in schools (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Based on the numerous challenges today's youth face, educators must strive to discover strategies to address the needs of culturally diverse students. One response that has been proposed to address the noticeable disconnect between students of color and school practices implemented by White society is culturally relevant pedagogy. Other terms related to this framework are *culturally appropriate* (Au & Jordan, 1981), *culturally congruent* (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), *culturally responsive* (Cazden &

Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), *culturally compatible* (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), and *culturally courageous* (Browne, 2012). Even though there are a number of terms that refer to culturally relevant pedagogy, the common premise indicates classrooms and the pedagogy that occurs in them should reflect the cultural backgrounds of the varied ethnic groups of students. Ladson-Billings (1994) defined *culturally relevant pedagogy* as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (as cited in Coffey, n.d., para. 1). Another scholar who has contributed to culturally relevant pedagogy research, Gay (2002) describes cultural relevant pedagogy as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). However, culturally relevant pedagogy is unlikely to be practiced unless White teachers recognize that students of color are different from them based on culture, race, socio-economics, and the current challenges they deal with in today’s world.

The term culturally relevant pedagogy is used in this research study for different reasons. First, the professional development that was utilized by the school district used the term culturally relevant pedagogy. Secondly, I see the terms culturally relevant and culturally responsive differently based on my experiences with ‘response’ teams. I view responsiveness as a reaction to a determined crisis or challenge. Therefore, I prefer to use and provide all teachers with culturally relevant pedagogy professional development

in order to prepare them to serve the diverse student population that they *will* encounter.

I really see it as a necessary practice that is essential to the work educators must do.

In this study, multicultural education approaches and dimensions will be used to categorize teacher practices before and after their participation in professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy. It is important to note that much like culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural education focuses on (a) ensuring the curriculum reflects the contributions of the diverse groups in society—and not just Western European culture, (b) informing the children of the privileged and powerful class—i.e., white children—about the contributions of other student groups, and (c) reforming the curriculum by changing the content and educational processes in schools (Banks & Banks, 2004). Both culturally relevant pedagogy and multicultural education encourage students to take social action against the social inequalities existing in schools and society (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Suzuki (1984) indicates teaching that creates a democratic atmosphere is needed for social action to be practiced and mastered (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2005). Culturally relevant pedagogy can be used to address the social action approach. Much like culturally relevant pedagogy, the goal of multicultural education is to improve the education of all students and ensure equal educational opportunities (Banks, 1999; Banks & Banks, 2004).

After taking all of the factors that impact their students' lives into consideration, teachers must acknowledge the necessity and commit to providing their students with the rigorous and relevant education that they deserve and need to meet the challenges of the future (Saravia-Shore, 2008). This cannot be done solely by looking at surface level

demographics and test data. Consequently, teachers must involve various dimensions such as culture, language, ethnicity, race, social class dynamics, and the current and past of their students' lives to really know and understand who they are, from whence they come, and how they see, learn, and relate to the world (Cooper, Allen, & Bettez, 2009; Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010). Teachers must earnestly strive to understand how students perceive the world. Ladson-Billings (1995a) acknowledges Bartolome's (1994) exploration to find a "humanizing pedagogy that respects the use of the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice" (p. 160). Cooper et al. (2009) assert that teachers utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to recognize, connect with students, and affirm their cultural backgrounds while improving their own cultural knowledge to improve the academic success of their students. Efforts like these will increase educators' effectiveness in preparing students for the challenges all students will encounter throughout their public school years and beyond (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

For years, a close examination of students' school and home experiences has been the focus of anthropologists in an effort to address the disconnect that exists between the two and to increase students' success in schools (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010). According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), there are three basic propositions recognized for culturally relevant pedagogy:

1. Students must experience academic success;
2. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence;
3. Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Gay (2010) describes six characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy as follows:

1. Validating
2. Comprehensive
3. Multidimensional
4. Empowering
5. Transformative
6. Emancipatory

The following sections will discuss each of Ladson-Billings's and Gay's characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Academic Success through High Expectations

Ladson-Billings (1995a) indicates it is paramount for students to experience academic success which can only be done by developing their academic skills. High expectations must be exercised by teachers to ensure all students are provided the education that is appropriate and equitable when compared to what their White peers receive (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Haycock (2001) provides a telling comment from a student who says, "But what hurts us more is that you teach us less" (p. 3). This statement communicates that students expect to be challenged and expect schools to equip them to succeed. Regardless of students' backgrounds, they all need to master literacy, math, science, critical thinking skills, technology, and politics (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Feeling sorry for students or failing to provide rigorous instruction to them, because you 'know their story' is a disservice to them regardless of the good-hearted intentions some teachers have to help them survive. Rigor must be provided as a result of

teachers knowing that African American students must not only ‘feel good,’ but they must be challenged and expected to rise to the challenge (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Without fail, teachers who believe in principles of culturally relevant pedagogy will advocate for the existence of high expectations for their students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Ormrod (1999) asserts the expectations that teachers possess affect the way they teach, assess, and make decisions regarding students. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers see the possibilities in each student and consider themselves as catalysts who unleash wellsprings of greatness found within each student (Gay, 2013; Grant & Chapman, 2008e; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) suggest that the greater the expectation, the greater the performance will be for students. Darling-Hammond (2010) indicates that “We need to take the education of poor children as seriously as we take the education of the rich, and we need to create systems that *guarantee* all of the elements of educational investment routinely to all children” (p. 279). Consequently, some students come to school needing more but receiving less as a result of low teacher and system expectations. Teachers who implement practices of culturally relevant pedagogy seek to provide all of their students with the learning experiences that will equip them to succeed (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Schools will experience an increase in academic and social achievement as a result of high teacher expectations. When students are cognizant of these high expectations, they strive to achieve them and thereby enhance their self-confidence in their abilities (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Those students who do not feel as though their knowledge is where it needs to be or that their significance in the classroom is important may begin to disengage from the learning process and eventually drop out of school (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Holliday, 1985; Ogbu, 1990; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Dei, Mazzuca, and Mcisaac (1997) mention that gradual disengagement of students involves a long process not just an instant occurrence. Furthermore, it is the result of low teacher expectations and other damaging perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes (Dei et al., 1997).

Cultural Competence/Validating

Based on the second proposition, high importance is placed on the need for educators to be mindful and intentional as they provide learning opportunities that will complement and help students maintain their cultural integrity, which is referred to as cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Moreover, cultural competence is utilized to help students see the value in knowing who they are (Barrineau, 2012; Brown & Brown, 2012; Gay, 2013; Smith, 2009). Classrooms that exhibit culturally relevant pedagogy support and encourage students to communicate their cultural heritage and be proud of it (Gay, 2013; Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010). Gay (2010) indicates that teachers who subscribe to culturally relevant pedagogy consider all their students as they design learning opportunities. This practice is recognized as being “culturally validating and affirming” (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Validation and affirmation acknowledges that all students come with skills and experiences that can be utilized to support learning (Gay, 2013).

Teachers who are sensitive to students' needs and knowledgeable of barriers affecting their learning seek to address issues that prevent their students from learning.

One such phenomenon that affects the way African-American students respond to learning is the fear of “acting White,” which causes them to be disliked and mistreated by their peers for following the Eurocentric school practices which cause teachers to consider them as successful (Brown & Brown, 2012; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) mention that African American students do not perform well because they fear being classified as “acting White” (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Succeeding as academic achievers with their teachers while being labeled as social outcasts by their peers is not the intended outcome for these African American students. Schools can contribute to students developing a positive self-image by being inclusive of their culture in the operation and curriculum of the school (Gay, 2013; Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010).

Teachers who are advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy strive to use student culture “as a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161). “Cultural models in schools can make learning more meaningful because they tap into what children already know about the world and act as important scaffolding” (Pang, 2001, p. 32). Ladson-Billings (1995a) found that teachers in a research study made purposeful instructional decisions to connect with ideas or experiences that interest their students. These teachers were able to teach more effectively, thus allowing students to master objectives and venture into enrichment activities to extend their learning. Integration of students’ cultures into the operation of class and school is essential to expressing the value of contributions of all students from different cultures (Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Intentional practices like these connect learning to meaningful life

experiences while validating their students' cultural backgrounds and improving their attitudes about themselves (Garcia, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Montgomery, 2001). Teachers must develop lessons that incorporate instructional materials which mirror diverse cultures and focus on the achievements of people from numerous cultures, races, religions, and genders in order to communicate value for the cultural backgrounds of students (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010; Saravia-Shore, 2008). Doing so will communicate the importance of being inclusive of all people as well as honoring the heritage and history of others different from the teacher and the dominant culture (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

As teachers create an atmosphere to honor their students, a greater emphasis must be placed on collecting textbooks and other resources that portray their students' ancestors in a positive and honorable light (Saravia-Shore, 2008). Educators will not accidentally select textbooks and resources that are inclusive. Teachers will need to be intentional about their search for instructional resources to expose students to diverse perspectives, ideas, and values. As a result of classroom discourse and carefully planned lessons, teachers can help students understand their peers and appreciate and respect their differences while acknowledging the assets they all possess (Maye & Day, 2012).

Loewen (1995) argued that the enslavement of Africans was being minimized in some textbooks, because the voice was from White America (as cited in Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2008). An accurate portrayal of the role White America performed in the enslavement of Africans was not communicated truthfully. In light of this and other inaccuracies, it is necessary that educators analyze instructional resources to determine

whose voice is being projected (Gay, 2013). Since the teachers are the most significant factors in their students learning and success, they must be vigilant to utilize every opportunity to provide students with the truth and learning experiences that encourage them to think critically and analyze the past and present world (Hayes & Puriefoy, 2003; Wong, 2007). Failing to do so may express inaccurate messages from the author or voice being heard. This is an injustice to students who are learning the material as well as to the voices of the people being silenced in the text. Multiple perspectives should always exist in history so certain groups are not ignored or portrayed incorrectly (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Comprehensive

The second element of culturally relevant pedagogy mentioned by Gay (2010) is comprehensive. Culturally relevant pedagogy is comprehensive when educators address the full spectrum of students' needs. Gay (2010) indicates that educators must accept their roles in helping under-represented student groups connect with their own current and past cultural and social structures and teachers must develop a sense of solidarity among their colleagues to collaboratively improve the educational experiences of their students in varied areas of the curriculum. Thus, Gay (2000) states that "learning is a communal, reciprocal, interdependent affair, and manifest itself habitually in their expressive behaviors" (p. 30).

Ladson-Billings's (1994) study about a group of teachers who taught African American students and collaboratively applied culturally relevant teaching practices indicated telling information about a holistic approach that illustrates the positive impact

of teachers taking ownership to educate their students. As a result of the study, it was noticed that when students experienced learning opportunities where their teachers subscribed to the “we” notion of team, high expectations were expressed more clearly, concepts were taught, and healthy interpersonal skills were observed among teachers (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additionally, student accountability and the charge of ensuring the success of each student was the personal and collective responsibility of all teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Cultivating an academic atmosphere like this allowed teachers to address individual student needs which was validating in that it communicated a high regard for their students’ self-worth as individuals and their importance within the community of learners (Gay, 2013; Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Critical Consciousness/Empowering and Emancipating Students

Ladson-Billings (1995a) emphasizes the need for teachers to help empower students, especially those who have been historically disenfranchised in order to develop their critical consciousness. Learning to engage peers, teachers, and the world is a valuable experience. Television, newspapers, radio broadcast, the internet, and other forms of media highlight issues that students of color and poverty regularly face. For this reason, students from underrepresented populations are aware of the struggles they will face based on the life challenges they regularly encounter at home (Smith, 2009). Since school is an institution that all children are expected to attend, it is necessary for educators to have conversations in academic and developmentally-appropriate ways with students in order to prepare them for what they will face in life (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Not only should students who are marginalized be exposed to these conversations, but so should students who are from more affluent backgrounds in order to help them understand the differences between being privileged and under-privileged (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008). The dialogue and life lessons crafted by teachers should be sensitive to the age of the students and introduced in a way to inform both sets of students about the inaccessibility of assets for some students and how other students are granted easy access to resources and opportunities. As teachers facilitate these necessary conversations, they will hear perceptions, generalizations, myths, misconceptions, and untruths that their students possess about their peers (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

What schools are expected to do for students and how that process affects society should be a benefit to our communities. Schools should prepare students today to meet the demands of tomorrow while reflecting on yesterday. Culturally relevant pedagogy embraces the belief that schools should be empowering (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a), transforming (Banks, 1991; Gay, 2010), and emancipating (Gay, 2010) to students who are not from the dominant culture. In classrooms where culturally relevant pedagogy is enacted, students are encouraged and invited to question and dialogue with others about world issues (Banks & Banks, 2004). This practice yields an atmosphere that empowers students to develop critical thinking skills and analyze and discuss curriculum that continues to be “reflective of white, Western or Eurocentric interests” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 3). Moreover, this empowerment invitation encourages students to examine how people of color from various cultures are represented in history along with the predicted outcomes of students of different cultural affiliations

(Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Edge, 2014; Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010; Tatum, 1997, 2000).

Another goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to equip students in “develop[ing] a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order by critiquing the cultural norms, values and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162). Delpit (1988) argues that opposition and detailed discussion during the learning process are attributes of culturally relevant teaching.

Emancipatory

The practice of questioning to help students understand the reason behind answers, methods, behaviors, and outcomes are encouraged by students during these empowering and emancipating exercises (Gay, 2010). Students are taught that “truth” is actually often merely the perspective of who wrote the textbook or is telling the story. Students begin to see that truth exists in more than one version. This causes students to understand that the mainstream ways of doing and knowing are not the only option (Gay, 2013). This is particularly essential since textbooks are viewed by many teachers, parents, and students as infallible resources that should not be questioned. Gordy and Pritchard (1995) contend that the influence textbooks possess is significant. The problematic issues posed by believing that textbook authorities are without error causes many stereotypes and mainstream ideas to be perpetuated while ignoring the achievement and contributions of underrepresented and underprivileged groups. When students feel empowered, rather than simply receiving statements from textbooks as facts, they understand and learn to question the truth presented by textbook authors (Gay, 2013). In

turn, this revelation causes students to take it upon themselves to search for resources that reflect different perspectives and contributions from varying cultures and people (Gay, 2013).

Instead of relying on textbook authors and others to provide information, teachers who foster culturally relevant pedagogy inspire students to participate in gathering textbooks and other resources (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sparks, 1989), and they become empowered and responsible to supplement their learning experiences. This participatory practice is definitely contrary to the banking system learning approach mentioned by Freire (1970). The banking system views the teacher as the distributor of knowledge while students are containers that receive the knowledge. When the time comes, students, through memorization, regurgitate the information back for the teacher to assess their understanding. Since students are not helping to construct their learning and the teacher is the sole authority of information, the prior knowledge that students have is viewed as unimportant and insignificant in regards to their academic growth. This commonly used learning approach does not encourage, model, teach, or empower students to ask questions about their teachers' perspectives or that of the textbook (Gay, 2013). Conversely, a culturally relevant pedagogy framework connects to what Freire (1970) denotes as the mining learning approach. Teachers see prior knowledge as a basis for students to use inquiry to build upon their knowledge, a foundation to scaffold their learning, and a way to build their own learning experiences (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Montgomery, 2001). Through this process of creating a learning environment that is safe, students undergo a transformation from what is expected of

students in standard classrooms that does not involve culturally relevant pedagogical practices. Learning environments that encourage questioning and classroom discourse among students will result in the students and teachers working collaboratively as co-creators of knowledge (Gay, 2013).

Multidimensional

Culturally relevant pedagogy is referred to as multidimensional and being composed of “curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments” (Gay, 2000, p. 31). The term multidimensional refers to the belief that culture has no bounds. Gay (2010) asserts culturally relevant pedagogy must be deployed by using the many factors that are involved in the educational process, such as the classroom climate, instruction, curriculum, learning, and assessment. The areas highlighted in subsequent sections are student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and community involvement.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The development and on-going nurturing of the relationship that is established between teachers and students is essential (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Consequently, culturally relevant pedagogy researchers have found that the quality of the student-teacher relationship impacts student achievement (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Gay, 1993, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995b; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Relationships with students who are similar to teachers are easier to develop and impartiality exists since there is commonality as it relates to race, class, and values (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). On the other hand, Boynton and Boynton (2005) indicate

students who are different from their teachers may have a more difficult time building relationships based on low teacher expectations and/or negative perceptions or beliefs about them as learners (Gay, 2013). Conversely, teachers who are sensitive to, and familiar with, the cultures of their students recognize the effect they have on students and their own biases. These teachers intentionally design opportunities to discover and create commonalities with their students (Jacobson, 2003).

Regarding the dynamics of the teacher and student roles in classrooms, educators who subscribe to culturally relevant pedagogy view teaching as both a personal responsibility and professional responsibility (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Villegas, 1988). The design of lessons and what they model is done consciously to show students they care (Gay, 2013). In contrast, some teachers create a hierarchy in their classrooms which emphasizes teachers as omniscient authorities who dispense knowledge and students are the receivers of this knowledge (Cummins, 1989, 1996; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant pedagogies are open to the fact that students come with their own abilities and will be able to enlighten their teachers during the learning process. This mindset helps to create a more equitable classroom atmosphere and improves the relationship between teachers and students (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Classroom Climate

Studies have revealed that positive classroom attributes contribute to students developing a sense of worth and belonging within the classroom which will manifest personal and social growth (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Kana'iaupuni et al.,

2010). Minkler (1955) notes, “The general climate of the classroom is determined, at least in part, by the degree of mutuality of acceptance. Mutual understanding and respect may precede or may follow acceptance” (p. 15). Minkler identifies mutual confidence as a vital component of a classroom. Mutual respect among all classroom participants, teachers, and students will be a result of the quality of interactions among teachers and students (Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010).

Research findings confirm that for many students “the climate of the schools they attend is characterized by high levels of distrust and disrespect among and between students and teachers and the sense that students do not care about one another” (Haynes et al., 1997, p. 325). When Tatum (2003) asked her college students to reflect on their experiences in school, she recalls them expressing anger, confusion, surprise, sadness, and embarrassment in their descriptions. Students conveyed they were hesitant to share their real thoughts with peers and school employees because they did not feel they could entrust them with the truth (Edge, 2014; Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010). They feared judgment and ridicule as well as misunderstanding. Since culturally relevant pedagogy involves high quality relationships between teachers and students, it is important to have schools and classroom environments that are conducive to this end (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Therefore, students must feel safe to share who they are and what their life experiences and backgrounds are in order for teachers’ and students’ relationships to profit (Kana’iaupuni et al., 2010; Maye & Day, 2012; Tatum, 2003).

Community Involvement

It is unrealistic to think that when students come to school they will leave behind everything that they are and integrate themselves into practices that are in many cases so different from what they know (Saravia-Shore, 2008; Smith, 2009). Accordingly, culturally relevant educators are sensitive to the differences that exist between students' home lives, backgrounds, cultures, races, and other factors that may prevent students from learning at the same rate as their peers (Saravia-Shore, 2008; Smith, 2009). Kana'iaupuni et al. (2010) assert that teachers must strive to address the disconnect that exists between home and school. To better understand students' cultures and their life experiences, it is expected for teachers to venture outside of their classrooms to attend community and cultural events to connect with their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Maye & Day, 2012). As a result of teachers' participation and familiarity with events in their students' lives, they are better able to relate and connect learning experiences to cultural and domestic events of their students (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010). This relevancy can involve inviting parents into class to participate in the learning process. Additionally, venturing into the community can involve soliciting support from businesses and agencies that have a vested interest in supporting schools as culturally diverse issues are addressed and strengthen the community (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

The partnership that can exist between teachers and parents is essential to maximize student achievement, largely because it is helpful for teachers and parents to interact and learn from one another (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Nieto (1996) suggests that continuous communication contributes to the success of students. Interactive communication allows teachers, students, and parents to be exposed to information that will stimulate more collaboration and improve the quality of their relationship. The learning that is a result of the communication helps teachers as they design learning experiences; thus, parents are able to reinforce school curriculum. Indeed, this connection validates and affirms the importance of the students' and parents' culture while encouraging continued involvement (Saravia-Shore, 2008). In addition, this confirmation provides an assurance to the students and their families that they possess vital information that can help schools effectively educate their youth. Also, parental involvement will help bridge the disconnect that exists between students' home life and schools (Saravia-Shore, 2008). Parental involvement is advantageous in helping students master learning objectives, achieve higher grades, improve attendance, complete assignments (in and out of class), demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, improve graduation rates, and increase postsecondary school enrollment (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Summary

The shift in societal and school demographics in recent years has caused educators to question what must be done to address the needs of all students in schools. White students have been able to lead the way academically as it relates to test scores and maneuvering through society. The existing challenge is to provide educational equity for all students as responses are developed to address what must be done to facilitate success of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002; Kana'iaupuni et al., 2010; Saravia-Shore,

2008). Culturally relevant pedagogy is a response that will encourage students to step outside of the classroom box that they are accustomed to encounter in schools. The freedom that students find as they question and engage in discourse about their learning will be a product of teachers who understand and subscribe to culturally relevant pedagogy that validates students' cultures, prior knowledge, and their ability to think critically (Gay, 2013; Saravia-Shore, 2008).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research study was to examine the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices after participating in monthly year-long culturally relevant pedagogy and common core professional development. The guiding research questions for the study were:

1. What are teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy?
2. How do teachers report themselves as practicing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
3. How does professional development influence teachers' *understanding and implementation* of culturally relevant pedagogy?
4. What contextual barriers hinder teachers' culturally relevant teaching practices in schools?

In this chapter, a description and rationale of the research method used is provided along with a description of the two forms of data collection. Definitions of key terms and concepts discussed in the study will be referenced as well. Elaboration about how the participants were selected along with the significant characteristics of the selected school will be given. The data collection methods used in the study will be explained in addition to the data analysis process employed. In addition, factors connected to the benefits, risk,

and limitations of the study will be explained. The methods used to ensure trustworthiness of the study will also be described.

Research Design

Creswell (2003) asserts that the qualitative research approach is used to explore social and human problems by using established methods to support inquiry. Qualitative research “consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible . . . [through] field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3). Furthermore, qualitative research typically:

- is enacted in naturalistic settings,
- draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study
- focuses on context,
- is emergent and evolving, and
- is fundamentally interpretive. (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2)

Qualitative research is defined as, “a way of knowing in which researchers gather, organize, and interpret information obtained from humans using their eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 5). Creswell (2007) denotes “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Furthermore, Creswell (2003) indicates that qualitative research focuses on observing members of society and learning from their life experiences, and their interpretation from what they have encountered. Woods (2006) asserts that focusing on people in natural settings is authentic and prevents researchers from creating artificial

settings and assumptions prior to observing participants. In addition, when researchers endeavor to comprehend “the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence this context has on their actions” the qualitative research approach is especially suitable (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the integrity of research studies relies on the meticulous record keeping, data collection, and data analysis in addition to the other procedures and rationale used.

Within the qualitative research category, there are a number of approaches that can be used. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicate there are a variety of methods used to connect procedures in an effort to better understand the subjects or concepts being studied. Lichtman (2010) indicates to study what people have encountered through their lives to understand a phenomenon is called phenomenology. Moreover, phenomenology is defined as including

the interrelationship between the context (or environment) and individuals, which constitutes an experience. In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essence or experiences. (Moustakas, as cited in Bergstrom, 2004, p. 13)

Edmund Husserl is given credit as first introducing the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2003; Husserl, 1931). When researchers use the phenomenological approach, they can understand people’s experiences during events and situations they encounter. Hug (1998), as cited in Bergstrom (2004), notes that using phenomenology gives a snapshot of a particular time, concept, or experience in written form so readers can visualize or understand what persons have experienced. The written description,

which provides the visual yielded from the use of the phenomenological approach, is not to be mistaken for the experience, but is only to be viewed as evidence of what the participants experienced (Hug, 1998, as cited in Bergstrom, 2004). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) note that “interpretation takes the central role” (p. 132) as the person’s experience is studied with the phenomenological approach.

The phenomenological approach was suitable for this study to describe experiences and practices of teachers in relation to their perceptions about their students before and after their participation in culturally relevant pedagogy professional development. Additionally, teachers were asked to describe in rich detail their interpretations, perceptions, and practices related to how they teach and build relationships with their students and parents, and their attitudes toward students of color and students experiencing generational and situational poverty. Through the use of pre-surveys, post-surveys, and interviews (see Appendixes A–C, respectively), I was able to use respondents’ descriptions of their perceptions in a collective manner as well as describe their individual interpretations based on their own lived experiences and how their perceptions manifest in their classrooms. Maxwell (2005) contends that the phenomenological research approach will help discover the value, meaning, and understanding people connect to specific events, experiences, behaviors, and acts.

Key Concepts and Terms

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy—Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to educators affirming student backgrounds and expanding their cultural knowledge about the students they teach to ensure academic success for all students (Cooper et al., 2009).

Achievement Gap—The achievement gap is the difference in performance on standardized achievement assessments between different groups of students (Stearns, 2002).

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)—Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills—commonly known in educational circles as DIBELS—are standardized assessments designed to identify students who may need additional help in literacy to improve their reading (“UO DIBELS data system,” 2012).

Professional Development—Professional development is training for educators intended to better help them carry out their work.

Professional Development Initiative in this study—Professional Development effort on which this study focuses consisted of monthly year-long training for the study participants about culturally relevant pedagogy and Common Core standards that was funded by a grant to improve African American male literacy. The focus of the urban school district where the elementary school in this study is located, has been to narrow the achievement gap between students of color and White students. A project team was assigned the task of analyzing data, determining priority goals for improvement, and developing and implementing plans for improvement. Data reviewed included Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS); End-of-Grade and End-of-Course; SAT; graduation rates; course scheduling in math, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate; suspensions and expulsions; and Exceptional Children’s Services. Though progress was made in the district, data revealed schools must continue to work more effectively to serve all students. A university within the school district and

the district's Curriculum and Instruction Department and Equity Office worked collaboratively to develop the professional development curriculum to address needed improvements in early literacy and disproportionality in discipline for African American males.

Six pilot elementary schools were selected to participate in a professional development plan grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural responsiveness. The plan was focused on the reading achievement of African American males in the 6 pilot elementary schools in which a significant number of students in this subgroup were reading below grade level. It appeared that reading difficulties emerged as a contributing variable to discipline issues for ethnic students in these schools.

The professional development model targeted approximately 220 teachers, staff, and school leadership team members district-wide, which included the elementary school in this study. The proposed plan occurred over a one-year time period. The plan involved two specific phases: (a) Phase I: Three Day Symposium on Culturally Responsive Literacy Instruction for African American Male Students, and (b) Phase II: Culturally Responsive Professional Development throughout the academic year (monthly sessions). The topics for the monthly sessions were as follows:

1. Understanding culturally relevant pedagogy and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy teaching practices/strategies;
2. Understanding and unpacking Common Core Standards;
3. Knowing how to run, analyze, and use DIBEL data reports to drive instruction;

4. Developing short- and long-term goals based on DIBEL data (individual classes and grade-levels).

Additionally, the principal and curriculum facilitator lead PLC meetings to review information discussed during the professional development sessions and support teachers as they integrated the information into their instruction on a weekly basis. Additionally, DIBELS data and other relevant information were discussed to help teachers better serve their students.

Research Setting

The elementary school in the study was selected because of its participation in the culturally relevant pedagogical professional development and its culturally diverse student population. It is one of 122 schools in a mid-size urban school located in the southeastern region of the United States of America. The elementary school was established in 1929 and is one of the oldest among the 69 elementary schools in the district. The school serves approximately 400 students from Pre-K to fifth grade. The student population represents nine countries. The student population is 66% African American, 6% Asian, 8% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic, 2.5% multiracial, and 2.5% Native American. The demographic and achievement data for the research setting—known herein by the pseudonym Woody Elementary School—were taken from the annual state report card.

The End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading percent of students performing on or above grade level for the elementary school in the study was below the district's overall total percentage of students performing on or above grade level. Additionally, the disparity in

the school's African American males' Reading percent proficiency was lower than many other elementary schools in the district. Therefore, the elementary school was selected to participate in a pilot to improve literacy and the academic success of African American male students. Part of the pilot was for the school to participate in the professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy. The standardized state assessments for elementary schools are called End-of-Grade (EOG) assessments. Students who score Level III or IV are considered to be on or above grade-level. The percent proficient represents the percentage of students who scored Level III or IV on a state assessment. The assessment data reflect student performance on state assessments (see also Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

School Assessment Data

	School	District	State
Reading (Overall)	51.5%	68.1%	71.2%
Grade 3	44.9%	64.1%	68.8%
Grade 4	49.2%	66.9%	71.6%
Grade 5	59.0%	70.1%	72.3%
Math (Overall)	73.2%	82.1%	82.8%

Research Participants

The participants in the study were staff members at one elementary school. There was a total of 12 interview participants: 11 were teachers and one was a school counselor. All participants were from the selected elementary school and they attended the district-sponsored monthly year-long professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and common core standards. The sessions began in July 2012 with a three-day symposium for all schools participating in the district's six elementary school pilot. The follow-up sessions were two hours long and held monthly. Participating schools were assigned a team of facilitators, who consisted of district curriculum specialists and local university school of education faculty, to conduct professional development sessions. Also, the school principal and the curriculum facilitator received training to provide support to teachers as they integrated newly learned information and strategies into their classroom instruction.

The data collection instruments for this study involved the use of pre- and post-surveys and interviews. The pre- and post-surveys were administered by the district as a data collection instrument for the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development. All teachers, teacher assistants, and support staff were asked to complete surveys prior to participating in the professional development sessions and when they completed the year-long professional development experience. The interviews were conducted after the professional development was completed.

Initially, more teachers were expected to participate in the research study. However, a number of the staff members did not return the following year and even

though they qualified to participate, they declined. Additionally, the school had less than 35 staff members total and all of them did not participate in the majority of the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development experiences. These factors limited the number of persons who participated in the interviews. However, the pre- and post-survey respondent comments represent a larger population. Specifically, twenty-eight school staff members participated in the pre-survey and eighteen participated in the post-survey. The post-survey was administered in the school year following the initial survey. Some administrators and staff members had transferred to other schools or did not complete the post-survey.

After speaking to the principal about the study's research questions, she suggested that the school counselor be considered as a person to be interviewed due to the student support role he holds. The principal believed the school counselor's experiences would yield information that would address the research questions as well. The fourteen members who volunteered to participate in the interview portion of the study were verified by the school principal as having participated in the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development. Consent forms were distributed to the fourteen teachers who qualified and one of them chose not to participate after taking medical leave for the year. Thirteen consent forms were returned. However, two teachers were unable to be interviewed after several attempts were made. There was a total of 12 interview participants: 11 were teachers and one was a school counselor. Participants' profile information is included in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2
Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender/ Race	Current Teaching Assignment	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Teaching Experience at Current School
Douglas	Male/White	K – 5	7	5
Molton	Female/White	3	4	4
Patton	Female/White	3	15	5
Pettiford	Male/African American	K – 5	36	23
Tatum	Male/African American	4	5	2
Morrow	Female/African American	K	14	12
Battle	Female/African American	3	6	6
Hardy	Female/African American	K – 5	7	2
Jolly	Female/African American	K	11	9
Massey	Female/African American	4 -5	14	3
Toldson	Female/African American	1	8	2
Georgia	Female/African American	1	20	14

The study participants who were interviewed after the professional development was completed included nine females and three males. Regarding racial or ethnic backgrounds, three participants were White while nine of the 12 participants were

African American. As far as the number of years study participants had worked in the field of the education, there were two study participants with two to five years, four study participants with between six and ten years, and six with 11–15 years of teaching experience.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the school district, I followed up with the principal. Prior to submitting the request to conduct research at the selected elementary school, the school district designee recommended that I contact the principal to ask what communication methods and locations for interviews with potential research participants would be best. When approval was granted by both the UNCG IRB Committee and the school district, I contacted the principal to determine which staff meeting would be best for me to attend to describe the study to the staff and solicit study participants. While I was explaining the study, each staff member was provided an envelope and a consent form with the description of the study. I reviewed the information and answered questions about the process and emphasized that all data would be confidential and explained the ways in which confidentiality would be ensured. At the conclusion of the meeting, staff members who were interested in participating in the study were asked to submit the envelope in the folder provided. I picked up the folder the following day and compiled a list of staff members who volunteered to participate. I contacted the principal to confirm that all staff members participated in the school-wide culturally relevant pedagogy professional development. Thereafter, I contacted staff members who met the

requirements to ascertain the best times to schedule interviews based on the parameters provided by the principal.

Data Collection

Pre- and post-surveys were administered by the district to all staff members who participated in the professional development. All survey responses were anonymous. The survey data was requested from the district for use in this research study.

The second data collection method used was interviews that were conducted after all professional development sessions were completed. Lichtman (2010) indicates, “The purpose of in-depth interviews is to hear what the participant has to say in his own words, in his voice, with his language and narrative” (p. 143). Since all staff members had indicated that they wanted the interview to be conducted at school instead of another place, most interviews were scheduled during participants’ planning periods or after school in their classrooms. The face to face interviews were conducted in quiet locations that were agreed upon by participants. The initial interview questions inquired about work experience and reasons for pursuing a career in education to help participants feel more comfortable, build their confidence, and create trust. Questions thereafter, were more focused on asking them to define culturally relevant pedagogy, and describe their practices, perceptions, and the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development experience. The interview concluded by asking study participants if there was anything they would like to share that they thought was important for the study.

Most interviews were 40 minutes to an hour in length. All interviews were digitally recorded with the knowledge of the participants in order to capture all of the

participants' audio responses. Each interview was transcribed. All confidentiality and approval procedures as outlined by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee and school district representatives were followed.

Data Analysis

With the use of pre- and post-survey responses and interviews, the goal was to analyze participants' responses to determine similarities and differences over time. I wanted to discover how teachers were impacted by participating in the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development.

After each interview, I listened to the audio recordings to make sure all responses could be heard clearly. Additionally, the review of each interview allowed me to determine if follow-up sessions were warranted. Reasons to schedule follow-up interviews would be because of poor sound quality of audio recording or if a study participant provided a response that needed more clarification. However, all recordings were clear and no additional details were needed for study participants' comments. I listened to the interviews on an mp3 player while driving, exercising, and doing everyday tasks. This allowed me to fully immerse myself in the interviews and use the skill of noticing nuances. I noted interview content that was similar, different, or repetitive. In most cases, I listened to the interviews prior to transcribing to become familiar with responses. This was helpful as I interviewed other participants, because as I was able to make notations on the interview question protocol about responses I had heard from other participants.

After the interviews were transcribed, I annotated the transcripts to identify key phrases and topics. This helped to identify emerging themes. Maxwell (2005) indicates marking of pieces of data with symbols and descriptions is called coding, which helps to organize data into broad themes. In order to record topics mentioned by each participant, I developed a chart with identifying demographic data along with responses to help as I analyzed data individually and collectively with other research participants. After comments were listed in the chart, I connected topics in categories to list emerging themes based on interview responses. I was able to categorize responses based on how they connected to the research questions. Responses that were similar were highlighted in the same color so I could determine the level of significance as it pertained to research questions or participants' experiences. When responses appeared to be repetitive and it was discovered that sub-categories could be formed that may give light to a deeper description pertaining to research questions, that was done as well. Responses that did not appear relevant to the research questions and were not repetitive were removed from categories and labeled as outliers.

I analyzed the pre- and post-survey data close-ended question data to determine the overall percentage of each question for categorical responses. I disaggregated the data for each question to determine how the majority of the respondents answered survey questions. This was done for each question in the pre-survey and then for the post-survey. Thereafter, I did a comparative analysis to determine if responses changed after respondents participated in the culturally relevant pedagogy professional development sessions. The change, or lack thereof, was noted and shared as findings.

In regards to the open-ended survey questions, I analyzed the responses to find similarities and differences in the pre- and post-survey questions individually. I looked for key terms and phrases that indicated similarities and differences in ideas. When the data were coded and annotated for the open-ended questions for each survey, I performed another comparative analysis to determine if similarities and differences existed. Similarities and differences were noted to see if any conjectures could be made based on participants' comments. Pre- and post-survey data was placed in a chart to compare responses and themes as well. This survey data chart was compared with the chart for interview response data.

The themes developed through coding and annotating the interview responses and pre- and post-survey responses were analyzed and compared as well. This was done to determine how the responses from the whole certified staff compared to the responses of the eleven participants who were interviewed. The differences and similarities from this comparison were noted, also.

Subjectivity

I am fully aware that I brought biases, beliefs, and perceptions based on my experiences as I conducted this research study. Peshkin (1988) believes

When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. (p. 17)

Furthermore, investigators who seek to be highly effective admit this and function with a clear understanding of their own subjectivity and seek to prevent their subjectivity from affecting the outcomes of their research studies (Peshkin, 1988). As the primary researcher of the study, I believe it is relevant to explain that I was a child of poverty who grew up with many teachers who were important factors in my academic success. Additionally, being an African American male, I observed how teachers treated students and reflected on my childhood school experiences. As I have heard different people speak negatively about students of color, I know that I had to keep a neutral demeanor during interviews and be objective while listening and as I analyzed transcripts to identify themes. I fully understand that I am from the ethnic group that has historically struggled in schools.

I spoke to the school principal about helping to select teachers to ensure diversity in race, age, and years of teaching experience among participants. In order to avoid developing an opinion about participants, I did not have any discussions with the school principal about participants as I interacted with and interviewed them; nor did I have discussions with the principal as I coded and annotated transcripts.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate the goal of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is to support the premise that the investigation and the findings are “worth paying attention to” (as cited in Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008, p. 1). Guba (1981) recommends qualitative researchers utilize four criteria to ensure trustworthiness: (a) credibility (internal validity); (b) transferability (external validity; generalizability); (c)

dependability (reliability); and (d) confirmability (objectivity) (as cited in Shenton, 2004). *Credibility* is an assessment of whether the findings represent a reasonable conclusion based on information collected from data sources (participants, documents, or events) (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008). *Transferability* is the extent to which the findings can be expected to occur in other studies or situations (Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008). *Dependability* refers to the quality of the data, the process to collect the data, and the data analysis (Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008). *Confirmability* is useful to validate if the research study findings are supported by the data collection (Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability improve the trustworthiness of research studies when utilized in data collection and analysis.

Credibility

Patton (2002) indicates that credibility of a research study is established by the use of a method called triangulation. Moreover, triangulation involves the utilization of varying methods of data collection, such as observations, focus groups, and individual interviews which are the major data collection practices in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). The limitations that exist for each method to establish credibility is minimized by using different methods together within a research study (Brewer & Hunter, 1989).

In order to ensure credibility of the study, I used triangulation, peer debriefing and support, and member checking. Peer debriefing and support involved me discussing commonalities and differences that interviews and survey data revealed, in addition to discussing my biases (Patton, 2002). The triangulation of interviews and pre- and post-

survey responses was used to identify consistent themes. Additionally, inconsistent responses were noted as outlier data.

Member checking was used to increase credibility of the research study, as well. Shenton (2004) indicates that another method to increase credibility is to allow each potential research participant to refuse to participate in the study so that all respondents are truly willing to participate and provide responses. This was done in compliance with University and school district protocols. In the same manner, research participants were informed of their rights to discontinue participating in the study at any time.

Transferability

Transferability refers to providing a detailed description of study participants' perceptions, practices, and thoughts so that other researchers and readers are able to determine what components from the study applies to other studies and situations (Bowen, 2005, 2010; Shenton, 2004). If the situation and population is similar to the one in the research study, based on the detailed description provided by the researcher, transferability may be able to connect with another situation. In order for this to be determined, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Firestone (1993) indicate the researcher bears the responsibility of providing adequate information about the situation, study site, and participants' demographics so readers can determine if a transfer is logical. Additionally, to ensure transferability, I have provided a detailed description of the research findings.

Dependability

Maintaining a detailed audit trail to outline all processes pertaining to the research study to safeguard it from bias, ensure accuracy of data collection, and promote

objectivity is important to establish dependability (Patton, 2002). Detailed information about the research study was documented to confirm the rigor and complexity of the research study. I kept notes electronically most of the time and any handwritten notes were transferred to electronic documents. Additionally, I coded study participants' responses on the pre- and post-surveys separately. Several days later, I re-coded the responses to see if there were any new findings when I compared the two. This method of coding and debriefing with a peer were used to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability was done through the peer review process. The peer review process was done on more than one occasion as I reviewed survey and interview responses to discuss change of or lack of changes in study participants' responses based on certain questions. The peer I chose was another doctoral student who was familiar with the research about culturally relevant pedagogy. Discussions were rich and caused me to analyze data differently based on questions posed as a result of our dialogue. Also, I shared each step of data collection and we discussed different ways to organize information and code study participants' responses.

Limitations

The 12 participants who were interviewed provided information to yield a better understanding of the impact of their participation in professional development about cultural relevant pedagogy. This insight came from one school within an urban school district in the southeastern region of the U.S. Additionally, elementary school staff members who serve a diverse student population were the only participants in this

research study. Therefore, this does not mean that the impact they experienced will be the impact for all teachers engaged in professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy.

Conclusion

Due to the cultural incongruity between the majority of the teacher population and the current student population, in addition to the importance of professional development to improve the skills of educators, I explored the perceptions and practices of teachers who participated in a monthly year-long professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy. Research participants' before and after knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy, perceptions of students, and classroom practices were examined.

In order to collect a detailed account of the participants' experiences, the phenomenological approach was used. I interviewed 12 staff members from an elementary school. The other data collection method utilized was pre- and post-surveys administered by the school district.

Study findings reflect the perspectives of staff members from one elementary school. As a principal, I will use findings and research to educate others about ways to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms and schools.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: INTRODUCTIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of this research study was to examine the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices after participating in monthly year-long Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Common Core professional development. An analysis of data collected and coded during the study will be presented in this chapter. The guiding research questions for the study were:

1. What are teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy?
2. How do teachers report themselves as practicing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
3. How does professional development influence teachers' *understanding and implementation* of culturally relevant pedagogy?
4. What contextual barriers hinder teachers' culturally relevant teaching practices?

Data collection included pre- and post-surveys administered by the school district, and face-to-face interviews designed to uncover what study participants knew about culturally relevant pedagogy before and after they engaged in professional development.

Participants

The participants in the study were staff members at an elementary school in an urban school district located in the southeastern region of the U.S. Twenty-eight school

staff members participated in the pre-survey and 18 participated in the post-survey. The post-survey was administered in the school year following the initial survey. Some administrators and staff members had transferred to other schools or did not complete the post-survey. There was a total of 12 interview participants: 11 were teachers and one was a school counselor. All study participants were educators who participated in the district-sponsored professional development focused on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Common Core Standards.

Participant Surveys

All questions on the pre-survey were used on the post-survey to see if there were any changes in responses after study participants completed the professional development. Information regarding race, gender, and ethnicity, and the number of years of teaching experience varied from the pre- and post-surveys because of the change in the number of staff members who participated in the post-survey.

Knowledgeable of Different Cultures

Seventy-five percent of study participants rated themselves as being knowledgeable of different cultures, with 7% indicating “completely knowledgeable” on the pre-survey. On the post survey, 61% and 11% rated themselves as “knowledgeable” and “completely knowledgeable,” respectively. This is a 10% decline from the pre-survey to the post-survey responses. The decrease in the study participants’ knowledge when comparing pre- and post-survey data could be based on different factors. The decrease could be explained because they discovered after participating in the professional development sessions that there were other characteristics in their students’

cultures that they had not considered previously. The study participants might have scored themselves higher initially and then adjusted their responses to reflect their new understanding of the many factors that are included in being knowledgeable of different cultures. Also, the change could have been due to the change in the number of participants in the pre- and post-surveys. As mentioned previously, some staff members were either on leave or no longer staff members at the school at the time the post-survey was administered.

Survey responses indicated that 68% of the participants rated themselves as believing they are prepared to teach students from different cultures and 7% rating themselves as “completely prepared” on the pre-survey. During the post-survey, 72% and 17% of the respondents respectively rated themselves as “knowledgeable” and “strongly knowledgeable,” respectively. This is a 14-point increase from the pre-survey to the post-survey.

Research Question One

Research question one asked about teachers’ understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. The two themes discovered from study participants’ responses were that culturally relevant pedagogy requires (a) knowledge of students and (b) building meaningful relationships with students. The two dimensions of knowledge of students are (a) knowledge of students’ cultures and backgrounds, and (b) knowledge of students’ culturally-grounded interests.

Participants were asked to describe how their culture related to their school experience and their teaching experience. As data were analyzed, it was apparent that

study participants believed that knowledge of students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests were characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Knowledge of Students

Knowledge of students' cultures and backgrounds. A number of participants emphasized the importance of the teachers being aware of their students' cultures and backgrounds. Study participants used the word "background" frequently to share their thoughts on surveys and interviews. In some cases, the words background and culture were used interchangeably by study participants. In this document the word 'culture' will represent racial/ethnic backgrounds while the word 'background' will refer to income level and family structure. Family structure refers to single-parent or two-parent (of the same or different gender), or being reared by grandparents, foster parents, or adoptive parents.

On the pre-survey, when asked what the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" means, one participant expressed, "It is a word that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural reference[s] to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." Another participant explicated, "This means teaching that is meaningful or relevant to the cultures of the students that I teach." Further, another participant said,

I think that culturally relevant pedagogy means knowing that a classroom is made up of different cultures and using this knowledge to develop instruction that would address the learning needs of all students.

After study participants completed the year-long professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy, they expressed their views that the knowledge of students' cultures was important. One study participant indicated the importance of, "Instruction and materials that are relevant to students of different cultures--the ability to reach students where they are, what they know and understand." Similarly, another survey respondent elaborated about the importance of knowing students' cultures by advocating for "student learning [that] is based on, and should be led by, their cultural experiences. Those affect their understanding of what's being taught." Additionally, another study participant expressed,

Culturally relevant pedagogy means using/teaching/sharing/learning about the cultures that are within the group you are teaching. It isn't just about books, but should also include thoughts, feelings and whatever else is relevant. It should be a way to try and prevent bias.

Battle, an African American female, maintained that "you have to know what their cultural preferences [are] and what [is] not necessarily only their culture. Their family could be their culture." Douglas, a White male, defined culturally relevant pedagogy:

I understand it to be your delivery of instruction and content that impacts students based on their culture. And again I think it's one of those things that you need to be careful about narrowly defining what that student's culture is . . . Obviously, if it's something that they can associate with, they're going to be interested in it. But I think it's just as important to give him a wide variety of cultural experience, because I think a lot of times we tend to get in a muddle even though we have a diverse school.

Even though Douglas, a White male, expressed his definition of culturally relevant pedagogy and then said it is important to provide students a well-rounded knowledge of other cultures, he still defined the term as the “delivery of instruction and content that impacts students based on their culture,” which highlights the significance of being knowledgeable of students’ cultures.

Patton, a White female, said the following to highlight the importance of students’ cultures:

Just over the years of teaching in the classroom, just having different things explained to me and kind of being like, . . . That’s why a student might do this, or that’s why, you know, a student might do that. That’s part of their culture and their beliefs in their family . . . I think it’s something I have to consider every day. You know, if I have . . . a student from Cambodia, not only is that something that’s going to appeal to him if I can tie it into the lesson because . . . he might perk his ears up . . . I know about Cambodia . . . He can contribute to it. If I have a student from Jamaica and . . . his dad is an awesome chef . . . I can find a way to . . . tie that in, I know I’ve got his attention. He’s going to remember whatever it is that we’re talking about a little bit more, because it has that tie to something that’s familiar to him.

Patton believes that the cultural connection with her students is valuable as learning experiences are designed so that an intentional connection can be made between students’ learning opportunities and their lives.

Tatum, an African American male, shares,

. . . well, we talk about cultural relevant pedagogy, I think a lot of it has to do with being able to introduce concepts or material that a child can relate to based on their upbringings, based on their environment. Things they’re used to hearing. Things they’re used to seeing . . . So when I think about teaching culturally relevant pedagogy. I think about teaching them a concept or teaching them a certain skill using . . . things that they are used to hearing, things they are used to, or things that they have heard about . . . and vocabulary that was related to their

culture . . . It's just introducing them or fine tuning or teaching a certain skill using concepts or using vocabulary or using graphics that they can relate to. Things that [are] already in their environment.

These teachers' views about culturally relevant pedagogy emphasize the notion that teachers should make cultural connections during instruction. This highlights the need for teachers to be knowledgeable of their students' cultures.

To emphasize the importance of knowing students' backgrounds, Patton, a White female, said,

I always feel that it's very important to understand where a student's coming from to understand their background, what they believe, and what they hold to be important. It's just learning different things.

Patton articulates that it is necessary to understand students' backgrounds and be aware of where her students were coming from so she would design lessons to be culturally relevant. Teachers being knowledgeable of students' backgrounds can help them make connections to learning objectives thus increasing the likelihood of students mastering learning goals.

Morrow, an African American female, cited the importance of being aware of students' family structure to provide encouragement and communicate to students that they can overcome life challenges. Morrow recalls her childhood experiences of being reared in a single-parent home and how those experiences assist her in teaching and supporting students with similar backgrounds. Morrow explains,

I can relate to a lot of my students because I have quite a bit of students who have just one parent in the home. And so looking at how I was raised and my cultural

environment [being African American], I'm able to be able to be a little bit more receptive to my students knowing that you still can be successful. You still can achieve just having one parent in the home . . . as long as you have love . . . There are some students, who even with that single parent, they have a struggle. There's a struggle because the parent is working, and like with my mom, my mom worked a lot. So even though she was there for me, I had an aunt that had to babysit me quite often. So I know with a lot of our parents they're working several jobs and there's someone else having to watch the child. They're not able to do the things they want to do as a parent, because they are working and trying to provide that safe environment and financially support their family.

Toldson, an African American female who experienced poverty as a child, commented about relating to "the same situation I came from" when referring to her students. She was noting that she had the same background as children she teaches and how it influenced her teaching. Additionally, Toldson cited,

. . . I would identify with the kids that were black or the kids that came from kind of the same situation I came from. Sometimes I wouldn't identify with the white kids or the kids that had more affluent backgrounds even though I've always taught in a Title I school. I never really taught kids that were from really affluent backgrounds, but I noticed that . . . I would have to work harder to kind of find common ground with them, because I would find myself not identifying with them at all so if it . . . I have to remember not to just focus on people like me and to make sure that I'm addressing what everybody needs even if everybody is like me. I still gotta teach them . . . there are other people in the world.

Toldson indicated that she believes she does not do a great job with some students because she does not relate to their experiences. She is aware that she is less effective with these students because their experiences are not like her background of poverty. She provides an example of how she connects with elements of her students' backgrounds at home:

I don't necessarily identify with their background because I'm from a higher economic status than them [now, but] I do identify with them and how they're treated at home, how they get whoopins and how the kids talked. I mean how the parents talked to them and stuff because my parents talked to me like that and so I know what it's gonna take for them to understand and what it takes to get their attention [especially] for the little boys. I know kind of what draws them in.

Explaining the importance of knowing students' culture so you can connect learning, Georgia, an African American female, commented,

I think, you know, our curriculum is relevant, but it's not relevant to all students. Often we had to take what they had given us from Common Core and kind of make it so it's relevant to our students in order for them to understand what's going on. It is not diverse. It's not—and I know they're supposed to be able to take whatever we teach them and apply it to that test, but if we want students to be successful, then we need to be able to make it relevant to them based on their cultural background.

This study participant is indicating that she believes that Common Core is not conducive to connecting with students and using the knowledge of students to help them master learning objectives. The question suggested by her comments is “Who are these learning objectives common to?” Is this information that relates and connects to the culture and perspectives of White America or Black and ethnic America? Affluent America or poor America? Who does the Common Core curriculum relate to? Who is it *common* to? The study participant emphasized that the assessments to determine if students have learned the Common Core curriculum are not relevant to many students, thus posing another challenge in preparing students for the assessments.

Jolly, an African American female, shared,

So when I think of that term [culturally relevant pedagogy] I think about how do I relate my experiences that I teach to the children in the classroom, the texts that I provide that I read to the students, the activities that we do to make sure that it's all culturally relevant. For example, this week we're talking about Hanukkah. We're going to talk about Jewish traditions. We're going to talk about regular Christmas and Kwanza, so just making sure I'm tying in all those cultural aspects as it relates to my students.

Jolly is emphasizing the importance of making connections with students' cultures and their learning experiences.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy that were compiled from the participants' quotes.

Table 4.1

Elements of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Elements of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
Incorporates:
Learning needs of students
Students' cultural experiences
Culturally-relevant books
Students' thoughts and feelings
Cultural preferences, including those that are family specific
Concepts & material related to students' upbringing & environment
Vocabulary related to their culture

Knowledge of students' interests. Knowledge of students' interests is the second dimension in the knowledge of students' theme. Study participants used the phrase "students' interests" throughout the surveys and interviews which emphasized the relationship of students' interests to teaching that is culturally relevant. Douglas, a White male, put it simply when he said, ". . . ask the kid what they like, I mean what are the things that you're into and they're gonna tell you." When teachers find ways to make connections to what students know or enjoy, it will "appeal to him if I can tie it into lesson[s] because you know, he might perk his ears up . . . He can contribute to it" Patton noted (White female). Additionally, Patton said, "He's going to remember what [it] is that we're talking about a little bit more because it has that tie to something that's familiar with him." Familiarity sometimes increases the comfort level of us all and in some cases it is what helps to make learning more engaging and exciting. Patton said we must make "sure that the teaching material ultimately ties back to whatever is important to the students." Tatum, an African American male, also spoke to connecting with students' interests:

Yeah, like I said before, just being an African American male, but also being able to talk about playing music, doing certain things that they're not able to get in that other classrooms they were in a couple years ago or last year. I don't know if you heard of flowcabulary. Man, we have to use that all the time here. Flowcabulary with the hip hop where they rap about different current events . . . or they introduce different division facts. We play that every day and hip-hop. I even do a lot with music.

Tatum is careful to provide lessons involving rap and hip hop music as a way to connect with students' interests. The students enjoy the raps so much, they even use rap

to celebrate classmates' birthdays. Tatum is connecting rap with his students' interests.

A large number of his students are African American. As a result of their race and ethnicity, rap can be viewed as an element that is connected with their culture as well.

The use of rap serves as a two-fold connection: students' interests and students' cultures.

However, Battle, an African American female, added a cautionary note,

It's definitely how it relates to the particular child you're teaching, and not necessarily stereotype, . . . I don't like [it] when that happens . . . just because he's an African American male he does not have to rap up the thing or do something like that. I cannot stand [it] when people do that. I have some African American boys. I will put on a rap and they will sit there and stare at me like I do not like this. This is not me. I don't want it. So it's definitely getting to know that child and knowing what that child likes to make it relevant to them . . . just because they are African American they do not necessarily like this, or just because they are Latino they do not necessarily like this.

Even though using books and other materials is part of providing students with a culturally relevant experience, Molton, a White female, added,

Well, it's not just books. It's not just books with African American or Hispanic children or children from Laos. It is bringing in what they're interested in, bringing in something from their culture, allowing them to show . . . And it's a hard thing to bring in without just using books. You have to be very close to these kids to say, "Well bring that in." Once they start talking about the food that their mom cooks at home, or the movies that they have seen . . . they need to bring it in or they need to be able to talk about it and show it. I think it's more than just text. Text is a big part, but I think it goes [back] to what they are doing at home. What have they learned about their culture that they need to be able to share, because I don't know a lot of it.

In summary, study participants' comments emphasize the importance of addressing and including students' interests in classroom instruction. The connections made by doing so have proven beneficial to study participants. Georgia, an African

American female, noted, “I’m able to be culturally sensitive to the groups in my class and being able to use teaching materials that would interest them in order to get them to move where I want them to move.”

Building Relationships with Students

The second theme that emerged related to the meaning of culturally relevant pedagogy was building relationships with students. Study participants’ responses suggested that building meaningful relationships with students is a major component of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Douglas, a White male, emphasized the importance of student and teacher relationships by saying,

I have always focused more on the individual relationship, on a one-to-one basis, rather than trying to connect to a student based on whatever [is] their demographic group . . .

Battle, an African American female, added the following:

You have to know what their culture likes and what not necessarily only their culture, their family, that could be their culture. So getting to know that child.

Some teachers indicated that they shared their childhood experiences with students in order to communicate that they, too, have been in the same situation, that they understand--which creates a deeper relationship. Tatum, an African American male, discussed,

. . . I always remind the students [that] I know what it’s like to struggle and I’ll allow the students to tell me their experiences. They’re gonna tell me anything.

They're gonna talk to me and tell me what's going on at home, especially black males. They'll come and tell me, "I got something I need to tell you." This one child told me, "I can't go back to my old day care . . . The daycare provider was choking me and my sisters while we were there and nobody knew about it. DSS [Department of Social Services] finally decided to investigate when someone told them that there was something going on there. I had another child, his parents, his father, I'm going to say . . . several of our young boys, even in fourth grade, that don't have father figures. They don't have a father at home. Their father is in jail. A lot of them have father that are in jail, especially African American boys . . . They have fathers that they don't know. They shared with me some experiences that they have at home that will bring tears. Man, you have to man up. You have to hear it but be, "Okay. It's gonna be okay, I've had the same experience."

Jolly, an African American female, shared,

So I think building that relationship with that child, getting to know what they like. Then you can make your things culturally relevant.

Jolly shared that there could be a difference between what people in a student's culture like and what a student likes. This was an interesting insight. Like this study participant, another study participant pointed out that teachers should be careful not to assume all students of a certain culture do or do not like certain things. For instance, hip hop music and rap are not liked by all African Americans. Hip hop and rap are enjoyed by a large number of African American students that I have encountered. However, I also know some youth who do not enjoy Hip hop or rap music. Certainly, this difference is significant as teachers seek to engage students in learning opportunities. Additionally, Jolly emphasizes knowing students allows teachers to build relationships in order to discover what their students' like. Doing so allows the student/teacher relationship to be

strengthened and encourages more sharing so a greater knowledge of students will exist to further improve students' achievement.

Just as some study participants raised the idea of building relationships is important to show students that their teachers care about them, some study participants maintained that when they were students, some of their school experiences did not relate to their culture and some teachers did not care. For instance, Patton, a White female, stated,

I had teachers who were just so out of touch and uncaring. You know. I had a teacher in high school who if you missed a problem, she would tell you she was going to flush your head down the toilet. And like she did not care about me, where I came from. She didn't care about anybody else in that classroom, where they came from . . . I feel like that was kind of the environment I grew up in . . . It doesn't matter who you are, where you are, what you know, what level you're at, you just need to get it right. Get it done. Move on.

Patton indicated how she perceived her teachers as not making connections with her. She interpreted that they "didn't care about me." As a result, Patton spoke passionately about her negative recollection of the experience with these teachers. However, in some cases, the attitude of "get the problem right" is viewed as a teacher who has high expectations for his/her students. From the student perspective, it can be viewed as an uncaring teacher. Nevertheless, not being as strict on students could also be viewed as a teacher who feels sorry for his/her students and is accepting of where they are, where they come from, and not expecting more. This behavior of being overly compassionate can be viewed as counterproductive in providing low income and students of color the rigorous and relevant learning experiences they need and deserve.

It was apparent to study participants that building relationships with students is a major factor in practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. However, this can only be done well if teachers have knowledge of and integrate the other dimensions: knowledge of students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests in their teaching. Figure 4.1 illustrates how the themes and dimensions relate to each other.

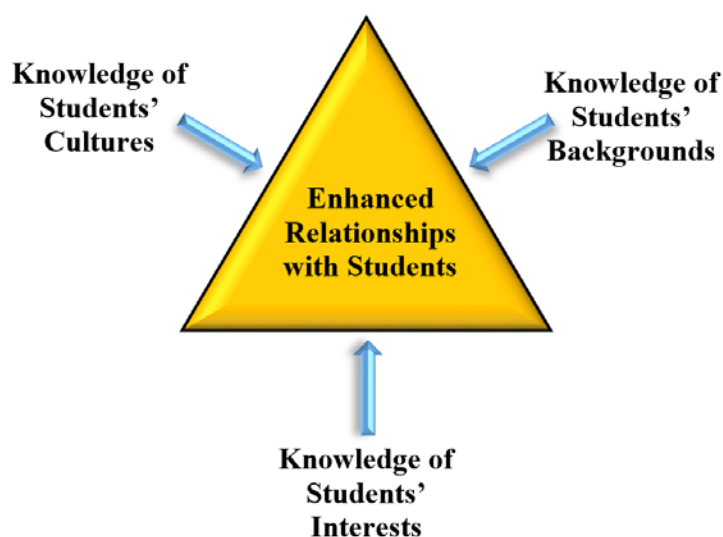


Figure 4.1. Enhancement of Relationships through Knowledge of Students.

In summation, two themes related to the first research question emerged from study participant responses: (a) knowledge of students (including knowledge of students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests), and (b) building relationships with students.

Research Question Two

How do teachers report themselves as doing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?

Study participants described how they used culturally relevant pedagogical practices in their classrooms. To analyze practices of participants before and after

professional development, practices were categorized based on the four approaches and five dimensions in Banks's Multicultural Education framework (Banks, 1999; see Figures 2.1 and 2.2 in Chapter II of this dissertation). Participants' responses were organized according to the themes previously identified in the analysis of their descriptions of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Knowledge of Students

The surveys and face-to-face interviews revealed study participants' thoughts about what they did to connect with their students. The types of activities that study participants used to engage their students varied, but the teachers' actions focused on making the needed connections with their students.

Dimension 1: Knowledge of students' cultures and backgrounds. When study participants described strategies they used before the professional development, their comments emphasized how being familiar with their students' cultures was paramount. One respondent indicated that they relate "lessons to different cultures and traditions." Another respondent mentioned, "encouraging [students] to read culturally relevant books," while another participant said, "I have always looked for and used reading material that reflects a variety of different cultures." "Students are accepted for who they are. I care about my students and encourage them to share their culture with me and their classmates," commented another study participant. Also, on the pre-survey, one study participant mentioned,

I try to incorporate literature that comes from various cultures. I try to find stories that my students can relate to and that engages them or feels familiar to them, even if it is not familiar to me. I find that my students enjoy explaining passages

or events to me that I may not fully understand; I am a learner in my own classroom. Some passages contain phrases from that culture's language that I have trouble pronouncing. The students love helping their teacher "speak" their native language.

Teachers indicated that they “use different types/cultural book[s], magazines, [and] websites.” Also, the teachers asked students “to bring in their cultures/traditions and interest and share them with the class.” One respondent admits to integrating more culturally diverse topics and biographies of African Americans. Another study participant mentioned the incorporation of virtual field trips to explore other culturally religious events. To connect with their students’ cultures, one respondent allowed students to read different folktales that relate to students’ cultures.

Molton, a White female, explicated,

My first year of teaching I had a group of kids that loved to bring things in. And so it wasn't me teaching, it was them bringing. And so they still got some culture from their other classmates . . . but it wasn't through me saying, “That's really cool. Bring it in.” They were bringing it in anyway just to show, I had that type of class my first year. Now, [she asks], What do you have anything that you can say? How do you celebrate this? What do you do?” . . . I always thought books were what we needed. Until that course, it was books.

Molton describes how she tried to connect with students before the professional development. She remembered her students in past years sharing their culture and currently, she allows students to contribute to the class based on what they know and things they celebrate at their homes. Questioning served as a strategy to encourage students who are not as forthcoming with sharing information about their culture as others, to share. She does admit that before the professional development, this type of

sharing among students did not occur as often. Molton probes more intentionally with questions to encourage more frequent sharing among students.

Morrow, an African American female, shared,

. . . if we had some Native American students in the classroom, we would do a focus on Native Americans where we would talk about the culture, exposing the students to different aspects of that culture, doing crafts, activities, reading books, [and] watching videos.

Morrow mentions that incorporating lessons that involve the Native American culture was a practice that existed. This helped to include the students from that culture and provided another cultural experience to their classmates.

Another respondent made an assignment more culturally relevant by including the names of students from different cultures. More specifically Hardy, an African American female, indicated,

Now, as far as being a minority, I mean I call it with a permanent suntan, culturally relevant information that I taught, the only change that I really needed to make is making sure I cater to both genders—boys and girls . . . If I do a spreadsheet, I might throw different races in there of different cultures . . . I put a twist and made it more culturally relevant for the students.

In order to include parents in the learning process, Jolly, an African American female, included cultural foods and parents, as guest speakers, to share their experiences with students. Jolly explains,

Well, I always celebrated things like Cinco de Mayo, just typical holidays that are well known, like Cinco de Mayo and Christmas. Like I said, we celebrate just three of the traditions for Christmas. I try to incorporate different foods from

different cultures. I allowed my parents to come in, speak, share things, some pictures and different experiences from cultures that are not similar to mine.

In the same manner, Morrow invited parents to prepare foods so students would be exposed to Hispanic cuisine. Parent involvement being a component of Morrow's practice is illustrated in the following statement:

For our Hispanic students, we would have parents coming in and preparing food or sharing artifacts from their culture to make students feel comfortable and expose them to that. So we just try to bring in parent involvement with different cultures and expose students to that and making other students feels comfortable as well.

Placing additional attention on the importance of knowing students' cultural backgrounds and the inclusion of material was emphasized when Georgia, an African American female, mentioned,

I had some Native American books because I had some Native American—children, I only had one Caucasian, well two Caucasian students in my class. However, I do have a lot of biographies that focus on different types of cultures, so I always use different types of books. I've always had interest for that so I collected these books over the past ten years. Most of them are mine. Some of them were given to us by the school after we had the professional development.

Georgia indicates her intentional inclusion of Native American books, because she had Native American students in her class. Additionally, Georgia shared she uses biographies to expose students to realistic images of other cultures with the books she has collected over the years.

Table 4.2 is provided to illustrate where the teaching strategies are based on the approaches.

Table 4.2

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform—Knowledge of Students’ Cultures & Backgrounds Examples

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform	Study Participants’ Practices
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Contributions Approach</p> <p>Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share celebrations and holidays ● Develop lessons to incorporate both genders and names from varied cultures ● Including parents, as guest speakers, to share cultural foods
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Additive Approach</p> <p>Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relate lessons to different cultures and traditions ● Use culturally relevant books ● Use material (books, magazines, websites, folk tales, and poetry) that reflects a variety of different cultures ● Encourage students to share their culture ● Use of biographies of individuals from different cultures ● Plan virtual fieldtrips to include cultural information ● Encourage students to communicate their thoughts about a topic to share varying perspectives ● Expose students to different aspects of other cultures through activities (arts, crafts, books, and videos) ● Including parents, as guest speakers, to share experiences ● Use of text and resources from other cultures
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Transformation Approach</p> <p>The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.</p>	

Table 4.2

Cont.

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform	Study Participants' Practices
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 4 The Social Action Approach Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them.</p>	

It is significant to note that the contribution and additive approaches possess different elements to introduce cultural content without challenging the basic curriculum framework (Banks, 1999). As it pertains to Table 4.2, all teachers' practices about how they use culturally relevant pedagogy are categorized within the contributions and additive approach levels. Unlike the contributions and additive approaches, the transformation approach changes the primary purpose and principles of the curriculum thus encouraging students to analyze topics, concepts, problems, and events from different perspectives and points of view other than that of the dominant culture (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Banks (1999) comments that a major focus of the transformation approach is "to teach students to think critically and to develop the skills to formulate, document, and justify their conclusions and generalizations" (p. 33). The decision-making and social action approach engages students in an extension of their learning beyond the transformation approach. Since teacher practices are not categorized within the transformation and social action

approaches, perhaps additional support is needed for teachers to develop practices in these two higher level approaches (Banks, 1999, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2004).

Dimension: Knowledge of students' interests. Knowledge of students' interests was one of the three dimensions that surfaced when responses for research question one were analyzed. One respondent shared that "Students are asked to try to connect with texts and works. They are allowed/taught to find ways to bring in their cultures/traditions and interests and share them with the class." Students' interests were used to plan lessons to help students to connect with curriculum topics to be learned. Consequently, this is a strategy that study participants used to improve students' mastery of learning objectives. Pettiford, an African American male, asserts,

If I wanted to, let's say if I was teaching a history class, basically if I wanted to talk about the Ku Klux Klan, if I wanted to talk about the way the South was versus the North, everything had to basically be approved. I could use maybe a Billie Holiday song as an introduction, *A Strange Fruit*, and build the student's interest in what do you mean by this song, or what is this song all about strange fruit, let's see in the Deep South.

In order to familiarize students with Billie Holiday, Pettiford strives to increase student engagement by connecting to students' interests through music and the interpretation of lyrics.

Tatum, an African American male, shared that he uses today's music and allows students to tell their stories in their own way. He says,

Like I said, I always used acronyms, raps, I love using hip-hop, poetry, also allowing students to come up with their own story, allowing students come up with their own story for the concept that we're learning. Because when they create their own story then a lot of times they own it.

Even though Battle, an African American female, admits to not subscribing to the culturally relevant teaching strategies as much before the professional development, she indicated that

I definitely still try to build that relationship and get to know what that child did, like to make it relevant to them, but it wasn't as deep as we try to do it now. We definitely try to go deeper, try to integrate it more, so before it was kind of a circus. I picked this book because I know you like this. Let's do this because I know you like this. It wasn't necessarily going as deep as we try to go now.

Battle communicates that she uses resources that students like and she goes deeper than just reading the books.

Also, Georgia, an African American female, indicates how she emphasizes students' interests in the following response:

Some of the things I've done used informational and non-informational text that was culturally relevant such as here's my African American and Hispanic collection of books. So I tried to incorporate a lot of those books inside my instruction and based on the dynamics of my class, I used books based on whatever the interests of my children, whatever the interests they liked . . . I've always had interest for that, so I collected these books over the past ten years. Some of them—most of them are mine, and some of them were given to us by the school after we had the professional development.

Georgia indicated in the face-to-face interview that "I used books based on whatever the interests of my children, whatever the interests they liked." Furthermore, Georgia explains, "I participate in their outside interests, like I go—I do home visits. I go to concerts . . . I try to support my students inside school and outside the school." Georgia's latter statement sheds light on being involved in students' lives outside of school is

important as well, which helps educators get to know their students and connect learning to their interests.

Table 4.3 is provided to illustrate where the teaching strategies are based on the approaches and dimensions.

Table 4.3

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform—Knowledge of Students' Interest

Examples

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform	Study Participants' Practices
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 1 The Contributions Approach</p> <p>Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher participates in other school related and non-school related activities of his/her students
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 2 The Additive Approach</p> <p>Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask students share their cultures and traditions ● Learn topic with varying perspectives ● Incorporate music (Billie Holiday, rap, and hip hop) to teach topics ● Use text (books and poetry) that reflects a variety of different cultures ● Encourage students to communicate their thoughts about a topic to share varying perspectives ● Use culturally relevant text
<p style="text-align: center;">Level 3 The Transformation Approach</p> <p>The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.</p>	

Table 4.3

Cont.

Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform	Study Participants' Practices
<p>Level 4 The Social Action Approach</p>	
<p>Students make decisions on important social issues and take actions to help solve them.</p>	

Building Meaningful Relationship with Students

The second theme that was identified in data analysis was building meaningful relationships with students. Participants noted that in order to strengthen the teacher/student relationship, it is important for teachers to determine where their students are and what they can do to connect with them in and out of the school.

One significant strategy teachers used to build relationships was to use different forms of communication with their students. Some study participants mentioned how they share information about themselves with students in addition to discovering information about the students. These moments of discovery by both teachers and students are helpful in building relationships that are beneficial.

Douglas, a White male, explains,

I think that [the] background of having experience with a variety of cultures, . . . made it easier for me to build those relationships with students. I have always focused more on the individual relationship on a one-to-one basis rather than trying to connect to a student based on whatever their demographic group [is], . . .

I find the most effective thing to do is to ask the kid what they like, I mean what are the things that you're into, and they're gonna tell you.

The excerpt from Douglas initially stresses his belief that “having experience with a variety of cultures” is a factor that has contributed to him being successful in building relationships with his students. Additionally, Douglas indicates that he strives to cultivate one-on-one relationships with students to get to know them instead of connecting with students based on generalizations about their racial or ethnic groups.

The dialogue between Douglas and his students allows both the teacher and students to share what they like and what they are involved in. Asking the questions and listening is the strategy Douglas uses to develop relationships with his students.

Another study participant, Battle, an African American female, comments,

So I think building that relationship with that child, getting to know what they like, then you can make your things culturally relevant, you have to know what their culture likes and not necessarily only their culture, their family. That could be their culture. So getting to know that child and knowing what that child likes.

In the same manner as the previous study participant, Battle strives to get to know her students. This includes learning what the students' cultures and family experiences are. Additionally, Battle echoes the need to know what each particular child enjoys.

In addition to exchanging information about cultures, families, and interests, the sharing of life stories is another strategy teachers and students use to build relationships. For example, Morrow, an African American female, explicates,

Just in the fact that I can relate to a lot of my students because I have quite a bit of students who have just one parent in the home. And so looking at how I was

raised and my cultural environment I'm able to be a little bit more receptive to my students knowing that you still can be successful, you still can achieve . . .

Morrow mentions that she can relate to her students because her life story is similar to some of theirs as it pertains to being reared in a single parent home. Morrow uses this childhood detail to connect with students. Moreover, she communicates to her students that she understands the challenges of one parent having to work and not having time to do other things, because she experienced it when she was a child. Morrow strives to motivate students by providing encouragement to them as she shares her life story that is similar to theirs thus building their relationship. Her own childhood memories help this study participant be "more receptive" as she teaches students who are encountering the same situation.

Patton shares life stories as well. However, she provides insight to students about her school experiences as a way to connect with them and create a strong student/teacher relationship. Patton, a White female, expressed,

I think I support academic growth by just encouraging them. I tell them a lot of stories about myself and my experiences in school. You know, I tell them that I had a teacher that I just hated and didn't get along with her. The other day I was telling them that in my eighth-grade math class I had to take Algebra I and I didn't do well enough on it, so I had to repeat it the next year and they were just like, "Ah, how could a teacher not . . .," you know, and I'm like, "guys, everybody has to learn, and then sometimes it works, sometimes it's better to do it again," you know, like just kind of try to relate to them, tell them stories that make them realize that you know . . .

Patton's comments indicate that she understands and builds relationships with students by telling her story to establish commonalities between their childhoods. The goal is to

share that she has experienced struggles just like her students. This type of sharing creates a deeper connection so students will share their struggles and be more comfortable expressing themselves to their teacher and peers. The stories become teaching tools to encourage students not to give up when they encounter challenges. As a victor of her own childhood struggles, Patton establishes an atmosphere to discuss challenges which helps to building the teacher/student relationship as well.

As it relates to strategies implemented by teachers that span outside of classroom to building relationships with students, one study participant, Georgia, an African American female, shared,

Well, I participate in their outside interests, like I go—I do the home visits, I go to their concerts, I go to their performances, I call their parents, like I said I send out postcards, I do home visits. I teach team building, . . . I try to support my students inside the school and outside the school, . . . just give him that boost . . .

This teacher points out the importance of extending herself beyond the classroom environment. Engaging in home visits, attending extracurricular activities, and participating in students' interests outside of school is viewed as essential by this study participant. Additionally, communicating with parents via phone and providing support to students “inside the school and outside the school” is a strategy used to build relationships to help students achieve.

Another study participant indicates,

I make home visits to understand my children and their family. I listen intently to what they are trying to share with me.

This study participant, too, highlights the need to connect with students beyond the instructional day and the school building. Home visits are an avenue that the teacher uses to gather information to enhance learning for his/her students, thus strengthening the teacher/student relationship.

The overall themes that were revealed by study participants emphasized the importance of teachers connecting with students by knowing their students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests and building relationships with their students. In order to connect with students, study participants stressed the importance of incorporating texts and other resources to familiarize students with a variety cultures and traditions. Strategies teachers deployed ranged mainly in the lower levels of the four approaches of the multicultural curriculum reform and the five dimensions of Banks's Multicultural Education framework. The use of strategies that infuse information from different cultures and traditions within instruction improved teachers' effectiveness in helping their students learn, in conjunction with helping students see the relevance of topics being taught. Additionally, the ways in which teachers communicated with students and how they engage in activities, in and out of school, helped to build relationships with students.

Research Question Three

How does professional development influence teachers' understanding and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Study participants were influenced by the professional development to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms and their responses communicated the varied ways they did so. They described the new knowledge, strategies, and

enhancements to practices that were made as a result of their participation in the professional development. Based on the survey responses, it was evident that the majority of the respondents believed that the professional development positively impacted their teaching.

In response to a survey question that asked about whether the professional development increased their *knowledge* of cultural awareness, tolerance, understanding, and acceptance, 53% of study participants *agreed* while 41% of the study participants *strongly agreed* that their participation in the professional development resulted in increased knowledge. Therefore, 94% of the respondents indicated that their knowledge increased, with only 6% saying it did not. Similarly, 94% agreed that the professional development resulted in improvements in their teaching students of varying cultures. Additionally, 76% of the study participants agreed that they gained knowledge to better *assess* students from different cultures while 6% disagreed and 18% of the study participants' responses were neutral.

The types of strategies and changes in behaviors that study participants noted as a result of the professional development sessions are significant. Study participants' comments highlight five influences: (a) increasing their overall awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy, (b) identification of culturally relevant materials, (c) sharing of culturally relevant teaching strategies, (d) awareness of the importance of individual student's learning needs and interests, and (e) development of culturally relevant analysis frameworks (knowledge and conceptual).

Overall Awareness of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As the study participants' comments were analyzed, there were some responses that focused on the fact that the professional learning opportunity influenced their overall awareness of what culturally relevant pedagogy is. "Valuable in terms of growing overall awareness in what's going on," is what Douglas, a White male, asserted, in addition to the following:

. . . it was definitely an increased awareness of—I mean it doesn't—for me it hasn't directly connected explicitly from A to B . . . but for me it has been that increased awareness of culture in general . . .

Consequently, a sense of awareness caused study participants to be more mindful to incorporate cultural elements into learning experiences they designed for their students.

Jolly, an African American female, explained,

. . . it just basically opened the door for things that I wouldn't normally have thought of, and it just basically reminded me about the importance of touching base with all cultures [of my] students.

Battle, an African American female, placed importance upon students' cultures and interests by saying,

I learned that it's very important. It plays a big part in academics and just making sure that meeting the interests of my students and making them feel welcomed and encouraging them to talk about their own traditions and cultures within the class. Just making sure I'm a lot more open. I basically learned how to be a lot more open to bringing it into the academics.

Another study participant had a similar revelation that was a result of the professional development experiences. Tatum, an African American male, explained,

I will say that that Symposium was probably the best. It was the best professional development session I've ever been to. It's the best one of all the ones I've been through in my five years of teaching and the reason why is because it opened up eyes. I thought it really opened up eyes. It, things that I knew, that my colleagues, things I kind of knew or things I didn't know, things that I didn't know I kind of learned in that, during the Symposium.

Also, Pettiford, an African American male, admits,

Yes, it changed my practice in being more updated with current information from not only just going to workshops to help me here at this school and other places in the community, from cultural achievement gaps to understanding of different culture background, but also understanding the reason why these things happened, and wanting to know more and to absorb more to be able to reach more and to help others.

In addition, Pettiford explained,

. . . basically after many of the workshops that I have attend in the past and classes, they give me a more of wealth of information of being politically correct. Basically how to approach a student according to research based information where I may have basically dealt with people in the past with just what I was aware of or what I may have been taught from this one pocket. And now since we're more of a global universe now or world, I'm able to express things from a different viewpoint where the sensitivity arena is not as strong as it was in the past but it is more understanding of people's different backgrounds.

Additionally, after participating in the culturally relevant pedagogical professional development, study participants were more knowledgeable about the importance of designing learning opportunities which were culturally relevant. Connecting academics

with their students' interests, backgrounds, traditions, and cultures is now part of their thought process.

Identification of Culturally Relevant Materials

The professional development also influenced the study participants through the identification of different types of materials that they could use to design lessons that are culturally relevant.

Molton, a White female, shared,

Like I said, she [the presenter] gave us all of that information [material] to help with because it's hard to do it on your own, it's hard to know what to use. So yes, I think it was very valuable.

Molton referenced a session that involved discussing material to use in order to provide students with culturally relevant learning opportunities. Additionally, Molton admitted that finding and knowing the types of material to select was difficult to do without guidance, but the session was valuable in helping to determine what material to select.

Also, Toldson, an African American female, explained,

I'm really mindful of the kind of books I'm picking and making sure that I'm picking something for everybody so like when we do our spelling PowerPoints each week we try to make sure that we show pictures from all different cultures, or when we're talking about a holiday, like we talked about Hanukah and Kwanza that, I talk about different, other places in the world, too.

An African American male, Tatum, asserts,

The one [professional development] we had here I thought was pretty good, because that's when we went into books, different texts that you could buy to support African American learners, Hispanic learners, things that are culturally

relevant. So now you look at a lot of classrooms, you'll find books on Gillespie, the jazz singer, or you might find different books on Wilma Rudolph. People have different books lined up in their classroom about African American leaders or people of color. When before [when] going to a [book] section, you used to see books on Alice and, Al and the Blue Dolphins or you might find books on Hamlet on the elementary level. You found things that women, the students never pick up and read. They [would] walk pass it and keep it moving. When they look and see that picture of an African American male or an African American woman on that book and see her doing something interesting, they see some huge print that kind of yells out to them "Pick me up! Read me!" I think kids get more out of it.

Tatum's statement described his previous experience about looking for books to connect with African American students. Additionally, he indicated what he believed his African American students say to themselves when they see books that they are not interested in or cannot related with. On the other hand, Tatum verbalized how his students reacted in excitement when they saw a book that had images of people that look like them or have illustrations that are interesting to them. Tatum stressed that identifying materials to get and hold the attention of learners was important and was influenced by the culturally relevant professional development.

Sharing Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies

Teachers were introduced to culturally relevant teaching strategies while participating in the professional development, which was another significant influence of the training. Sessions that engaged participants so they could immediately use strategies when they returned to their classrooms were appreciated. Consequently, one participant mentioned some of the sessions involved material that she already knew, but there was still value in the professional development. Toldson, an African American female, shared,

Some of them [professional development sessions] were valuable. I knew the information already, but I could tell other people were getting things out of them. They were valuable. The ones that were most valuable to me were things that I could take away and do the next day because those are always the things that are most valuable to me . . .

Likewise, Patton, a White female, when asked about the value of the sessions, commented that “it [professional development training] gives me strategies that I can take back and use in the classroom.”

An epiphany about how to engage African American males was experienced by Morrow, an African American female, who said,

Well, that was really informative because it exposed us to ways to support our AA male boys in the areas of reading and math —basically giving us strategies on how to support them as far as their self-esteem, to encourage them, to give them just a positive role model, and basically giving us ideas of ways within our school that we could support them overall as far as extending into the community, having community involvement to support our AA males, as well as the whole school. So those are—they just gave us a lot of strategies and just very informative and ways that we can improve in reading and math.

As it relates to study participants being equipped to help students succeed.

Molton, a White female, communicated,

Well, to be honest, what I like about it is that the strategies that were given for those African American males can also be used for anybody that’s in that situation, and that makes a huge difference because sometimes when you’re looking up only the lowest children you’re not thinking about those kids that are higher that you can extend or the kids that are in the middle and with the African American males if you’ve got a range. Then you’re looking at strategies for all of those.

Molton commented that the professional development sessions were helpful in the design of classroom instruction that targeted students at varying academic levels. The responses emphasized the need to be relentless in finding ways to educate different types of students.

Furthermore, Tatum, an African American male, said the professional development experiences:

gave me some ideas of what to do and how to motivate those African American males to read . . . recognize them, they love being recognized, they love having that.

Study participants confirmed that the professional development provided strategies to help improve their students learning experience and to design culturally relevant lessons.

Awareness of the Importance of Individual Students' Learning Needs and Interests

It was apparent that the professional development influenced how teachers addressed the learning needs and interests of their students.

Molton shared,

I think it was very valuable, because it made us look at the data. It made you pull out kids that maybe you would not have looked at individually.

This comment emphasized the need for study participants to know who they are teaching. While it is important to know what student subgroups exist, it is critical to know who students are individually so their academic strengths and needs can be prescriptively addressed as well. Pettiford, an African American male educator commented,

It has certainly opened my eyes [to] . . . the different other grade levels that I work with in understanding the whole student and students from different backgrounds . . . so the different workshops or professional developments that we attend today are more relevant, and up to date, so it helps to be able to be successful on your job.

After the professional development, Toldson, an African American female, subscribed to the notion of knowing the academic needs of her students, in addition to knowing her students' interests. Toldson shared,

I learned how I need to focus on the kids [and] what their goals were. That was a big one that I learned. I need to ask them, "What do you want to be?" "What do you want to do?" "What kind of things do you like?," so that everything isn't focused on academics. I do have to relate it to academics. I can make it more interesting to them. So if you like basketball and want to be a basketball player and you're not getting it, I need to focus on basketball and stuff like that. And some kids just need to know that they [teachers] care. No. They just need to know that I care. Like when you take that time to ask them, "What do you like to do?" and stuff like that. That's taking the extra time to really just see what they're about.

As Toldson reflected on her students, she was able to determine which strategies would be useful to address the needs of individuals and student groups. Toldson mentioned,

So there were some [sessions] where we had to think about kids in our class and what we were doing with them. These were valuable, because I could think about particular kids and what I was going to do the next day, weeks, months to push them along or last year.

One participant emphasized the need to allow students' interests to guide classroom instruction and learning. Douglas, a White male, shared,

I think back to that idea of rather than asking the kid what do you like as an African American male, what do you like? What do you guys, letting them have more of a voice in the things that we're studying. I've got a little more creativity than some classes do as far as topics, and in a lot of ways I let them guide based on their interests.

Several other study participants mentioned the need to plan with students' interests as a major factor along with teaching about the world with their perspectives in mind. Of course, the way in which students' interests are involved and determined by teachers varied. However, being knowledgeable of students' interests was definitely evident in study participants' responses and viewed as necessary. Molton, a White female, indicated,

Well, number one, we still do books, but it's not—it doesn't have to be a book about an African American, it has to be what's in it that they relate to. Or what's in it that somebody else can relate to, not just that, but Hispanics relate to certain things . . . I have six African American males in here, and just turning our math questions into football or whatever it is that they are talking about instead of gardening has gotten them to pay more attention because that is their interest of what they are wanting to do. And that's only because I have the six African American males that actually talk to me about what sports they're playing, but that's sort of what we do, we take it to where it's relevant to them.

Also, Battle, an African American female, described the use of students' interests and connecting with what students can relate to as:

And now I try to integrate it in everything we do, math problems, real world related to them, reading problems, I mean reading books, problems, whatever we do, try to relate it to them, try to make sure they're up moving, and like I say it doesn't always have to be a rap. It can be other things that they find interesting to get them to do things. I know a lot of my boys like basketball, so when they get a question right they can shoot the ball in the hoop or something like that. So just different things to kind of get them motivated to want to learn and be engaged.

Not only including activities that students can relate to and are interested in doing is important. It is critical to include learning experiences that allow students to see characters in books and learn about historical figures who look like and live like them. Patton remembered being encouraged through the professional development to include books that had characters that reflect her students. Patton, a White female, communicated,

We watched a video, I think it came from PBS, and it followed two students from elementary school up through high school graduation. And that was very interesting because it wasn't only the students' perspective, it also talked about the parents take on things. It happened to be two African American males who were placed into a school that was predominantly white. And so it was just very interesting and educational and eye opening on different perspectives in situations that came up in that. And then we've received professional development on how to include folks that might be more appealing particularly to African American males in different strategies that we can use with those books.

One study participant described how students' interests are a part of the classroom instruction and learning. There was also consideration in regards to how male students learn and do activities best. There are allowances being made to incorporate movement and standing versus sitting when male students work. This connection goes beyond the interests of students. It goes deeper into how to relate to gender learning characteristics. Morrow, a White female, elaborated,

Well, I tried to make sure that my African American males were more challenged, were more stimulated, supported them more. For example, just trying to make sure that they as far as my boys are concerned, making sure that they—I will expose them to things to their interest, and allowing them to, maybe to, if they enjoyed science, nonfiction texts, books and things, having those—having more of those for my boys because they like—because I noticed that they liked science more, so I would try to provide more materials that I felt that my boys would be

attracted to or more of an interest so that they would discuss it and share it amongst themselves. And just making sure that they had the support from me and that they had that level of trust with me and working closely with them and monitoring them and making sure they have their—what they needed and making sure—and allowing them to stand up when they did their work versus making them sit down. If they wanted to stand up as long as they weren't disrupting another child, just those types of things. I'm just trying to change around and not necessarily everything had to be strict as—you have to sit down, because boys are very active, so allow them to stand up sometimes versus sitting down and letting them kind of move around a little bit. I allowed that to be more with boys and just to let them to be—interact with each other more also within the classroom.

Finally, the study participants indicate that professional development sessions helped to influence how they identify what student groups and individuals are in their classes in order to address their academic needs. Additionally, study participants discussed how they connected learning opportunities for their students as a result of the professional development's emphasis on the importance of teachers knowing their students' interests.

Development of Culturally Relevant Analysis Frameworks (Knowledge and Conceptual)

Some study participants indicated that they were influenced to organize their thought processes differently about teaching students and how they need to prepare lessons based on their students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests after participating in the professional development. These study participants understood not only about the materials used to connect with students but, from the comments that follow, it is obvious that some study participants started to be reflective about the creation of culturally relevant learning experiences and pedagogy.

Tatum, an African American male, noted,

She talked about . . . the language barriers that some of our African American males have, or even Hispanics, that's not related to the European culture. Also, what the European are used to seeing and what they're used to having. She broke it down.

Tatum's comments go beyond merely identifying materials that can be used to improve student success too conceptual framework for study participants to understand underlying cultural factors related to learning.

Some study participants acknowledged that simply selecting text with images that looked like their students was an element but not the core of culturally relevant lessons.

Molton (a White female) described her change in understanding about culturally relevant pedagogy.

I truly think that I was only using books, and I was only using books if we were talking about African American males. I was only using those books that had those characters but that's not necessarily culturally relevant pedagogy. That's just a book that has African American males in it, and they may not even be able to relate. I think that it took it down to no, no, no, culturally relevant means what is relevant to these kids that are in my classroom at this time. So what may be culturally relevant to my [current] children may not be culturally relevant to some of my kids in ten years. And that was—it just made us look at it through it during different lenses.

Molton is saying that simply selecting books that have African American males as characters is not the final step to connecting with students and ensuring their success. Culturally relevant pedagogy goes beyond that. Just because the character in the book is of the same race as her students, it does not mean the character will be relatable to her students. Therefore, the journey to educate students involves digging deeper to find out

what characters and text will connect with students to ensure they experience culturally relevant learning opportunities. Study participants realized that an analysis of the resources used in lessons is necessary to embrace culturally relevant pedagogical principles.

Massey cites the need to know your students and their cultures but notes that there are many variables that teachers have little to no control over.

I thought about what the kids in my class [like]. Where they come from? How they think? How much of that is based on stuff that I have nothing to do with, but that I can have an effect on. We talked about what has to do with the kids. I mean things that the kids have to deal with. That's not in our control. So it helps me to think more about [what] you got from your home but how can I have you think differently about that in class or how can I expand you, expand your knowledge so you know there's a different way to think in case you don't want to change the way you think. It just helped me to focus on the population that I have.

Massey mentions there are numerous factors that exist in the lives of children. An educator must seek to know about these factors as well as other ways to help their students succeed. This goes beyond just knowing about strategies and the culture of their students and then stopping. Being open to learn and know the needs of students is the task of educators. Therefore, teachers will need to be reflective risk-takers in order to help their students excel.

In summary, based on the respondents' comments, the professional development was effective in providing opportunities for study participants to improve their teaching. The study participants indicated that the professional development (a) increased their overall awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy, (b) helped them identify culturally

relevant materials, (c) facilitated sharing of culturally relevant teaching strategies, (d) heightened their awareness of the importance of individual student's learning needs and interests, and (e) assisted in the development of culturally relevant analysis frameworks (knowledge and conceptual).

Respondents highlighted the need to know the academic needs of their students so that classroom instruction would be conducive to providing learning opportunities that would reach all groups and individual students. Study participants stressed the importance of book and text selection along with providing learning experiences that reflect the cultures of students as an essential practice of the culturally relevant pedagogical philosophy. Study participants made it clear that the culturally relevant pedagogical professional development influenced their identification of materials to use with their students. Consequently, some materials and ideas were utilized by study participants immediately to improve their instruction thus improving the educational experience of their students. Hence, the professional development was effective, because of the impact it had on teachers improving their ability to reach students along with the number of strategies teachers were provided to better engage students.

Research Question Four

What contextual barriers hinder teachers' culturally relevant teaching practices in schools?

When examining responses regarding barriers to culturally relevant teaching, study participants mentioned that they, as teachers, lacked knowledge and understanding of student cultures and awareness of culturally relevant teaching strategies. Other

barriers mentioned were the lack of time and resources, and parent involvement. The misalignment of culturally relevant pedagogy with teaching responsibilities as it relates to curriculum standards, was mentioned as a barrier as well.

Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Student Cultures

When looking at the responses from study participants, there is significant data that stresses limited teacher knowledge and understanding of students' cultures as being a barrier to them as they implement culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. For example, one study participant indicated that a "lack of knowledge about the cultures on my part" was an area of concern. The need to be familiar with the varying cultures of students is highlighted as a study participant indicated that "I do not have as much knowledge about other cultures as I would like in order to teach in a more relevant way." Identifying the lack of knowledge about students' cultures and the necessity of pursuing ways to quench this thirst was revealed by another study participant who said, "Lack of information about cultures and traditions have prevented me from teaching about others in the past. However, this is an area of which I will continue to work on."

One study participant explained it this way:

Yeah, but it's all on me. It's just me having a deeper understanding of different cultures and just learning more, so I'm my own barrier.

Toldson, an African American female study participant, commented,

The biggest barrier is just me not knowing about something and so I just really have to, some things I just have to research more or like if I don't know how to do it then the tendency would be well, we're not gonna do it or I don't know about this thing so I'm not gonna teach it but, so I just have to take more time and

research some things or like some strategies I'm not familiar with and so I have to just take more time and either research it myself or ask if somebody else is, can do it better and like the teacher leaders here are really good about being able to help or model things, so if I don't know how to do it, there's somebody at this school that's done it before, so they can show me or help me figure it out so I can do it too.

Toldson communicates that the biggest barrier is "not knowing about something" but takes responsibility to address this issue by making a commitment to researching information to increase her exposure.

Lack of Time and Resources

Two significant barriers that research participants mentioned related to implementing culturally relevant pedagogical experiences were time and resources. One pre-survey response indicated that "not having access to all students consistently and limited time the students [are] with me," is a barrier. "Time would be my only barrier," was shared by another participant. The significance of time is further emphasized as other study participants mentioned it as being a barrier in both the pre- and post-survey items. One research study participant stated that more time is needed to do research. Another participant observed that he/she wanted "to research strategies to teach students from different cultures," but that lack of time prevented her/him from doing so.

In regards to resources needed to create student and professional learning opportunities, one participant responded that the lack of "technology resources" is a barrier. Relatedly, it was mentioned that technology access is limited. With the role technology plays in today's world and with high student interest in technology, integrating technology would enhance learning and implementing culturally relevant

teaching practices. Another study participant shared in a post-survey response that he/she lacks “having the resources to adequately explore a culture.”

Study participants brought attention to the need to have outside [classroom and school] resources as part of learning opportunities. Lack of access to these resources hindered the maximum impact of the teaching and learning experiences. Georgia said it in this manner, “I think one of our main barriers is [the lack of] outside resources.”

Parent Involvement

Another barrier that hinders teachers from implementing culturally relevant pedagogy was the lack of parent involvement. Study participants emphasized the need for increased parental involvement in order to enhance learning opportunities. Georgia, an African American female, shared,

I think one of our main barriers is outside resources and our parent involvement. That is a great barrier. Because I believe that if we have more parents involved in the classrooms or any capacity then we would be stronger . . .

Also, Georgia expressed,

. . . our parents’ [lack of involvement] can be a barrier, because we don’t have that participation from our parents and that can be a problem, and we have poor participation here at our school, not as much is being shared. I believe if we had more [parent involvement], then those barriers would not be so great. And as for the Hispanic, now Hispanic families, they are very strong at our school . . .

These study participants highlight the need for increased parent involvement in their children’s school experiences which will be beneficial to them and others as they share their cultures and home lives.

Even though parent involvement was mentioned as a barrier, I believe the study participant is emphasizing the importance of having parents involved in their children's education. As the researcher, I thought it was important to highlight that the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy is not prevented by parents not being as involved as teachers might want. Also, the lack of parent involvement does not hinder teachers from implementing culturally relevant pedagogy because there are several elements that can be integrated in classroom instruction without parent involvement. The elements that encourage parents to share their culture, backgrounds, and life experiences with students may be affected. Certainly, parent involvement is essentially important. However, its absence does not hinder the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Curriculum Standards

As educators strive to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms, they must make sure they still address the local, state, and national curriculum standards. These standards are meant to guide the work teachers do to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to provide instruction that engages students in ways that helps them master the required objectives to advance through their K-12 curriculum. Study participants indicated that addressing curriculum standards through the use of culturally relevant pedagogical strategies was a barrier. One study participant indicated that barriers included "guidelines and restrictions on opportunities to teach different cultures," while another study participant cited the lack of curricular "flexibility." Another study participant communicated it this way, "SCOS [Standard Course of Study] has been the biggest barrier here. It will be interesting to see

the effects of Common Core.” When asked about what barriers exist, Tatum, an African American male, shared,

I could say just don't link up, they don't always link up to standard, what the state expects. It doesn't always link up to what the state expects us to, I feel like we're missing some vocabulary, we're missing certain pieces. Even though I teach . . . certain concepts using a book written by an African American author or with African American characters, using terms that were used before desegregation, you still, when it's time for you to take that test, you still are gonna miss out on [things]. I still haven't taught you what agriculture is. I haven't taught you about plowing, harvesting [and] in some cases plantations. There's still some vocabulary that's missing and even when they have to take district level tests [when] we look at reading, there's still some words that the students are not familiar with. They've never heard of [them] before, so we [are] trying. So in other words, you're teaching the skill using the culturally relevant text. You're teaching the skill, but you're still missing out on the vocabulary and you're missing out on the other pieces. That's the problem.

An African American female study participant, Toldson, stated,

So yeah, the Common Core, it restricts a lot of it because even though they say that it was an outline or a template for it, they don't give us much guidance to use in how we can use it for African American males. They give us some type of— they give us links and things like that, but I think the problem comes in when administrators or whomever come into your classroom and they do not understand your pedagogy . . . and they, you know, they're coming outside, from outside in and they expect it to be this way because this is how it is in the book. But it does not give us much leeway to step outside the box and apply some, but those like me, I take risks, so I would do what's best for my students anyway.

Study participants also mentioned the gap that exists between what the curriculum indicates needs to be taught and where students are academically. The mention of a gap and the implication that the gap prevents teachers from creating culturally relevant learning opportunities should definitely be examined closely by the school district and the state in order to provide support to teachers. Also, school administrators must

intentionally examine lesson plans, instruction, and academic outcomes to determine if the misalignment between the curriculum standards and students' current knowledge exist and whether this prevents teachers from implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Either way, teachers will need additional support to address this concern in order to move forward and address the academic needs of students.

As the researcher and an educator, I agree that it is easier to teach standards if students possess the prior knowledge needed to advance to next level. However, it is rare for all students to possess all the prior knowledge they need for the next grade or course. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves filling in gaps and creating opportunities for students who have been disenfranchised, which may have caused them to be behind academically. Unfortunately, gaps existing between what standards should be taught at different grade-levels and in different courses will always exist until the children receive learning experiences that are rigorous and appropriate so they can learn concepts that they have not mastered. Therefore, existing gaps is an *excuse* not to implement culturally relevant pedagogy instead of a *barrier*.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study explored culturally relevant pedagogy in a small, elementary school within a midsize school district in the southeastern region of the U.S. Specifically, it examined the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices before and after participating in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Common Core professional development.

Gay (2002) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). After taking all of the factors that impact their students' lives into consideration, teachers must acknowledge the necessity of, and commit to, providing their students with the rigorous and relevant education that they deserve and need to meet the challenges of the future. Consequently, teachers must involve various dimensions such as culture, language, ethnicity, race, social class dynamics, and the current and past of their students' lives to really know and understand who they are; from whence they come; and how they see, learn, and relate to the world. Cooper et al. (2009) assert that teachers utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to recognize, connect with, and affirm the cultural backgrounds of their students while improving their own cultural knowledge in order to improve academic success. The implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical

strategies increases educators' effectiveness in preparing students for the challenges they will encounter throughout their public school years and beyond.

Summary of Research Findings

The focus of this research study was to examine the impact professional development had on teachers' perceptions and practices after participating in monthly year-long culturally relevant pedagogy and Common Core professional development.

The guiding research questions for the study were:

1. What are teachers' understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy?
2. How do teachers report themselves as practicing culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms?
3. How does professional development influence teachers' *understandings and implementation* of culturally relevant pedagogy?
4. What contextual barriers hinder teachers' culturally relevant teaching practices?

When I described my K-12 educational journey in Chapter I, I expressed who I was, where and how I was reared, and what my experiences were in school, in addition to how teachers impacted my life. While a student in public schools, I was unaware of what terminology represented the practices that I now know to be the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy that my hero teachers demonstrated. Study participants' comments mirror many of the practices of my K-12 hero teachers.

Since this study involves one school with a small number of educators, I understand study participants' comments may not represent the perceptions, knowledge,

thoughts, and practices of all educators. However, this research study suggests the following:

1. The professional development influenced teachers' implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy by:
 - a. increasing their overall awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy;
 - b. identifying culturally relevant materials;
 - c. sharing culturally relevant teaching strategies;
 - d. emphasizing the importance of individual student's learning needs and interests; and
 - e. developing personal culturally relevant analysis frameworks (knowledge and conceptual).
2. The contextual barriers that hinder teachers from implementing culturally relevant practices are the
 - a. lack of knowledge and understanding of student cultures;
 - b. lack of awareness of culturally relevant teaching strategies;
 - c. lack of time, resources, and parent involvement; and,
 - d. misalignment of culturally relevant pedagogy to teaching curriculum standards.
3. Teachers who implement culturally relevant pedagogy:
 - a. are knowledgeable of students' cultures, backgrounds, and culturally-grounded interests;
 - b. build meaningful relationships with students.

The subsequent sections will provide more details about the findings. In some cases, I will connect my school experiences with respondents' comments as well.

Influence of Professional Development

The study uncovered information about the effectiveness of professional development. For instance, study participants mentioned that professional development sessions increased participants' awareness of what culturally relevant pedagogy entailed. Of course, in order for any philosophy to be implemented correctly, a clear description of what the philosophy is must be provided along with what it looks like in and out of classrooms.

Respondents indicated that the professional development sessions involved participants becoming aware of different elements of culturally relevant pedagogy. The professional development sessions provided intellectual space for participants to discuss different resources and integrate culturally relevant learning opportunities into the classroom. Additionally, professional development facilitators showed and discussed different resources that participants could utilize to design high engagement lessons which enhance students' mastery of learning objectives.

An awareness of culturally relevant pedagogy and resources used to implement the approach are only useful if teachers are given ways to design their lessons which are aligned with local, state, and national standards. Research participants highlighted the importance of the professional development sessions addressing teaching strategies that were useful in helping students to engage in culturally relevant learning experiences.

In addition to determining what teaching strategies were best suited to provide instruction for the learning objective to be taught, it is equally beneficial to know and understand the learning needs of all students. The academic levels and the prior knowledge of students are factors that must be considered as resources are selected and lessons are designed. Demographics such as race, gender, ethnicity, learning disabilities, learning styles, academic levels, reading ability, and interests are necessary to meet students where they are regardless of their demographic designations. Knowing who the students are in the classroom will help to engage, motivate, and effectively teach them.

An additional level of growth by study participants was their awareness of what culturally-focused materials are available for instruction. However, the selection of resources is not enough to create the learning opportunities that our youth need and deserve. As information was provided during the professional development sessions, participants started to reflect and question what could be done beyond the selection of resources and books to improve their students' learning experiences. Study participants started: (a) knowing what they need to do to implement culturally relevant pedagogy, and (b) thinking deeply about what strategies and practices would improve student achievement.

This deep reflection helped study participants create a conceptual framework to guide their thinking and doing as they designed lessons. Study participants moved beyond the checklist of things to include in a lesson to thinking about what research-based instructional strategies could be utilized to improve the instructional delivery and maximize learning for all students. The simplistic notion of just selecting books that

have images of students is a surface-level characteristic of culturally relevant pedagogy. The continuous process of questioning old ways of delivering instruction, developing new ideas to connect with students, and taking risks to teach concepts to engage students occurred as a result of what was learned during the professional development sessions.

Barriers Hindering the Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The professional development sessions were designed to empower educators about what culturally relevant pedagogy is and how they can utilize it within their classrooms and schools. With any new knowledge, there are always barriers that hinder the implementation of that knowledge. In this case, the knowledge to be implemented was culturally relevant pedagogy. Study participants indicated that limited awareness of students' cultures and knowledge of culturally relevant teaching strategies were two barriers. The lack of time, resources, and parent involvement were other barriers that prevent culturally relevant pedagogy from being implemented effectively. Teachers were clear about needing more time to plan and more time with students to have the greatest gains in student achievement. Lack of resources was another element that study participants emphasized as significant in preventing them from implementing culturally relevant pedagogical practices in their classrooms.

The misalignment between teaching curriculum standards and culturally relevant pedagogical practices was another barrier that was mentioned by study participants. One of the participants noted the lack of flexibility that exists within the confines of teaching Common Core standards. The time allotted to teach all the objectives outlined in the curriculum was insufficient to incorporate varying cultural perspectives during

instruction. Other concerns were the gaps that were evident when the curriculum was compared to the prior knowledge needed by students. For example, some study participants thought it was unreasonable for teachers to be expected to teach students to master the standards when students lacked essential prerequisite vocabulary to advance to the next level of learning.

As the researcher, I am compelled to say these comments do not connect with teachers implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Gaps related to students not being ready to learn new concepts are issues teachers have had to address regardless of subject or grade level. Therefore, citing gaps in learning is an excuse for not implementing culturally relevant pedagogy instead of a barrier.

Needing additional support to know how to implement culturally relevant pedagogy was mentioned as well. This referred to teachers needing more assistance in designing lessons to connect with students of different races and determining which instructional strategies were best suited to teach certain learning objectives, integrating information about students' cultures, backgrounds, interests, and academic levels.

Implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Since this research study involved analyzing what teachers knew and did before and after professional development sessions about culturally relevant pedagogy, it is important to discuss if and how classroom instruction was affected. As a result, the following sections will provide a description of the findings based on study participants' thoughts and practices about culturally relevant pedagogy and how it is used in their classrooms.

As I reflect on my own school experiences, I cannot help but to ask myself the question, “How were my teachers able to connect with me?” The thought that springs forth is the fact that our town was a small rural area and everyone knew everyone or was familiar with a member of your family, your place of work, worship, school, or other things that connected you to the community. I must admit that I thought my teachers were just gifted at making connections with me or I was just a likeable student. However, after thinking about the culture of the community we lived in, I believe my teachers were able to craft educational opportunities for me in class and outside of school because they knew my culture, background, and interests. Likewise, the study participants highlighted the importance of teachers knowing students’ cultures, backgrounds, and interests in order to connect meaningful learning experiences. This practice allows educators to design teachable moments that prescriptively address the needs and opportunities for growth appropriately for their students.

Personally, as a youth who saw school as my pathway out of poverty, I hungered for someone to notice me and provide me with opportunities that revealed that they knew me, they expected me to excel, and how intelligent I was. Students who are aware of the expectations of their teachers strive to achieve them which yields improved self-confidence in their ability to succeed (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

My teachers demonstrated, and the study participants confirmed, the need for educators to take the time to get to know where their students come from, what and who they aspire to become, what challenges they encounter at home and in school, and how

they see their futures unfolding. They interacted with us after hours by attending church services, events, and competitions sponsored by civic organizations, and helping me as I sold candy in order to fund certain educational opportunities that were school-sponsored (as well as those events I merely wanted to attend). Certainly, it is an expectation for educators to go beyond their classrooms to participate in community and cultural events to connect with their students to better understand their cultures and their life experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Cultural knowledge is powerful as it can be used to encourage students to maximize their potential through the creation of lessons which engage students and produce a love for learning which yields success on many levels. Thus, it is beneficial for teachers to learn as much information as possible about the diverse cultures and various backgrounds that exist among their students which will be useful in helping them succeed throughout their schooling years (Neuwirth, 2003).

Knowledge of Students' Cultures, Backgrounds, and Interests

The importance of students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests were mentioned by the majority of the study participants. Gay (2013) explains,

Education must be specifically designed to perpetuate and enrich the culture of a people and equip them with the tools to become functional participants in society, if they so choose. This education cannot progress smoothly unless it is based upon and proceeds from the cultural perspectives of the group of people for whom it is designed. Since all Americans do not have the same set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, values, and norms, a single system of education seems impossible to serve everyone. . . . [Educators] must accept the existence of cultural pluralism in this country and respect differences without equating them with inferiorities or tolerating them with an air of condescension. (p. 50)

The way in which students see, experience, or have experienced the world is definitely informed by their encounters at home, at school, and other significant locations or with people. The idea of using students' backgrounds to capture their attention and improve achievement is the goal. Doing so is likely to encourage students to participate in the lesson and share what they know so other students can learn through peer collaboration. Class discussions allow students to share their backgrounds and cultures thus helping them to have a more positive self-image along with communicating to all class members that their heritage is important and is a valuable component of the learning process (Gay, 2010, 2013). This sharing is an example of what Gay (2010) meant when she describes culturally responsive teaching as:

It cultivates cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students, and between students and teachers. It incorporates high-status, cultural knowledge about different ethnic groups in all subjects and skills taught. . . . Thus, [it] validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by . . . cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. (pp. 45–46)

Also, teachers who are knowledgeable of students' backgrounds are able to make connections to learn objectives thus increasing the likelihood of students mastering learning goals (Gay, 2010, 2013).

Building Meaningful Relationships with Students

As it pertains to building meaningful relationships, I experienced being a part of the lives of teachers who are known as my educational heroes. I recall spending time with their families, running day-to-day errands, and having real-life conversations, including discussions that I never had with my parents, but were certainly appropriate to

be discussed as I approached adulthood. This interaction made me feel valued and communicated that I have a purpose in society. For this reason, I have always aimed to succeed and have kept in contact with former teachers who were a part of these dimensions of my growth. Similarly, study participants emphasized the need to create bonds with their students in order to enhance their ability to positively influence their students to remain focused academically and to serve as resources to address challenges their students face.

Study participants' responses to surveys and interviews suggested that building meaningful relationships with students is a major component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2010) asserts,

Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. It is contingent on . . . seeing cultural differences as assets; creating caring learning communities where culturally different individuals and heritages are valued; using cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and *relationships with students*. (p. 31)

Additionally, research has revealed quality student-teacher relationships positively impact student achievement (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Gay, 1993, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Thompson (1998) says, "The most powerful weapon available to secondary teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with our students" (as cited in Boynton & Boynton, 2005, p. 1). Marzano (2003) believes relationships at the

elementary and middle school levels are more important than those at the high school level (as cited in Boynton & Boynton, 2005).

Culturally relevant pedagogies embrace the idea that students arrive to school with their own abilities and experiences that will enlighten both their teacher and their peers during the learning process. Educators who welcome and allow this to occur in their classrooms create a more equitable atmosphere which improves the student-teacher relationship (Saravia-Shore, 2008).

Study participants mentioned that they connect with students and seek to improve the student/teacher relationship by attending out of school activities and events. Gay (2013) says, “the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living” (p. 49). Pressing beyond the school doors to spend time with students to celebrate what they cherish outside of school is a strategy some educators utilize to convey that they care and value their students. Some researchers assert students will not avail themselves to listen to their teachers unless they feel respected and valued (Zehm & Kottler, as cited in Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Scheduled home visits to speak with parents about students’ academic performance and to help families with other concerns that exist are other ways to show that teachers care and are on the same team as the parents to ensure their sons/daughters excel.

There is evidence, from both study participants and researchers that emphasize the need for positive relationships to be formed between students and teachers (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Saravia-Shore, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Improved academic achievement is a result of healthy relationships between students and teachers (Gay,

1993, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a). Therefore, building meaningful student-teacher relationships are critical components study participants indicate they do more often as result of participating in the professional development about culturally relevant pedagogy.

Recommendations for Further Study

With studies of this nature (i.e., studies of limited scope, focusing on a single site), there are often multiple opportunities for further study. This study's participant interviews yielded rich information about their understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy and how they self-report culturally relevant pedagogy practice. This study explored culturally relevant pedagogy in a small, elementary school within a midsize school district in the southeastern region of the United States of America. It would be meaningful to study culturally relevant pedagogy at a school serving children beyond grade five (e.g., middle school or high school). It would also be illustrative to study culturally relevant pedagogy at more than one school (e.g., three to five school sites) to offer a comparative analysis.

It might be insightful to pursue a line of study exploring the intersectionality of identity, socio-economic background (i.e., the past), socioeconomic status (i.e., the present), and race/ethnicity. For example, a study could focus on African-American teachers and their use (or non-use) of culturally relevant pedagogy. Or a study could explore the impact of one's childhood socio-economic background on the practical application of culturally relevant pedagogy practices. In the future, it may also be

beneficial to study other barriers that hinder the effective use of culturally relevant teaching practices.

Additionally, research seems warranted on the type of professional development required to effectively integrate culturally relevant pedagogy into Common Core Standards-based instruction. There exist opportunities for misalignment between Common Core Standards and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study noted the importance of establishing and sustaining deep, meaningful relationships with students and how such relationships inform teacher practice. To support teachers and leaders in culturally relevant pedagogy capacity building, policy and practice recommendations are proposed. One such policy recommendation would be to require newly hired educators to complete a prescribed number of hours of culturally relevant pedagogy professional development training. Another policy recommendation could be requiring teachers, administrators, superintendents, and even school board members to complete culturally relevant pedagogy training with a refresher every five years.

Regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, one recommendation would be to offer embedded professional development so that educators are able to enhance their skills within their normal routine work. Professional Development Networks present another practice recommendation. Groups of educators—from a class just next door to a school as far away as another hemisphere—could collaborate to share their observations and practices on a topic or educational philosophy. Some common responses to an innovative

school practice are, “Well, it works for them, but our students are different” and “You don’t know our demographics.” It is recommended that school districts establish Professional Development Schools in partnership with colleges and universities so that teachers can see that culturally relevant pedagogy is “being done” within their district with students of similar backgrounds.

Conclusion

It was easy for me to see my teachers as ambassadors of hope because they knew me beyond just scores and attendance marks in a grade book. My teachers subscribed to the notion that they have to know what students think, feel, and how they see the world. It is essential that educators use culturally relevant pedagogy to connect with students and affirm their cultural backgrounds while improving their own cultural knowledge to become better equipped to ensure the academic success of their students (Cooper, Allen, & Bettez, 2009). It is my hope that this study has illustrated ways in which that can be made a reality.

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APPENDIX A

PRE-SURVEY

PRE-SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is important and your responses will help determine how professional development can be enhanced to improve learning opportunities for educators and students. This survey should only take about 15–20 minutes. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Please respond to the following statements/questions according to what identifies with you as a teacher.

1. What is your gender?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decline to answer

2. What is your racial or ethnic background? (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	African American/Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian American/Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	European American/White-non Hispanic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hispanic, Latino/Latina, Chicano
<input type="checkbox"/>	Native American/American Indian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decline to answer

3. How many years have you been teaching? (Include this year in your years of experience so data during the post survey will be the same).

<input type="checkbox"/>	First year
<input type="checkbox"/>	2-5 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 – 15 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	15 – 19 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	20 or more years

4. I believe I am knowledgeable of different cultures.

Strongly Unknowledgeable	Unknowledgeable	Neutral	Knowledgeable	Strongly Knowledgeable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. I believe that I am prepared to teach students from different cultures.

Strongly Unprepared	Unprepared	Neutral	Prepared	Strongly Prepared
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. I believe that my past experiences or perceptions sometimes impede my ability to interact with students from different cultures.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. What does the term culturally relevant pedagogy mean to you?

8. Describe the kinds of culturally relevant practices, strategies, or methods you currently use in your classroom with your students?

9. How do you think your life experiences have contributed to your approaches toward culturally relevant pedagogy?

10. What barriers keep you from teaching in more culturally relevant ways?

APPENDIX B
POST-SURVEY

POST-SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is important and we are hopeful your responses will help determine how professional development can be enhanced to improve learning opportunities for educators and students. This survey should only take about 15–20 minutes of your time. Your answers will be kept completely confidential. The data from this survey will be shared with Guilford County Schools and local researchers.

Please respond to the following statements/questions according to what identifies with you as a teacher.

1. What is your gender?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decline to answer

2. What is your racial or ethnic background? (Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	African American/Black
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian American/Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	European American/White-non Hispanic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hispanic, Latino/Latina, Chicano
<input type="checkbox"/>	Native American/American Indian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decline to answer

3. How many years have you been teaching? (Include this year in your years of experience so data during the post survey will be the same).

<input type="checkbox"/>	First year
<input type="checkbox"/>	2-5 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 – 15 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	15 – 19 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	20 or more years

4. I believe I am knowledgeable of different cultures.

Strongly Unknowledgeable	Unknowledgeable	Neutral	Knowledgeable	Strongly Knowledgeable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. I believe that I am prepared to teach students from different cultures.

Strongly Unprepared	Unprepared	Neutral	Prepared	Strongly Prepared
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. I believe that my past experiences or perceptions sometimes impede my ability to interact with students from different cultures.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. What does the term culturally relevant pedagogy mean to you?

8. Describe the kinds of culturally relevant practices, strategies, or methods you currently use in your classroom with your students?

9. How do you think your life experiences have contributed to your approaches toward culturally relevant pedagogy?

10. What barriers keep you from teaching in more culturally relevant ways?

11. I believe that professional development increased my *knowledge* of cultural awareness, tolerance, understanding, and acceptance.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. I believe that professional development increased my knowledge of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques for *teaching* students from different cultures.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. I believe that professional development increased my knowledge of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques for *assessing* students from different culture.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions*

1. a) How long have you been teaching? b) How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. How did you get into teaching?
3. Where else have you taught? For how long?
4. How would you describe this school and the student population?
5. How do you describe yourself as a teacher?
6. a) What role did culture play in your teaching experiences? b) What role did culture play in your teaching at this particular school?
7. How do you define culturally relevant pedagogy?
8. Did your teachers teach you in a way that could be described as culturally relevant? Describe that or give some examples.
9. Describe the kinds of culturally relevant practices, strategies, or methods you used before the professional development.
10. Describe the kinds of culturally relevant practices, strategies, or methods you used after the professional development.
11. Are there barriers to you using culturally relevant pedagogy in your classroom? If so, what are they?

12. a) How do you describe and assess student progress? If only standardized assessments are mentioned, ask b) Are there other forms of student progress? If yes, how do you assess those other forms?
13. In what ways, do you support academic and/or social growth in students?
14. Tell me a little bit about the professional development you have received.
15. How many professional development sessions did you attend?
16. Was it valuable? If so, how?
17. What did you learn from it?
18. Did the professional development change your understanding of culturally-relevant pedagogy? If so, how?
19. Did it change your practice in any way?

* Interview questions adapted from Maye and Day (2012)