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Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Diverse Secondary Classrooms:
Teachers' Perceptions, Preparation, Current Practices, and Challenges

Mariola Krol

Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

The dissertation of Mariola Krol entitled: *Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Diverse Secondary Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions, Preparation, Current Practices, and Challenges* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education and Human Services has been read and approved by the Committee:

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my mother Celina who supported me throughout the whole process and reminded me that big accomplishments are done in small steps. A month into the program, when I wanted to quit, she told me I reached a point of no return and I could not go back. To my children, Oscar, Sarah, and Gabrielle, whose determination in pursuing their own careers inspired me and helped me get through my toughest moments. They were my cheerleaders and kept reminding me that I was “cool to be back in school.” And to my husband Pawel who believed in me and quietly approved of my endeavor.

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Enacting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Diverse Secondary Classrooms:

Teachers' Perceptions, Preparation, Current Practices, and Challenges

Mariola Krol

Abstract

Due to an increasingly diverse student population in U.S. public schools, there has been a pertinent need for teachers to enact *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) when educating children from racially and linguistically diverse backgrounds. CSP is an asset-based approach that uses the cultural capital of communities of color to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students. Although much is known about CSP, less work has explored how teachers enact CSP in diverse classrooms and how their background knowledge, lived experiences, pre-service preparation, and in-service professional learning may facilitate this process. Therefore, this case study examines the factors that teachers believe contribute to the development of CSP and how these factors help them enact CSP skills in the process of teaching and learning. Data collection included 15 teachers from a suburban high school district in Northeastern United States who participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom visits. The findings indicated that “diversity” is a multifaceted and evolving construct and that all stakeholders, including the administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents, are responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity in the school community. Several key elements of CSP were identified in how the participants presented themselves: as mindful individuals trying to embrace a whole-child philosophy, ready to learn alongside their students, and eager to establish relationships with students and engage students’ families in the educational process. However, the findings also showed that some

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participants lacked culturally sustaining pedagogical beliefs and skills and perpetuated biases and color-evasive attitudes. Despite these challenges, all participants made an effort to become culturally proficient, although their journeys are an ongoing process of self-reflection and vulnerability. Implications of this study include (a) creating professional learning programs to help teachers acquire and enact CSP skills in their diverse classrooms and (b) taking actions to provide more equitable access to challenging classes for all students and to detrack the curriculum. Further research is needed to uncover the impact of CSP on student achievement and how various stakeholders (i.e., administration, students, families, and social support staff) perceive diversity in a school environment.

Keywords: culturally sustaining pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, diversity, instructional practices, multicultural education, professional learning, social justice, teacher education

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I also appreciate other members of the Molloy College faculty who shared their expertise and inspired me to take steps toward becoming a social justice leader. Thanks to them, I have evolved into someone who not only sees value in diversity but is also able to mobilize others and strive for systemic change. The content of the program, the class discussions, readings, and posts made me realize that attitudes need to be questioned, and that includes my own convictions and biases.

I am also thankful to my classmates whose caring and supportive attitudes, critical feedback, sense of humor, and positive energy made me feel that Cohort 2 was my second family. I am especially thankful to Kelley Cordeiro, my classmate and friend, with whom I collaborated on many class projects, conference proposals, and presentations. I hope our collaboration extends into the future and, together, we will spread social justice ideas across the world.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Searching for a peaceful place to live when emigrating from Poland during the political unrest of the 1980s, I decided to settle in the United States. My choice of a new home was justified by the concept of the *cultural mosaic* (Palmer, 1976), the idea I became familiar with while studying the English language and learning about the American culture in Poland during my high school and college years. The concept of the *cultural mosaic* suggests that different cultures, religions, and ethnicities are pieces of a unified whole and, together, they define the American nation (Palmer, 1976). People of various backgrounds with different values and experiences can generate ideas that may strengthen democracy and create unity by acknowledging differences (Smith, 1970). I was attracted to the concept of *diversity* because I was not exposed to it in a predominantly homogenous Poland with limited racial and cultural diversity. I wanted to become a part of this cultural mosaic, and I expected to be accepted, regardless of my inability to fully understand and practice the American customs, traditions, and the language. However, experience living in the US has showed me that in the United States, tensions among diverse groups often exist due to various perspectives, values, and priorities, and members of the dominant White culture often perceive racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as a challenge. This may be attributed to the fact that many Americans live in culturally homogenous communities with limited interactions with others who do not look like them, similar to my own experience of growing up in a racially homogeneous country.

Working for 25 years as a teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse public schools in New York City and on Long Island, I have often experienced inflammatory situations among students and adults that resulted from implicit and explicit bias, racism, prejudice, cultural misconceptions, or misunderstandings.

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I have also heard informal, troubling comments that some teachers have expressed about having to address the needs of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse learners. The recent changes in the instructional model that involve the inclusion of diverse learners in general education classes are perceived by some teachers as a challenge because they may not feel prepared to work in diverse classrooms. It must also be recognized that students in all schools represent many dimensions of diversity, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, cultural traditions, although many secondary curricula continue to be Euro-centric, focusing on European culture or history, prioritizing Western terms, Western values, and Western experiences, and not reflecting the students' rich cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. I have observed that some teachers understand the need to educate themselves and re-evaluate their instructional practices so they can effectively work with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. However, many others do not see cultural proficiency as a priority. They would rather focus on the curriculum and make it their goal to prepare students for state assessments. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine how teachers perceive diversity and what factors contribute to their ability and preparedness to enact culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in their diverse classrooms.

Overview of the Related Literature

Having presented professional development workshops on topics related to diversity in my school district, I noticed these workshops were not as highly attended as the workshops on content instruction or technology in the classroom. My observations are well supported by research suggesting that teachers who often come from the dominant White group may have implicit or explicit biases about racial, cultural, or linguistic diversity (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bassey, 2016; Blair, 2002; Richmond & McCroskey, 1983). Teachers' personal biases may

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mirror societal biases, manifested in the divisive rhetoric on the political scene, social media, news programs, and reality TV (Huang & Cornell, 2019; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). Biases can become roadblocks in teachers' ability to develop a positive perception of diversity in the classroom (Fiarman, 2016; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983; Moses & Chang, 2006) and may lead to students of color feeling stereotype threat and prejudice (Blair, 2002; Fiarman, 2016; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983).

In addition, schools often reinforce the social divides by creating structures and policies that perpetuate marginalization and increase opportunity and achievement gaps between the privileged and marginalized groups (Blair, 2002; Holt & DeVore, 2005; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Kozol, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012). Lack of equitable access to resources and the most effective teachers, tracking, punitive discipline practices, disproportionate suspensions, and behavioral over-referrals of students of color are examples of practices rooted in misperceptions of cultural differences between diverse students and the expectations of U.S. educational institutions (Bracey, 2016; Carter & Welner, 2016; Kozol, 2012; Teasley, 2014). These practices lead to racial segregation of Black and Latinx students from White students inside school walls (Kozol, 2005). Marchitello and Trinidad (2019) pointed to White and Asian students often having more access to higher-level courses, while Black and Latinx students are given stricter punishments and show higher suspension rates. As a result of disparities between students based on race, socioeconomic status, or resources, several opportunity and achievement gaps among student subgroups were documented in states and school districts around the country that pointed to race and ethnicity playing an important role in student achievement (Bracey, 2016).

At the same time, the literature showed that racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in a democratic society should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future

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generations (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2017; Gay, 2010; Gudeman, 2001; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Steffens, Reese, Ehrke, & Jonas, 2017). Paris (2012) pointed out the positive effects of diversity that lead to pluralism, promote sharing across difference, sustain individuals' unique cultural strengths, and engender the development of critical thinking and engaged citizenry by maximizing academic and social success. In my literature review, I have established that diversity is a complex notion and can take many forms, including racial and ethnic differences, varying socioeconomic statuses, cultural experiences, and gender roles (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). Diversity also involves differences regarding behavior, language, religion, dress, food, and holiday traditions within communities (Guerrero, 2002). It is important to note that racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity among students and faculty is a crucial component in fulfilling the educational mission of a public school (Gudeman, 2001). Topics related to diversity occupy a key position in the public discourse about how to provide increased opportunities for all students (Moses & Chang, 2006). Some research pointed to the presence of positive educational opportunities that result from racial and cultural diversity, like a broader sharing of experiences, highlights of new perspectives, in-depth discussions of racial and ethnic topics, and an increased ability to examine personal biases (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu, Glover, & Williams, 2017; Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013).

Recognizing the value of diversity builds understanding of one another and helps move beyond simple tolerance to capitalizing on the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual (Bonner et al., 2017; Gurin et al., 2004; Samaan, 2000; Steffens et al., 2017). By being exposed to racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity, students learn to respect others and value differences, adapt to change, and understand how to respectfully disagree when faced with

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different perspectives instead of showing apprehension or resentment (Bonner et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017).

However, diversity in school settings often presents a challenge due to lack of teacher preparation and failure to integrate instructional practices that support diverse students (Bassey, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Fiarman, 2016; Shields, 2004; Steele, 2010). Gay (2013) stated that some teachers may show resistance to culturally responsive teaching and recommended that teachers develop the ability to “resist resistance” (p. 56), which means restructure their beliefs so they can resist their negative attitudes toward diversity and focus on the positive impacts of cultural differences in planning their instruction. Although the blame for negative perceptions of diverse students cannot be solely attributed to educators since inequities are deep rooted historically, several research studies have acknowledged that teachers are not always prepared to work in diverse classrooms (Bassey, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Fiarman, 2016). While some teachers perceive racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in positive terms, many others have doubts about the validity of demographic changes and feel anxiety about having to address them (Coronel & Gomez-Hurtado, 2015; Gay, 2013). Teachers tend to perceive diverse students from a deficit perspective (Delpit, 2006), or they marginalize the problem by excluding those students from their teaching practices (Gay, 2013).

Educators may struggle to recognize personal and societal biases; yet, their teaching profession requires that attitudes be challenged and questioned in search of appropriate pedagogy to address all students’ needs (Bassey, 2016; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2012; Gu, 2005). Several studies pointed to the need for teachers to take a stand against discrimination and prejudice and develop a consistent language to discuss topics related to race and diversity (Shields, 2004; Steele, 2010). In fact, hooks (2017) claimed that “among educators there has to be an acknowledgement that

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any effort to transform institutions so they reflect a multicultural standpoint must take into consideration the fears teachers have when asked to shift their paradigms” (p. 36). As Gay (2013) pointed out, teachers should include accurate content about racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups and highlight their experiences when designing curricula. Teachers have to know how to cultivate diversity in the classroom and enact appropriate skills for students to fully benefit from the experience (Marin, 2000).

Although research highlighted the importance of teacher preparation programs in helping teachers acquire adequate pedagogical skills, it also demonstrated that these programs often fail to expose pre-service teachers to diverse perspectives (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Moses & Chang, 2006). Lack of preparation reinforces racial and cultural biases, which can further lead to inequities in schools. Therefore, educators as social justice leaders have a responsibility to engage in a variety of professional learning (PL) opportunities and prepare for working in diverse classrooms (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). PL, which may lead to the development of CSP skills, includes teachers’ lived experiences, pre-service teacher preparation, professional workshops, and collaboration with other teachers. It offers teachers opportunities to acquire the knowledge on how to bridge social justice and pedagogy and create a productive learning environment for all students (Gay, 2002, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). By enacting CSP in diverse classrooms, teachers promote students’ cultures as heritage and foster linguistic and cultural pluralism, thus challenging a Euro-centric curriculum and traditional instructional practices. Chapter 2 offers a more in-depth review of the literature.

Statement of the Problem

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Research highlighted the vulnerability of diverse school settings in times of change, political instability, or social divide because schools often reflect the larger society (Carter, 2015; Joseph & Duss, 2009; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). Research also pointed to education as one influential resource that has the potential for creating culturally responsive and for sustaining productive school settings (Carter, 2015; Gay, 2015; Paris, 2012). According to Zuniga (2018), educators as social justice leaders have the responsibility to address the new challenges resulting from changing demographics. Using an asset-based approach, they can create a teaching model that builds on students' knowledge, experiences, skills, values, and perspectives, and use this model to guide curriculum development to challenge racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices (Paris, 2012). Public schools, which are often perceived as bastions of democracy, have a responsibility to prepare teachers for creating productive learning communities in which social, cultural, and linguistic diversities are valued (Stitzlein, 2012). Through PL opportunities and their own personal efforts, teachers should learn skills to help them challenge prejudice, bias, discrimination, and oppression in society with the purpose of finding ways to embrace diversity and enhance learning (Carter, 2015).

However, there are educators who struggle with meeting their instructional challenges and, coming from homogenous backgrounds where they may not have been given the opportunity to prepare for working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations, they may fail to find the adequate approach (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Acting from a position of power, teachers may unintentionally impose their perspectives on students, ignoring each student's right to be valued as a human being despite racial, cultural, or linguistic differences (Delpit, 2006). They may often be unsure of how to identify and confront their own biases, how to address biased language used in relation to diverse

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students, or how to avoid intercultural confrontations in school settings. Some teachers may also fail to incorporate restorative justice into their practice instead of destructive educational policies (Teasley, 2014) or set high standards and expectations for diverse students (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017). Educational researchers further suggested that the academic challenges faced by many students from marginalized groups are connected to cultural discontinuity between those students' backgrounds and school-related experiences (Tyler et al., 2008). As a result, working with diverse students becomes a problem, especially to inexperienced, unprepared, biased, or uncertified teachers who may not have had enough training in their field. These teachers struggle to create a welcoming and accepting atmosphere in their diverse classrooms or may not see the need to address diversity at all (Fiarman, 2016).

For several reasons, I designed a research study that explored teachers' perceptions of diverse students and their preparedness and ability to enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. First, as an educator, I have been following the public discourse regarding diversity on the political and social scene, as well as the national trend of educational institutions to create opportunities for dialogue on diversity and how it impacts student learning (Bonner et al., 2017; Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017). Second, as I explained in the introductory vignette, my personal interest in diversity and the role it plays in the classroom has been something I have grappled with since moving to the US from Poland. I also was interested in examining how teachers perceive their successes and challenges and what role the school or district administration played in helping teachers integrate CSP into the teaching and learning process.

While several research studies examined issues related to diversity, pointing to challenges and benefits of diversity, most of these studies focus on higher education institutions and

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workforce (Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017). Relatively few studies examined secondary teachers' perceptions concerning racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and how teachers develop appropriate skills to integrate CSP in the classroom (Bonner et al., 2017; Cipriano, Barnes, Pieloch, Rivers, & Brackett, 2019; Juvonen et al., 2017). Moreover, research suggested that public school teachers need to be educated and prepared to work with diverse students to safeguard these schools' democratic traditions and prepare students to be critical thinkers and engaged citizens (Allensworth, 2012; Bonner et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Stitzlein, 2012). The findings from my research study add to the body of literature on teachers' perceptions of diverse students and factors that shape teachers' preparedness and ability to integrate CSP into their racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

CSP served as the theoretical framework for my qualitative case study on how teachers use their background knowledge and experiences to enact CSP in secondary classrooms. In a school setting, CSP means not only creating a sense of community where each individual is valued and accepted and where both similarities and differences among people are recognized. It also means creating curricula that build on students' funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992), offering challenging yet equitable opportunities for all students (Moses & Chang, 2006) and turning schools into positive environments that maximize learning and communication (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Recently, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) developed new guidelines focusing on CSP and introduced asset-based teaching as an appropriate teaching approach in diverse classrooms. NYSED (2019) described *asset-based teaching* as follows:

Asset-based teaching is a strengths-based approach that leverages students' knowledge, experiences, skills, values, and perspectives as assets for learning. Asset-based educators

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see cultural differences as assets, create caring learning communities in which social, cultural, and linguistic diversities are valued, use the cultural knowledges of diverse cultures, families, and communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students, and challenge racial, linguistic, and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression. (p. 60)

By mitigating cultural barriers and valuing differences, teachers have a potential to build a positive learning environment where diversity is an asset that enhances student learning. In this environment, educators with an asset-based philosophy value social, cultural, racial, and linguistic diversities; develop their curricula based on the cultural capital of diverse communities; create positive relationships with students and their families; and challenge racism, intolerance, injustice, and oppression (Paris, 2012).

CSP theory (Paris, 2012) provided a lens to explore teachers' knowledge and application of CSP in their classroom. CSP, which evolved from culturally sensitive and culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006), promotes students' cultures as heritage and fosters linguistic and cultural pluralism. It advances understanding in educators and enables them to preserve a critical but open mind in search of appropriate practices for diverse students (Paris, 2012). In a similar way, Gay (2002) proposed to eliminate deficit thinking and actively encouraged educators to value and preserve diversity while stimulating growth within and across cultures. Therefore, the theoretical lens of CSP provided an adequate tool to analyze the extent literature exploring equity and social justice, multiculturalism, implicit bias, and inequitable school structures and policies. While much is known about CSP, less is known about how

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teachers enact it in the classroom and how their background knowledge and experiences facilitate this process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms, given how much they say they value diversity in the teaching and learning process. My research goal was to make sense of how teachers' background knowledge and experiences help them translate CSP in the classroom and what role the school or district administration plays in facilitating this process.

Research Questions

Research questions that helped guide this study included:

1. How does a diverse group of secondary teachers value and define racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and culturally sustaining pedagogy in the teaching and learning process?
2. How do teachers perceive their ability and preparedness (personal background and lived experiences, pre-service teacher preparation, in-service PL) to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment?
 - a. What successes and challenges do teachers anticipate or encounter when working in diverse classrooms?
 - b. How do teachers perceive the role of administration in helping them enact CSP?

Research Methods and Design

The research questions of this dissertation study were answered by utilizing a qualitative case study. The choice of case study was justified by my intention to explore subjective aspects of educational phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The study was designed

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for a unit of analysis that constituted high school teachers employed in a diverse, demographically changing school district in Northeastern US. Within the last decade (2010-2020), the district has experienced an influx of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, mostly from South and Central America, and Asia, while the number of White students has decreased. The context of the study was a bounded system of a specific school district that was intentionally preparing teachers to meet the needs of their diverse student population. This case study design allowed me to capture the participants' perceptions and various experiences by being attentive to individual accounts and then comparing responses for themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My qualitative case study design sought to make sense of teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges by analyzing them both in detail and holistically in their own context.

Data were collected during the spring of 2020 and analyzed simultaneously with the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). First, I conducted 45-60-minute semi-structured interviews with individual teachers, followed by classroom visits approximately 40 minutes in length. I intended to conduct all interviews and classroom visits in person. However, due to school closure on March 13, 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was compelled to adjust my data collection process. In place of in-person interviews, I conducted Zoom interviews and accepted teachers' invitations to observe their classes on Google Meet. I also asked the teachers to share their lesson plans with me if Google Meets could not be scheduled.

The data analysis involved the following steps: (a) doing an initial reading of the transcripts, (b) assigning in-vivo codes to interview and classroom visit transcripts, (b) comparing and aligning in-vivo codes with theory-generated codes from the literature, (c)

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organizing codes into themes, (d) drawing conclusions, (e) reporting the findings, and (f) reviewing transcripts to ensure the validity of findings. The data collection and analytic process concluded in May 2020, and I proceeded with writing Chapters 4 and 5. All names used in the dissertation are pseudonyms.

Context and Setting of the Study

I conducted my qualitative research study in a diverse Northeast high school district. According to the data from the New York State Education Department (n.d.), the schools in the district enroll a racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse student population. The diversification of the student body does not reflect the demographics of the faculty, which remains predominantly White and female. I chose to conduct my research in this district because student demographics have become more diverse over the last decade. In response to the changes, the district authorities have focused on racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as a step to create a positive school climate and enhance student learning. The aim of the district's efforts is to transform it into a place that promotes diversity, fosters intercultural communication, and provides equitable learning opportunities for all students. In 2017, the district began to offer a comprehensive cultural proficiency training program designed to address implicit bias, racial and ethnic bullying, and restorative discipline. The training helped develop a consistent language to address themes of race and diversity across the faculty.

The district also collaborates with other agencies to address topics related to ensuring social justice in the district, including the problem of punitive discipline practices. Motivated by the disproportionate suspension of African American male students, as reported within the district and in response to the issue reported in the research, the district administration collected data regarding school suspensions throughout the district. Perceived through the lens of critical

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race theory (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006), the problem of disproportionate suspension of Black male students is believed to be rooted in White supremacy and racist policies in the United States (Teasley, 2014). The district has created a committee working toward equity and a bias-free treatment of students, which takes efforts to support behavioral and educational needs of students to prevent suspensions.

The district's mission statement includes words like "gaining a deeper understanding of diversity and celebrating it as we move into the future." In a discussion with Dr. Michael Carmona, the Assistant Superintendent for the Curriculum and Instruction, it became clear that the administration "appreciates the endless opportunities to interact with students from different racial, cultural and social backgrounds" (personal communication, May 22, 2019). The aim of the district's efforts is to transform it into a place that promotes diversity, fosters intercultural communication, and provides equitable learning opportunities for all students. Since 2016, the central administration has taken steps to offer PL opportunities to members of the school community to help them better understand racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and develop CSP to enhance student learning. By personally participating in the workshops, administrators attempt to support the faculty and join forces in creating projects to be shared with a wider audience during faculty meetings.

Positionality of the Researcher

I was aware of my positionality as a researcher conducting this case study. This positionality resulted from being an educator for the past 25 years in the US and often having been exposed to the concerns content area teachers voice when working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. I committed myself to supporting diversity as an asset throughout my life, and I have often been an advocate for diverse students. Embracing and

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celebrating diversity is a priority in my personal life and professional career, but I understand it may not be a priority for everyone. I was aware of tensions that teachers experience as a result of the pressure to implement state-mandated curricula, with the purpose of preparing all students for high-stakes standardized assessments. I also understand frustrations both teachers and students may experience due to their inability to communicate and understand each other's culture.

My positionality also resulted from the nature of the subject area I teach. Reflecting on the years of interacting with different cultures as an ESOL teacher, I believe that in my professional experiences, I have learned to appreciate diversity by interacting with students and communities from different cultures on a daily basis. In my professional career, oftentimes, I had to serve as a mediator and a peacemaker when intercultural conflicts arose between students or between students and adults in the building. I prioritize dialogue and communication over punitive methods, such as reprimanding or suspension, because it is important to establish a positive climate in school as a foundation for effective learning (Cipriano et al., 2019; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). However, I tried to remain objective during the process of conducting this research by reflecting on my own biases and refraining from judgment of teachers who volunteered to participate in my study. As a researcher who is aware and open to self-reflection, I monitored my biases and, to the best of my knowledge and ability, excluded them from influencing my interpretation of the collected data. I conducted member checks and consulted with my dissertation committee to minimize personal bias. In addition, I ensured the validity of my study by applying triangulation during the data collection process since I was collecting data from multiple sources.

Significance of the Study

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School is one place where teachers help diverse students come together to celebrate their differences and build on them to enhance learning (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gay, 2015; Gurin et al., 2004; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013; Moses & Chang, 2006). As the numbers of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students enrolling in U.S. schools are growing steadily, it is important to understand how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classroom, given how much they say they value diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, how their background knowledge and experiences help them translate CSP in classroom, and the role of administration in helping them do this work.

In today's climate of divisive rhetoric (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Sondel, Baggett, & Dunn, 2018), there is a need for educators who build a bridge across differences through dialogue and action. Teachers who choose to be agents of change in their schools have the power to impact their students and actively contribute to the development of awareness, knowledge, and tools for creating and sustaining change over a long period of time (Zuniga, 2018). Teachers' efforts in schools may extend outside of school communities and contribute to building a fair and equitable society, founded on the rejection of bullying and physical violence, fostering awareness of injustice, and transforming schools into places where people from all backgrounds have a voice, representation, and equal opportunities to learn and succeed.

Summary of Findings

My study on teachers' ability and preparedness to translate their knowledge about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment broadens the knowledge on how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, linguistically diverse classrooms, and what contributes to their challenges and successes. The study adds to the body of literature on how teachers perceive diversity and what factors contribute to their ability and preparedness to enact CSP in

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their classrooms. My findings showed that diversity is a multifaceted and evolving construct and all stakeholders, including the administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents, are responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity in the school community. The findings demonstrated that teachers displayed different levels of racial awareness and a range of CSP skills. The findings revealed that several elements of CSP were identified throughout the data. The participants showed how they elevate their students' voice, tap into their funds of knowledge, and infuse multicultural perspectives into the curriculum. They also support diverse learners by a variety of equitable strategies and resources, and most participants used an alternative assessment to highlight their students' strengths. The participants generally presented themselves as mindful individuals trying to embrace the whole-child philosophy, ready to learn alongside their students, eager to establish relationships with students, and engage students' families in the educational process.

However, the findings also revealed that some participants lacked culturally sustaining pedagogical beliefs and skills and perpetuated the traditional approach of equality over equity. The findings pointed to implicit and, in some cases, explicit bias and color evasiveness, including their definitions of "diverse students" that framed White students as the norm by which students of color were compared and which may have been by-products of the way the participants were raised and educated. Some participants reported difficulties in connecting with other educators in their schools and creating a network of allies to support their efforts. They believed some teachers chose to repress their biases and pretend that discomfort was not there instead of reflecting on them and allowing themselves to grow. An important finding revealed that, despite their challenges, the participants made efforts to become culturally proficient

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although their journey is an ongoing process of self-reflection and vulnerability that involves interrogating and then changing deep-seated beliefs about students of color.

The findings contribute to the research on teachers' perceptions and experiences with diversity and factors that help teachers enact CSP in diverse classrooms. The findings also have practical implications for professional practice. They point to the need for creating effective PL opportunities for teachers to help them acquire and enact CSP skills and enhance diverse students' learning. The findings revealed that the participants would like to see more focus on issues of social justice as an integral part of PL. There is also a need for preparing the administration to accommodate diverse students' needs, engage in reforms to close the achievement gap, and provide more equitable access to challenging classes for all students.

The findings also pointed to ways my study can be improved upon and how future studies might contribute to a better understanding of topics related to diversity in the classroom. Recommendations for future research include investigating how various stakeholders perceive diversity in a school environment; exploring whether teacher background, preparation, or years of experience in the classroom are predictors in enacting CSP; and empirically demonstrating how CSP impacts student achievement.

Definition of Terms

The following terms defined in this section are the terms used for the sake of this study.

Cultural Diversity: Cultural diversity is the co-existence of differences in behavior, traditions, and customs within communities. It is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and of the groups and societies that make up humankind. These differences should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations (Guerrero, 2002).

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Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Culturally relevant pedagogy requires that educators be willing to appreciate their students' cultural heritage and recognize that students' academic success intertwines with teachers' cultural competence. Culturally relevant pedagogy reverts the deficit model of student diversity and turns it into an asset-based approach. It takes learning beyond the classroom walls and extends it to life-long, authentic learning by providing opportunities to connect students to their communities and engaging them in the life of society (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Educators who implement culturally responsive pedagogy use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for students. Culturally responsive pedagogy empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically because it encourages students to use their prior knowledge and experience (Gay, 2002).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: CSP contributes to the knowledge on creating peaceful school settings and recognizes cultural assets of people who belong to different cultural groups. When implementing CSP, teachers build on the students' funds of knowledge and value students' lived experiences. They allow the students' culture to become an integral part of new learning. Recognizing student cultures as assets leads to using student funds of knowledge as guidelines on how to design instruction and what content and instructional strategies to choose that will enrich, not eliminate or negate students' prior experiences (Paris, 2012).

Eurocentrism: Eurocentrism is a worldview based on a European perspective that includes a tendency to prioritize Western terms, Western values, and Western experiences (Hall, 2011).

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Implicit Bias: As a result of unconscious bias, people favor the group they are members of, while at the same time claiming that they have no preferences. People across groups show unconscious preferences on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, or other aspects of identity toward the culturally favored group (Fiarman, 2016).

Pluralism: A socially constructed system of pluralism allows students to maintain participation in their identity group while they belong to a larger cultural group. Based on the belief that no culture is standard or dominant, pluralism promotes cultural and linguistic sharing across difference and sustains individuals' unique cultural strengths to maximize social and academic success or acceptance (Paris, 2012).

Positive School Climate: A positive and caring environment is fostered by addressing the needs of diverse students, prevention of conflict, and early intervention that help improve the quality of learning and living experiences of children and adults working together in a school setting. It is characterized by children and adults engaging in healthy relationships (Thapa et al., 2013).

Professional Learning (PL): This involves a continuous professional growth driven by teacher agency and choice, using authentic, active learning strategies to handle specific scenarios in classrooms. It is structured by having teachers work in groups with overlapping responsibilities and engage in nontraditional learning methods with the purpose of preparing students to be active learners (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006).

Race: Race is a socially defined category, based on real or perceived biological differences between groups of people (Samaan, 2000).

Summary

Reflecting on my own experiences with diversity and how it often becomes a challenge—rather than perceived as an asset—has inspired me to take action toward a better understanding

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of the processes that inform teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges regarding racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity. In my dissertation study, I examined how teachers perceive diversity and how they enact the acquired CSP skills in their classrooms. My study on teachers' understanding of CSP may help advance knowledge on how both personal and professional learning allow teachers to understand their own biases and learn useful strategies to approach diversity in their classrooms for the purpose of creating a productive learning environment. In Chapter 2, I present a review of related literature, aligned to the theoretical framework of CSP. I review the literature connected to diversity as a social and educational construct, implicit bias, and the role of PL and leadership in the process of acquiring CSP skills by teachers.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States is becoming racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, and the White population is expected to lose its majority status by 2050 (DeFrain & Assay, 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported that more than half of public school students come from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In addition to the millions of African American, Latinx, Asian Pacific, and American Indian students whose families have lived in America for generations, there are about 10 million (9.4% of the total U.S. student body) English language learners (ELLs) currently attending U.S. primary and secondary schools. Despite an increasingly diverse student population, the majority of teachers still identify with the perspectives of the dominant White culture, creating a mismatch between student and teacher demographics (Adams & Jeanrenaud, 2008; Allensworth, 2012; Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Fiarman, 2016; Gay, 2010, 2012; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017).

The increase of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students calls for a model of education that acknowledges and values prior practices and experiences of students (Dean, 2016). Zuniga (2018) affirmed that educators as agents of change and social justice leaders are responsible for creating productive learning environments for their students. They have a responsibility to help society by getting actively involved in the development of awareness and policies that increase learning opportunities for all students. Working in a diverse environment, educators are required to become culturally proficient and design learning experiences that maximize diverse students' success (Carter, 2015; Kea & Trent, 2013). In culturally responsive classrooms, both students and teachers thrive because instruction revolves around valuing students' prior cultural knowledge and experiences; improving student–teacher relationships; and

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making students active, engaged participants in the educational process (Chen, 2011). Therefore, educators are required to become culturally competent to be able to meet diverse students' needs by valuing their cultural backgrounds and fostering their agency (Adams & Jeanrenaud, 2008; Allensworth, 2012; NYSED, 2019).

Recently, in times of anti-diversity rhetoric on the political scene, the role of American educators has expanded beyond providing academic support for their students. Educators are expected to be guardians of democracy and cultivators of public schools' mission to uphold democratic ideas because the foundations of American democracy have been shaken (Huang & Cornell, 2019; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018; Sondel et al., 2018). The public discourse against diversity, also prominent in historical research (Delpit, 1988; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Reardon, 1988), has been reflected in more recent studies (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Heitner & Jennings, 2017; Huang & Cornell, 2019; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). In the post-Obama era, American society has experienced a surge of hostility directed at certain vulnerable groups, such as immigrants and people of color (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Sondel et al., 2018; Thapa et al., 2013). The intensified public discourse against diversity makes educators responsible for addressing the themes related to racism, prejudices, biases, and unwillingness to accept different cultural values and perspectives (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2019).

While the changing student demographics require increased need for cultural sensitivity in education, research indicated several educational inequities experienced by marginalized groups in educational settings (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay, 2010, 2012; Lipton & Oakes, 2007; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012). Schools often reflect the anti-diversity tendencies present in society due to explicit or implicit bias or lack of teacher preparation (Blair, 2002; Holt &

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DeVore, 2005; Joseph & Duss, 2009). In addition to teacher biases and failure to integrate instructional practices that support diverse students, schools often reinforce the social divides by creating structures and policies that perpetuate marginalization and increase achievement gaps between privileged and marginalized groups. The increasing burden of racism resulting in lack of equitable funding, limited access to resources and higher-level courses, disproportionate suspensions, and behavioral over-referrals of students of color are a few examples of practices rooted in misperceptions of cultural differences between diverse students and the expectations of U.S. educational institutions (Kozol, 2012). Despite the high numbers of students from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic groups, schools have failed to make meaningful progress toward desegregation and creation of equity in school settings (Stroub & Richards, 2013). Through policy, practice, and curriculum, the U.S. educational system continuously provides advantages for White and wealthy students while perpetuating disadvantages for students of color from low socio-economic backgrounds (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Kozol, 2005, 2012; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012).

Previous research also suggested that education is the core element in establishing a more equitable and just educational system (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Carter, 2015; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Kelly & Kelly, 2013; Massaquoi, 2009; Reardon, 1988). Because of the crucial role of education in promoting social justice, there is a need for teachers to not only value the presence of different cultures in their classrooms but also prepare students to be critical thinkers and engaged citizens (Allensworth, 2012; Moll, 1992; Milner, 2011; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Educators need to develop the knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to teach children from diverse backgrounds and create a productive learning environment for all students (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2013, 2015). Enabling students to build on their culturally developed funds of

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knowledge and integrating them into classroom activities will create a richer and more socially just learning environment for students (Moll, 1992). Educators also need to eliminate bullying, teasing, and biased language and build on student diversity as an asset (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Kea & Trent, 2013).

Important elements in the process of supporting diverse students are teachers who understand the role they play in this process (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013). Building on diversity as an asset involves educators who understand how to utilize the rich culture and experiences of their students in planning their instruction, as well as adjusting their teaching style to better meet the needs of diverse students (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012). Providing students with opportunities to interact with peers from different backgrounds might help in developing an increased desire and opportunity for intercultural communication in their school community (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014). The asset-based approach to racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity might further lead to building strong and resilient communities, founded on the recognition and rejection of violence, resolving conflicts through dialogue, building awareness of injustice, and understanding ways to promote sustainable collaboration (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Kelly & Kelly, 2013; Massaquoi, 2009, Reardon, 1988).

In the current context of increased need for cultural sensitivity in education, this research study contributes to a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of diversity and their successes and challenges in classrooms with diverse student populations. Although many teachers have experienced PL in their schools and possess the skills that enable them to work effectively with diverse students (Darling-Hammond & Garcia-Lopez, 2002), many others still lack preparedness or willingness to integrate CSP (Gay, 2012, 2015). Some teachers may show

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opposition and resistance to culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013). Therefore, Gay recommended that teachers develop the ability to “resist resistance” (p. 56), which means to restructure their beliefs and focus on cultural differences in planning their instruction. My study on teachers’ perceptions of diversity and how educators make sense of their ability and preparedness to work with diverse students built on the existing literature and analyzed it through the lens of CSP as a theoretical framework. By conducting interviews, classroom visits, and analyzing lesson plans, I searched for themes that pointed to perceptions and practices focused on racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

The educational theory that provided a useful framework to analyze the perceptions of teachers regarding racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity was CSP. The theoretical framework of CSP is the lens I used to analyze the related literature, which set the context for my proposed research study. By using a case study approach, I aimed to add to the body of research on (a) the perceptions of educators regarding diversity in the classroom, (b) educators’ ability and preparedness to integrate CSP into a diverse classroom environment, (c) the perceptions of successes and challenges teachers encounter or anticipate when working in diverse classrooms, and (d) teachers’ perceptions of the role of administration in helping them build capacity with CSP.

CSP (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017), which evolved from culturally sensitive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2002), promotes students’ cultures as heritage and fosters linguistic and cultural pluralism. In his seminal article, Paris (2012) determined that racial and cultural differences should not be perceived only as strengths in the educational process, as had been previously established by Ladson-Billings

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(1995, 2006) and Gay (2002). He proposed sustaining those differences and preserving the cultural capital, knowledge, and abilities of diverse students and their families because this capital is what makes the students and families unique. Traditionally, the cultural capital of White families is privileged in the school system (Goldenberg, 2013), and by introducing CSP, Paris proposed to extend this privilege to the cultural capital of marginalized communities. By suggesting a restructuring of the curriculum and enabling students to view issues and events from their diverse perspectives, Paris offered a student-centered, rather than a teacher-centered, pedagogical approach. Therefore, I have chosen this approach as the lens to analyze the literature on themes related to teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and experiences with CSP in diverse learning communities. The next section offers a historical background on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)—as it led to the development of CSP—as well as a deeper analysis of CSP.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The theories regarding cultural understanding, sensitivity, and responsiveness in education evolved from the principles of equity and social justice. They are rooted in the civil rights movements that began in the mid-1950s and lasted through the 1960s and 1970s. The struggles for civil rights during this time aimed toward dismantling institutions that protected the dominance of the White population of European descent. The cultural shifts occurring in the United States during this time period included attempts to desegregate schools and recognize the cultural values of non-White groups. Research studies from those decades include the concepts of *culturally appropriate*, *culturally congruent*, *culturally responsive*, and *culturally compatible* as terms describing the strands of innovative educational approaches (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). From these strands emerged the work of Geneva Gay (2002), who coined the term *culturally responsive teaching*, and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006), who built upon

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earlier philosophies and explored *cultural sensitivity in education*. Ladson-Billings (1995), in her seminal article on culturally relevant pedagogy, reverted the deficit model of student diversity and turned it into an asset-based approach that produced new generations of educators willing to appreciate their students' cultural heritage. Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that teachers excessively focus in their work on "what to do" as opposed to "how we think" (p. 30). Ladson-Billings also suggested a change in attitude toward teaching and posited that "doing is less important than being," turning her attention to the human interaction between the teacher and the learner. She pointed out that cultural sensitivity principles call for an instructional model based on relationships with students and knowing their needs and lived experiences. When teachers are able to uncover and understand the invisible structures that, as Ladson-Billings claimed, separate them from the learners, they will be able to move between cultures and become advocates for the students who often come from backgrounds different from the ones of the teachers.

Like Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006), Gay (2012) also recognized that students' academic success intertwines with teachers' cultural competence that takes education beyond the classroom walls and extends it to life-long learning. Gay defined *culturally responsive teaching* as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for students" (p. 31). Gay further stated that CRP empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically because it encourages students to use their prior knowledge and experience. The concept of *culturally responsive teaching* includes five essential elements from the teachers' perspective: (a) becoming proficient in cultural diversity, (b) incorporating cultural diversity content into the curriculum, (c) building communities of learners through caring, (d) building relationships with diverse students, and (e) responding to diversity in planning and

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delivering instruction (Gay, 2002). Gay also emphasized that teachers who relate the curriculum to students' backgrounds succeed in establishing connections with families and local communities, thus creating shared learning experiences beyond the classroom walls.

Practicing CRP allows educators to experience success in their professional endeavors because they appreciate their students and they are enthusiastic about their work (Callaway, 2017). They value and respect their students' families, and they understand the challenges they have to face. Those teachers have few discipline problems and high attendance rates (Bassey, 2016). Students in their classes become academically successful because they feel they receive respect and their perspectives are valued (Heitner & Jennings, 2016).

Proponents of CRP emphasized strategies that foster relationship building and intercultural understanding in the classroom (Bassey, 2016; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Kea & Trent, 2013). These strategies include discussion in art, social action, creative writing, drama, newspaper commentaries, and role playing in class. These pedagogical choices also allow engaging students in organizing and conducting public meetings, preparing agendas, writing letters to newspapers and politicians, public speaking, conducting opinion polls, utilizing leadership skills, and volunteering. Other successful strategies to be used with diverse students focus on collaborative learning using heterogeneous groups, which provides new ways to cross intercultural borders, develop dialogue, and create projects focusing on global citizenship (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013). Projects inspired by culturally responsive philosophy revolve around collaboration and understanding and inspire the participants to develop a positive attitude to diversity and differences in perspective (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

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As the populations of students become more diverse, the researchers and practitioners revisit earlier theories and revise their work. Ladson-Billings (2006) stated that culture is a constantly evolving concept and, therefore, societies synthesize and shape it into new forms. Similar to Ladson-Billings, Paris (2012) proposed to “shift the term, stance, and practice of asset pedagogies toward more explicitly pluralist outcomes” (p. 87). Paris also proposed to eliminate deficit thinking and actively encouraged educators to value and preserve diversity while stimulating growth within and across cultures. Therefore, the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* more adequately reflects trends in education that are based on equity and social justice as well as multiculturalism and multilingualism. These trends counter dominant narratives about racial and cultural diversity as deficits and revert the need to eliminate and remediate differences. On the contrary, they build on racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as elements that enrich the life of society and sustain cultural differences to ensure pluralism (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Educators who provide their students with opportunities to learn and interact in a culturally sustaining setting help their students develop a stronger sense of stability and an increased desire for learning because they allow diverse learners to participate in changing the structure of the curriculum and take action for social change and reform (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017).

Coining the term of *culturally sustaining pedagogy* encouraged other researchers and educational reformists to contribute to the knowledge on creating diverse school settings and designing curricula that recognize assets of people who belong to different racial, cultural, and linguistic groups (Au, Brown, & Calderon, 2017; Camicia, 2017; Emdin, 2016; Perez, Breault, & White, 2014; Sleeter & Carmona, 2018; Smits & Naqvi, 2017; Valenzuela, 2016). The important factor that influences the work of these researchers and educational reformists is

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addressing current changes in education policy and practice while proposing a rich, academically rigorous, multicultural curriculum with a focus on standard-based instruction, two priorities that have to occur simultaneously to ensure student success. The authors elaborated on how teachers can bridge theory with practice and work toward high standards of academic achievement for diverse students. These findings may help educators reflect and conquer personal biases, alleviate tensions between school reforms and progressive classroom practices, and prepare teachers to become culturally competent. By building on the students' funds of knowledge and recognizing their lived experiences (Moll, 1992), teachers may not only allow but also intentionally invite their students' culture to become an integral part of new learning (Bassey, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013). Recognizing student cultures as assets leads to choosing content and designing instruction based on students' funds of knowledge, which may enrich students' experiences instead of forcing them to adjust to the norms and standards of the dominant White culture (Gay, 2015; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017).

Most recently, the New York State Department of Education (2019) developed a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (NYSED CR-S) framework, the goal of which is

... to help educators design and implement a student-centered learning environment that:

- (a) affirms racial and cultural identities and fosters positive academic outcomes, (b) develops students' abilities to connect across cultures, (c) empowers students as agents of social change, and (d) contributes to an individual's engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking. (p. 11)

The framework points to the teachers' role in implementing an inclusion curriculum to explore social problems and prepare children to stand up to injustice and discrimination and to question stereotypes. It further affirms that the system of inequity, deeply rooted in the historical

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background of the United States and its institutions, needs to be addressed, challenged, and transformed. Therefore, the framework, along with the New York State's Every Student Succeeds Act Plan, reinforces the need for (a) responding to the needs of historically marginalized population; and (b) promoting their cultures, languages, and values, and enriching the curricula by including their perspectives and lived experiences.

Within the New York State context, the CR-S Framework is a milestone in the journey toward equity in education and a major step toward a change in the perception of racial and cultural differences, which are no longer regarded as deficits but rather assets and building blocks of a democratic society. At the foundation of their CR-S Framework lies an effort to provide quality education, inclusive curriculum and assessment, delivered through high expectations and rigorous instruction in a welcoming and supportive environment. One of the principles of the CR-S Framework is to support educators through continuous PL that prepares them to examine implicit bias and challenge beliefs and assumptions about diversity. The Framework also discusses supporting teachers to be able to align curriculum and instruction to include traditionally marginalized groups. Similar to the CR-S framework, this present study contributes to further understanding what CSP is and how teachers enact it in their classrooms.

To practice culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, educators need to understand how to address topics related to diversity, which becomes especially important in the climate of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminations (Bonner et al., 2017; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Sondel et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2017). Although many teacher PL programs include strategies to prepare teachers for working with diverse students, educators are often ill prepared to meet diverse students' needs, or they operate under misconceived notions that students need to learn to conform to the dominant White culture's norms (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2002, 2010, 2012, 2013,

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2015). Some school districts have responded to the need of better preparing teachers for diverse learning environments by implementing programs that focus on implicit bias, racial, religious, and cultural bullying, and the effect of cultural differences between students and adults in diverse schools (Callaway, 2017; Chen, 2011; Gay, 2015; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). These school districts believe that education is the key to creating a productive learning environment with a climate of safety, open and authentic conversations, trust, and respect. Consequently, the districts made attempts to provide tools to the administration, faculty, staff, parents, and community members to support them in the process of acquiring racial and cultural awareness (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Callaway, 2017; Gay, 2013).

A growing body of research highlighted several themes revolving around the importance of cultural sensitivity as a critical factor in creating a productive learning environment for diverse students (Allensworth, 2012; Bassey, 2016; Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). CSP involves utilizing the rich culture and experiences of students to design curricula and acknowledge the cultural capital of historically marginalized groups (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). It also involves planning instruction and adjusting pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of diverse students (Paris, 2012). Thus, CSP provides an adequate frame for the analysis of literature on themes related to teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and experiences with diverse learning communities.

In sum, I utilized CSP as the theoretical framework for my study because research showed that CSP highlights the need to value and maintain communities marginalized by systemic inequities for the purpose of upholding the American democracy. Culturally sustaining practices in schools focusing on pluralism in the form of languages and literacies, as well as other cultural practices, such as religion, customs, and traditions enhance diverse student success

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because they do not perceive diverse students as “empty vessels to be filled with knowledge” (Valenzuela, 2016, p. 5) but build on the already-existent funds of student knowledge (Moll, 1992) and value perspectives of traditionally marginalized groups. CSP was the lens through which I designed my research study and consequently explored teachers’ perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges to define how teachers develop their cultural competence skills to effectively support diverse learners.

Review of Related Literature

The following section includes a body of related literature divided into four subsections, closely aligned to the research framework established for this dissertation. I review the literature connected to (a) how diversity is defined as a social and educational construct; (b) how implicit bias and stereotype threat impact teacher perceptions; (c) what perceptions and experiences educators have with diversity in their classrooms; and (d) what role(s) PL, background knowledge and experiences, as well as leadership play in educators’ successes and challenges with CSP.

The first subsection on diversity as a social and educational construct is followed by the literature on implicit bias and stereotype threat as important factors that affect teacher attitudes toward diversity. I further explore the pertinent literature on educators’ perceptions and experiences with diversity. The literature review concludes with the section on PL designed to equip teachers with strategies to work in diverse educational settings and the role of school leadership in supporting teachers’ efforts in diverse school settings. This literature review helped identify the gap in literature that my study attempted to fill regarding how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms, given how much they say they value diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, their background knowledge and

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experiences to translate CSP in classroom, and the role of administration in helping them do this work.

Diversity as a Social and Educational Construct

The call for more attention to diversity in educational settings is reflected in a large body of research demonstrating the important educational benefits of interacting with classmates from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Bonner et al., 2017; Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013; Moses & Chang, 2006; Steffens et al., 2017). Diversity as a descriptive term can have many different definitions depending on the context. As a social construct, diversity is defined as the co-existence of differences in behavior, traditions, and customs within communities. It is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and of the groups and societies that make up humankind (Steffens et al., 2017). These differences should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations (Stamatopoulou, 2019). In educational contexts, NYSED (2019) defined *diversity* as a wide range of differences in students, referring to race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or ability.

For the purpose of my study, which focuses on culture-related diversity in response to the increasing number of culturally diverse students in U.S. schools, I focused on racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as an attribute of students who come from backgrounds often involving racial, linguistic, religious, or socio-economic differences. The term *racially and culturally, and linguistically diverse students* used throughout this research proposal, refers to native-born or foreign-born children from racially, ethnically, culturally, or linguistically diverse households,

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often of low socioeconomic status (Wells, Cordova-Cobo, & Fox, 2016). Embedded in the NYSED CR-S Framework is the following statement:

Culture far transcends practices such as cuisines, art, music, and celebrations to also include ways of thinking, values, and forms of expression. These ways and forms are in constant flux, renegotiation, and evolution. Schools then become a meeting point for cultures, containing children and adults who bring with them multiple facets of their identity, along with unique experiences and perspectives. (NYSED, 2019, p. 11)

The above definition implies that cultural diversity is a complex construct, reaching far beyond noticeable differences among students. Not only are the significant differences often hidden to the eye, but they are also in a state of constant evolution. Therefore, the presence of children from culturally diverse groups places specific demands on schools and teachers and requires cultural competence. In culturally responsive and sustaining classrooms, multiple expressions of diversity should be recognized, valued, and built upon as educational assets (NYSED, 2019).

Diversity as a Democratic Ideal

A review of related literature reveals a growing body of research on the significance of racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom (Bonner et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017) and a key position it occupies in the public discourse (Moses & Chang, 2006). Research points to diversity as a crucial component in fulfilling the educational mission of a democratic school (Gudeman, 2001). Diversity in the classroom may lead to the presence of several positive educational outcomes, including a broader sharing of experiences, highlighting of new issues and perspectives, in-depth discussions of racial and ethnic matters, and an increase in one's ability to examine personal biases (Carmichael &

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Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013). Embracing diversity in the classroom means recognizing individual differences and creating the understanding in young people that each individual is unique. Recognizing the value of diversity builds understanding of each other and helps move beyond simple tolerance to celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual (Bonner et al., 2017; Gurin et al., 2004; Samaan, 2000; Steffens et al., 2017).

Another vital educational benefit of diversity is that it creates opportunities to educate broad-minded global citizens (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013). In classrooms where diversity is perceived as a positive educational resource, students learn to respect others and value differences, learn to adapt to change, and understand how to respectfully disagree when faced with different perspectives instead of showing apprehension or resentment (Moses & Chang, 2006; Steffens et al., 2017). Students in diverse classrooms are more comfortable pursuing cross-race interactions at school and often feel safer, less bullied, and less lonely (Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013). Teachers who explicitly focus their instruction on topics of race and ethnicity report greater benefit from classroom diversity than do those who only show appreciation and respect of diversity, without further building on it as an asset (Gudeman, 2001).

Although criticism has been raised against the reported benefits of diversity—which claim that diversity has become nothing but a fashionable trend (Schuck, 2003; Wood, 2003)—research studies point to prominent philosophical origins of the ideal of diversity and the race-conscious educational policies founded on this concept (Frank, 2005; Moses & Chang, 2006; Robertson, 1992). The concept of diversity as a democratic ideal reaches as far back as ancient Greece and is widely discussed in the works of John Stuart Mill and John Dewey (Moses &

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Chang, 2006). Aristotle did not directly embrace cultural or racial diversity, but he believed that multiple points of view strengthened democratic principles and produced sounder political judgments (Frank, 2005). John Stuart Mill, who embraced religious and even class differences, perceived diversity as the “marketplace of ideas” (as cited in Moses & Chang, 2006, p. 8) and created a strong argument for the value of diversity in schools and public life.

Dewey (1927) connected the discussion on diversity explicitly to the realm of educational practice and emphasized the role of intermingling of races, religions, and customs in creating a new and broader environment for students. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) advocated for face-to-face interactions for the purpose of formulating and communicating various points of view. He also expressed the belief that students should practice a sense of responsibility for others when they consider their own actions and their impact on the larger community, which might lead young people to understand that their own good is connected to the good of others (Robertson, 1992).

Diversity and the Curriculum

A growing body of educational research revealed themes revolving around the importance of student-centered curricula and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogical practices as critical factors in embracing diversity and turning it into a powerful tool to enhance student learning (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Tampio, 2018). Embracing diversity not only includes curriculum planning for groups of varied ability but also cultivating intercultural connections, recognizing individual differences, and moving from simple tolerance to celebrating the rich dimensions of individual and shared identities (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Carter, 2015). Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogical practices promote students’ cultures as heritage and foster linguistic and

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cultural pluralism by tapping into the students' funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992), as well as recognizing students' lived experiences and learning strengths (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012). Research showed that having diverse schools and classrooms does not provide sufficient evidence of embracing diversity. Only full integration of all students and giving them equitable access to educational opportunities may provide benefits resulting from having a diverse student body (Kelly & Kelly, 2013; Massaquoi, 2009; Reardon, 1988).

Diversity and Teacher Dispositions

As research emphasized the importance of diversity in school and society, it also pointed to the specific importance of classroom teachers and their attitude toward racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students (Bassey, 2016; Gay, 2015; Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006). The role of teachers in building on diversity is critical because they participate in shaping the curriculum and they have power to decide what knowledge to present to their students (Tampio, 2018). The students may mirror their teachers' behavior and attitudes, since teachers often set the rules, provide guidance, and lead by example (Goldenberg, 2013; Gurin et al., 2004). The presence of diversity alone does not guarantee that it will be beneficial; it needs to be embraced and systematically incorporated into the curriculum by a well-prepared teacher (Marin, 2000). Having studied college and university classrooms, Marin posited there are enhanced educational outcomes in racially and ethnically diverse classes among faculty members who recognized and used diversity as an educational tool; incorporated topics related to diversity in their courses; engaged students with active teaching methods; and created an inclusive, supportive learning environment. Marin concluded that the experiences with enhanced benefits resulting from diversity produced more faculty members who are prepared to teach in similar classrooms.

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Educators who embrace their role as agents of change and social justice leaders are responsible for creating positive learning environments and developing awareness and policies to promote every student's success (Zuniga, 2018). Because of varied educational experiences of students from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups, educators are required to embrace the differences and design lessons which would diverse students for participation in a pluralistic society (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Carter, 2015; Mette et al., 2016). The implementation of culturally responsive practices in a diverse classroom leads to success for both students and teachers because the instruction builds on students' prior cultural knowledge and experiences, involves recognizing different learning strengths, opens dialogue between teachers and students, and promotes collaboration among all stakeholders (Gay, 2010; Moll, 1992; Paris, 2012). These strategies increase student achievement because they make young people active participants in the educational process (Chen, 2011).

Implicit Bias and Stereotype Threat

To turn their diverse classrooms into productive learning environments, educators need to understand how to approach diversity and view it not as a deficit but as an asset (Delpit, 1988, 2006; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). However, even in democratic societies, school success still relates to students' social background (Gay, 2010). Bassey (2016) posed a question of how to implement socially just practices in schools when social justice is a major global challenge. Delpit postulated that two dominant factors hindering progress toward social justice in education are implicit bias and stereotype threat resulting from cultural differences between teachers and students who often come from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Blair (2002) affirmed that stereotyping is inherent to most individuals and their preferences tend to reflect the preferences of the culturally dominant group.

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At the same time, Fiarman (2016) noted that individuals are not aware of these biases because they are unconscious, yet they significantly affect people's behavior. The primary reason why these findings have such power is that the operation of stereotypes and prejudice seems to exceed people's ability to control them (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Delpit (1988) encouraged educators to eliminate communication blocks and have an open dialogue on racial and cultural differences to drain the tension and resentment and "heal the sores" (p. 282).

In addition, Gay (2002) recommended that educators acknowledge their participation in the culture of power and face the discomfort when examining attitudes regarding diversity. Delpit (1988) proposed that educators abide by the rule: "I want the same thing for everyone's children as I want for mine" (p. 285). She considered it a major step in challenging bias, a major roadblock to intercultural communication. She reflected on the unfortunate phenomenon that the dialogue on cultural differences—how different cultural groups perceive themselves and how to best serve diverse students—often gets silenced.

Shields (2004) also noted that educators who are often uncomfortable with diversity fail to develop relationships with their students or acknowledge some of the diverse perspectives present in their classrooms. Steele (2010) claimed that not only do stereotypes limit communication between White teachers and their diverse students but they may cause emotional damage and intense levels of anxiety that can restrict students' personal growth because a feeling of not belonging in a certain space can limit the person's motivation to succeed. Only by eliminating stereotyping can educators design instructional practices that would increase the students' intellectual performance and create high expectation for them.

In their seminal research on racial stereotypes, Gaertner and McLaughlin (1983) observed that, within the context of the 1980s, racial attitudes among White Americans began to change.

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From the traditional, “redneck” (p. 25) form of racism, racial attitudes evolved into more convoluted, complex forms of prejudice. Gaertner and McLaughlin pointed to stereotypes gradually taking on a different form as society members were becoming more aware of what was socially appropriate. For example, when the college students who participated in their study on stereotypes became aware that the study was about racial prejudice, they became more careful with their responses, which may have been the reason behind a slower response rate and a more careful choice of words. The accumulated evidence resulted in the conclusion that the dominant groups do not necessarily attribute negative qualities to certain socially disadvantaged groups. At the same time, members of dominant groups continue to attribute positive qualities solely to individuals who also belong to the dominant group. The researchers concluded that in the time between the 1940s and the 1980s, racial stereotypes might have changed, but they have not ceased to exist. Their research is indispensable in understanding the presence of implicit bias that often leads to lack of communication in diverse educational settings.

Educators’ Perceptions of and Experiences with Diversity

One of the significant effects of demographic changes in the United States is the influx of multicultural populations that constantly re-design the American cultural mosaic. For this reason, it seems necessary to consider how educators perceive and experience racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and how it impacts the teaching profession. The results of research studies pointed to increased efforts to educate teachers and prepare them for working with different racial and ethnic groups, as well as highlighting teachers’ perception of diversity as a challenge (Gay, 2012, 2013; Goldenberg, 2013; Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Teachers often lack preparedness or willingness to prepare for culturally diverse students’ needs. Many seem to perpetuate the deficit thinking of diversity and fail to challenge

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discriminations and distortions in schooling (Gay, 2013). Teachers who perceive having to educate diverse students as a challenge often expect diverse students to eventually adapt to the requirements of the American educational system with the support of school counselors and other educational specialists, taking the responsibility off of themselves (Coronel & Gomez-Hurtado, 2015; Dubbeld, de Hoog, den Brok, & de Laat, 2019). In addition, school authorities tend to marginalize the need for culturally responsive and sustaining instructional practices and often exclude it from their agenda (Gay, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017; Stitzlein, 2012). Thus, teachers or school authorities may not assume the commitments resulting from racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity as their own and thus fail to incorporate diversity into their teaching practices.

Racial, cultural, and linguistic differences that come along with changing student demographics can also affect teachers' and students' interactions. The differences can make misunderstandings stemming from different backgrounds escalate into conflicts (Blair, 2002; Helskog, 2014; Holt & DeVore, 2005; Joseph & Duss, 2009). The research on intercultural conflict fits into my study on diversity because the findings point to teachers' struggle to bridge racial and cultural gaps. The intercultural conflict that results from the demographic gaps between teachers and students might shape the perceptions of educators regarding their ability to work with diverse students. The research pointed out that implicit bias, stereotype threat, and the natural human trait to disagree when faced with different perspectives are obstacles to creating intercultural understanding in the classroom (Blair, 2002; Helskog, 2014; Holt & DeVore, 2005; Joseph & Duss, 2009). According to Joseph and Duss, intercultural conflict exists in many diverse communities because of incompatible goals, beliefs, resources, or simply the inherent

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human tendency to disagree when confronted with different perspectives, and diverse classrooms often mirror these conflicts.

People from various cultures also have different ideas on how to handle conflict. The research on styles of conflict resolution creates greater strategies of understanding to address tensions and conflicts that affect relationships between members of different cultural groups (Helskog, 2014). In an attempt to understand conflict-resolution strategies in different cultures, Holt and DeVore (2005) examined a correlation between two types of cultures, individualistic and collectivistic, and their role in intercultural conflict. Holt and DeVore revealed different styles of managing conflict depending on whether the culture was individualistic, more concerned with the self than others, or collectivistic, where the needs of a group were put forth before the needs of an individual. In individualistic cultures, typical for the United States and Western European countries, Holt and DeVore observed more emphasis on strong verbal communication and more active, confrontational approaches when solving conflicts. At the same time, the researchers observed that withdrawing, compromising, and problem solving were preferred methods of conflict resolution in collectivistic cultures, typical for Asian, Middle Eastern, or Hispanic cultures. Considering different styles of conflict resolution in different cultures, it is important for educators to understand differences in perspective and take a proactive approach to conflict resolution that responds to students' cultural norms (Helskog, 2014).

However, in traditional learning communities, power often exists between teachers and students in a way that teachers dominate over their students and treat them as subordinates (Fiarman, 2016). Teachers who are unfamiliar with their students' culture may expect students to instinctively understand teachers' preferred conflict-resolution strategies and unknowingly

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punish students for honoring practices they may have learned at home (Joseph & Duss, 2009). Students from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds may also get disproportionately referred for discipline problems, which may lead to school suspensions or other punitive measures. Linguistic diversity creates a barrier between teachers and students, and it may lead to conflict when teachers struggle to understand what the students are attempting to express (Farinde-Wu et al, .2017). Perceived through the lens of critical race theory (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006), the issue of disproportionate suspension of diverse students is also rooted in misperceptions of racially and culturally diverse students and the expectations of American educational institutions. Since suspensions diminish educational engagement for already marginalized students, they reduce opportunities to attend school and to participate in educational practices, further creating opportunity gaps and/or achievement gaps between privileged and marginalized groups.

Meanwhile, culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy calls for creating the conditions to sustain and utilize diverse students' cultural capital and create a joint and collaborative effort between educators and school leadership to create structures that will support diverse students. Therefore, there is a strong need to prepare educators in pre-service and in-service programs to bridge cultural gaps that exist between cultures, which is rarely included in these programs' agenda (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Advocates for proactive programs recommend bias-free treatment of diverse students and support modeling good behavior, rewarding growth, and using restorative justice practices to prevent suspensions (Delpit, 2006). These advocates also believe in classrooms built on principles of social justice that allow for a coexistence of cultures while promoting student achievement and increasing teachers' self-efficacy (Schunk, 1989).

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Researchers have consistently pointed to education as the key element in establishing communication among diverse groups (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Carter, 2015; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Kelly & Kelly, 2013; Massaquoi, 2009; Reardon, 1988; Sari, 2016). Given the findings that humans tend to disagree because of differences in perspectives, educators should develop communication strategies and incorporate them into the teaching process to address differences and create a productive learning environment (Joseph & Duss, 2009). If educators help create conditions needed for diversity to be perceived as an asset, effective learning and intercultural co-existence will take place in the classroom (Carter, 2015).

PL Related to CRP and CSP

Educators cannot fully bridge the achievement and opportunity gap between students from diverse backgrounds unless they are prepared to provide support and meet the students' needs (Goldenberg, 2013). Goldenberg further claimed that schools should celebrate and not neglect diversity because culturally diverse immigrant students may bring in resources that the country needs to remain vital and dynamic. The flow of ideas that comes with diverse students is the key element of progress that gave the foundations for this country (Juvonen et al., 2017). The individuals who participate in this progress should be provided with the necessary support and not be excluded based on a possible lack of skills to succeed (Barnes & Whinnery, 2002). It is essential that designers of PL programs consider the value of cultural diversity and create programs that prepare teachers to work with students in inclusive settings (Gay, 2002, 2012; Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; NYSED, 2019).

Building on the idea that racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students may come from a variety of educational backgrounds and experiences, teachers need to embrace cultural differences and design lessons that could increase student success and create a positive and

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productive atmosphere in the classroom (Mette et al., 2016). Educators may struggle to recognize they are biased, so Gu (2005) recommended that in the teaching profession, personal attitudes need to be examined and questioned in search of appropriate pedagogy. Teachers must be able to find ways to discuss topics related to racism, inequality, and other sensitive and complicated problems that may bring out differences in perspectives (Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is within teachers' responsibility to guide conversations around these difficult topics and bridge cultural differences (Joseph & Duss, 2009).

To perceive diversity not as a deficit but an asset, teachers must go through the process of personal transformation and carefully reflect on their biases and attitudes that illustrate how they see others through the lens of their background and experiences (Delpit, 2006; Fiarman, 2016). The literature I reviewed suggested that teachers often tend to bring their own cultural values and allow these values to shape the curriculum and instructional practices (Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Carmona, 2018). When teachers become culturally responsive and sustaining, they begin to recognize the cultural heterogeneity of their students and can move between diverse cultures, being able to advocate for cultures that differ from the culture of the dominant White population (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). Educators are then able to create change by examining their own attitudes and developing critical skills to address injustice, and although "the process is painful, we change our hearts and minds" (Zuniga, 2018, p. 590). Personal reflection is often a challenge for teachers who may refuse to acknowledge their negative attitudes toward certain groups, but they should strive to create a school culture revolving around inclusion rather than segregation (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gay, 2015; Kea & Trent, 2013). A positive attitude toward diversity might enable teachers to bridge social justice and pedagogy and create a welcoming and vibrant learning environment (Bassey, 2016).

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Research on effective professional development programs that facilitate the integration of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy pointed to strong links between teacher needs, successful classroom experience, and strong administrative support (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Marshall & Maricela, 2010; McCray & Beachum, 2014; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). If public schools are to promote democratic values and effectively serve diverse students, teachers must feel supported in their efforts to engage students and families from diverse backgrounds and honor students' cultures instead of devaluing them (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Stitzlein, 2012). Goodwin (2017) pointed out that administrators must be prepared to provide teachers with honest and forthright feedback, so teachers make sure that they are instilling a strong sense of community among learners in their classes. To close achievement gaps and provide effective interventions for the neediest students, school leaders need to clearly define the desired outcomes and ways to achieve them, which means continued investments in research to identify effective and ineffective policies and plans and support teachers in their efforts to successfully work with diverse students (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Marshall & Maricela, 2010; McCray & Beachum, 2014; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007).

Summary

Although the numbers of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students enrolling in schools are growing steadily, the teaching force remains predominantly White. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) predicts that in 2024, White students will represent only 46% of public school students, whereas the number of White teachers will remain at 82% (pp. 5-6). Because of this racial mismatch between teachers and students, there was a need for a study to explore teachers' perceptions regarding diversity and to understand their experiences enacting CSP in the classroom. Researchers contended that CSP and CRP are essential components of

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productive learning environments and educators are required to build their capacity with these educational approaches. CSP and CRP involve educators utilizing the rich culture and experiences of their students in planning their instruction as well as adjusting their pedagogical approaches to give students opportunities to fulfill their potential (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). Researchers also agreed that examining teachers' own attitudes toward diversity and providing students with opportunities to interact with peers from different backgrounds helps in enhanced learning and better understanding of their school community (Massaquoi, 2009). It further leads to building a strong and resilient democratic society, founded on the recognition and rejection of racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, resolving conflicts through dialogue, building awareness of injustice, and understanding ways to promote sustainable collaboration among diverse groups (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006).

This qualitative research study is an exploration of how teachers enact CSP in the racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classroom, given how much they say they value diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, their background knowledge and experiences to enact CSP in their classroom, and the role of administration in helping them do this work. The findings provided valuable insight into teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenges as districts prepare educators to work in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. The next chapter presents the research design and methodology applied to my qualitative case study on how a diverse group of teachers enacted CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms.

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Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology that I utilized for my qualitative case study on how a diverse group of teachers enacted CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. The participating teachers were purposefully chosen because of (a) how much they valued diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process; (b) the role their personal background and lived experiences, pre-service preparation, and in-service PL played in helping them translate CSP in a classroom; and (c) the role of administration in helping teachers acquire and integrate CSP.

In light of the existing research gap on secondary teacher perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges regarding diversity, I sought to make sense of how teachers explain the successes and challenges of their work and how their current practices relate to their perceptions of prior professional preparation. My study adds to the body of research on how teachers develop and translate their understanding about diversity and CSP into a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classroom environment. The study also helps understand what factors contribute to teachers' belief systems about diversity and what beliefs lead to CRP and CSP. In the process of interviews and classroom visits, I made sense of the successes and challenges experienced by educators who work in diverse classrooms. Filling these gaps contributes to the research on the factors that shape teachers' ability to develop skills with CRP and CSP and integrate them into their teaching. Teachers' reported and observed practices were analyzed through the lens of CSP. This framework served as a reference point to discuss the methodology and the results. The CSP framework guided the entire research process and helped explain phenomena related to my study.

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The research questions of my dissertation study were answered by utilizing a qualitative case study. This methodology is closely connected to my study, because through systematic analysis of teachers' perceptions and experiences, I explored what contributes to the challenges and successes that educators experience in the process of teaching and learning. I aimed to make sense of factors affecting the development of teachers' skills with CSP and how teachers interpret and respond to the reality of working in diverse classrooms.

Rationale and Purpose

Research highlighted the vulnerability of diverse school settings in times of change, political instability, or social divide because schools often reflect tendencies present in society (Carter, 2015; Joseph & Duss, 2009, LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). Research also pointed to education as one strong resource that has a potential for creating culturally responsive and sustaining productive school settings (Carter, 2015; Gay, 2015; Paris, 2012). Public schools are perceived as bastions of democracy and have a responsibility to prepare teachers for creating productive learning communities in which social, cultural, and linguistic diversities are valued (Stitzlein, 2012). Through PL opportunities and their own personal efforts, teachers should learn skills to help them challenge prejudice, bias, discrimination, and oppression in society with the purpose of finding ways to embrace diversity and enhance learning (Carter, 2015).

However, educators often struggle with meeting their individual challenges and, coming from backgrounds where they may not have been given the opportunity to prepare for working with diverse student populations, they fail to find the adequate approach (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006). They are often unsure of how to identify and confront their own biases, how to lead discussions on difficult topics regarding race and cultural differences, or how to include diverse students' perspectives into the curriculum (Au et al., 2017; Camicia, 2017;

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Emdin, 2016; Perez et al., 2014; Sleeter & Carmona, 2018). Education researchers further suggested that the academic challenges faced by many students from marginalized groups are connected to cultural discontinuity between those students' backgrounds and school-related experiences (Tyler et al., 2008). As a result, working with diverse students becomes a challenge, especially to inexperienced, unprepared, or biased teachers who struggle to create a welcoming and accepting atmosphere in their diverse classrooms and fail to provide rigorous instruction for all (Fiarman, 2016).

Relatively few studies have examined secondary teacher perceptions in regard to the challenges and successes of responding to racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity (Bonner et al. 2017; Cipriano et al., 2019; Juvonen et al., 2017). Most research studies related to diversity focus on higher education institutions and workforce (Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017). At the same time, research suggested that public school teachers need to be educated on topics related to diversity to safeguard these schools' democratic traditions (Allensworth, 2012; Bonner et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Stitzlein, 2012).

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teachers' perceptions of their ability and preparedness to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment. It helped to make sense of how teachers perceive their successes and challenges, how the administration helps them build and apply skills related to CSP, and how their observed practices reflect their ability to integrate CSP in their classrooms. The use of a qualitative approach was suitable for gaining insight into the participants' perceptions and examining their responses to interview questions regarding their thoughts and feelings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Questions

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The methods and procedures of the study are designed to answer the following research questions that guide my inquiry:

1. How does a diverse group of secondary teachers define and value racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and culturally sustaining pedagogy in the teaching and learning process?
2. How do teachers perceive their ability and preparedness (personal background and lived experiences, pre-service teacher preparation, in-service PL) to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment?
 - a. What successes and challenges do teachers anticipate or encounter when working in diverse classrooms?
 - b. How do teachers perceive the role of administration in helping them enact CSP?

Research Design

In this research, a qualitative case study was utilized for gaining insight into the factors that shape the process of designing and implementing instruction in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse secondary classrooms to gain insight into teacher perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges as they relate to CSP. The choice of case study was justified by my intention to explore subjective aspects of educational phenomena (Yin, 2003). A case study with qualitative methods was best suited to address the components, namely (a) how teachers interpret diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, (b) how teachers perceive their ability and preparedness to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment, and (c) how teachers perceive the role of administration in helping them build capacity with CSP. This research design allowed an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of the contextual conditions related to implicit bias; lack of cultural

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sensitivity in instructional practices; inadequate representation of marginalized groups in the curriculum; unfair assessment policies; or discrimination of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students manifested in disproportionality in discipline referrals. It furthered the knowledge on the teachers' perceptions in regard to their work in diverse classrooms. The case study approach was suitable for my research since the approach allowed me to grasp “the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

The case study design was connected to my research because through systematic analysis of teachers' perceptions, preparation, and experiences, I explored what contributes to the challenges and successes that educators experience in the process of teaching and learning. A case study approach helped me understand participants' perceptions and behavior from a social constructivist perspective. This design was best suited to address the research questions about the core processes leading to teachers' developing or not developing CSP skills.

Considering that the research question asks how teachers perceive the value of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and translate their professional knowledge into practice in a diverse learning environment, the use of the case study approach seems suitable because it is utilized in contexts where *how* and *why* questions are being asked (Yin, 2003). A widely accepted definition of *case study* is as follows: “Case studies are focused on a bounded system or a unit of study. They provide the researcher with new insights into the way things are by answering a descriptive question” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 456).

Mills and Gay (2016) pointed out that case study design had been well established in the exploration of phenomena, which in this case was how the changing demographics—the increase of Latinx and Asian students and the decrease of the White student population—inform instructional practices of secondary school teachers who participated in the study. This case

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study design allowed me to capture participants' perceptions and various experiences by being attentive to individual accounts. My qualitative case study design sought to make sense of teachers' perceptions by analyzing them both in detail and holistically in their own context.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicated that qualitative researchers are concerned with observing relationships, interviewing people, digitally recording, transcribing, and collecting data through sustained contact with people. I attempted to explore the perceptions, preparation, and current practices of educators by analyzing data obtained during interviews and observations. A case study design helped me generate new ideas that could be tested by other methods in future studies.

Research Methodology

Methodological principles that guided my research approach involved philosophical assumptions and the worldview typical for qualitative research and based on the meanings of phenomena within an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm is based on the epistemological view that people act upon their interpretations of meanings of objects, actions, and symbols in the world through the process of social interaction, while the meanings arising from the interaction can be revised on the basis of experience (Cohen & Mannion, 1989). In accordance with this view, which considers human interaction an important element, this research attempted to bring out interactions between the researcher and the researched in semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

Context of the Study

The context of the study was a bounded system of a specific suburban school district located in the Northeast of the United States. To protect the confidentiality of the school district, all demographic data are approximate. The larger community's population of about 130,000

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varies in race and income. The schools mirror these demographics and enroll a racially, socio-economically, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse population of about 8,000 students. The 2019-20 district's demographics were 35% White, 25% Black, 20% Asian, and about 20% Latinx. Students classified as economically disadvantaged and receiving free or reduced-price lunch made up approximately 25% of the district's student body.

Within the past decade (2010-2020), all schools in the district have reflected a similar pattern of the changing demographics, with the number of White students significantly decreasing, the number of Black students remaining about the same, and the number of Latinx and Asian students significantly increasing. Since 2000, the number of White students has decreased from 50% to 35%, the number of Black students has remained about the same at 25%, the number of Latinx students has significantly increased from 10% to 20%, and Asian students has increased from 15% to 20%. Yet, common across many diverse school districts, the diversification of the student body does not reflect the demographics among the faculty, which remains predominantly White.

As previous research has pointed out, racial, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences between White faculty and diverse student body may lead to implicit bias and lack of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogical practices. At the same time, several research studies have shown that schools can greatly improve their quality of education by providing culturally responsive and sustaining instructional practices to create a productive learning environment for all students (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Gay, 2002, 2012; Joseph & Duss, 2009; Kelly & Kelly, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Massaquoi, 2009; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). CSP (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017) promotes students' cultures as heritage and fosters linguistic and cultural pluralism. By building on the students' funds of knowledge and

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recognizing their lived experiences (Moll, 1992), teachers not only allow but intentionally invite their students' culture to become an integral part of new learning (Bassey, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013).

Having taken into consideration the research findings and the needs of the increasingly diverse student population, the district has taken steps to provide PL opportunities to its employees to prepare them for meeting the needs of their students. The central administration believes that all members of the school community need to develop a deeper understanding of the role diversity plays in educating students. The district has cooperated with a nationally recognized cultural proficiency training company that provided copyrighted materials and launched a PL program called *Cultural Proficiency Training*. The company provides a series of workshops for schools and organizations. The program facilitators are experts on topics of cultural competence and engage participants in PL experiences leading to reflection and personal and organizational change. The essential elements of the training are assessing culture, managing and adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. The training also focuses on intercultural conflict, implicit bias, cultural sensitivity, and strategies to improve the school culture.

The training program was first implemented in the district in the spring of 2017 to a group of individuals from the district community: administrators, faculty members, support staff, parents, and students. The training was presented as a learning opportunity regarding the topic of cultural competency. The program was made up of five full-day training sessions spread over two months. Following the training of the district-wide cohort, the PL opportunity was extended to the school level, where previously trained teams presented to the entire faculty during monthly faculty meetings. Individual teachers volunteered to provide workshops based on the principles

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of the *Cultural Proficiency Training* during scheduled PL sessions throughout the school year. Because of their commitment to embrace diversity and promote its power, in October 2019, the district administration began implementing Phase 2 of the *Cultural Proficiency Training* to a group of faculty members voluntarily recruited from the first cohort. This part of the training focused on preparing educational leaders to apply the acquired knowledge of cultural proficiency within their work environment. The group of 12 participants (including myself) was working on designing a field project with the use of cultural proficiency tools until the COVID-19 pandemic caused the schools to close and work on the project was interrupted.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is interpretive in nature; therefore, the researcher is usually involved in an ongoing and intensive experience with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher needs to consider a range of strategic, ethical, and personal concerns in the qualitative research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These concerns, which include biases, values, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status, may shape the researcher's interpretations of the collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I was well aware of my own positionality as a researcher conducting this case study. This positionality resulted from the fact that I had participated in cultural sensitivity workshops prior to designing this study. I have my own perception of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and how it has influenced me as a Polish American. I have also presented workshops to colleagues and at local, regional, and state conferences on cultural sensitivity and addressing the needs of diverse students. In addition, I knew some teachers who agreed to participate in the study, and although one criterion for participant selection was that I was not friends with them, the fact that I knew them and worked in the same district may have possibly influenced their behavior during interviews and classroom

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visits. However, this insider status may have also resulted in some teachers feeling more comfortable when interacting with me as opposed to an outside researcher.

I also have a long experience working with diverse students in various school settings and have participated in multiple PL opportunities prior to designing this research study. My long-term passion for CSP and having a strong opinion about the value of racial and cultural diversity in school settings may have led to compromises in my ability to collect data and report findings in an objective and non-judgmental manner. Although data collection was convenient when conducting the study in my district, problems of reporting data that were biased or incomplete may have arisen due to my positionality. As a researcher who was aware and open about revealing my own biases, I disclosed and monitored them to the best of my knowledge. I conducted member checks and consulted with my dissertation committee to minimize personal bias. As a research instrument, I also co-created meaning with the participants regarding the phenomena of interest, and they participated in the interpretation of collected data.

I took several steps to ensure that my study met the requirements and respects anticipated ethical concerns. Prior to the data collection, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board to protect the rights of the participants. I also gained entry to the setting and secured administrative permission to study the participants. I sought the approval of the district superintendent who provided access to the site and permitted the research to be conducted. I developed a brief proposal that addressed my rationale for choosing the site, description of the activities occurring during the research study, and the methods of reporting the results.

After gaining the approval of the district authorities to access the site, I selected the participants in the process of purposeful sampling followed by snowball sampling, which allowed me to collect data on factors that influence how teachers enact CSP in racially,

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culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. I selected my participants from a group of 11 educators who had participated in Level 2 Cultural Proficiency Training and whom I asked to recommend other teachers dedicated to CSP, this way ensuring an information-rich group of individuals. I informed the participants in writing of the purpose of the study and confidentiality that protected them from possible consequences of sharing their private thoughts and observations. I asked the participants' consent to be involved in the study. After receiving their consent, I informed the participants that they may withdraw from the study for any reason and at any time, without any consequence.

I then collected data during semi-structured interviews and classroom visits, digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews, took field notes, wrote memos, and analyzed data in search for themes. I conducted member checks to ensure the consistency of my notes with the perceived intentions of the researched. In the final step of the research process, I reported the findings. Although my positionality may have played a role in the research process, I made every effort to remain objective and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, conducted a trustworthy case study.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teachers' perceptions of their ability and preparedness to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment. My research helps to make sense of how teachers perceive their successes and challenges, and how the administration supports them in the process of acquiring CSP.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process included setting the boundaries for the study; collecting information through semi-structured interviews, classroom visits, and lesson plan analysis; and

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designing a protocol for recording information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When approaching events with a researcher's frame of mind, even ordinary events may become significant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, during the data collection process, I rigorously and systematically recorded the data and checked them for accuracy. I established a protocol for organizing my data and adhered to it to avoid confusion.

Gaining Access to School Sites and Participants

I presented a brief proposal that addressed my rationale for choosing the site, description of the activities occurring during the research study, and the methods of reporting the results. I presented the proposal to the district authorities (who provided access to the site) and sought their approval.

Selecting Sites and Participants

Merriam (2009) recommended that a qualitative researcher choose to study participants using the purposeful sampling strategy based on the assumption that individuals selected by this method will best allow the investigator to discover, understand, and gain insight into the phenomenon under study. Purposeful sampling focuses first on the problem area, which in my case study was what happens to teachers during the process of personal learning and professional learning that turns them into culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogues. I began my research with the theoretical framework of CSP and analyzed the processes teachers report on as dependent on the theoretical framework. I purposefully selected individuals for the research study to identify the ones who would most effectively help me understand the problem and answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling allowed for selecting information-rich individuals to inform me on their perceptions of working in a diverse classroom. The unit of analysis in my case study were diverse teachers from different content areas. To begin the

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process of purposeful sampling, I created the list of characteristics I expected from my sample and then searched for a unit that matched my list. One of the characteristics I looked for was that the teacher is tenured in the district, which means that he or she has been the district's employee for three or more years. The reason for choosing tenured teachers is that they are more secure in their positions and, therefore, may feel more comfortable to voice their opinions and ensure more honest responses. I initially invited a group of 11 teachers who were participating in Level 2 Cultural Proficiency Training offered by the district. Their voluntary participation in this PL program may have been an indicator of their commitment to CSP. I then used the snowball sampling strategy and asked each of the 11 teachers to recommend another teacher employed by the district who, according to their knowledge and belief, was also committed to issues of diversity and CSP. In this process of purposeful and snowball sampling, I selected a group of 15 participants instead of expected 20-22 because not all teachers responded to my invitation to participate in the study.

One of the main criteria for participant selection was the willingness of teachers to participate in the study. I approached the pre-selected teachers and inquired about their willingness to participate in my study. I followed up with an email that confirmed the purpose of my study and my interest in working with the pre-selected individuals. Seven out of the 11 participants positively responded to my invitation and they recommended other teachers who met the criteria for participation. After having selected my sample, I requested the teachers' consent to participate in face-to-face interviews and classroom visits. I was not compelled to look for additional participants because the data collected from the first group answered my research questions, and none of the participants decided to withdraw from the study.

In-Depth Interviews

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After gaining the approval of the district authorities to access the site, I began data collection by scheduling the semi-structured interviews to access the participants' perceptions. The interview protocol (Appendix A) includes main questions and probes. It is organized thematically into seven sections and aligned with my research questions. The introductory part is followed by two sections where the participants were asked to define diversity and further describe diversity in their classrooms. The next sections of the interview protocol included questions on the curriculum and instruction, district and school level attitudes on diversity, and professional development. The section on teachers' challenges and successes with diversity concluded the interview protocol.

I intended the interviews to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. If the participants were unavailable after school, I hoped to be able to interview them during their free period. I set this particular time limit to the interviews to accommodate the participants and minimize the investment of time the teachers would have to make to participate in the study, and, by doing so, increase their willingness to participate. Some interviews were conducted during the teachers' free period while others consented to interviews at alternative times because the interviews could not be arranged during the teachers' free period. I conducted the interviews in places convenient to the teacher and myself, such as in an empty classroom. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that the researcher study the individuals in their natural setting where they feel most comfortable and act most naturally; therefore, a classroom seemed to be an appropriate location. However, if a participant suggested another location, like a coffee shop, I made every attempt to respect his or her choice.

Some interviews were conducted face to face and involved unstructured and generally open-ended questions intended to gain perceptions and opinions from the participants. During

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school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I resorted to Zoom interviews with the participants whom I was unable to interview face to face. I adhered to the interview protocol (Appendix A) but also asked additional questions or probes to elicit deeper responses. I properly documented data and initially analyzed them for themes to determine questions for the additional interviews if needed. I obtained the participants' consent to digitally record the interviews. I utilized the Voice Memos app on my cell phone to record the interviews. I also took notes during the interviews as a backup. The interviews allowed me the opportunity to have a first-hand experience with the participant and record information as it occurred. The interview protocol (Appendix A) helped me to have control over the line of questioning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, I also allowed the participant to occasionally stray from the question and provide additional information that I did not anticipate prior to the interview.

During the interviews, I hoped to build a relationship and gain the teachers' trust. Therefore, the classroom visits were scheduled after the interviews to maximize the level of comfort the teacher felt when being observed. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed soon after it was done. I transcribed the interview before the classroom visit so I could have a better understanding of the relationship between the reported and observed classroom practices.

The process of data analysis and searching for themes began while the data were being collected and they were still fresh in my mind. Based on the initial data analysis, additional questions were formulated and I asked the participants' consent to conduct an additional interview for the purposes of answering the additional questions to support the findings of how teachers enact CSP and integrate it into their racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. After I concluded recording and transcribing the interviews, I created a table

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summarizing what teachers said during the interviews and then began the classroom visits to document what teachers did in terms of enacting CSP in their classrooms.

Classroom Visits

I collected multiple forms of data to ensure triangulation and examine the phenomenon under study from multiple perspectives. Therefore, I also spent a considerable amount of time in the teachers' natural setting, observing their classes during classroom visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had no personal access to the classroom but made arrangements to visit the teachers' virtual classrooms through Google Meet and Google Hangout. The classroom visits included taking field notes on the behaviors and activities of the participating teachers at the research site. I used an observation protocol (Appendix B) that was directly related to my topic and answered my research questions.

During my classroom visits, I looked for patterns and themes across the collected data and used the CSP framework as my lens. I did not evaluate the students' work but searched for evidence of teachers using CSP. I conducted a classroom visit and took field notes to record the physical setting and the appearance and behaviors of the teachers. I particularly focused on the inside of the classroom, its physical arrangement and student seating, language supports, and educational posters. I also focused on the teachers' ability to integrate CSP, which included instructional planning and presentation and how curriculum goals reflected racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students' perspectives. I observed how teachers drew on the cultural capital of their students, instructional practices, and in-class and homework assignments. In addition, I observed the presence or absence of differentiation strategies to support diverse learners. These strategies include visual, oral, and hands-on instruction, discussions to invite differing opinions and multiple perspectives, and including all students into the learning process.

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During my visits, it was of great importance to observe the classroom discourse as well as the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the teachers. The visit allowed me to get a general sense of the physical setting and of people's activities and behaviors. I scheduled a second visit when needed, to fill the gaps in my report from the first visit.

I recorded my field notes in a semi-structured way by using a thematic chart for all activities at the research site. The chart had a dividing line down the middle separating descriptive notes from reflective notes. Descriptive notes included notes on the portraits of the participants, the physical setting, dialogue and events, while reflective notes included my thoughts, feelings, impressions, suggestions for future observations, and questions (see Appendix B). Immediately after the visits, I wrote memos and conducted the initial analysis of the collected data. After the first visit, I took notes and wrote suggestions on what I would explore in more detail if another visit needed to be scheduled.

The process of data collection in a case study design was characterized by numerous ways of recording both the information coming from the participants and the reflections of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition to interviews and classroom visits, I kept a researcher journal reflecting on the findings throughout the data collection process. The journal served as a tool to build on the collected information and develop additional data collection strategies to ensure validity. The journal provided an opportunity to create additional questions and guidelines for the classroom visits. I continued to collect and analyze data until they reached saturation, which means that the themes started repeating themselves in multiple interviews and classroom visits, and I had ample data to report the findings on how teachers enact CSP and how they integrate it into their diverse classrooms for the benefit of all students. This concluded the data collection process.

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Data Analysis Plan

The process of data analysis involves exploring the collected information and moving deeper into understanding what it means. Creswell and Creswell (2018) compared it to peeling back the layers of an onion and getting an overall detailed picture only after getting to the center. Merriam (2009) claimed that data collection and data analysis must occur simultaneously. Therefore, as soon as the fieldwork began, I arranged field notes, interview transcripts, and other materials into manageable units and synthesized them in search of what was important and what contributed to answering my research questions. I had the audio recordings transcribed verbatim on Rev.com and I continuously reviewed my field notes, the transcriptions, and my researcher journal entries. The journal allowed me to systematically reflect on phenomena relevant to my study, document spontaneously occurring events, record my experiences, as well as begin to draft answers to my research questions.

I performed continuous personal and analytic reflection about the data and looked for possible themes, like interpretations of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity; types of PL that teachers have experienced; the role of PL in helping teachers integrate CSP; successes and challenges that teachers encounter or anticipate; and the role of administration in helping them enact CSP. The interpretation process and making sense of the collected materials took place to establish how the participants contributed to answering the research questions.

As the research progressed, I continued to screen the materials and develop analytic questions. My comments and memos regarding ideas generated during fieldwork accompanied the process of making sense out of the collected data. I used visual organizers in the form of charts and tables to help organize my data. At the same time, I continued to review newly

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emerging related literature to enhance the data analysis and my process of answering the research questions based on teachers' perceptions as well as past and present experiences.

The search for data regularities and irregularities (disconfirming evidence) began the coding process. Finding words, phrases, patterns, topics, and behaviors that repeat themselves or stand out led to identifying coding categories. I began coding data as soon as I started collecting them. I wrote down words or phrases that represented patterns. The next step involved coding data into a coding software. I utilized Dedoose, an online qualitative analysis software program, which helped me identify meaningful data chunks; retrieve them; and isolate, group, and regroup them for analysis. The data analysis process allowed me to classify the information regarding the persons, places, and events, and make sense of the properties that describe them.

Trustworthiness

I addressed the topics of validity and reliability in the process of designing the study to determine its accuracy and credibility, or trustworthiness (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Reliability in qualitative research means that there is consistency between the collected and reported data and the studied context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative researchers ensure reliability by collecting data that are consistent with the setting under study, not necessarily consistent across observations by different people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). One characteristic of a qualitative researcher is the responsibility to keep detailed records of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I ensured the accuracy of my description of the research site and participants by keeping rigorous field notes and recording them carefully for accuracy. Recording data in an objective and nonjudgmental way also added to the validity of the study. I continuously conducted checks with my literature review and continued to read more on the topic that I was studying. The existing

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and emerging literature provided the framework and clues to guide my study and place my findings in context.

I attempted to eliminate any threats to validity that may have resulted from the observer effect. Although I conducted the study with the hope of getting honest responses from the teachers during interviews, there was a threat that the interview may have caused teachers to provide responses they thought I wanted to hear. The observer effect may also have become a threat to validity during classroom visits and may have caused the people being studied to change their behavior as a result of my presence.

Qualitative research requires that the researchers take notes of everything they do and consistently check for the accuracy of their collected data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). They provide very detailed, thick descriptions, including how they control their own opinions and values to avoid bias, by including their own agenda in the conclusions. Thick description refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 2004). I carefully checked my transcripts to ensure that they do not contain errors made during the process of transcribing. I also compared data with the established codes as well as reviewed codes and their definitions. I checked for the consistency of using the same codes for the passages with similar content in the transcripts.

I used multiple strategies to enhance the accuracy of my findings with the goal of convincing the reader that they are accurate. One of them was triangulation, examining evidence from multiple perspectives, and creating a consistent explanation for themes. I conducted member checks with 15 teachers throughout the process of data collection and presented the summary of coded data to them for accuracy. I asked the participants for a follow-up meeting

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and gave them an opportunity to comment on the data. I also included disconfirming evidence and anomalies from the data and reported why they did not help me answer my research questions. By presenting contradictory evidence, I ensured that my study is more realistic and valid.

My positionality as a researcher may have also been a threat to validity and, therefore, it needs to be addressed and taken into consideration as an important factor in my research study. Since I bring in my opinions, educational background, experiences, and biases into the study—described in detail in the section on the role of the researcher—I conducted self-reflection and remained honest about my positionality, with the hope that my honesty resonated with the readers. I continued to check in with the members of my dissertation committee and discussed bias recognition with them. As a qualitative researcher, I ensured the study's trustworthiness and reliability in several ways to deliver an honest and convincing narrative to the reader.

Generalizability

The question of generalizability in qualitative research arises regarding the ability for the data to hold up beyond the specific subjects involved in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My intention was not to generalize findings to individuals who did not participate in the study. Therefore, I did not make assumptions that my findings hold true for other teachers who work in diverse classrooms but were not selected for my study or for those teachers who display similar behaviors in different locations.

Yin (2003) noted that that a qualitative research study can be generalized to a theory and not to a larger population. Studying the literature on my topic before conducting the study and reviewing it throughout the whole process allowed me to examine my cases and generalize them to the findings of previous studies. It does not mean that all teachers who work with diverse

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students behave in the same way as teachers in my study. Therefore, the goal of my study was to add knowledge to the topic of how teachers in the specific context perceive their ability and preparedness to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment. Through systematic analysis of teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges, I attempted to discover how my research participants enact CSP and what contributes to their challenges and successes.

Limitations

I confronted several limitations in the process of conducting research. A significant limitation arose from the fact that I collected data only in a single district. Although I intended to select a diverse group of participants in purposeful sampling, I was not able to get a more diverse group of teachers due to the fact that faculty members are predominantly White. My presence may have been an interference during class activities, as I may have been perceived as intrusive and altered the behaviors of the individuals present at the site of observation. I may have not had an adequate attention span and several things may have escaped my attention during observations. Also, the behavior of the participants during interviews may have changed as a result of my presence.

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic presented the need for an adjustment since teachers were not available to conduct face-to-face interviews. I was compelled to adjust my data collection process and instead of face-to-face interviews, I conducted Zoom interviews and accepted teachers' invitations to observe their classes on Google Meet and Google Hangouts. I also asked the teachers to share their lesson plans with me if virtual classroom visits could not be scheduled.

Ethical Considerations

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As a researcher, I have an obligation to respect the rights, desires, needs, and values of the participants. During the process of interviews, participants share their personal opinions, and at times, they may feel vulnerable when exposing sensitive information regarding their experiences. Observations invade the life of the participants and their students. A participant's vulnerability plays a significant role when his or her position and institution are highly visible and exposed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I addressed several ethical considerations to protect the participants' rights. I articulated the objectives of the study to the participants verbally and in writing prior to the commencement of the research. I informed the participants that my research was about how teachers interpret racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity; how they perceive the successes and challenges resulting from diversity in the classroom; and the specific practices that they use to integrate CSP into their teaching. I ensured that the participants clearly understood both the research objectives and how the data would be used. I obtained a written consent from the participants to proceed with the study. I also ensured the participants' right to confidentiality, and the participants had the right to withdraw from the study for any reason at any time.

Conclusion

The body of literature on topics related to racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity points to a gap in research on factors that shape secondary teachers' ability and preparedness to integrate CSP into a diverse classroom environment. A case study design allowed me to better understand the processes that shape teachers' perceptions and practices, particularly in a district with changing demographics. I employed qualitative methods and interpreted the findings by co-constructing the data with the participants. My findings are generalizable to the theory of CSP, which establishes that public schools have a responsibility to honor the diversity of their students

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and help young people develop critical-thinking skills and responsibility to be engaged citizens in a democratic society. In Chapter 4, I report the findings of my study.

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Chapter 4: Overview of Findings

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected during my qualitative case study on how secondary teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, successes, and challenges with educating diverse high school students. With an increasingly diverse student population in U.S. public schools, there has been a pertinent need for teachers to enact CSP when educating children from diverse backgrounds (NYSED, 2019; Paris, 2012). Paris described CSP as an asset-based approach that builds on the cultural capital of diverse communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students. The body of literature discussed in Chapter 2 documented the need for integrating CSP in diverse classrooms to enhance student learning. Following the principles of CSP, educators can create a teaching model that builds on diverse students' knowledge, experiences, skills, values, and perspectives, develops students' critical thinking, and prepares them for engaged citizenry. Teachers can use the CSP model to guide curriculum development and challenge racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices.

The 15 teachers who chose to participate in this dissertation consented to in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom visits, and sharing of lesson plans. The racial background of the teachers was 11 White, 2 Black, 1 Latina, and 1 Asian. Out of the 15 teachers, 9 were female and 6 were male teachers. Two of the teachers were born outside of the United States. Interviews were audio-taped, lasted 60-90 minutes, and were conducted face to face or via Zoom from February 2020 to May 2020. Approximately one to two 40-minute classroom visits occurred in each of 15 teachers' classrooms before the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close.

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This chapter is divided into three parts that coincide with the three major findings of this study. Part 1 details perceptions of diversity as a multifaceted and evolving educational construct. It includes the findings about teachers' conceptions of diversity, which for some dismissed the importance of race, how they defined it broadly in the school, and then narrowed it down through the lens of their classroom. In addition, Part 1 discusses the significance of recognizing the benefits of racial, cultural, linguistic, and other types of diversity in the classroom, an important first step for teachers who enact CSP, and the role of different stakeholders in shaping the perceptions of diversity in a school setting.

Part 2 provides the analysis of the factors leading to the development of CSP. These factors include (a) personal background and lived experiences, (b) pre-service teacher training, and (c) in-service PL that teachers are exposed to within and outside of the district. The cross-cutting theme of color evasiveness was widely repeated throughout this part. The findings have shown a strong connection between the family values of acceptance of racial and cultural differences and the participants' passion for embracing diversity. The findings also revealed how pre-service teacher preparation programs did not adequately prepare teachers for working in a diverse classroom. It was the actual classroom experience that made teachers aware of diversity and the need to find an approach to support diverse students. Finally, the findings have shown that teachers' attitudes toward diverse students had evolved as a result of PL, which helped them examine their own biases and learn useful strategies to be successful in a diverse classroom.

In Part 3 of the chapter, I present findings on how the teachers develop CSP curricula and to what extent diversity themes are present in the curriculum. The findings for this section came from the interviews and classroom visits that illustrated culturally sustaining instructional practices, as well as the analysis of lesson plans shared with me by the participants. I also

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provide an analysis of findings regarding reported and observed instances of CSP in the classroom that were manifested in instructional practices. These examples of CSP are illustrated by teachers' personal stories regarding successes and challenges of working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students in secondary classrooms. The responses of teachers participating in this study and their practices observed during classroom visits serve as the foundation upon which I based the responses to the research questions.

A cross-cutting theme that emerged from the data was how implicit bias and color evasiveness are important factors in shaping attitudes towards diversity. Teachers in the sample believed implicit biases must be addressed because otherwise they may hinder other teachers' ability to implement CSP. Yet, some of the teachers' responses revealed that they also held biased and color-evasive views of their students of color, showing that CSP is an ongoing process of discovery in search of the best pedagogical approaches.

Data Analysis

In the following section, I explain how I developed the codes, categories, and themes included in the Coding Table (See Table 1). Prior to recording the interviews, I had the key interview questions color-coded for different research questions the participants would help me answer. I identified several categories from research questions; for example: definitions of diversity, teachers' challenges and successes, PL, lived experiences, and role of administration. These categories resonated in my mind while I was talking to the participants, and these categories later turned into theory-driven and in-vivo codes in the transcripts (Saldana, 2016). I also identified categories related to CSP, such as building on funds of knowledge, civic engagement, or multicultural themes. The Coding Table became an illustration of my own

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thinking as themes emerged from the data. It also helped clarify the direction in which my participants' voices and the field notes written after the classroom visits were taking me.

I allowed the data to speak, rather than manipulate them to say what I wanted them to reveal. I read the first interview that I transcribed and began to code it for categories. Snyder (2012) described coding as the process of grouping participants' responses by similar ideas, concepts, or themes; therefore, as I read, I wrote notes in the margins of the interview transcripts, gradually labeling similarly themed statements with category names, such as the definition of diversity, personal background, PL, etc. One of the approaches to qualitative analysis exemplified the intuitive nature of this stage of the research and opened an avenue to interpretation by claiming that there are no right or wrong answers (Saldana, 2016). I trusted my intuition and allowed myself to enjoy the space that qualitative analysis leaves for interpretation. After coding the first interview transcript, I coded the field notes taken during a classroom visit with the same participant, looking for comments regarding the presence of multicultural themes and CSP. This conversation with the data became the stage of open coding.

During open coding, I constantly reflected on the themes that emerged from my literature review. I went back to my literature review and jotted down the headings, making them into theory-generated codes. A few of them, for example, overlapped with the codes that emerged from my interview transcripts: perceptions of diversity, significance of diversity in the classroom, implicit bias, experiences with diversity, role of the administration, PL, and CSP. Next, I reviewed the list of codes generated during open coding of the interview transcripts and organized them into categories in the process of axial coding. My goal was to create categories that reflected a recurring pattern that cut across the data. I created categories and subcategories, grouping the codes into meaningful segments. After creating the categories, I entered them into

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the visual organizer that became my Coding Table. On the left side, I listed the categories derived from the interview transcripts and the literature review and grouped them according to common themes. After this was completed, I uploaded the list of categories into Dedoose, an online coding software program, and coded all of the collected data.

While conducting interviews, I noticed a clear pattern that emerged from the teachers' in-depth responses. I transcribed the first set of interviews myself without using a transcribing service. The last few interviews were sent to the transcribing service called Rev.com. No matter how time consuming, the time spent while transcribing was also the time spent on reflecting and searching for themes in the participants' responses. I had an opportunity to interact with the data, jot down questions for further clarification, and mentally ascribe codes to chunks of data before compiling my list of codes. The final step in the data analysis process was to create themes and subthemes, further reducing the number of codes and making a list that aided me in the creation of an outline. I read and re-read the data accumulated around the themes and subthemes until the findings started to emerge. At that point, I began the process of writing Chapter 4, following a previously created outline.

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Table 1*Coding Table*

In-Vivo Codes	Theory-Generated Codes	Main Findings
<p>Perceptions of Diversity</p> <p>Definition of Diversity Demographic Changes Benefits of Diversity Implicit Bias Shaping Perceptions of Diversity</p>	<p>Diversity as a Social and educational Construct Democratic Ideal Significance of Diversity in the Classroom Benefits of Diversity</p>	<p>Diversity is a multifaceted, evolving educational construct. All stakeholders are responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity. Administration has not looked at culture at the forefront of learning.</p>
<p>Professional Learning (PL)</p> <p>Personal Background Reasons for Career Choice Pre-service In-service Workshop Recommendations</p>	<p>Educators' Perceptions and Experiences with Diversity Personal Background Teacher Dispositions Implicit Bias Professional Learning Role of Administration</p>	<p>Connection between family values and the passion for diversity Color evasiveness, implicit and explicit bias Actual classroom experiences programs prepare teachers for diverse classrooms PL workshops help examine personal biases</p>
<p>Curriculum Development</p> <p>Curriculum Development Diversity Themes in Curriculum Instructional Practices</p>	<p>Diversity and the Curriculum Role of Administration</p>	<p>The curriculum provides a shell, but teachers have the ability to interpret it. Teachers have the power to infuse the curriculum with multicultural topics and perspectives.</p>
<p>Instructional Practices</p> <p>Successes Challenges Teacher Characteristics Advice for New Teachers</p>	<p>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Role of Teachers</p>	<p>Diversity only has significance in the classroom when teachers know how to utilize it. Using the students' background made lessons come to life. Teachers experience both successes and challenges.</p>

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Research Questions and Summary of Findings

This dissertation sought to answer research questions exploring how a diverse group of secondary teachers define diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process. It also aimed at making sense of how teachers perceive their ability and preparedness to translate the knowledge they have about diversity into culturally sustaining practices in a diverse classroom environment. I focused on teachers' dispositions, personal background, and lived experiences, as well as pre-service and in-service preparation and how the administration supports teachers (or not) in their CSP work. I also aimed to explore personal stories of success that pointed to the power of diversity in the classroom, as well as challenges teachers faced when working with diverse students. The findings revealed that the 15 teachers in my sample were information-rich individuals and provided valuable perspectives on working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students (see Table 2 for the list of participants broken down by name, gender, race, years of teaching experience, and current school).

Table 2*Characteristics of the 15 Participants*

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Race	Years of Teaching Experience	Subject in the current school
Adam	Male	Asian	11-15	English, Lafayette HS
Adana	Female	Latina	11-15	Elective ^a , Yorktown HS
Amina	Female	White	4-10	Language, Jefferson HS
Cathy	Female	White	30+	Social Studies, Cherry Hill HS
David	Male	Black	21-25	Science, Yorktown HS
Denise	Female	White	4-10	English, Lafayette HS
Howard	Male	White	4-10	Math, Margaretville HS
Konrad	Male	White	21-25	English, Cherry Hill HS
Lauren	Female	White	21-25	English, Yorktown HS
Martin	Male	White	16-20	Social Studies, Jefferson HS
Matias	Male	White	30+	Art, Jefferson HS
Melanie	Female	White	11-15	Math, Margaretville HS
Meriam	Female	White	16-20	Language, Yorktown HS

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Regina	Female	White	16-20	Art, Jefferson HS
Tatiana	Female	Black	16-20	Social Studies, Yorktown HS

a. An elective subject, unlike a core subject, is an optional subject of study.

The findings are presented in three parts. In Part 1, I review the participants' definitions of *diversity* as a multi-faceted and evolving educational concept. I also discuss their perceptions of the demographic changes in the district and their views on who is responsible for shaping attitudes toward diversity in the district. The findings pointed to all the stakeholders, including teachers, administration, guidance counselors, coaches, students, and parents as responsible in shaping perceptions of diversity in a school setting. The findings also demonstrated that although all 15 participants had a positive attitude toward diversity, several grappled with some aspects of diversity, such as linguistic diversity, and considered it a challenge. The findings displayed different levels of racial awareness and a range of CSP skills, as well as instances of implicit and explicit bias.

In Part 2, I explain the factors leading to the participants' preparedness to work in diverse classrooms. Most participants had not always been exposed to diversity when they were growing up. However, during the interviews, they discussed family values, interracial and intercultural friendships, and exposure to diversity in the place where they had grown up, which later helped them develop cultural awareness and sensitivity and led to perceived success in working with diverse students. When discussing their pre-service preparation, most participants expressed criticism regarding the insufficient number of courses and programs focused on racial and cultural awareness, especially in the case of teachers who had begun their teaching careers over 20 years ago. Several participants believed in the significant role of in-service PL within and outside of the district, which made them aware of their own biases and provided deeper awareness of racial and cultural issues. Voluntary participation in PL by teachers also provided helpful strategies to become more effective in a diverse classroom.

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In Part 3, I explain the findings related to how the participants developed their curricula and how their instructional practices demonstrated examples of CSP. The participants were able to share personal stories of successes and challenges when working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. They also shared numerous examples of lessons and strategies that may be helpful in training future culturally sensitive and sustaining pedagogues. These findings will be discussed in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

Part 1: Diversity as a Multifaceted, Evolving, and Educational Construct

Research on diversity as a social and educational construct describes how crucial it is for public schools to provide an opportunity for students to encounter people from a variety of backgrounds (Paris & Alim, 2014). Recognizing the value of diversity builds understanding of each other and helps move beyond simple tolerance to celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual (Bonner et al., 2017; Gurin et al., 2004; Samaan, 2000; Steffens et al., 2017). In Part 1, I start with teachers' definitions of diversity at the district, school, and classroom levels.

Definition of Diversity

When asked to define diversity in the classroom, all 15 participants agreed that it could be defined in many ways, and all agreed that diversity goes beyond differences in skin color. Diversity was described as a complex term with 25 different key words and phrases used in reference to student diversity in the participants' classrooms. Table 3 illustrates the key words elicited from the participants' responses, broken down by culture, race, academics, and personal diversity.

Table 3

Key Words and Phrases Used to Describe Student Diversity

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Cultural	Racial	Academic	Personal
cultural background	skin color	ability use	interest
language	Black	learning style	age
dietary restrictions	Brown	academic ability	opinions
frames of references	racial background	special needs	outlooks
cultural capital		learning level	gender
ethnic background			points of view
religion			experiences
nationality			inhibiting factors
cultural conflict			intelligence
			personality
			intellectual ability
			family structure
			political diversity

Most participants pointed out that diversity involved a variety of different types of people in a group. For example, they pointed to students of different cultural, racial, or linguistic backgrounds, as well as students of different academic abilities, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and even personality. Prompted by the demographic changes in the district, some participants, especially the ones who taught over 30 years, grappled with the increasing racial and linguistic diversity of the student population and how the definition of diversity was evolving because of those changes. Matias, a White art teacher, noted that his school, Jefferson High School, had been predominantly White for many years, and within the last two decades, he

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has become aware of the increasing diversity. He defined it as “having people who are from more than one ethnicity and more than one background.” Regina, also a White art teacher working at Jefferson High School, stated that diversity goes beyond skin color and added, “If I’m just merely looking at color, I would look at how many students of color I have, any shade, brown, black skin.” Noticing the linguistic diversity, Lauren, a White English teacher from Yorktown High School, pointed out, “Honestly, I think of cultural [diversity]. Linguistic, I suppose now because there’s such an emergence, an influx of students from other countries, different nationalities, experiences, points of view, so that’s definitely something I think about now.” These responses seem to be downplaying race as an important aspect of diversity and point to the fact that White students are not considered in teachers’ definitions of “diverse” students.

Although most responses reached beyond the definition of diversity as racial, cultural, and linguistic, those three terms were used most frequently and were often the ones the participants listed first before delving deeper into the other aspects of the word that are less visible. For example, a common aspect of diversity was socioeconomic status. When asked to define diversity, Amina, a White language teacher from Jefferson High School, previously employed at Yorktown High School, explained, “On the surface level, we can talk about differences in race and ethnic backgrounds, but there is also socioeconomic status. I think there’s also diversity in intelligence, intellectual ability, opinions, and even personality.” Martin, a White social studies teacher from Jefferson High School, added family structure and religion to the definition:

When you look at diversity, I think it breaks down to different socioeconomic status. I think of...families that have two parents versus families that have one, or none; maybe

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they're being raised by an aunt, uncle, or grandparent. We have different religious backgrounds, we have different cultural backgrounds. I think to just stop at skin color is a little bit too short. I think you have to look at the broader things that make our kids different.

Regina further explained that age and learning style should also be considered when she replied, "Diversity could mean the special needs of a student, it could be the range of even ages or maybe things that inhibit certain students, or require different instruction, or... to me, it just means a multitude of things." When sharing his definition, Adam, an Asian English teacher from Lafayette High School, proposed that diversity means "what students can contribute to their own learning." He explained his answer further by saying:

They come from such different backgrounds and upbringing and have so many different points of references that they can really tap into, so it's on a cultural level, it's on a learning level, on an aptitude level as well. Diversity has to be a more holistic term. I don't think we can just look at diversity as skin color, or basically different learning, multiple learning styles; it's just a combination of all those things.

The participants noticed that political diversity also plays a significant role in today's classroom because of the present political climate, the divides on the political and social scene, and targeting certain marginalized groups like immigrants or people of color. For example, Amina reminisced about a 7th-grade class where the students were from different backgrounds in terms of their families' political affiliations. She discussed political diversity in her classroom when she shared:

They were very vocal students, with different outlooks. One day we had to talk about labels, how people label each other, that labels aren't accurate all the time and kids

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started talking about political differences, disagreeing with each other, and that was new for me; I never experienced this kind of disagreement. They mentioned Trump and how he hates immigrants. I knew I wasn't supposed to take sides. One student refused to be called an immigrant, even though he was from a different country...I tried to moderate. You know, one voice at a time. It was tough.

Meriam, a White language teacher, added a perspective that points to conflict and occasional clashes in her classroom:

Diversity is not always pretty. There's cultural conflict sometimes. I have to put out fires that erupt between students. Someone makes an offensive comment behind my back, says something to another student in a language I don't understand. Once a student, he was White, was picking on a student from the same country but he had darker skin, so apparently lower social status.

Amina and Meriam's responses echoed the research on the vulnerability of diverse school settings in times of change, political instability, or social divide because schools often mirror tendencies present in society (Carter, 2015; Joseph & Duss, 2009, LeMaster & Hummel, 2018). The intensified public discourse about race and racial justice makes educators responsible for addressing the themes related to racism, prejudices, and biases, which apparently not all teachers are ready or willing to do, as I discuss next.

Implicit Bias and Stereotype Threat

Several research studies highlighted teachers' perception of diversity as a challenge (Gay, 2012, 2013; Goldenberg, 2013; Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). While some participants pointed to the significance and power of diversity in their classroom, the presence of implicit bias or stereotyping was also revealed in their own thinking, other teachers'

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beliefs, and in each school's policies and culture. Research suggested that diverse groups are often seen and appraised from the perspective of one's own paradigm. Cultural differences between teachers and students may result in cultural discontinuity and can also be translated into a social-psychological distance. Research suggested that implicit bias, prejudice, and lack of willingness to recognize multiple perspectives often lead to stereotype threat (Blair, 2002; Fiarman, 2016; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983). Steele (2010) discussed how stereotype threat may negatively affect student performance when students who feel disconnected from their teachers are at risk of confirming negative stereotypes that exist about their cultural group.

All of the participants referred to implicit bias and stereotype threat during the interviews, regardless of the absence of a direct question to address these issues in the interview protocol. They may not have used the terms "implicit bias," and "stereotype threat," but clearly referred to attitudes and behaviors that played a significant role in the way the demographic changes and students of color were perceived. Most expressed the need for adjusting school practices based on the influx of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, and shared how they did not think those practices were always aligned with the new situation.

Some teachers commented on biases they had observed in other members of the school community and revealed their awareness of how those biases affected people's attitudes toward diversity, or certain school policies, including racialized tracking in AP classes, or recognizing cultural celebrations. Cathy spoke about a lack of sensitivity and willingness to change in some educators who started their careers 20 or more years before, when they were trained to focus on the curriculum and hold all students to the same standards, without providing the extra support to the ones that needed it. When talking about cultural awareness, she said:

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There's a whole segment of the faculty that are not open to it and they definitely need to be exposed to it. And I'm not sure the best way to do it because some people seem so set in stone that nothing will ever change their mindset. It means when you hire, administrators have to be looking for people with that perspective, with that point of view because people who are set in their ways, I don't know if you're going to change them. I think you might have to wait for them to leave. And then you'll have much more success with the younger people that you bring in. Make sure that you bring in people that have an open mindset, a growth mindset, not a fixed mindset.

A few teachers in the sample also revealed a tendency to perceive certain ethnic groups in terms of stereotypes and categories. They revealed implicit bias and cultural deprivation theory, blaming students' culture for behavior and learning differences (Fowler, 1998). For example, Melanie worked in several schools in the district and reported that she noticed certain patterns among the populations throughout the years of her teaching career. She talked about Margaretville High School where she had many Haitian and Jamaican students, with a few Spanish students, and they were "very involved, very open, and very outspoken." She concluded there were a lot of behavior issues in that school "because of the way the students were treated at home and they would bring that into the classroom." At Jefferson High School, a school that is predominantly White, "with English speakers coming from American families, and only little pockets of differences," Melanie "did not have any behavior issues." She went on to explain:

Those kids are great. They do their work. Other kids know their parents don't care, so they do whatever they want. So, if I have Spanish students, their parents are tough on them, so they know they have to act right in the classroom. And there are Italian kids who just do whatever they want.

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The issues of implicit bias and stereotype threat were addressed a few times during the interviews when the participants discussed tracking and the student demographic makeup of the AP classes. As those classes remain predominantly White and Asian, the participants reported that administration is trying to ensure that Black and Latinx who had often been overlooked get recommended for AP classes. Cathy spoke excitedly about including more students of color in AP classes. She said:

A kid might not be getting a 95, but if you see that they have the aptitude, or the interest—and sometimes interest is all they need—you have that conversation with them: ‘Hey, have you ever thought of taking an AP class?’ and the fact that you ask them, you see the spark in their eyes; to them, it’s such a profound compliment. So, I think sometimes we just have to stop judging the kid by the number. Do they have interactions in class, do they show that interest? Because if they think you believe they can succeed, they will succeed. They’ll rise to the challenge.

The above reflections from the participants’ work environment demonstrated the tendencies often present in the U.S. educational system, which continuously provide advantages for White and wealthy students while perpetuating disadvantages for students of color from low socio-economic backgrounds (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Kozol, 2005, 2012; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012). Burris (2010) also pointed out that, on the national scale, achieving educational equity has been both elusive and complex. As a result, schools are becoming not less but more segregated because of tracking, and the nation has witnessed the resegregation and racial isolation of Black and Latinx students from White students inside school walls. Although the district has made a concerted effort to close the gap between privileged and

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marginalized groups, the responses pointed to an existing imbalance between White and Asian, and Black and Latinx students in AP classes.

Being aware of the influx of students of more diverse backgrounds in their classrooms, 6 out of 15 participants revealed other areas where the district could embrace diverse students' cultural identity in the school community. Those participants believed that one area the schools might need to improve is recognizing holidays other than the ones celebrated by the dominant White population. "If the school has a hallway decorating contest, instead of all Christmas theme, they could really do a winter theme instead. To me that always seems a little insensitive," Cathy reflected. Another participant, Adam, shared that the administration in his school "hasn't really looked at culture at the forefront of learning. They haven't emphasized it, they haven't placed enough focus on it, and they're not acknowledging our students as much as they should for what they bring to the table from a cultural lens." Adam went on to reflect that the hallways did not celebrate the cultures in the building:

Even when walking into the building, what do you see? You see a suburban high school. I don't think that we're like: 'Oh, this is the school where half of the population is actually from an Asian cultural background.' You don't see it; you just don't see it. It's not visible in the hallway, it's not visible in the school calendar, it's not visible in our announcements; daily, throughout the day, you don't see that.

Since the district has experienced an influx of Muslim students, three of the participants felt it was important to highlight the students' efforts to receive the school board's approval and have Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan included on the school calendar so the students would be allowed to have a celebration with their families and not incur an absence. The participants considered this action a major contradiction of what the district was trying to achieve in terms of

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cultural sensitivity, and they found it upsetting. Regina talked about how the students had been fighting this for years:

They've been going to the board of education meetings, they've been talking, they've had petitions, etc. and it's a holiday for them just as for a Catholic person Christmas would be their holiday. And they fast for 40 days, they don't listen to music for 40 days, they go into deep prayer for 40 days and the last day, which is their celebration, is when they can finally listen to music and have a feast. They visit their family, and they've only asked for this one day off.

Regina shared how just recently one of her students "went to the board meeting and spoke eloquently," and said to the entire board of education:

How can I matter if you ignore me? I walk around in my school and I'm different. I look different, I'm treated different, and now you're telling me I cannot have this day off, as if my holiday, or my belief, or my religion does not matter to you.

Regina expressed how disappointed she was and she believed granting the students' wish, especially that they had been trying to be heard for years, could have meant: "We are listening, we do care, and you're not invisible." She concluded with indignation that the president of the board of education "was rolling his eyes, actually rolling his eyes while the girl was speaking to further insult these Muslim students." Cathy wondered if it was even constitutional "to violate the 'neither advance nor inhibit' rule by the court if you put some religious holidays on the calendar, and then deny a group their most important religious holiday." She gave an example of schools, including Catholic schools that try to show respect for all religions by eliminating the spring break around Easter and just randomly assigning it in March or April. She concluded,

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“It’s shocking how a public school system doesn’t even see that it could be a constitutional question. It’s disappointing that they don’t see how contradicting it is.”

In addition to the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, the participants reported other underlying issues and inequities in their schools. Adam believed that neighboring urban high school districts are far ahead of his district when it comes to cultural responsiveness. He pointed out that “suburban high schools in particular are lacking and they are a little late to the game.” Regina confirmed Adam’s statement by saying, “I don’t think we’re as welcoming as we could be. I don’t even know if there’re enough clubs that include students of color and ELLs.” Denise also noticed a lack of cultural awareness among members of the school community. She mentioned that some people may be more open to discussing race and multicultural topics, but she noticed the resistance in others who, as she described, “have no desire to really touch these subjects with a 10-foot pole.” Most teachers agreed that their schools and the community, although making an attempt, had not really embraced the demographic changes and they did not think the district was doing enough to address the needs of the increasing population of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students.

Shaping Perceptions of Diversity

In their responses to the interview questions, the participants wondered who in the school community is responsible for shaping the perceptions of diversity and who has a crucial role in promoting inclusive practices. The findings show that teachers believe all stakeholders, including teachers, administration, guidance counselors, coaches, students, and parents are responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity in the school community. The findings pointed to teachers having a lot of power in highlighting the benefits in the classroom. An important finding also emerged that although the administration had been making efforts to prepare the school

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community and embrace the growing diversity, their efforts felt half-hearted and inadequate to the needs of the district.

Teachers. Research has pointed to a significant role of classroom teachers in the process of shaping perceptions of diversity and illustrated how the role of American educators had expanded beyond providing academic support for their students (Huang & Cornell, 2019; LeMaster & Hummel, 2018; Sondel et al., 2018). Educators are expected to be guardians of democracy and cultivators of public schools' mission to uphold democratic ideas (Stitzlein, 2012). In alignment with research studies, most participants also highlighted the role of teachers in shaping a positive perception of diversity. Amina commented:

Teachers can do much to address the diverse students in their classroom. They should not assume that all students understand cultural terms—holidays, famous people, foods, songs, games. Categories or topics that might cause confusion should be fully explored together. I think if a teacher took the time and care to do this, his or her students from different backgrounds would appreciate this. I also believe that teachers should facilitate student interaction. I don't think different types of students naturally gravitate towards each other. They probably need a little push.

Amina's comment demonstrated that it is the teachers' responsibility to build on the students' culturally developed funds of knowledge and integrate them into classroom activities, which will create a richer and more socially just learning environment (Moll, 1992). It is also the teachers' responsibility to create an environment where students can develop agency as citizens in a democracy. By participating in discussions between representatives from groups that do not normally interact, students learn to challenge bigotry and acquire tools for democratic citizenship (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014).

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Being aware of the influx of linguistically diverse students, teachers became aware of having to address their needs. Tatiana defined the need for educators to be positive and boost the self-esteem of ELLs. She went on to clarify:

They're coming to a country that they know nothing about and they're not speaking the same language. So, the educator has to take an interest in these students, not ignore them. And they have to boost their confidence level, give these students tasks that they know they can complete.

The theme of teachers' responsibility was also repeated in Melanie's response. She believed that "if the teacher has a mindset that everybody should be treated equally, regardless of where the person came from, or what they have, it makes the class more comfortable." She added that the teacher is the one who is in front of the students every day, so if the teacher does not show the students that he or she is welcoming, the students will feel that. Melanie also believed relationships played a significant role in making students feel welcomed. She shared that students often tell her they "do not like teachers because teachers do not care," and added, "So, if they find a teacher who actually cares, they look at school differently. It's just that one person that makes a difference." Being aware that "the teacher has the steering wheel in the classroom," David felt teachers should always put the students' needs in the forefront. He concluded:

When it's all said and done, what we do in a school, district, building, classroom, is supposed to be to the benefit of our students. And comfort should be synonymous with learning. The more comfortable I am, the more I can identify with what I'm hearing, seeing; it opens me up to the information.

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Matias reiterated David's point when he spoke about the teachers' need to model the behavior that they hope students will adopt. He went on to clarify:

I think teachers need to model understanding and patience, and the thing they need to do is to make the extra effort. If that's your style and if you have that ability to let your guard down with your students a little bit in the name of some good humor while you're teaching, it all has to be accessible to these kids; teachers need to model that.

Two of the participants believed it gave them a sense of power and a great sense of responsibility to be a classroom teacher. Meriam observed that in the earlier times of her career, she used to think of herself as "just a teacher." She was not sure how she could change the structures that created divisions between privileged and marginalized groups. She did not think her voice was strong enough to be heard by "the more prominent stakeholders, like the building or district administration, the school board, or the state authorities." Now she is convinced that she has a mission in the classroom to promote diversity because she is a teacher. She feels teachers have a lot of power in the classroom. She does not want her school to perpetuate what is going on in the media and on the political scene, so she does not want her students to be embarrassed because they have an accent or because they get free lunch. "If I see somebody being picked on, I stop the lesson and explain why it is inappropriate, how we should make everybody feel welcomed, how hurtful it can be, how bullying is unacceptable in my classroom." Meriam added a perspective on how teachers are responsible for addressing conflicts when they occur in the classroom: "Taking small steps, avoiding confrontations, giving opportunities for students to talk it out, giving them some exposure to the topic, and always having a discussion." Then she added with a smile, "When the smoke clears, they're usually all friends." Matias felt having this kind of power to shape attitudes and instill positive perceptions of diversity in the

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young minds “is a source of pride for us, but also a source of humility because we sometimes forget that we have that ability.”

The above comments demonstrated the power teachers felt they had in the process of creating a positive environment and maximizing learning opportunities for diverse students. These findings are supported by the theoretical framework of CSP, which offers a student-centered, not a teacher-centered, pedagogical approach (Paris, 2012). They are also supported by research studies that highlighted the teachers’ role in embracing diversity in the classroom (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013). The interviews with the participants confirmed that teachers lead their students to a broader sharing of experiences, to understanding new issues and perspectives, to in-depth discussions of racial and ethnic matters, and to increasing their ability to examine personal biases. While 9 out of 15 participants shared the perspective that teachers are number one in shaping the perceptions of diversity in their buildings because they have the most intimate relationship with the students, they also pointed out that this is not a task they can perform alone.

Administration. The participants clearly communicated that teachers are not the only stakeholders who shape the perceptions of diversity in a school setting. Thirteen out of 15 participants pointed to the importance of the administration in this process as well. Konrad believed that administration plays a crucial role because they set the standard for the rest of the school. By acting and interacting in certain ways, the administration creates models for teachers and students who will be prone to follow these models, knowing they come from a higher authority. Konrad also believed the administration in his building celebrates diversity because “they celebrate all kinds of students, they celebrate all types of teachers, and the hiring process has been more reflective of our student body.” Tatiana added that if administration does not

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make it a priority to promote benefits resulting from diversity, “it trickles down to the educator, and educators are not going to make it a priority; if they see it’s not supported by the administration, they’re not going to.” Denise pointed out the administration needs to set the rules “in terms of things that will or will not be tolerated, in terms of behavior and comments, and the disciplinary aspect of it.” She also expressed her strong belief in the role of administration by saying:

The administration leads the way of what the building looks like. Are there ways in which the hallways can embrace student diversity, what are some of the things you hear over the loudspeaker, is there a way to incorporate linguistic diversity in the daily announcements that would reflect our very diverse population. I feel that if they even set that tone as to what is expected from teachers, even expecting for our lessons to be interdisciplinary, to be multicultural, just creating an environment in the building where it’s seen as an acceptable and an awesome thing. I think that would be incredibly helpful to building more of a community inside the school.

Efforts of the Administration to Promote Diversity. Six of the 13 participants who believed the administration is important in shaping attitudes toward diversity perceived their efforts in their school buildings as effective. Cathy observed the administration is definitely trying to make the AP classes more diverse. She considered it a concerted effort of the school to make sure that African American students, Latinx students, any students that have been overlooked, get recommended for AP classes. Cathy also observed how the administration is trying to train more teachers for cultural proficiency. In the objectives of the workshops that she was attending, there was an effort to develop cultural awareness among the school community members. The principal was very supportive of Cathy’s project, which has a purpose of “trying

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to find kids who have fallen through the cracks, trying to make the school a more welcoming place, and trying to help students find activities that they can join and friendships they can make.”

In an attempt to improve the overall atmosphere in their buildings, the administration promotes mindfulness and wellness programs that complement the cultural proficiency journey. Martin believed the administration in his building is very supportive of mental health awareness programs, which are also expected to deliver “a larger message to be nice to each other, to accept each other, and to understand that everyone has a story. You don’t know what someone is going through on a daily basis.” Describing the effective actions of the administrative efforts on students, Martin continued:

I think that’s trickled down to the kids. But I think it’s also on the minds of the teachers now that we’re not looking at 32 of the same kid in the class, that every kid has that story regardless of their race, religion, skin color. We need to treat kids more as individuals and we need to care about who they are as a person as well. That’s something that I think is very, very important. I think it comes from the top-down in our building, for sure.

David also noticed over the years that the administration had been conscious of diversity in a positive way. He thought it was something that “had been embraced from the top-down in here.” David continued, “There are certain times when music is played throughout the school building and it does cross all, maybe not all, but many, cultural barriers. And that would only happen when administration finds it to be a plus, in some way.”

One participant brought up the role of administration in solving issues resulting from implicit bias and stereotype threat. Melanie discussed how the administration in her school

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supported racially diverse students and helped resolve interracial or intercultural disputes

between teachers and students. She went on to explain:

There were some kids who were saying their teachers were racist and I would see it was addressed by the administration a lot at times. Teachers would get in trouble because they would say things they were inappropriate towards the Black students... The first time the notion came out with Black Lives Matter that all the kids wanted to discuss, how the Black children don't have privileges because they're Black, and they would always discuss that they get picked on because they're Black. They always discussed police officers, and Black people, how Black people were treated. If it dealt with racism, the diversity, then yes, the administration was supportive.

The role of the school administration was also discussed in terms of providing support to teachers who work with academically or linguistically diverse students. Two of the participants believed co-teachers in those classes played a significant role because the expertise of the co-teacher gave support to learners with special needs while the lead teacher focused on the content. Tatiana noted that since she had "a high number of ELLs" in her classes this year, she was given a co-teacher, which she thought was a sign that the administration realized she needed additional support to help students who were struggling with the curriculum. She also added, "I understand that it's going to cost money, but I think it all depends on whether the administration wants to put the money into that area. And I think they should since the population is growing." As much as Tatiana believed the role of the administration was to support teachers, she also claimed that teachers need to communicate their needs to the administration. She shared:

You cannot assume that administration knows what's going on. So, you really have to communicate your concerns, which I always do since I started. I've always

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communicated my concerns about certain challenges that I face. I never keep that to myself because I need the support.

Lauren also felt supported in terms of having co-teachers in her linguistically and academically diverse classes, but she criticized the administration for not allowing the same co-teachers to work together throughout the years: “I think it’s a great show to allow us to have co-teachers, but they don’t allow us to keep the same co-teachers so that we can have the relationship grow.” The participants understood that scheduling the same co-teachers to work together the following year might be difficult but not impossible, and they both expressed hope that this procedure would be done more effectively in the future. In sum, half of the participants who spoke about the importance of administration in shaping perceptions of diversity noticed the positive efforts that had been made in this direction. Even though the remaining six participants also agreed that the role of the administrations is crucial, they had a more critical view of what the administration had done so far to embrace diversity in their schools.

The Administration’s Efforts in Need of Improvement. While most participants discussed the importance of the administration in promoting diversity issues in their buildings, six participants thought that the administrative efforts needed improvement. Regina said that shaping attitudes toward diversity is “everybody’s job,” but she particularly pointed to the administration. Amina participated in several trainings with the focus on diversity and she believed that the administration would like to do more to address cultural proficiency. She had seen the topic brought up in staff meetings, but as she further clarified, “We’re in March and I don’t think we’ve talked about it for a few months. And actually, just the other day, I was thinking about how last year our principal tried to put together an event for the kids to share things about their culture. I haven’t heard anything about it yet, so I’m wondering if they’ll try

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again.” Lauren also believed that “they like to talk about it but I don’t think there’s anything implemented to show any real support.” Matias perceived the efforts of the administration to support linguistically diverse students as “somewhat inadequate.” He shared:

I think that a lot of times, students that aren’t speaking the language often get pushed or shoved aside because they may not be necessarily that involved with activities, and unless they become a discipline issue, I don’t really see administration getting directly involved as much. If you see the students who connect with administration on a more personal level, it’s almost always a particular type of student. I don’t know if our diverse students necessarily feel comfortable with administration per se as they would with their teachers.

In terms of supporting cultural proficiency efforts, Adam felt the administration was lacking in that aspect. He believed “that administration hasn’t really looked at culture at the forefront of learning. They haven’t emphasized it, they haven’t placed enough focus on it, and they’re not acknowledging our students as much as they should for what they bring to the table from a cultural lens.”

In sum, most participants agreed that it is the responsibility of the administration to set the tone and help shape positive perceptions of diversity present in their buildings. While some participants commended the administration for taking adequate steps to promote diversity in PL opportunities and diversifying AP courses, others felt the administration was encouraging and open to inclusive practices, but they had not acted or supported them. Indeed, there seemed to be a disconnect between administration’s beliefs in the importance of the roles that race and culture have in the educational process versus teachers’ perceptions of how these beliefs are put into action.

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Other Stakeholders. An important finding that emerged from the data was that teachers and administration were not the only essential elements in shaping attitudes toward diversity. Ten out of 15 participants agreed with Regina's statement, "I think it's everybody's job." Konrad further explained, "When I think of the school community, I think of all the stakeholders, who I value and I think are very important and attitudes toward diversity come from business people, parents, parishioners, students, adults, teachers, security guards, custodial staff." Martin added that several guidance counselors in his school building had taken an active interest in supporting diverse students. He went on to explain:

I've had very positive interactions with every guidance counselor in our school. Even now during this epidemic, there've been very few times where I've reached out to a guidance counselor and they said, 'Oh, I have no idea what's going on.' Generally, they're like, 'Oh, I just spoke to the kid yesterday, and so and so is happening or this happened.' Mom called me last week. The guidance counselors have been doing an amazing job. Our social worker, psychologists, they care about all kids. They're on top of what they do.

When asked the question of who shapes attitudes toward diversity in his building, Matias included the athletic coaches and believed a coach could be an outstanding mentor. Coaches provide a lot of great opportunities for social situations for the students who are diverse. Matias added that team mentality, becoming and being a part of a team, and modeling that acceptance was really important.

Two other participants, Adana and Denise, pointed to the students' responsibility for the tone of the school building. Adana pointed to student leaders, the ones in the student government, student council, clubs, and athletic teams, the students that the adults tend to rely on

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for their input. She shared that the role of students in setting the tone for the building could be really instrumental. Adana compared her experience working at the diverse Yorktown High School versus her previous school, Jefferson High School, which was predominantly White:

I think in the building where I am now, the students are very proud of themselves, of differences, I think they've been exposed to diversity longer; to them, it's just the norm, so there is a lot of celebration. I had a student at Jefferson, the older brother. He was Hindu of Guyanese descent. The brother was very shy about the religion, he was shy about the culture, he was shy about everything. I have the younger brother here and I think because of the environment where people, students are welcoming, more open, he's very proud of his food, religion, what he can and cannot eat, and he's very vocal. Now, that could be a difference in a person, but it could be the students that are making him comfortable, and the environment. I'm not sure, but it's something I've noticed. The students here seem to bring that out in each other.

Denise and David also believed that parents have an important influence on beliefs about diversity. Denise wondered if more parental involvement and more input from the community would also impact better outcomes in the form of acceptance and the celebration of diversity. She did not feel parents, especially parents of students of color, were considered part of the building. Since there was a lot of conversation in her building about the poorly attended PTA meetings, she was wondering if that was necessarily the result of parents not caring, or rather not being made aware that "they have a seat at the table." David confirmed Denise's statement about the role of parents and how family upbringing can be a key factor in how their children treat other people who may have different racial, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. David noted,

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“Certainly, everything must start at home; be it consciously or unconsciously, it’s going to start at home.”

While most participants shared the perspective that teachers are number one in shaping the perceptions of diversity in their buildings because they have the most intimate relationship with the students, they also pointed out that this is not a task they can perform alone. When Tatiana was asked whose role is it to promote diversity in her school, she explained, “You cannot do it by yourself. They always say it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a community to educate a student. You cannot do it alone.” Besides feeling that teachers are the ones at the forefront and they have the responsibility to promote students’ cultures as heritage and foster linguistic and cultural pluralism, the participants also pointed to other stakeholders’ role in fostering diversity, including the administration, parents, community members, athletic coaches, and the students themselves. Significantly, the findings also showed that the schools are doing some things right but lacking on other things like encouraging parent involvement, building an inclusive culture and community, and celebrating student’s cultural identity in curriculum and pedagogy.

Part 2: Factors Contributing to CSP

In Part 2 of this chapter, I focus on analyzing the findings relating to factors that had influenced the participants’ ability to work with diverse students and develop CSP skills. The research studies had pointed to cultural discontinuity between teachers who often belong to the White dominant group and the diverse student population (Basse, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Fiarman, 2016; Shields, 2004; Steele, 2010). Hence, there is a need for teachers, particularly White teachers, to go through the process of personal transformation and prepare themselves for working with diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic groups (Gay, 2012, 2013; Goldenberg, 2013;

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Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). During the interviews, I wanted to know how the participants prepared for their role as educators of diverse students. I asked the participants about the role of their personal background and experiences, the coursework they completed during their pre-service preparation, and the impact of PL acquired during their teaching careers. Since 11 out of 15 participants grew up within the White culture, it was not surprising that they had limited contact with racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity when growing up. As a result, during the interviews, they reflected on their background that may have affected how they see others through the lens of their personal experiences.

What was less expected was the strong connection that I found between the family values of open-mindedness and acceptance of differences and the participants' passion for embracing diversity and commitment to their students. The participants did not reveal resistance to diversity, as often discussed in the research (Delpit, 1988, 2006; Gay, 2013), which could be attributed to the fact that I did not select participants from a random pool of teachers. The purposeful selection of participants committed to supporting diverse students, signified by their voluntary participation in programs on cultural proficiency, may have been the reason why I observed a long-term positive attitude towards diversity throughout the participants' lives.

Personal Background and Experiences

As the participants talked about their personal background and experiences, they mentioned several factors that may have shaped their attitudes towards diversity. These factors were (a) location where they grew up, (b) family, (c) friends, (d) prior work experience, and (e) travel and other lived experiences. While most participants had critical reflections about how race shaped their early experiences with diversity, given their ages and timing of when they grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, some still gave color-evasive responses. This finding pointed out

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connections to some teachers' approach that did not consider the importance of racial or ethnic identity. While the rest of the world views people of color in terms of their race, teachers who do not notice color when working with racially diverse students deny students this part of their identity. The findings also showed that the color evasiveness was camouflaged as open-mindedness and confirmed that to several participants it was not natural to be surrounded by diversity. Although many of them felt that their aspiration not to see color was a positive behavior, it actually revealed the competing ideologies in some of these teachers, and it came out during the interviews.

Location. Describing the influence of the place where they grew up, 7 out of 15 participants shared that they grew up in the same area as the schools they are teaching in today and did not have many encounters with diversity in the early periods of their lives. Denise, a White English teacher, who grew up in a predominantly Irish-Italian community, remembered “there wasn’t a ton of diversity” in her high school. Konrad, also a White English teacher, was a product of Roman Catholic schooling and went through 16 years of a school system that was “not very diverse at all.” Matias, a White art teacher, who defined himself as “blue-collar Italian” felt that when he started his career about 30 years ago at Jefferson High School, he “had his cousins there” because the entire student population was White. Adam, an Asian English teacher, went to primary and secondary schools with mostly Italian-Americans and he believed he “essentially went to school without a multicultural education.” He felt he had been “somewhat deprived of that” and when he became an educator, he knew he “had it in his control to change it.” Working with a diverse student population had fueled him to focus on multiculturalism. “I didn’t want these students to have that same type of education [as I did]...where you learn things

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from teachers because they're supposed to know better even if you don't find it relevant, even if you're not connected with the material you're working with."

When asked how her personal background impacted her perception of diversity, Cathy, a White social studies teacher, who grew up in a predominantly White town in the area, revealed:

Growing up in that environment, I didn't learn racial history, it wasn't talked about, we didn't know about it. And my parents didn't talk about it, I didn't hear much about that at home either. It was mostly the lack of it, to be quite frank, that impacted me. The fact that I wasn't exposed to any diversity until I was a college student is what shaped my interest in trying to achieve a more just society.

The remaining eight participants shared that they were surrounded by diversity when growing up and they perceived it as a natural characteristic of their environment. Adana, a Latina general elective teacher grew up in an ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse urban neighborhood. She shared,

I met so many different people, and the idea of differences was so normal to me. It was almost rare to have someone look like me; it was just normal to be different. I think it's realistic, it's a representation of what's right in our society, the extreme potential.

Martin, a White social studies teacher, also grew up in a diverse urban community, and when he started working in a predominantly White school almost 20 years ago, he experienced "a little bit of culture shock because everybody was White." He added, "For me, the more diverse it is, I'm more comfortable with it." Lauren, a White English teacher, remembered "always being open to different cultures" and, as a child, she enjoyed traveling with her father through diverse parts of the city where she grew up. Tatiana, a Black social studies teacher, also shared how lucky she felt being surrounded by diverse groups her entire life. She also understood why a person who

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did not have this opportunity may feel “uncomfortable with people that are not similar.” Tatiana recognized that people who grew up in a homogenous environment may be more likely to have implicit bias toward people of different races or cultures.

While all other participants claimed the location and environment where they grew up significantly shaped their attitudes toward diversity, David, a Black science teacher, provided disconfirming evidence that the place where he grew up was irrelevant and further explained:

As a matter of fact, my students constantly ask me and try to probe to find out where I’m from. I never tell them. And I do that with intention because I want them to understand it doesn’t matter, so just deal with me as I am. Because once you acknowledge to a student where you’re from, they want to label and claim you, so I say, ‘no, this is who I am’.

‘Where are you from?’ Wherever you want me to be from. I come from everywhere, and nowhere is usually my answer.

The location where the participants grew up in most cases physically defined exposure to diversity or lack thereof. Despite the nature of their early life environment, all 15 participants expressed a positive attitude toward diversity and later talked about additional factors like family, friends, or lived experiences that played a significant role in shaping their perceptions.

Family. Within the family-related factors that shaped the participants’ perceptions of diversity, two factors seemed to have played the most significant role: immigrant roots and open-mindedness, which in some cases turned out to be synonymous with color evasiveness.

Immigrant Roots. Adana shared how growing up with immigrant parents gave her an insight into the challenges and struggles that many immigrants face. With melancholy in his voice, Matias spoke about his grandmother who lived in his house after she had come from a European country. As he described, “Her parents couldn’t read, she taught her own parents to

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read and sign their names.” Marrying into a Taiwanese family impacted the way Denise was able to “look at life and education” and embrace her husband’s family values and perspectives. Adam shared how coming from an immigrant family allowed him to “have a very parallel experience” to the experiences of the students he worked with. A lot of his students also come from immigrant Asian families and they recognize Eastern upbringing and the values that come with it, like Confucian teaching, filial piety, or diligence and determination. “As I get older, I’m also realizing where my cultural roots are and I think that’s shaping me more as a teacher,” Adam added to his previous statements.

Melanie, a White math teacher, shared her memories of coming to America with her family when she was eight years old. “We were homeless, we had no food, and my clothes were from the garbage, for years. I was one of the weird kids in elementary school that nobody spoke to. I was that child,” she said, nodding her head. She explained how she often talked to her students about her experiences and told the students who are struggling with adjusting to a new place that she went through the exact same things they are going through.

Being a daughter of immigrants, Amina revealed sensitivity to “things that come up in kids’ everyday lives that they may not know about because they might not have heard of these things at home.” She can see how such “things,” like popular culture, can be impenetrable for people who came from a different part of the world. Lauren talked about her multicultural (Italian, Latino, and Asian) family background with pride, and said she believed it allowed her to be “a good teacher in a diverse classroom.” She said:

My aunt is Chinese and going to her house, I was always impressed with what she cooked. Maybe if I had never been exposed, I would think that different cultures were weird, eating something like turtles, snakes, but it fascinated me and I loved that she was

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different from us. At least that's how I saw it as a child. I loved her and she was a wonderful person, and her diversity just made her that much more beautiful to me, so I carry that with me. Growing up, I always loved learning about other cultures, so it made me very appreciative of diversity.

Having multicultural roots and being exposed to immigrant perspectives has certainly made the participants more sensitive to diverse students' needs. Adam called it "coming from an authentic place and not a stereotypical background." Having authentic experiences has allowed the participants to develop stronger relationships with their students, as they had an opportunity to share similar experiences.

Color Evasiveness Disguised as Open-Mindedness. Twelve out of 15 participants discussed their families' receptiveness to a wide variety of racial and cultural ideas and perspectives as key factors in shaping their perceptions of diversity. The participants believed these factors allowed them to build foundations for receptiveness to diverse concepts. However, given the current perspective of how treating everyone as if they looked the same denies people of color their racial identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), color evasiveness perceived as open-mindedness may be a glaring mistake. Bonilla-Silva called it "a new form of racism." In this context, what the participants reported as presumed evidence of their families' positive attitude toward diversity because they did not notice color may actually be a sign of a colorblindness. David shared how he had grown up with parents and grandparents that were business people, politically connected, so since an early age, he had interacted with a variety of people from different races and cultures. At home, he was always taught that "People are people, Black and White, blue and green." Skin color was never discussed in his house in terms of negative and positive. He went on to explain, "People are people, and they come in all flavors, colors, and you

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will find every characteristic in every race and culture. I was just taught that you deal with people as people and I bring the same belief system into the classroom.”

Matias’s parents and grandmother always were “very adamant about not perpetuating racist attitudes.” Both his parents had friends of color that regularly came over and socialized with his family. Konrad’s parents grew up in a diverse urban neighborhood and they fostered a positive diversity outlook from an early age. Konrad had two Black friends in his second-grade class who were not allowed to attend other people’s houses and play there, but “those two gentlemen” were always invited to his household.

When asked to describe the impact of her personal background, Regina, a White art teacher, was proud to share that she had “a home that was inviting, and still to this day when we have a holiday dinner, we can have people of all different colors at the dinner table, depending on who we invite.” In her reflections on diversity, Regina pointed out that she was aware in her early life that people of color were treated differently than she was, and she would always question that. “Why you’re treating them differently. Why do I get a special treatment?” she would ask herself, fighting “an internal battle.” She shared that she did not feel confident enough to say to a friend: “Why did the teacher treat you differently, or why did the man at the store look at you a funny way?” She did not feel knowledgeable enough at that point, but she knew that with the love of different people her grandmother had instilled in her, she knew she could love them “with all her heart.” Both Regina and all other participants revealed in their responses that immigrant roots, exposure to diversity at an early age, and the families’ open-mindedness played an important role in shaping their positive attitudes toward diversity. However, several comments pointed to instances of color evasiveness, which, given the participants’ upbringing, they had learned to consider as a virtue. It is important to note that high school is a critical time

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for young people to make sense of race and racism, and students may be turning to teachers for support in helping them make sense of their experiences. Overlooking racial differences may deprive students of the much-needed support in search of their identity.

Friends. Having the foundations from home that diversity is of value, the participants sought friendships among diverse people. Although Denise was only surrounded by a handful of students of color in her elementary school, she befriended them. Konrad invited Rene and Cliff, two Black boys from his second-grade class, even though neighbors would ask, “Why are you having them over to your house?” Adana grew up with a friend who was half Black and half Puerto Rican. She recalled, “Growing up she was like a sister to me,” and although they looked different, Adana claimed, “I never noticed that until I was much older.” She realized that race played a factor for some people but fortunately for her it did not, so she tried to instill that in her students and in her own family. As previously discussed, Adana also displayed color evasiveness and perpetuated this attitude while being a teacher, perceiving it as positive. Martin remembered his childhood friends who taught him Spanish and he still speaks a little bit of Spanish because of them. Matias had friends of color from the time he was in kindergarten and was able to foster relationships that he keeps to this day. He also developed many friendships with his students who are now in their 40s. Matias is proud to say that those students still maintain contact:

I was able to form great relationships with people from all diverse backgrounds. I’ve had the experience where I’ve been to weddings, I’ve gone to a funeral, and I was the only White person there, not speaking the language (he laughed) and so I got a little slice of what it’s like for some people every day.

Since friendships with diverse people often formed at an early stage in some participants’ lives, they had always considered them as natural and cherished them as something important.

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Many participants felt those friendships helped to shape who they were as individuals and as educators. However, the findings also showed that while the participants valued their early contacts with diverse people, they often acted color evasive, as if the racial differences did not exist. They prided themselves in the approach of equality for all. Most of them did not realize how lacking acknowledgment of racial differences and avoiding a discussion of racial issues denied the people of color their identity.

Prior Work Experience. Before they became teachers in public schools in the district, 5 out of 15 participants held other teaching or non-teaching positions that positively affected how they perceive diversity today. Denise, whose school has only recently started to become more diverse, thought that her exposure to diversity in general came when she worked at Starbucks. She also experienced teaching in a non-profit urban school. She called that school “every person’s dream” and went on to explain: “All my students were of a different background and they were so wonderful and welcoming and open, and there was never really a time when I felt, my gosh, ‘I’m the only White person in the room’.”

Meriam, who had worked in a language school for international students, recalled, “I had such a strong connection with my students and I think they were very comfortable and open with me.” Adam remembered the first time he ever stood in front of students as a teacher, which was in college while he was working for a nonprofit in Grenada, an island in the Caribbean. It was a learning experience both for him and his students because it was “the first time ever that those students saw an Asian person, so there was a lot for us to learn from one another.” Adam felt “you really get people to open their eyes to diverse learners when you expose them to different cultures.” Tatiana worked in the business world before she became a teacher and she recalled in her prior career she was always with a diverse group of people. She always found that she

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learned more when she was “around people from different walks of life.” Matias discussed his previous teaching experience in a school with much more racial diversity than Jefferson High School where he is employed now. He explained that it was the previous school where he learned a lot of sensitivity to a variety of diverse student challenges. However, he also revealed implicit bias and cultural deprivation theory by generalizing about teenage pregnancy and parents’ lack of interest in their children’s education because of their race, economic, and cultural backgrounds. He recalled,

A lot of kids there were at the poverty level, a significant population in the school was pregnant, and there were certain cultural attitudes that were pervasive. Parents didn’t reach out to teachers, parents didn’t come to open school night, parents didn’t come to parent teacher conferences, and they didn’t want to engage with the teacher at all. That was a cultural thing in that a lot of the parents were graduates of the school and may not have had the best experience with teachers, or with the administrators who were still there. Also, we had a lot of very young parents, and they were struggling, they were not comfortable being an active part in their child’s education; you know, that was my reality for seven years.

The participants’ prior work experiences offered more exposure to diversity than some of the schools in the district could. They valued their early exposure and experiences and felt it helped them develop an appreciation of different perspectives. They also valued relationships and felt a sense of acceptance among people who did not always look like them. Yet, some teachers also showed implicit biases by perpetuating certain cultural stereotypes.

Travel and Other Lived Experiences. Besides the place where they grew up, family, friends, and prior work experience, the participants also discussed how other lived experiences

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shaped their ability to be effective teachers of diverse students. Adam, David, Regina, and Meriam mentioned the importance of travel as it allowed them to experience deep, authentic moments with the diverse people they met while traveling. Adam said that his fascination with the island of Granada was where he met his first students. David felt travel and exposure to different people, different cultures allowed him not only to see the world but to confront his beliefs. He thought travel played “a big part role in breaking down differences and barriers.” He believed it was also evident in students who travel. “They tend to be a little more open-minded, a little more accepting of differences,” he reflected. Regina also believed travel could change a person and she added, “You really get to explore diversity only if you travel maybe, really travel. If you’re only going on vacation there for a week, you’re not exposed to it.”

Meriam, a White language teacher, born outside of the United States, often travels back to her home country and exotic destinations across the world. She shared that travel taught her respect for “other people’s ways of life, no matter what it is.” She also felt that “when you travel, you take something and you leave something behind.” When asked a follow-up question to further explain what she meant, she added, “You take the memories, the respect for people and cultures, that later shape your everyday life, and you leave your biases and preconceptions behind. You also leave a piece of your heart everywhere you go.”

Although Denise did not mention traveling to destinations across the world, she said reading had really expanded her horizons. She had been a reader since she was a child, and it gave her “a lot of empathetic point of view.” It was reading about people’s different backgrounds that allowed her to be exposed to diversity when she had very little diversity in her school. The characters that represented “different abilities, cultures, beliefs, and skin colors” helped her

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develop a positive attitude to those differences. It allowed her “to step into the characters’ shoes and experience their reality even without leaving the comfort of the room.”

An important finding that emerged from this section was that places, people, and lived experiences throughout the participants’ lives shaped them into the people they are now. Regardless of whether they grew up surrounded by diversity or were deprived of exposure to diversity but allowed themselves to learn and appreciate it, their personal background and experiences helped them develop CSP with their students.

PL Programs

Effective PL programs are important to promote teachers’ skills, master new knowledge, develop new proficiency, which, in turn, helps improve student learning. Research also pointed to the significance of programs that facilitate the integration of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gay, 2015; Kea & Trent, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017). The interview protocol included questions about the coursework at the college or university level and questions on district-implemented PL programs that influenced the participants’ ability to work with diverse students.

Pre-service. The finding was that, with a few exceptions, most participants did not find their preservice teacher training helpful in preparing them to work in today’s classroom. It was not surprising that the participants who began teaching about 30 years ago were not required to complete coursework dealing with cultural proficiency, since at that time, there was no prominent influx of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students into the area, and historically, teachers were trained to service the dominant White population. What was less expected was that several participants who received their pre-service training in the last two decades—when areas across the country began to experience demographic changes—did not

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remember participating in a sufficient number of pre-service programs that would prepare them to work with diverse students.

Melanie called her pre-service preparation “a whole bunch of reading, but nothing else,” while David thought of it as “the usual array of classes that you take, but nothing specific pops up in my mind.” Howard did not remember anything profound that impacted his cultural awareness, and Konrad shared there was “only one class called cultural diversity and it was taught by an amazing professor.” Lauren expressed her criticism of her pre-service program by saying, “Maybe one course, multicultural learning. And I don’t really recall what meaningful information I would’ve gotten from that.” Reflecting on his college preparation, Matias also shared the above perspectives and stated, “My college experience was lacking in diversity training. At that time, I had professors that were old and weren’t really equipped, or weren’t even considering any of that.” Martin, a history and political science major in college, recalled the content as “pretty dry, Civil War, American Revolution type of thing,” and Tatiana succinctly concluded, “At the time? When I went? None. None about diverse groups of people. We were just informed on how to educate a student, not a diverse group of students.”

In addition to the lack of diversity training in his college experience, Matias raised another issue, color blindness, that had echoed some participants’ responses regarding their perceptions of diversity in Part 1. Color evasiveness—perceiving everyone as equal, the same, presumably out of respect for all people—had been considered a positive perspective on race, had dominated society, and had been reflected in the way school programs were designed until recently, when people of color raised their voice to have their race recognized and not ignored. Matias commented on the differences in perspectives on race and how it was perceived and discussed during his college career:

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The philosophy at that school was that you're colorblind. We were trained that you don't notice color, you don't see color. I think that was something cultural at that time.

Whereas now that philosophy has changed. I think now people feel that if you're colorblind, you're denying someone a culture; you're diminishing them by not noticing that they're Black or Hispanic.

A few participants actually reported receiving specific instruction on how to work with diverse students or becoming more aware of diversity while attending pre-service programs. Denise remembered her college, located in an urban area, which highlighted the need "to get the kids where they are and really tap into the resources that they have to get them invested, to really maximize learning." However, Denise wished she had gained more knowledge on how to support ELLs in her class. Adana reflected on how her master's degree program, which was "all about language acquisition," helped her understand how difficult learning English can be. However, she did not recall any specific courses on cultural proficiency from her college career. Cathy, who was a history and a psychology minor, commented that because of the nature of her coursework, she became sensitive to the existence of inequities between the dominant and marginalized groups and "the impact it can have, especially on young people, and their development."

The theme of insufficient preparation for a diverse classroom in pre-service programs was widely repeated throughout the participants' responses. In this section of the interview protocol, I did not include the question on what shaped teachers' ability to work with diverse students, but several participants added comments that contrasted with their criticism of preservice preparation and pointed to the real source of their CSP skills. Melanie felt it was the actual classroom experience that made her aware of diversity and the need to find an approach to

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support diverse students. She praised her student teaching experience for giving her exposure to the reality of teaching in a diverse classroom. She shared:

I feel a lot of time you take all this coursework, classes, you study, take a test. But you don't really learn until you're inside the classroom. Student teaching makes you think if you really want to do this. It prepares you because you get thrown in there and you've got to survive. This is where you learn your management, where you learn how to talk to different kids, you learn how to panel behavior. Books are not going to tell you because every situation is different. So, I feel once you're in that situation, that's when you decide what you want to do, you sense what you should do.

A few participants felt the need to connect CSP to their individual qualities and background. David stated, "Being who I am, it wasn't a struggle for me to accept it, act on it, and enhance what I already had," and credited his cultural awareness to his childhood, his upbringing, and his travels. Regina felt it was an ongoing process and admitted to constant personal reflection but also "talking with people in the building about diversity and why it's important to have training in it." Lauren did not feel it was her college career that prepared her for a diverse classroom but her "experience with the students." She also noticed it had been something addressed in recent workshops. Lauren explained, "I think people are understanding the importance of diversity now—people like administrators, the districts—and so we've taken courses now."

In sum, the findings have shown how pre-service teacher preparation programs have not adequately prepared teachers for working in a diverse classroom. The findings are supported by research studies that identified gaps in pre-service teacher education and stated that these

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programs often fail to expose pre-service teachers to diverse perspectives and CSP strategies (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Moses & Chang, 2006).

In-service. PL during the in-service years involves a continuous professional growth driven by teacher agency and choice. It is interesting that several participants gave this type of learning a higher rating, as compared to pre-service preparation. Although a few participants displayed criticism of PL workshops, and some others revealed more instances of implicit bias as a source of their disapproval, the overall finding was that in view of the demographic changes in the district, teachers appreciated the much-needed efforts toward cultural proficiency training. David highlighted the role of PL by saying:

The professional learning component brings to light the whole concept of differences to the teacher. I think many of us go through life locked into our norms and when you engage in a teaching profession, and you become exposed to a culturally diverse classroom, it brings it to your consciousness. For some people, it's obvious even before they go there, but for many people, the classes we take bring it to the forefront. At least now you're conscious of it so you can start to act on it.

Cathy believed PL on cultural awareness was “absolutely important,” but she also said it was “going to a limited group of people and it seems like most of the people that are participating were already wanting to view the world from that perspective.” She was wondering if there was a way to mobilize “the segment of the school population that's not open to it but definitely needs to be exposed to it.”

Positive Perceptions. Some participants who had a positive perception of the PL programs specified what helpful strategies they had learned to be more effective with diverse students. In a co-teaching workshop, Lauren remembered that she learned “how to differentiate

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for students whose English was a new language.” Matias, aware of the need to become culturally proficient but also showing implicit bias in his response, reported how the workshop he attended made him “tiptoe around words a little bit more.” He commented on how his attitude toward diverse students had evolved from being hesitant to feeling more confident as a result of PL:

I remember being really cautious and almost like hesitant to engage them a lot. Every conversation would be like: ‘Oh, I got through that one’. And then eventually I got a lot more comfortable. I think it was the byproduct of that training. It’s not going to do any damage to the kid. You always think it’s going to do some kind of damage or reveal ourselves to be ignorant; but we are ignorant, so if we admit it, it makes things a little easier.

When asked how he perceived his PL experience, another participant, Martin, explained that he enjoyed going to workshops on cultural proficiency and then sharing his new knowledge with the rest of his department. One of those workshops gave him an inspiration to develop a new course the district would soon offer to students as an elective. Martin shared that the new course would address “groups that have been marginalized throughout US history, laws that have been passed on equity and equality, or social justice.” Martin’s new learning helped him understand that “a lot of us were brought up learning one perspective, so naturally, when we go into the classroom, that’s the perspective that we bring,” and he had learned to question that perspective. He understood the PL workshops were more about bringing awareness and looking at people’s own biases rather than implementing strategies. He seemed excited when he said:

But I feel like that in itself is a strategy. Coming to understand that you feel a certain way about a certain group of people, about a certain topic, whatever it is, because if you’re not

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aware of it, if it's happening subconsciously, that could come out when you're in front of kids. I think that was a big takeaway from those workshops, examining my own biases.

Because the district has been experiencing an influx of ELLs, the participants also brought up the need to be educated on strategies to best support these students. Denise discussed how her principal had sent her out to voluntarily attend a program at a local university. The program culminated in K-12 ESL certification. Denise enjoyed the opportunity to learn how to help the student population present in her classroom. She particularly enjoyed one lesson and recalled:

One of my professors brought in a friend of hers who was a native Japanese speaker and the friend of hers started the class completely in Japanese and just that moment: 'Wow, this is exactly what it feels like when you do not speak English, or the language the teacher is speaking to you.' It was a completely mind-blowing experience for me. It was an 'aha' moment, and I feel that if we all had that 'aha' moment, we would then have that first step of 'Ok, now I know what it's like; now what do I do about it?'

Reflecting on her experience, Denise recommended that once the first step had been made, teachers should have more PL opportunities to figure out "how to approach this kind of student, what to do when a person has a certain cultural background, or has a gap in their education, or has an emotional or special needs issue." Concerned with the needs of the ELL population, Adana also brought up an effective workshop and called it "a model that should be duplicated." In this workshop, she shared that there were four ELLs speaking about their experiences. "I was so moved," she recalled, and further explained:

I'll tell you what I thought was the best part of it. Teachers who I know personally are somewhat hardened, somewhat stuck in their ways, couldn't help but be moved by the

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stories coming from the students themselves. So, it's very difficult to disconnect from a student who is explaining their story and their point of view. There were tears, there was a clear connection made. I didn't see a single cell phone out, so I was just sitting and watching this interaction.

Outside PL Workshops. Several participants expressed their contentment with PL opportunities they acquired outside of the district. They enjoyed going to conferences in urban areas where they were exposed to a variety of attitudes and perspectives due to a much more diverse faculty employed in urban schools. Howard shared, "Witnessing teachers coming from very different school districts who had very different student populations than the ones I was working with prompted me to kind of explore working on a broader level, too, in terms of design and instruction, and how do engage other students."

As Adam mentioned in Part 1 while describing his district's efforts to keep up with the needs of the changing demographics, his suburban district was "late to the game." Attending a recent conference outside of the district, Adam had a chance to "listen to someone like Dr. Ladson-Billings speak, which kind of opens your mind a little bit more." Amina, who attended the same conference, also noted how eye-opening it was. "It taught me a lot. That term, *culturally sensitive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy*. If I hadn't attended that conference, I don't think I would've heard that term. Now that I'm taking ESL classes, I keep hearing about it."

Going Back to School. Seven out of 15 participants reported that they had gone back to school to pursue either a doctoral or an administrative degree. They thought it enhanced their ability to better understand the student perspective and helped shape their teaching as a result of the new knowledge. Meriam said, "The best learning experience for a teacher is to be a student."

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Adana said she was able to “see teaching through the lens of all the stakeholders.” She shared that when she started her program, she thought she “had a good handle on teaching,” but she realized that she learned to look at ideas differently, and instead of just recording the facts, she felt that the program made her “ask a lot of the why.” She gave an example:

Before, if a student didn’t hand in something, it definitely would get recorded in my grade book and perhaps I’d even give the student an opportunity to do it later. Now, I’m really concerned about the why. Because I’m realizing that students are coming to school with so much that before they can complete your assignment, they need to feel safe, they need to be fed, they need reassurance, some of them are looking for a sense of security. The list goes on and on. So, I think finding out a “why” has helped me as a teacher and has built relationships in my career. I think, overall, it’s made me a better teacher.

Adam, who had also gone back to school, felt the last three years of being a student had “reinforced” his empathy for students. He thought that while teaching, he had “lost sight of the student point of view a little bit.” He had been reading a lot of the existing research on culturally responsive teaching, existing practices, and that really prompted him to try more of these things in the classroom. Adam always considered himself a “constructivist, a supporter of student-centered learning” but now, as a result of the new knowledge, he would do it “more methodically.” Adam elaborated on his response by saying:

Before, it was just: Oh, here is an activity I thought about, and the activity opened the instructional entryway for students, but it kind of happened coincidentally. Now, I’m purposely thinking: I need to do it this way so that I can engage the students.

Meriam added that being back in school and “reading about educational laws, learning about historically marginalized groups, and exchanging points of view with other educators” made her

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“more confident” and she felt she had more of a “voice to advocate for her students when talking to the administration.” She always felt “student-centered learning, understanding the student perspective, building relationships with students and their families” were very important elements of being an effective teacher, but she shared how she felt more convinced now that she was “doing the right thing.”

Negative Perceptions of PL. Not all participants in the group presented a positive perception of the PL opportunities or experiences. Adam thought the district focused on technology training too much, “making it a driving force behind every training, neglecting the need to train teachers on implicit bias and culturally responsive teaching.” Melanie believed math teachers are ignored in the training and there are not enough workshops that address strategies applicable in math classes. She shared, “Everything is social studies, science, English. We technically pick which workshop we want to attend and, again, there aren't many choices for math. They'll have PDs for diverse students, students with behavior problems, but for math? I haven't taken a PD to help with math.” Regina shared how she appreciated the district's efforts, but she was unsure whether it was a genuine attempt to change mindsets or just something the district wanted to put on the record. She further reflected:

Do I see it going anywhere? No, I don't. I feel it's something they have to do. We have participated in sending our staff to a conference, we participated in a, b, c, as opposed to we're engulfed in this, we're training people in this, we see something's wrong, and we're addressing it.

While several teachers valued the opportunities for PL on cultural awareness, offered to them either within or outside of the district, Tatiana felt differently and claimed that “it has to be within the person.” When asked a follow-up question to explain her statement, she added:

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I don't know if a workshop is going to help you improve. It has to be within you, it has to be your makeup, your attitude towards life. And some people don't really pay attention to who they are, what their makeup is, what they like, what they dislike. I don't think people really pay attention to that when they go into some professions. I think it has to be something internal. I don't think it can be taught. I really don't. Yes, and I cannot believe that we have workshops that tell you what you need to be doing when...that's something to me that you should've been doing without somebody telling you. That's what so mind boggling that you would have to go to a workshop.

Perceptions of Other Teachers' Implicit Bias. While many participants either valued or criticized their PL experience, some also commented on other teachers' biases that often interfere with the new learning. Cathy commented, "some people seem so set in stone that nothing will ever change their mindset." She believed administrators should be looking for people with a growth mindset when they hire. She expressed her concern that people who were set in their ways might not be able to change. "I think you might have to wait for them to leave. And then you'll have much more success with the younger people that you bring in," she concluded. Matias's comments also touched upon the issue of bias that often hinders teachers' ability to change their perspectives. He shared:

I feel some of the things are off-putting to a lot of people. Sometimes people go in, believing that their mind is open and that they're genuinely what they consider themselves to be: accepting and in good faith. I think a lot of times, they leave these workshops feeling as if they were attacked, or their implicit bias is pointed out, and I think that's off-putting. I think a lot of times, teachers really get frustrated with that, but

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they do need to realize. I think it's a really hard thing to do, to have people realize it but not be put off.

Asked if she could comment on her PL experience, Lauren expressed mixed feelings, and although she mentioned a few “eye-opening workshops,” she also thought some others “seemed almost accusatory, where they’re making assumptions about those in the class and you become very defensive internally while you’re listening.” Amina recalled a workshop where she got disturbed because “the presenters were talking about what people physically looked like and they were saying really terrible things. It made me kind of scared to participate again, but I put that fear away, and I’m glad I did because the sessions that came after were great.” Amina shared that “the tone of the presenters made her feel offended, vulnerable.” She did not appreciate the workshop and objected to “targeting White people as a point of departure for the majority.” She further explained, “They’re really being offensive because they’re not acknowledging our diversity. It was biased, I guess.” These comments demonstrated that the participants’ biases interfered with their perception of racial issues and they showed how difficult it was for the participants to recognize they were biased. The participants revealed instances of White fragility by having defensive reactions when questioned about race or asked to consider their own race (DiAngelo, 2019). Research on implicit bias illustrated how educators often struggle to recognize personal and societal biases (Gay, 2010, 2013; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1996, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). The same research also highlighted the need for educators to restructure their beliefs so they could resist their negative attitudes toward diversity and focus on the positive impact of cultural differences in planning their instruction.

In sum, the majority of teachers believed that PL was an important component of the journey in becoming an effective educator of diverse students. A theme generated by the data

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was that PL gave teachers a lot of insight into students' perspectives. It also allowed teachers to examine personal and societal biases. All of the participants felt PL on cultural proficiency was what teachers involved in educating diverse students must do. The participants reported that many White teachers that they worked with often found it offensive when they were asked to confront their biases or acknowledge White privilege. The participants wondered how to get other teachers trained in CSP so they would be able to discuss race in the classroom instead of avoiding it because they are scared or think they might say the wrong thing. The main findings were that pre-service PL was not sufficient and actually some teachers were taught to be color evasive. The participants also expressed negative perceptions of PL. Some were unsure if the district administration was making a genuine attempt to change mindsets or it was just something they wanted to put on the record. Most of the valuable PL was acquired either while working in the classroom or by choice outside of what was offered by the district.

Part 3: Curriculum Development and Instructional Practices

One of the educational issues that creates barriers and raises a lot of controversy among educators, parents, and community organizations are curriculum standards that schools are expected to follow (Tampio, 2018). Adams and Adams (2003) pointed out that despite the movement toward equity in education, there appears to be outside control over curricula that propagate strong White middle-class values. Culturally sustaining teachers need to determine how to make adjustments to the curriculum standards so the standards can better serve a diverse student population by providing socially just and equitable frameworks (Au et al., 2017; Sleeter & Carmona, 2018; Tampio, 2018). In Part 3, I discuss how the participants develop their curriculum and to what extent their curriculum includes elements of CSP. I then describe how

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the participants address diversity in their instructional practices and what challenges they face when teaching diverse students.

Curriculum Development

When answering the question on curriculum development, all 15 participants stated that they have access to a set curriculum, financially secured by the district and aligned with the state standards. The participants reported having scopes and sequences, areas of interest that they are obliged to teach, and the timeframe the topics must fit into. Most did not believe that the district would be open to replacing the existing curricula; yet they appreciated the fact that as teachers, they had the freedom to supplement the curriculum by infusing diverse perspectives into their instructional practices. David, a Black science teacher, noted, “We tend to follow a generalized format in terms of the topics that we teach and the sequence in which we teach them, based on what we believe makes sense. Then we put our own little flavor on it as we go through the various topics.” Matias, a White art teacher, observed that “the curriculum provides a shell, but teachers have the ability to interpret the curriculum the way they want to.”

The participants also described the process of curriculum writing, which was very similar in most departments. Teams of teachers guided by the department chairs propose a curriculum, which is then presented to the administration to obtain the final approval. The district authorities require that all the schools be represented in the curriculum writing. The work is done by people who do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The curriculum-writing process is also enriched by different types of diversity present among the people who work in each building. Howard, a White math teacher, thought it was a good strategy because “the buildings are different, some are diverse, some are not so diverse, and people have a variety of experiences.” Depending on the course they teach, some teachers reported having an exam made by the

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College Board, which they administer at the end of the year. Martin, a White social studies teacher, pointed out the importance of a “cumulative or a summative exam for the course that a lot of teachers use as their curriculum guide for the classes.” The overall finding that emerged from this section was that the state standards and assessments are the driving force behind the district-prescribed curriculum and at times caused narrowing the curriculum because of the tests.

Elements of CSP in the Process of Curriculum Development

The findings also showed that despite the prescribed curriculum, educators are given flexibility in terms of developing their lessons and supplementing them with materials of their choice. In search of materials that would benefit diverse students, the participants talked about how they invited their students to share their interests and help them supplement the curriculum with materials that appeal to the students themselves. Keeping in mind the diversity of the student population, the participants also reported trying to include multiple perspectives and multicultural education topics.

Tapping into Student Interest. Contrary to the common practice of many schools and classrooms where students have little input in what they learn and how they learn it, 7 out of 15 participants shared that student voice in shaping the curriculum was important to them. They believed giving students a voice accelerated learning and prepared students for a world where taking initiative maximized student success. With that in mind, Konrad, a White English teacher, reported that at the beginning of the year, he gave his students a questionnaire “to get their interests, what they want to learn and explore, and offer opportunities for them to pursue that, so they could participate in shaping the curriculum.” He believed this was a method “to step away from the prescribed curriculum and offer opportunities where teachers trust their students and

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allow them the space to explore things that are near and dear to their heart, but also things that they might want to pursue in the future.”

Denise, also a White English teacher, who is mandated to teach certain works of literature, reported that she selects supplemental texts with students’ interest in mind. “Is there something the kids can connect to? Are there characters they can relate to, struggles, conflicts they can identify with? Is there anything where kids can see themselves within the text?” These are the questions Denise asks herself when planning the instruction. Matias shared how he facilitated student input so that many of his art projects were “based on self, not just the physical self-portraits but students’ interests, their wants, their desires.” When giving student choices, Konrad described how he not only let the students explore different book topics and make choices that were important to them but also provided space for students “to partner up and share out to get different outlooks on things.” Konrad’s perspective reinforced the finding that tapping into student interest is a way of opening children’s minds and exposing them to different ideas, which results in having a sense of participation in their own learning.

Multicultural Perspectives. Banks (1994) established that one way to effectively educate students from diverse backgrounds is to infuse the curriculum with multicultural topics and perspectives, thus making the curriculum more inclusive. The participants’ responses echoed the above statement and illustrated how multicultural topics in the curriculum help all students develop a better understanding of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups. Adana, a Latina general elective teacher, shared how she always tells her students that since food is an important cultural component, “there is no way to be culturally proficient without understanding food diversity, understanding the variety of different foods people eat, and respecting their

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dietary restrictions.” One of the projects her students do is pretend to open up a restaurant. She further noted:

They learn the culture that they are focusing on, research different dishes from that country, they actually make the food and then find the location in the city where that restaurant would potentially be successful. They sell the idea to judges, almost like a Shark Tank, and what’s great about it is they end up tasting foods and learn about foods that they really had exposure to.

Adana concluded that she was always very happy “to see people who were kind of apprehensive to taste new foods and when they tasted it they were taken aback how much they enjoyed it. So, you could see the smile on the kids’ faces and on the judges’ faces, too.”

Denise also believed in the importance of infusing the curriculum with multicultural topics and, since she refused to force the Eurocentric traditions on her diverse students, she shared a lesson plan where she had designed a project to teach about the American traditions but allow the students to perceive them from their perspective. This is how Denise described her project:

Around Thanksgiving, we do like a fun mini project where the students have a Thanksgiving board of directors and they have to come up with what they think their best Thanksgiving food is, but it doesn’t have to be meat and potatoes and cranberry sauce; it’s whatever that person’s family eats for Thanksgiving if they celebrate it. I had a group that did chicken, I had a group that did ramen, and I had a girl who presented the idea of fufu from her culture. It’s sweet to see how excited they get.

Denise also shared another example of a lesson with a multicultural perspective that involved food. She has her classes read “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan, a short story she uses to supplement

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the curriculum since she has a large population of Chinese-American students. Denise noted how the protagonist's family who are immigrants from China invited over a minister and his son, both White, for their holiday dinner. Denise recounted:

Amy is so mortified because her parents are making all these traditional dishes and the minister and his son are completely appalled, and she has a crush on this boy, so she's so embarrassed, but by the end, her mother informs her that she specifically made all these dishes for her because she wants her to be proud of her culture. It's short but a very sentimental piece.

Denise reported that she always tried to find the cultural piece that reflects the students in her class, or their linguistic background, trying to get them to see if there is something in it that is similar to them. She plans her lessons with the following question in mind: "How can you make that connection so that we don't all feel so isolated, so different from each other? What are our similarities, as opposed to our differences?" Inspired by a TEDTalk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story," Denise planned a project she called "The Real Story" to highlight the need for recognizing different perspectives. She wanted her students to challenge cultural stereotypes. When I interviewed her, the students were looking at literature and designing a project to talk about their perceived identity. "They are going to tell me who they identify as. Do they identify as Indian? Do they identify as Latino? Or do they simply identify as teenager?" Denise concluded, sharing that she was very excited to see the outcomes. Two weeks after the interview, I was invited to join Denise's class on Google Meet and observe how the students presented and interacted while sharing their projects. Very few presentations revolved around ethnic identity, with examples of Korean, Chinese, or Indian. Most students chose to identify themselves as male or female, and a few chose to identify as teenagers. Lauren, a White

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English teacher, also reported using a lot of TEDTalks to open up discussions about diverse topics. When studying poetry, she tries to find the poem in the original language and compare it to the English translation. “Once I found a poem in Mandarin and a translation in English, and it was cool to look at the characters and how they were translated into English,” she shared.

The history teachers reported and demonstrated in their lessons how they tried to make the past come alive by teaching it in a way that engaged emotions, and presenting it in the form of an exciting, perhaps inspiring story perceived from multiple perspectives. In one of his lesson plans that Martin shared, Martin puts Columbus on trial to question the stereotypical Columbus who discovered America, American hero type, which had dominated a lot of U.S. history textbooks. Martin noted, “I think as a kid, you’re free to make your decision on whether or not you think he’s a hero or a villain. We’re discussing not just Columbus’s side or the European side, but we’re taking a look at what happened to the Native Americans.” Martin also liked to examine Martin Luther King versus Malcolm X in his history lessons. “I think a lot of times people spend more time on Martin Luther King, Jr, and he definitely deserves that. But Malcolm X is shunned a little bit maybe because he’s was a proponent of violence. But when you looked at what he was dealing with, it makes a lot more sense,” he explained. Martin also encourages discussions on the history of the KKK, the history of segregation in the United States during his time period and considers them valuable lessons that “allow the students to see the big picture.” In the modern socialism course that he proposed to teach as a new addition to the curriculum, he hopes to address marginalized groups throughout American history, laws that have been passed, legislation, and where we are today. “I think people know their history and know their past. But I think a lot of us were brought up learning one perspective, so naturally, when you go into the

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classroom, that's the perspective that you bring," he stated at the end, pointing out that social justice is always at the forefront in his curriculum planning and instruction.

In their attempt to educate students to be global citizens, 5 out of 15 participants discussed giving students access to other cultures besides their own since they believed it helped students "go into the world." In Meriam's class, I observed how students worked on a project that involved a simulation of a United Nations General Assembly. After researching problems in countries across the globe, students pretended to be representatives from these countries presenting the problems and brainstorming possible solutions on the public forum.

Regina and Matias, both art teachers, often infused multicultural perspectives into their teaching. Regina's classroom displayed current student work inspired, as she explained, by international artists she introduced her students to. She also shared, "If I want to talk about color, I will pull in art from international artists, someone like Frida Kahlo, who the students may have never heard of before, and they're fascinated once I tell her story and show her artwork. They use her style as an inspiration to produce their own work." When I observed Regina's class, she had students draw the name of an artist from the hat. The artists were non-American and the students had to find out facts about the artists' country and present to the class on that country and its different traditions. The list of selected artists included names like Yayoi Kusama, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Kiki Kogelnick. Regina called this project "The Culture Book."

Matias went on to explain how he tried to build on cultural diversity in his classes and give students access to other cultures besides their own:

Cultural capital is a fascinating potential that we have because there's such a broad spectrum to choose from. You have literally 10 thousand years to draw from. When you're showing examples from art history, you have the entire globe to draw from,

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showing examples of artwork and pattern making, and style, and color. Each color has its own, not even just tastes, but things that have developed within cultures, so there is a look of artwork from certain cultures or certain geographical areas that lends itself to study, so I have students emulate a look, aboriginal look for example, and kind of see where it sprang from.

Although the participants who taught science and math reported they did not necessarily discuss cultural issues, they both had multiculturalism on their minds when planning instruction. David shared how he infused the genetics unit with multicultural perspectives: “There are instances where you would have one White parent and one Black parent and then the baby is a combination of the parents’ genetics and that stimulates interesting discussions in the class.” David shared that his awareness of “how Eurocentric television and American society tend to be,” causes his students to not necessarily see themselves reflected there. This inspired him to present imagery that the students can relate to. He gave an example from his genetics sequence:

There is one area where I discuss traits like eye color, etc. I have females; I got one Black, one White, one in Middle Eastern wear with a hijab. That’s one way where I try to express that [multiculturalism] in my lessons. I use an Asian twin in one of my slides, where I discuss cloning. I even have albino students involved in my PowerPoint lessons because I have had albino students in my class before, so I got albino people in my PowerPoints with intention.

During one of my classroom visits, I witnessed how David presented the image of the Asian twins that he had previously mentioned on the Apple TV in his classroom. It was the beginning of the health crisis due to Coronavirus and several students, in reaction to the image, started calling out “Corona, Corona,” as the tendencies in some society groups were to blame the

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Chinese for spreading the virus. David did not address the students' reactions directly but shut down the racist comments by saying: "They're actually Japanese. Asian is a big umbrella."

Melanie, a White math teacher, reported it was hard for her to include diversity topics in math, but she consciously focuses on equity that facilitates access to math for all students. During one of my visits, I observed how Melanie designed math problems using actual students' names. Howard, also a White math teacher like Melanie, noted that whenever possible, he tries to highlight the achievements in math of "people outside the traditional White male culture, like Katherine Johnson or David Blackwell." I observed Howard's way of infusing multiculturalism into math by highlighting geometrical shapes present in the architecture of cultures like Native Americans (tipi, long house, hogan) or the Eskimos (igloo). Howard is aware that a lot of students born outside the United States may use a different measurement system, like the metric system, or a different numerical system, and he reported "trying to use their knowledge to build strengths, not see it as a deficit."

Although working within a prescribed curriculum, most participants were able to provide examples or demonstrate in their instructional practices how they make a conscious effort to infuse the curriculum with multicultural perspectives and inspire critical conversations around race, ethnicity, culture, and questioning one's own values. Most also believed that it inspired critical thinking, an indispensable component of student success.

Instructional Practices

The responses to the questions in the interview protocol, reports from classroom visits, and the lesson plans shared by the participants led to an important finding that teachers have the power to shape their instructional practices to accommodate all learners in a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classroom. Lauren, a White English teacher stated, "We can't just talk

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about diversity. We need to make it work by introducing authors, introducing literature, research, allowing students to tap into their own ethnic background, getting to know them, and maybe having something entertaining once in a while, like a cultural day when students can bring something connected to them and connected to the literature that we're studying in class."

Lauren's statement, as well as statements from other participants, revolved around aspects of CSP, reflected in the existing research (Paris & Alim, 2012, 2014, 2017). These elements of CSP included: (a) tapping into students' funds of knowledge, (b) providing support for diverse learners, (c) alternative assessment, (d) civic engagement, (e) whole-child philosophy, (f) relationships, (g) teacher as a learner, and (h) family engagement.

Tapping into Students' Funds of Knowledge. Research on the role of the students' cultural capital described how crucial it is for teachers to recognize the value of prior knowledge and consider it an asset in the educational process (Moll, 1992). Several participants discussed and demonstrated infusing the curriculum with topics related to the students' prior academic and personal background and lived experiences. Adam, an Asian English teacher, described how he valued his students' cultural capital and tried to access it as a resource. In his student-centered classroom, I witnessed how students were doing collaborative work and interacting. When they were engaged with one another, they were bringing their own frames of references into instruction so it was no longer about the teacher directing and explaining the concept using his or her own examples but the students being forced to do that on their own, using their own words and examples but working collaboratively.

Adam shared an example of how non-threatening collaborative activities allowed even the shy students to open up. He talked about a female student who, during a discussion on perceptions and stereotypes, explained how "the idea of pale skin was valued in her culture. She

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shared her own story and talked about those things, and she was the first one to explain it.”

While reading a poem that involved a jackfruit that, Adam admitted, he did not know much about, the Asian students became the source of information because “it’s a very common thing for them, so as soon as they came across that term when they were annotating the poem, they were the ones who explained it to the rest of the class what the jackfruit was.” Adam shared how the lesson opened up an avenue for personal stories: “The jackfruit is also a very important symbol in their culture and they talked about how when they travel to Asia, they try to bring it back with them in their suitcase.”

Since Adam has a large number of students of Chinese descent in his classes, he decided to bring in some Chinese fables, “particularly those involving the monkey king,” and he reported how the Chinese students “instantly found it relevant and approachable.” I observed during a classroom visit how Adam encouraged the students to teach the stories to the rest of the class and was happy to see how using the students’ background made the lesson come to life. Adam also shared a lesson plan based on the book “Raisin in the Sun” by Lorraine Hansberry. Since he included a discussion on the topics of acculturation and assimilation, he planned on encouraging students, many of whom come from immigrant families, to share their understanding of the words and how they relate to their own stories of living within the new American culture.

Matias, a White art teacher, also noted that his students enjoy reflecting on their own ethnicity and heritage and produce artwork that is based on their prior knowledge and experiences. When I visited Matias’s classroom, he had his students look at Shaun Tan’s book *The Arrival*, which is a fantasy picture book created by an Asian-Australian author. Students watched a YouTube video and read the book, and then they were expected to produce artwork that represents their own culture. Inspired by the book, the class discussed the immigrant

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experience of the main character. When asked a follow-up question to explain the significance of this work of literature, Matias shared:

It's symbolic of when immigrants come to their new country. It kind of brings back home the idea of an alien. Parents react so positively to it because children go home and they talk to their grandparents and their great grandparents and they ask questions and it's a really terrific, encompassing project. I got phone calls from parents thanking me.

The importance of prior knowledge in teaching history was also brought up when Tatiana, a Black social studies teacher, discussed how it is always difficult to teach American history to students who come from other countries because they lack a point of reference. "We go into such depth into our history, and it's hard for the diverse group of students to comprehend it, so they don't take much interest." However, when teaching global history, she had quite a different experience and enthusiastically talked about it in her response:

Most of my students, a lot of them come from other countries, and they can relate. I show a lot of images of what those countries look like, because we study the topography of every country that we go over. So, they take an interest in the curriculum and then do quite well because they can relate to the different locations. For example, we studied India, and a lot of my students were from there, so we studied the map and the different locations, and the students that came from those places would get up and tell the class about them. And it just made the lesson more interesting because then they talked about their culture, what their traditions were, and they really took an interest.

Cathy, a White social studies teacher, also shared how much she enjoys teaching global history to a diverse group of students because "while hopping around the globe and learning history of China and Japan, the Koreas, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the African continent,

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the students feel like they're going back home.” When I visited her classroom, she demonstrated how the students’ cultural capital became a source of new learning when students shared their funds of knowledge with the rest of the class. Cathy asked a female student of Indian descent to come to the map and show the class the spread of different religions in India. The student’s family was from the southern province of Kerala and the student proudly explained that both her family and most people in Kerala were of Catholic religious orientation.

Although the participants reported that the school board and district authorities did not enforce policies pointing to the celebration of student diversity (see Part 1: Shaping the Perceptions of Diversity), they, as teachers, ensured that cultural events like holidays are recognized and the students’ knowledge of these important cultural elements are shared within the classroom community. Amina, a White language teacher, gave an example of a Muslim student who told her he would be absent for Eid at the end of Ramadan. She remembered his religious background and when discussing American holidays, she also asked the Muslim student if he would be comfortable sharing about Ramadan. “He agreed and taught us about Muslim holidays. That was such a nice moment,” she recalled. Most participants reported that the students’ funds of knowledge positively influenced new learning and improved critical-thinking capacity to apply higher order cognitive problem-solving skills. Allowing students to use their own frames of reference also served as a motivational factor, which positively affected students’ self-esteem and introduced multiple perspectives into the classroom.

Providing Support for Diverse Learners. Research showed that educators cannot fully embrace diversity unless they provide support to meet the variety of students’ needs (Goldenberg, 2013). With regard to the question on how the participants address diversity in their instructional practices, most included student-centered activities, differentiation,

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scaffolding, visual aids, demonstrations, hands-on activities, practice in collaborative groups to create a non-threatening learning environment, and the use of technology to enhance learning.

Konrad illustrated his response with the following example, “I often use pictures and paintings in my lesson because it connects pretty easy with themes and literature, so in sharing those works of art, kids are able to reflect upon their experience and many times, it offers opportunity for kids to share their perspectives.” When I asked Martin how he supported his diverse learners, he answered: “I’ve always been a believer of just as many methods of putting it out there for students as possible. I’d have a graph to supplement a reading, or a video clip to supplement a chart for my visual learners, or a music piece for my auditory learners.” Adana, who uses a lot of demonstration in her classes, shared: “I break down a topic to two or three days and just focus on one aspect. I demo, they practice. The next day, I demo, they practice so I am introducing the language, but it’s not a deciding factor whether they can participate or not.”

Facilitating a student-centered, stress-free environment, Matias allows for students to be on their feet, moving around the classroom as much as possible: “A kid doesn’t have to be in his desk, working bell to bell; a kid can get up and move around the room, and move freely, and communicate, and get his own supplies, and reach his own avenues to ultimately get an end goal.” Matias also mentioned that he needs to build trust before he gives his students more freedom. He believes that a student-centered environment creates space for students to “feed off of each other, have exchanges and conversations about their work, about their products, about their ideas. The teacher doesn’t always have to be the sounding board, or the teacher doesn’t always have to guide them.” Meriam, a White language teacher shared, “I’m not really a fan of a 30-minute lecture period. I want my kids to feel like they have a voice and I try to build activities in so they can talk to each other and exchange ideas, not just be spoken to for a class period.”

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Adana talked about her world language class where some students needed additional support. She explained how she accommodates these learners, “We scaffold in a sense that we may talk about questions that we’re going to discuss after we watch a video, and we help them with the meaning, we translate so everybody is on the same thinking level as we watch.”

Because the district has constantly been investing in technology tools, the participants reported how technology can be used in maximizing student voice in learning and making students active participants in a lesson. “Have you ever heard of Pear Deck?” Konrad asked, when sharing his innovative ideas. He further explained:

I put up a question or a worksheet, and kids are using their device, sharing responses anonymously on the screen so that kids can share information during the class to still have their voice heard in the lesson. I use different games like Quizlet Live, and I randomize themes and the program jumbles up the names and randomly assigns kids to different things. When you go live with it, you create grids and they take a quiz. It’s fun.

Although Martin pointed out that technology could be “a double-edged sword,” he still believed that it can be a great learning tool. I witnessed during a classroom visit how he uses it to translate documents to support linguistically diverse students. He also said that he uses technology to find different programs online that could help differentiate instruction, like graphic organizers, maps or charts, or tips for breaking down texts. Technology can be a huge challenge both for teachers and students who do not have prior knowledge on how to use it, but the participants appreciated having technological tools available to support diverse students.

Alternative Assessment. Research showed that both teachers and students may experience frustrations as a result of state- and district-mandated curricula that focus on preparing all students for high-stakes standardized assessments (Tampio, 2018). The participants

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revealed their efforts to provide quality education delivered through high expectations and rigorous instruction to practice for standardized assessment but also talked about using alternative assessment tools. Meriam mentioned how she valued alternative assessment because it allowed her to “see what students can or cannot do as opposed to what they know or do not know.” She shared how “applied proficiency” was more important to her than “acquired proficiency.” Cathy demonstrated in her lessons how she gives her students a variety of choices, especially in the optional assignments. She said, “They can write an essay, they can write a poem, or if they’re artistic maybe they can create a painting, create a poster, create an iMovie. She explained that students can demonstrate what they had learned using a medium that they are more proficient in. “I’m mostly amazed at their talent, the diversity of talent that you certainly wouldn’t see in a multiple-choice test,” she concluded. Matias described a project where his students collaborate to make videos. He reflected on the benefits of having all the students involved:

Together, they have to have a script, they have to have a director, everybody has to be included, and you get to have the most diverse groups of kids work together. They had to be on camera, act and pose, and perform, and then go into postproduction and edit together and narrate. Invariably, there would always be some kid that never spoke in the class and that kid would come out, would blossom in this unit. I’m thinking about some of our very quiet ELLs who would suddenly come out and encourage the other kids, romances blossoming. That is a visual product of diversity in action.

One of the benefits of alternative assessment that was also discussed by the participants is boosting student self-esteem, which the students often carry over to other areas of their lives. Regina, a White art teacher, reflected how a student “could actually pull out an earlier piece of

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artwork or a later piece of artwork, from September to June, and they'll be able to see a difference. Kids are often startled by the difference. Kids are not startled by seeing a 75 and then a 90; they're happy but not startled." Matias added, "The kid will say: 'Wow! Look how much I've learned!' And that boosts self-esteem and fosters more than love and respect for the subject." Matias further explained:

When students are allowed to choose their level of comfort when completing an assessment, they may also realize their own potential. It shows them places where they could be employable, too. You're good at this, you could have a career out of it, or giving the kid a potential major in college. So, all that combines to offer them an opportunity to excel at something.

Denise expressed an important aspect of assessment by saying that it should measure progress, not only the outcome, and should not be tied to a specific score on the test. She reflected:

Maybe that kid in front of me didn't go from a 3 to a 4 on the ELA exam, maybe that kid just needed to be able to raise his hand in class for the first time ever, or feel comfortable in a classroom setting, or maybe there's five kids now who don't think reading is completely terrible as much as they used to. Maybe they'll just think reading could be fun sometimes.

The participants' responses and observations of their classes revealed a significant finding that providing opportunities for students to produce their own original responses and allowing them to show progress is more equitable than analyzing test scores.

Civic Engagement. Prior research pointed to civic engagement as a component of CSP and an important element in educating broad-minded global citizens (Carmichael & Norvang, 2014; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Juvonen et al., 2017; Kea & Trent, 2013). The participants,

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especially the social studies teachers, reported their conscious efforts to address issues of public concern, trying to instill in their students the readiness to protect public values or make a change or difference in the community. Cathy shared how she liked to spend the entire week on studying peacemakers like Mohandas Gandhi, making analogies to Martin Luther King, Jr., and current movements, such as Black Lives Matter, promoting the idea of peaceful protests. In her government and politics class, she discussed how the Constitution was written to serve the White male population of the United States, leaving women and minorities behind. She tries to inspire students to act after they study the background of today's inequities and marginalization. In one of her lessons on civil liberties, during an activity called "Fishbowl," a topic of civil liberties came up. The students wondered if it was constitutional to allow certain ethnic groups to have their religious holidays on the school calendar while other groups' holidays were excluded. Cathy believed this discussion might inspire the students to continue making a plea for having their religious holiday recognized by the school board.

Meriam designed a project to have her students research political and social problems in different countries around the world, or the students' home countries, and has them put up for discussion how these problems could be solved. "It encourages students to see these problems not as something they hear about in the news, but something they can actually help solve. In the next 10 or 20 years, they might be the ones making decisions about what this world looks like." The participants' intention to instill in their students the need for taking action and addressing issues of public and global concern became an important finding, pointing to the presence of this important element of CSP in their classrooms.

Whole-Child Philosophy. Several participants expressed their belief that a teacher is not only responsible for content but also for the mental health of the students. Martin added, "We're

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teachers, we're social workers, we're guidance counselors, we're on top of it, we need to make sure that they [the students] are taken care of." Cathy admitted:

I may have been quick in the past to judge a certain behavior in my class based on my own experiences and that could be completely wrong. So, if the kid in my class shows up unprepared, I would draw a conclusion: that person doesn't care, and if that person doesn't care, why should I care? When it might be a whole bunch of things going on in that kid's life. When that kid shows up in my classroom, that is not the beginning of the book. He's showing up to my class in the middle of the book, in the middle of the chapter.

Adana confirmed Cathy's statement of having to look at the whole child and not judging the students by applying the teachers' own standards. She shared how her perspective changed in the process of acquiring more experience with diverse students:

I used to think, if that kid doesn't come, he obviously doesn't care, but maybe he doesn't care at the moment because he has some other bigger things going on in his life. If we slow down and get to know kids as individuals, we're going to help those kids. They probably need us more than the kids who are already earning the high grades because they're going to be fine. It's the ones that are struggling that need us the most.

Another aspect the participants considered in their attempt to be mindful was the diversity of student personalities and cultural backgrounds related to classroom routines. Amina shared how she had a student with anxiety issues who did not want to be called on, so she avoided calling on her for a while. Gradually, after she allowed the time for the student to reach a level of comfort in her class, she started calling on her "little by little, one time a day" until the student got to the point when Amina can call on her with the same frequency that she calls on the

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other students. Denise shared how mindful she was of cultural and personal differences when completing the progress reports and the report cards. She said:

I know that students from some cultures are more reserved, and they feel that their role in the classroom is not to have fun, not to be that vocal. I try to avoid putting in the comment for them: 'To participate more in class.' Even though I try to hear from all my students, I understand that it's not necessarily an area of comfort for them, so I try to not force that upon them and I try to be mindful of what's accepted in other cultures, what they're used to just in terms of participation and the way they present their ideas to the class.

In a safe and comfortable classroom environment, participants said that students can share freely with each other and benefit from peer interactions while teachers accept their ideas and behaviors without judgment. In the context of most participants' accounts of their mindfulness, it was surprising to hear Tatiana's story about a student who challenged the teacher's required mode of expression. Tatiana talked about a student who did not want to do a presentation. The parent called and said, "My daughter does not want to do this presentation. She does not have confidence in herself; she thinks that she's ugly. She doesn't want to go in front of the students. She doesn't want people to make fun of her, so I'm asking you not to have her do the presentation." The parent suggested that her daughter do a paper instead. Tatiana reported the following interaction between her and the parent:

Tatiana: Excuse me, but what I do for one, I do for all.

Parent: You're not going to accept the paper?

Tatiana: No, I'm not.

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Parent: Well, you know what? I'm going to have to come up there and I'm going to kick your behind.

Tatiana: What? You're going to do what?

Parent: Because you're not listening to me.

Tatiana: I don't have to listen to you. I'm the educator.

Tatiana further recounted:

So, I called the principal, told the principal about my conversation, and I said, 'You need to lock the doors. Because this parent just threatened me. She's going to come up here and beat me up because I wouldn't allow her daughter to do a paper.' So, the principal was very supportive. She said, 'Listen, if you want her to do the presentation, she has to do it or she'll get a zero.' So, the young lady came in the next day. And I said, 'Are you ready to do this presentation?' She said, 'Yes.' Do you know she was a great presenter? She got up there and she did a fantastic job. She got a 100 on her presentation. Her mother called me back the next day apologizing to me, telling me how wrong she was and how right I was. She brought tears to my eyes. I got a present from her for Christmas. I have that present sitting in my bedroom now.

Tatiana's approach and the way she handled the student pointed to a disparate finding that some educators promote equality and fairness over individual needs. In the above section on alternative assessment, several participants pointed out how much they valued giving student choices and allowing them to showcase their strengths while demonstrating what they had learned. Tatiana is still operating under the old way of thinking about assessment while CSP promotes a more equitable form of assessment that allows students to choose the format. Had Tatiana given all student choices of how they want to deliver the product of their learning, she

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could have avoided the unpleasant confrontation. Tatiana's story showed that, despite their best intentions to educate diverse students, not all teachers' practices are aligned with CSP, which stresses equity and catering to individual student needs. The principles of CSP are built around the belief that allowing students choices does not exclude high expectations but helps create a positive and productive learning environment (Paris & Alim, 2012, 2014). David summarized it in his comment, "What we do in a school, district, building, classroom, is supposed to be to the benefit of our students. And comfort should be synonymous with learning. The more comfortable students are, the more they identify with what they're hearing, seeing, it opens them up to the information."

Relationships. To introduce equity into education, teachers need to know their students' lived experiences and understand their needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). Several participants pointed to student-teacher relationships as an important component of their teaching. Cathy brought up the importance of these relationships when she said, "I know nothing about the student's previous experiences, so before I draw a conclusion, I have to try to get to know that student better as an individual so I can appreciate where they're coming from. And when they're not prepared, I have to further find out about the why." Adana remembered a documentary she saw during one of the PL workshops about the effects that trauma can have on students. The documentary, along with several experiences she had with students who come from other countries, taught her that there is a link between trauma and student success. Adana shared:

Some students are so traumatized about their conditions in their home country or perhaps with what they have to do to get here and it affects how they do as students. Their stories are so horrific and, you know, some students open up easier than others. I think the idea of being a stable, consistent adult in their lives is definitely beneficial.

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Regina added to the above comments by stating, “If I have a diverse classroom, I’d find out the students’ backgrounds. I’d try to know things about them.” She illustrated her response with this example:

When I had my Haitian students, I would go home and I would research their flowers, or their vegetables, or fruit, and I would just throw it in a conversation and say: “Oh, I just had papaya,” and they would say, “Oh, we have that in our country. I love papaya.” So, I would always try to get something that I could hook them in with.

The overall finding that emerged from this section was that embracing diversity in the classroom strongly calls for an instructional model based on making sure students feel safe and secure in the classroom, building relationships with students, and knowing their needs and lived experiences. When teachers were able to connect with the students, they were also able to move between cultures and become advocates for the students who come from backgrounds different from the ones of the teachers.

Teacher as a Learner. Prior research has pointed to the benefits of a diverse classroom where teachers become learners alongside their students, as well as teachers of their students (Biesta, 2016). An important finding that emerged from talking to the participants and visiting their classrooms is that they were experts in their field of knowledge but they also immersed themselves in the culture, customs, and lived experiences of their students. David shared:

I love learning from my students. I will always try to incorporate a variety of words here and there in a foreign language, or foreign accent, and I do that on purpose. Early in our year, I tell my students this is not my classroom; this is our classroom, and information must move in two directions, from me to you, and most importantly, from you to me. I will often tell my students to teach me certain words, certain phrases, not necessarily non-

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English, sometimes it's English, but to the adult, it's not English because it is slang terminology. And they teach them to me, and I use them throughout the new school year with intention. I'll often say things in Spanish, French Creole, Russian, Japanese, cowboy accent, British accent, French accent, and I do this on purpose because mainly it's fun, and also, I believe it opens another channel to my students, making them comfortable in the environment. You know, it's human nature; if you're having fun, it's easy to learn.

During classroom visits, it also became clear that equitable teaching does not mean a teacher in the front of the room, lecturing for 45 minutes. Some participants revealed a sense of humor, known to lower students' affective filter. "Mr. Dennis, slow down, I can't keep up with you," said Howard to a student, putting aside an image of a teacher who is always perceived as a leader. "Go to page 316. No, my apologies, guys. Stay on 315," David instructed his class, not afraid to admit he made a mistake. Regina talked about having a book on her desk in the language she knows her students speak, and as she is trying to understand the reading, she would ask the students to help her. "They really connect when they see how I struggle trying to learn their language. It also helps me understand their struggle when they try to learn English," she shared. The participants' comments demonstrated that abandoning the traditional role of an omniscient educator significantly helps create a positive learning environment that maximizes student learning.

Family Engagement. A growing body of research highlighted the importance of family engagement in the educational process (Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). It is said to improve student achievement, reduce absenteeism, and enhance parents' confidence in their children's education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Callaway, 2017; Gay, 2013). A finding emerged from the data that pointed to a core benefit of having students'

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family members engaged in the educational process. Several participants discussed their effort to connect with the students' families and use them not only as cultural resources but also invite them to witness their children's intellectual growth. David talked about utilizing parent voice in designing a curriculum: "Talk to parents of the population that you're hoping to impact, get their view, get their perspective, get some feedback from them, and then you use that as your guide." Inspired by *The Color of Water*, a memoir by James McBride, Adam had his students write their own memoirs and reach out to their families as resources. He excitedly talked about the outcome:

In their memoir, they have to interview someone in their family, someone close to them. It could be a close friend, too, about life experiences, and oftentimes, the students do take a very different perspective because now they're starting to look at that person, the other person they're interviewing in a very different way and oftentimes they get to know them on a much deeper level, too, especially in a class that's multicultural. Students write about their own experiences growing up in America, kind of comparing it to their parents' experiences coming to America. I got emails from parents telling me how much they enjoyed having their input in that project.

Meriam shared how she invited family members to the library where her students were sharing their creative writing assignments. She reminisced:

Only one parent showed up and I thought it was going to be a failure. I remember he was from Haiti and didn't speak a lot of English. We used this software "Story Bird" to write stories and the students presented them on the big screen. The smile on this man's face when his son was presenting was priceless...

Matias reflected on how the seventh graders at Jefferson High School were involved in making anti-bullying public service announcement videos. All students from the grade were involved,

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and when the videos were combined into an hour-long movie, the school auditorium filled up with family members who came to join their children in watching it. “It felt like a celebration,” Matias added.

The above perspectives reinforced the theme that family engagement can play a significant role in promoting student success. Creating a welcoming environment for students’ families is vital to the educational development of students and to upholding the democratic mission of public schools. However, as reported above (see Part 1: Shaping Perceptions of Diversity), not all participants felt that parents were recognized as important stakeholders. As Denise reported, especially parents of immigrant students were not considered part of her building, Lafayette High School. She was wondering if the school was doing enough to ensure better attendance at PTA meetings and making parents aware that “they have a seat at the table.”

Challenges of Teaching Diverse Students

Several research studies examined not only benefits of diversity but also challenges teachers often face when working in a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classroom (Gudeman, 2001; Gurin et al., 2004; Steffens et al., 2017). When I asked the participants what challenges they faced or anticipated, they discussed the following aspects of their teaching: (a) growing linguistic diversity, (b) socioeconomic needs of the students, (c) prescribed curriculum (d) racialized tracking, (e) implicit bias, (f) lack of parental involvement, and (g) overall changes in society.

Growing Linguistic Diversity. When asked about their perceptions of diversity and the demographic changes in their schools and the district, 12 out of 15 participants brought up the growing linguistic diversity among the student population. All have experienced an influx of ELLs as more families from South America, Southeast Asia, Middle East, and African countries

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are moving into the district. Konrad, a White English teacher at Lafayette High School, remembered that when he started teaching 25 years ago, “if students weren’t native speakers they would be probably Spanish speaking.” He further explained, “Today, we have Urdu and just so many more diverse languages that are part of what the kids speak. And they come from more different backgrounds today than ever before.” Tatiana was not sure how many different languages were spoken at her school and added, “We just had a student come from Turkey, and that was one of the first that we’ve experienced!”

The participants discussed several challenges they face when teaching ELLs. Some of these challenges relate to the rigorous curriculum imposed by the district, state, or national standards, and high-stake assessments all students have to take at the end of the year. Other challenges the participants discussed included not knowing their students’ cultural needs because, as Adam stated, “there is no instrument designed that teachers have access to, and that could be a survey instrument, something that could give us a better idea of what students’ diverse cultural needs are; then we can begin to assess their needs.” The participants, often unable to communicate with the linguistically diverse students, brought up “a barrier in communication,” which often became a source of empathy they felt for their students. Konrad shared, “The linguistically diverse students are withdrawn from class, so there were times they just did not know what was going on, they couldn’t follow the instruction, and that broke my heart; that hurt.” Cathy also reported how her “heart breaks for those kids because they’re often trying really hard and they’re trying to learn a new language, and they’re trying to learn the curriculum, and it’s not easy.” When I asked David about his challenges, he replied:

The language component at times may lead to some frustration because I have to work in the structure that I have to work in, often tied, and mostly as a result of time, in my ability

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to help the foreign language students that have difficulty reading, understanding, speaking English, that presents some frustration for me in that, what else can I do to help the student? And even when I do have ideas, time is my enemy. I still have a curriculum to complete, I still have a Regents exam in June that I want my students to be successful on, so time wins, unfortunately, in some cases.

Matias also talked about his challenges “with somebody who doesn’t speak the language” because “a lot of times, it’s hard to tell how they’re feeling.” He also reported “kind of making sure that they’re getting the instruction as much as they can.” Cathy reminisced about a student from Haiti who she was working with:

She [the student] was having a miserable time doing the multiple choice, understanding what the question is and which choice to pick and I could see that she was so frustrated because she already failed the Regents once and she was getting ready for the third time, and I could see that she was starting to cry. Her tears were welling up in her eyes and I remember saying to her: ‘Look, you speak two languages, I speak one. If somebody made me take this test in French, I’d be lost.’ And then I remember she looked at me and she goes: ‘It’s not two languages, I could speak three.’

Teachers who had linguistically diverse students distanced themselves from their responsibility to support all students. I observed during classroom visits that if there was a co-teacher present in the classroom, he/she was the sole support for the ELLs. In David’s classroom, I witnessed the co-teacher leaning over the student, whispering or pointing to the iPad screen.

Teachers reported having a limited time to differentiate and support linguistically diverse learners due to the curriculum restrictions. When describing her classes, Melanie said: “I don’t have beginners, which is good [because] I couldn’t move that fast.” Tatiana brought up the

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challenge that her linguistically diverse students posed and she described them as “very low functioning when they enter into the class.” She was happy she had a co-teacher and did not have a Regents test at the end of the year so she could “dedicate more time to support the students.” She felt pressured by the curriculum and concluded, “I don’t blame the educators. It all depends on what course the educator is teaching that would warrant additional support for these students.” The above comments raise important questions, such as: Are the educators looking for ways to provide support and help the students meet the rigorous expectations of the curriculum and state assessments, or do they merely stop at empathy and pity the students for having to struggle because they lack English language proficiency? Research on supporting ELLs describes how crucial it is for teachers to become familiar with the process of language acquisition and strategies like scaffolding (Adams & Jeanrenaud, 2008; Allensworth, 2012; Goldenberg, 2013). Perceiving the students as victims of the rigorous expectations imposed on them by the state or national standards limits the educators’ responsibility to push themselves out of their comfort zone and connect with all their students, without exceptions.

Socioeconomic Needs of the Students. Alongside changes within the district’s population that had become more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, the participants also reported “growing changes within the predominantly middle-class neighborhood.” Martin observed:

I do see much more students now, who may be coming to school a little bit hungry because they can’t afford certain meals or we do have some students in the school now that are, by definition, homeless, living in shelters. I think even what I said before our school being a middle-class school, that might be painting with too broad of a stroke.

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The socioeconomic status of the student's family played a significant role during school closures when students depended on the internet connection to complete their assigned work and remain in touch with their teachers. When asked a question on how the participants supported their students during the COVID-19 health crisis when schools remained closed, 8 out of 15 reported having difficulty staying connected and all 8 mentioned the most difficult to reach were the immigrant students. Meriam talked about contacting the student by phone only to hear that "they had no internet connection" and the next day "their phone was going to be disconnected" as well so she "went out of her way trying to help the family." Amina mobilized the guidance department and helped a family pay their rent with the money from fundraisers. Martin brought up a story of a student who did not have internet until the last few weeks of the school year since the family lost their income and could not pay their bills. The student's assignments piled up and he needed a lot of help to pass his classes. Howard discussed how he communicated with some students late at night, "working around their schedules because they had long work hours trying to help their families." The expectations that all students would be able to switch to remote learning turned out to be unrealistic. Remote learning exposed numerous inequalities between privileged and marginalized groups and magnified the social and educational disparities already present in American society.

Prescribed Curriculum. Seven out of 15 participants reported that the prescribed curriculum created a big challenge in the context of teaching diverse students because it was lacking multicultural perspectives and posed rigorous expectations in terms of test preparation. For example, Adam explained that certain works of literature are on the mandated reading list even though they "offer stereotypical depictions of certain races" and he gave an example of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. He believed that "finding works that create counter

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narratives, present a different perspective, give a more cultural take on things, or even the young adult approach” would help reduce the stereotypes. However, he was afraid that “oftentimes teachers, the English teachers in particular, only look at the literature from their own lens.” He reported often hearing from his colleagues how they found it challenging to use supplemental literature because “they just don’t know the works. They don’t even know where to look.” Most participants felt that the curriculum restrictions limit the time they have “for reviewing, re-teaching, and differentiation.” Howard reported, “We rush through the units and don’t have time to go back and review. I always thought ‘less is more,’ but apparently, those who design the curriculum don’t feel the same way.”

Racialized Tracking. Four out of 15 participants reported challenges that relate to racialized tracking practices, particularly AP versus low-track classes, which align with the literature on the failure to integrate instructional practices that support diverse students. Kozol (2012), Ravitch (2013), and Stitzlein (2012) addressed the issue of schools reinforcing the social divides by creating structures and policies that may perpetuate marginalization and increase achievement gaps between the racial groups. For example, Cathy confirmed that at Cherry Hill High School, which has a high percentage of the Asian population, “if someone walked into [her] AP classroom, they would see a lot of White students and a lot of students with Asian backgrounds, with Black and Latinx students underrepresented.” Although the school has made a concerted effort to address that disparity and it is definitely improving, it is still typical for AP classes to have a significantly higher number of White and Asian students. At the same time, Cathy stated that her “regular classes were much more evenly mixed as compared to the AP classes.” Cathy was not happy with the state of the matters and expressed her desire to have “a mixed group of students in all her classes because it benefits everyone.”

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Tatiana shared Cathy's perspective and pointed to an uneven number of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students in AP classes as compared to regular classes in her school, Yorktown High School. She used to teach advanced classes where the students' average course percentages reached 90 and above, but this year, she is teaching all ninth graders. She described her regular classes as having a large population of "average students" whose grades are 80-85, "below average students" with lower grades, and a lot of students who are ELLs." When asked a follow-up question about the racial makeup of her classes, Tatiana answered that her building is very diverse but her AP classes had a high ratio of Indian and Pakistani students, with fewer Black and Latinx students. All four participants found value in having "a racially and academically mixed group of students" in all their classes and believed all students should have an opportunity to interact with "people from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds."

Implicit Bias. Other comments on challenges that participants face in diverse classrooms included implicit bias demonstrated by both some students and adults in their schools. Cathy shared that she experienced racist comments made by students in the classroom:

Sometimes kids would say things that are racist but they don't realize it's racist because they're not proficient in understanding. They may say something and, quite frankly, it's racist, but they're 15 years old, they don't even realize it's racist, but other students are getting angry that something was said.

Matias presented the problem of racist comments from the perspective of someone who had been in the district for many years. He said:

It doesn't happen with near the frequency like it used to. That was huge at Jefferson, the early days at Jefferson. It was rough and you had parents that reinforced racism and

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archaic notions at home. And I fought against it. Now, the students would kind of police each other. You have students who would be outspoken and tell somebody else: ‘You know, that’s not right or appropriate.’ So, I think that’s a challenge now, allowing other people to speak and have an opinion but being sure that you explain why they [racist comments] are not appropriate and hope kids try to get it.

The participants also felt in the present climate of perpetuating racial and cultural biases, it was difficult to find other people in their schools who could be considered allies in the process of acquiring cultural competency. Using recommendations from the workshops she had attended, Amina reported making several efforts to create a network in her school made up of people who care about diversity and cultural proficiency. She shared, “I often feel that it’s forced and people don’t care enough about it. It’s not a priority for them.” Adana claimed that “a lot of people are somewhat hardened, somewhat stuck in their ways.” She also said that it was often difficult to know how individuals feel because often “they can hide it [their bias] well.”

Lack of Parental Involvement. A few participants reflected on the possible source of the problem with educating today’s students, blaming parents for lack of interest in their children’s education. The participants identified possible sources of this lack of parental engagement as cultural differences or the influence of technology on the family structure. Adam pointed out the challenge that cultural differences between the teachers and parents may pose. He commented, “It can be very challenging speaking to the Asian parents. Certainly, they support education, but oftentimes, because some of them would just be too compliant and say “yes” all the time, other times there is a language barrier.” He further observed how in his school, it is very challenging to get parents involved in school activities. He concluded, “It’s easier to get the stereotypical parents to get involved in school activities, to have parents to go to the games, to have parents to

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go to homecoming, but the Asian parents—it's a little harder sell for them." Adam's comment on challenges echoed a theme of limited parental involvement discussed in Part 1, where Denise stated parents may have not felt welcomed into the school community.

The participants also believed because the parents themselves were distracted by the technology, they did not give their child necessary attention, which caused the lack of teaching and learning interaction and developing communication skills. David commented with a smile, "Because the parents are playing Candy Crush on their phone and the parents have the television babysitting the child when it should be them reading to their kids, teaching them social skills, etc., so it's just the overall collapse from home base down."

Overall Changes in Society. The participants also reported challenges that transcended racial, cultural, or linguistic aspects of their classroom. Those challenges were mostly posed by changes in society, like the emphasis on the use of technological tools in education, mental health crisis, and the overall lack of motivation among adolescents. Several teachers stated that smartphones and iPads changed the way students learn and the way they expect to be taught. They perceived it as a challenge to keep the students' attention in the classroom when their focus is often divided. David went on to explain: "Technology has significantly damaged the students' ability to imagine, and it's the power of imagination that creates the world. So, when you now replace the child's ability to imagine with toys, you are going to get a diffused student."

The findings that emerged from the section on challenges demonstrated that the participants were not always able to address diverse students' needs and often revealed biased beliefs. The findings also indicated that there were challenges posed before educators that resulted from district policies. However, the findings also revealed that the participants strived to become culturally responsive for the benefit of their students. Regina said in answer to the

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question about her challenges: “There’s always going to be challenges. Not just with diversity, but with education. And you have to figure out a way to have your classroom be inclusive, have your classroom safe, and have a learning environment that’s good for everybody.” Matias concluded his response on challenges by saying: “Challenges? Well, there’s challenges in education, period. I use the word *challenge* as something that I’m going to win.”

Portrait of a Culturally Sustaining Educator

Having coined the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, Paris (2012) actively encouraged educators to develop skills needed to be successful in a diverse classroom. When I asked the participants if they were aware of important personal characteristics that school teachers needed to possess or develop to effectively work with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, they listed several key qualities that I included in the portrait of a culturally sustaining educator. These CSP teacher characteristics include (a) empathy, (b) self-reflection and a growth mindset, (c) student-centered classroom, (d) raising global awareness and preparing students for future careers, and (e) participation in extracurricular activities.

Empathy. Nine out of 15 participants listed empathy as the number-one characteristic of a successful teacher of diverse students. Denise claimed, “I don’t think that there is any barrier that cannot be broken if the kids genuinely understand that you are trying to meet them where they are and you care about what happens to them.” Adam added, “Sometimes, teachers think too much with a teacher lens. They do lose sight of what students go through.” Cathy gave a detailed explanation of what empathy encompassed for her:

Without the empathy and compassion, without the ability to understand a perspective that’s different from your own, if you’re not willing to do that, if you’re only going to judge interactions based on your own limited experience, you’re not going to be

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effective. So, if you're working with a diverse clientele, you have to be culturally proficient or at least on that journey to learn more about other cultures and to try to appreciate your students' experiences, and how that has impacted their outlook.

Meriam thought that empathy should not stop at just walking in a student's shoes. "If the student is in distress," she explained, "the teacher needs to take action to help that student, not just commiserate with them. If empathy doesn't include taking action, it's just an empty word."

Self-reflection and a Growth Mindset. Five participants identified honesty and the ability to reflect on one's own biases as important characteristics of a successful educator of diverse students. Adana alluded to "honesty with others and honesty with yourself." She elaborated on her response: "If something is different for you and that difference makes you uncomfortable, owning that is step one." Regina added, "Just being a good human being is the first place to start. Knowing who I am, knowing that I do have a certain privilege as I navigate myself through this world." Lauren explained how teachers should be aware of the language they use in the classroom: "You need to be sensitive and just have a sense of self-awareness so that you know what to say, how to say it, be professional, loving, and caring." Amina proposed open-mindedness and sensitivity in personal relationships. She thought teachers should not be afraid to try something new and be prepared to fail. "Some days, you'll feel like things didn't work out, but it's ok; every day you'll have a fresh start. The bottom line is to be kind because when you're kind, even if you fail, people will be responsive to you trying again," Amina concluded.

Student-Centered Classroom. Four participants stated how important student-centered activities are to culturally sustaining teaching. Adam included tapping into the students' cultural capital into the profile of the culturally sustaining educator. He shared:

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If your mentality going in is “my way and that’s it,” you will never be able to experience what the students can bring to the table. So, you have to adapt and to change the way you do things, and to not be afraid to let the students teach you something. I think the learning needs to be reciprocated. And if you can open yourself to doing that, all of a sudden, you have a classroom environment where you’re going to empower students more to not only share their stories but to have more ownership over their own learning. I do think teachers need to be more of that facilitator mindset as opposed to kind of that authoritarian mindset.

Cathy added another quality to the portrait of a culturally sustaining educator. She suggested diversifying the assignments to allow students to showcase their strengths. She said, “Not everyone has the same strengths, so give students an opportunity to demonstrate a strength that otherwise you wouldn’t have noticed.” Howard pointed out that in a student-centered classroom, a teacher must listen to the students and allow himself or herself to look vulnerable. “If you make a mistake, sometimes a serious one, not just a misspelled word, it’s ok to go back and fix it in front of the students. Sometimes, they may even point it out to you. It’s not the end of the world.” Denise went as far as asking her students for feedback on the lesson. She shared:

It’s scary and it makes you feel extremely vulnerable to ask kids how something went or what advice they would give, but I think ultimately, that’s the best way to grow. The kids see you 180 days a year for 43 minutes a day and they are the ones who know more about you than a quick snapshot that the administrator may get, so ask them, get their opinions, get their intake.

Raising Global Awareness and Preparing Students for Future Careers. As today’s adolescents are the inheritors of the rapidly changing world, three of the participants felt it was

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important to raise global awareness and to prepare students to be mindful citizens in a democratic society. Meriam reflected:

You can't just fall in love with the content, you have to make it relevant to the students' lives. How does it prepare them for college or a future career? How does it open them up to different perspectives? How does it make them global citizens? If you only make them think it's relevant because it's on the test, you'll probably lose them.

Participation in Extracurricular Activities. Five out of 15 participants brought up involvement in extracurricular activities, like field trips, school plays, concerts, clubs, and sports as a characteristic of a successful teacher of diverse students. Matias thought it was extremely important to establish relationships and allow teachers and students to see each other outside of the classroom context. Meriam, having reported participation in several school field trips, reflected that the conversations she had with students on the bus and while visiting different places allowed her to really get to know her students. "Every field trip I've been on, I feel that students have showed me their best sides. We come back to the classroom and we are not the same people anymore. We have a bond."

A portrait of a culturally sustaining educator that emerged from the data is someone who values and preserves diversity while stimulating the students' growth within and across cultures. It is also someone who sets high expectations but allows for individualism to come out when assessing learning outcomes. A culturally sustaining educator is a person who caters not only to students' cognitive needs but also social and emotional needs, with the purpose of preparing the students for their future lives in a democratic society.

Summary

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In this chapter, I presented the findings of my qualitative study on CSP in secondary classrooms. I divided the chapter into three major sections. Part 1 included a discussion of the findings related to the definitions of diversity and the stakeholders responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity in a school setting. In Part 2, I focused on factors leading to the teachers' development of CSP skills, including personal background and lived experiences, as well as the role of pre-service and in-service PL programs in preparing them to be effective teachers of diverse learners. In Part 3, I reviewed the findings related to how teachers develop the CSP curricula and to what extent diversity themes are present in the curriculum. I also reviewed teachers' instructional practices demonstrating how teachers enact CSP skills.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the study and a discussion of the findings related to the literature. It also provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research. The summary of the study includes an overview of the previous four chapters and recapitulates the problem, purpose statement, methodology, research questions, and the major findings. I elaborate on the findings not only as they relate to the existent literature but also to the conceptual framework of CSP. In the methodology review, I include the type of research, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. In the unanticipated and surprising findings section, I present the unexpected outcomes of this study. I conclude this chapter with the study's limitations and provide recommendations and implications for further research. I close this chapter with concluding remarks that relate to my study.

Summary of the Study

In this dissertation, I explored teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges of working in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse secondary classrooms. Since the number of diverse students in U.S. classrooms has increased substantially over the last two decades, teachers need to be prepared to embrace diversity and build on it as an asset (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2014). Research suggested that one of the appropriate approaches when working with diverse students is CSP (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). CSP is an asset-based approach that uses the cultural capital of diverse communities to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students. This approach moves from a teacher-centered to a more student-centered frame of reference (NYSED, 2019; Paris, 2012). CSP is represented by four central tenets: (a) school community members participate in critical self-awareness of implicit biases; (b) administration

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recruits, retains, and prepares teachers for CSP; (c) all stakeholders promote inclusive school environments; and (d) community members and parents are engaged in the life of the school in culturally relevant ways. By focusing on the four tenets of CSP, educators can create a teaching model that builds on diverse students' knowledge, experiences, skills, values, and perspectives; develops students' critical thinking; and prepares them for engaged citizenry. During this process, educators need to participate in critical reflection on personal biases. They also need to promote inclusive school environments and maintain relationships with community members and parents. Educators can use the CSP model to guide curriculum development to challenge racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices. Therefore, in this dissertation, I sought to examine factors that contribute to the development of CSP and how these factors help teachers enact CSP skills in the process of teaching and learning. Teachers who chose to participate consented to semi-structured interviews and classroom visits and shared sample lesson plans. The findings from this research study contribute to the literature on how teachers enact CSP and how they integrate it into their diverse classrooms for the benefit of all students.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the entire study and sets up the rationale, highlighting the benefits of diversity for all students and the need for teachers to acquire appropriate skills to enact CSP. In Chapter 2, I applied the theoretical framework of CSP (Paris, 2012) to contextualize my literature review and my research design. The theoretical framework provided a lens that I used to explore teachers' knowledge and application of CSP in their classrooms. Additionally, in Chapter 2, I provided a comprehensive analysis of the literature related to CSP. In Chapter 3, I outlined in detail the qualitative study I conducted using a case study design to make sense of the participants' perceptions of diversity and factors leading to the development of CSP skills. In Chapter 4, I

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analyzed the collected data, searching for relevant themes and presented the findings of my qualitative study on CSP in diverse secondary classrooms.

Overview of the Problem

Research highlighted the vulnerability of diverse school settings in times of change, political instability, or social divides because schools often reflect societal tendencies of marginalizing certain underprivileged groups like immigrants, students of color, or ELLs (Kozol, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012). Research also pointed to educators as key facilitators in the process of creating culturally responsive and sustaining school settings (Gay 2002, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1996, 2006; Paris, 2012). Therefore, school districts have the responsibility of preparing teachers for working in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. While some districts have taken steps to promote inclusive school environments and provided training on CSP to their faculty and staff, their journey toward cultural proficiency is far from complete. There are still gaps in teacher preparation that point to implicit bias, color-evasive attitudes, or lack of practices focusing on diversity as a strength.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to examine how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms. My research goal was to make sense of how teachers' background and experiences, pre-service teacher preparation, and in-service PL helped them enact CSP in the classroom, and what role the school or district administration played in facilitating this process. Research questions that helped guide this study included:

1. How does a diverse group of secondary teachers define and value racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and culturally sustaining pedagogy in the teaching and learning process?

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2. How do teachers perceive their ability and preparedness (background knowledge and lived experiences, pre-service teacher preparation, in-service PL) to translate the knowledge they have about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment?
 - a. What successes and challenges do teachers anticipate or encounter when working in diverse classrooms?
 - b. How do teachers perceive the role of administration in helping them enact CSP?

Review of the Methodology

The research questions of my dissertation study were answered by utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. The study was designed for a unit of analysis that constituted teachers employed in a racially, socio-economically, and linguistically diverse Northeastern school district. I sought to make sense of teachers' perceptions, preparation, current practices, and challenges by analyzing them both in detail and holistically in their own context. The school district for this study was chosen because of its changing student demographics. Within the last decade (2009-2019), the district experienced an influx of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, mostly from South America, Central America, and Asia, while the number of White students has decreased.

I collected data from February 2020 to May 2020 through a series of 60-90 minutes face-to-face and Zoom interviews with 15 participants. Most of the participating teachers were White ($n = 11$) and female ($n = 8$). I selected the teachers by their interest and voluntary participation in workshops related to cultural proficiency. To validate the study, I conducted member checks with the participants by sending them the transcripts, kept a researcher journal, and carried out classroom visits in person and via Google Meet. I also analyzed lesson plans provided by the participants. I coded data within this time frame and from February 2020 through July 2020, I

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reviewed and analyzed data simultaneously to the progression of my collection process, searching for common themes to answer the research questions.

Major Findings

The significance of this study lies in unpacking the diversity construct in a local context and interrogating the diversity discourse. A detailed explanation of the findings in answer to the research questions stated above is found in Chapter 4. With regard to the first research question on how secondary teachers defined and valued racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, the 15 participants described diversity as a multifaceted and evolving educational construct that involves the co-existence of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. However, the participants often used the language of “diverse” as a marker for people of color, of non-European descent, or speaking a language other than English, which defaults “White” as “normal” or “non-diverse” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2007; Wells et al., 2019). The participants’ definitions of “diverse students” framed White students as the norm by which students of color were compared, which may have been by-products of the way the participants were raised and educated. Grappling with the definition of diversity that included several key terms and aspects, some teachers revealed personal biases and color-evasive attitudes. This shows that the first CSP tenet about uncovering one’s own personal biases about students of color is not realized. Teachers’ lack of personal awareness exposes a significant concern that may lead to the othering of students of color.

The interview data suggested that not all teachers were ready to fully include students of color in high-track courses, practice anti-racist teaching, or act to diminish racial inequalities in school. They were often relying on the selective inclusion of some diverse students instead of the full inclusion of all students (Berrey, 2015). The findings also showed that some participants

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lacked culturally sustaining pedagogical beliefs and skills and perpetuated the old-school approach of equality over equity. While equality is important in education because all students deserve an equal amount of respect or an equal amount of instruction, not all participants provided each student with the tools he or she specifically needs to thrive. A few participants reported difficulties to connect with other educators in their schools who ignored their attempts of creating a network of allies to support cultural proficiency efforts. They believed some teachers chose to repress their biases and pretend that discomfort was not there instead of reflecting on them and allowing themselves to grow personally and professionally. Yet, teachers strongly believed that diversity only has significance in the classroom when teachers know how to enact it and then use it for educational advantage.

In terms of the second research question regarding how the participants made sense of the factors leading to their development of CSP, I found that their personal background and lived experiences, pre-service teacher preparation programs, and in-service PL all played a role. Teachers pointed to the importance of immigrant roots and their family's open-mindedness in helping them develop interracial and intercultural connections and cultural awareness. The findings also showed that the participants' lived experiences, like travel or the love of reading, broadened their horizons and opened them to diverse perspectives. In addition, the findings pointed to implicit bias and colorblindness that may have been by-products of the way the participants were raised and educated. An important finding revealed that despite their challenges, like difficulty in communication with linguistically diverse students, the rigors of the prescribed curriculum, or racialized tracking in AP classes, the participants made efforts to become culturally proficient. They recognized that their journey is an ongoing process of self-

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reflection and vulnerability that involves interrogating and then changing deep-seated beliefs about students of color.

The findings also demonstrated that elements of CSP were included in the process of curriculum development. The participants revealed how they interpret the prescribed curriculum by tapping into their students' interest to guide the curriculum development and by infusing the curriculum with multicultural perspectives. Furthermore, several elements of CSP were identified in the participants' instructional practices. The participants showed how they elevate their students' voice and tap into their funds of knowledge. They were also able to support diverse learners by using a variety of equitable strategies and resources. Although some participants straddled the line between equity and equality and provided the same education as opposed to an education in personalized ways, most participants used alternative assessment to highlight their students' strengths. Many participants presented themselves as mindful individuals trying to embrace the whole-child philosophy, ready to learn alongside their students, and eager to establish relationships with students and engage their families into the educational process. However, some participants revealed deficit-oriented views of families of color, leading to stereotypical perspectives on students' ability and behavior. In addition, classroom visits and lesson plan analyses did not always back up the participants' reported perception of diversity as a strength. They sometimes revealed that linguistically diverse students were separated in their own groups and lesson plans focused on Eurocentric perspectives.

The focal teachers felt that all stakeholders, including the administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents, are responsible for shaping perceptions and promoting the benefits of diversity within the school community. The findings demonstrated that teachers valued the administrative efforts to embrace diversity, but they also believed that the efforts were

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inconsistent and the administration did not put diversity at the forefront of learning. The findings also revealed that teachers, administration, and the community had made an attempt but had not fully embraced the demographic changes in the district. On one hand, the participants shared how they have been making efforts to become effective in working with diverse students; however, it also became clear that despite their best intentions to educate diverse students, not all their practices were aligned with CSP that stresses equity and catering to individual student needs.

Findings Related to the Literature and Theoretical Framework

In this section, I discuss the findings of this dissertation not only in terms of the existing literature but also concerning this study's theoretical framework of CSP. I elaborate on how these findings add to the existing research on diversity and CSP. I explain how this study attempts to fill the gap in research on the process of teachers' preparation to acquire CSP skills and what factors shape their ability to enact these skills in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms.

The Significance of Diversity

During the interview process, most participants expressed that they valued diversity in their classrooms and believed that it benefits all students. The beneficial aspect of diversity is supported by prior research and the literature that describe how crucial it is for public schools to embrace diversity and create a positive learning environment for students with a variety of backgrounds (Bonner et al., 2017; Gurin et al., 2004; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Saaman, 2000; Steffens et al., 2017). Prior research also proposed to "shift the term, stance, and practice of asset pedagogies toward more explicitly pluralist outcomes" (Paris, 2012, p. 87). The findings of this dissertation study are aligned with existing research and suggest eliminating deficit

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thinking and building on diversity while stimulating personal growth and preparing diverse student populations for citizenship.

Prior research also described diversity as a multifaceted, evolving, and educational construct and suggested that the presence of children from culturally diverse groups places specific demands on schools and teachers to become culturally competent (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Tampio, 2018). This dissertation confirms that cultural diversity is a complex construct, reaching far beyond noticeable differences among students to include students' frames of references, cultural capital, linguistic background, academic ability, socioeconomic status, personality, and many other dimensions of identity, norms, values, and experiences. The findings illustrated that classroom diversity can have many different meanings, depending on context, and refers to a wide range of differences in students' attributes and needs. Although prior research describes diversity as a mix of race, culture, and socioeconomic status, including White students (Moses & Chang, 2006; Schuck, 2003; Steffens et al., 2017), the findings demonstrated that diverse students are often perceived as solely students of color or immigrant students. Even though teachers view students of color and immigrant students as a positive asset to their classroom, they are still normalizing White culture, while any student that is not White is considered "diverse."

Prior research pointed to teachers' responsibility for embracing diversity and applying its benefits to the advantage of all students (Bassey, 2016; Gay, 2015; Koerner & Abdul-Tawwab, 2006; Marin, 2000; Tampio, 2018). The findings of this dissertation showed that teachers believed all stakeholders, including teachers, administration, students, and parents, are responsible for shaping perceptions of diversity. Teachers believed that the administration needs to support them in their efforts to become culturally proficient by providing PL opportunities and

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by creating and enforcing district policies that promote diversity. They believed students should have a voice in shaping the curriculum and instructional practices, and parents should be engaged in the educational process and feel welcomed into the school community. In light of these findings, I propose that the responsibility for how diversity is recognized and built upon in schools be extended to the whole school community.

While the literature and the findings of this dissertation illustrated the benefits of diversity and the need for all stakeholders to embrace and build upon diversity as an asset, the reality may present a more complex situation. The teachers included in this research pointed out that schools and the community, although making an attempt, have not fully embraced the demographic changes and are not doing enough to address the needs of the increasing population of diverse students. The findings also illustrated that the administration has not really looked at culture at the forefront of learning. Since prior research also pointed to the existence of school systems that perpetuate social divides (Kozol, 2012; Stitzlein, 2012), there is a need to eliminate policies and structures, like racialized tracking, punitive discipline, or denying certain groups their religious holidays. These Eurocentric policies and practices often marginalize students of color and exclude them from fully participating in the life of the school, including both academic and extracurricular aspects. It is of vital importance to create a welcoming and inclusive environment and culture in order for students to feel included, valued, and heard, which, along with restorative justice and relationship building, leads to improvements in learning.

Furthermore, there is a need to support and prepare teachers to effectively work in a diverse environment. In a broader sense, the findings of this dissertation highlighted the need for more explicit training in CSP practices for all those involved in the field of education. More PL programs with a focus on eliminating biases and efforts to mobilize more people should be

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geared not only to classroom teachers but also to the administration and all other school community members. People who interact with diverse students are expected to know how to respond to the needs of all students, not just the needs of students whose backgrounds are similar to their own. Being attentive to issues of diversity can help engage students academically, socially, and emotionally in more effective ways and create a positive and inclusive environment.

Teacher Preparation

A common thread in the literature and prior research on teacher preparation to work in diverse classrooms is teachers' ability to integrate culturally relevant and sustaining practices and turn the classroom into a place for social change (Gay 2002, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1996, 2006; Paris, 2012). To address these diversity challenges, teachers need to understand the issue of implicit bias and stereotype threat when working with students from diverse backgrounds (Kea & Trent, 2013; Zuniga, 2018). Qualitative interviews, classroom visits, and lesson plans supported these findings in the literature and demonstrated that several teachers have embarked on the journey toward cultural proficiency. Yet despite their best intentions to educate diverse students, not all teachers' practices are aligned with CSP. The findings pointed to challenges, such as difficulty in communication with linguistically diverse students, curriculum restrictions, racialized tracking, implicit bias and color evasiveness of the participants, as well as inadequate efforts to embrace diversity from the administration and other teachers.

However, while the literature elucidated that teachers who belong to the White culture often mirror societal biases and may show resistance to culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2013), the findings of this dissertation showed that teachers displayed a positive attitude toward diversity. Since the participants were selected not from a random population of teachers but from

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a group that voluntarily participated in PL on cultural proficiency, chances for identifying individuals committed to effectively educating diverse students were considered higher.

Therefore, while this study does not contradict the claim that teachers must develop the ability to “resist resistance” (Gay, 2013, p. 56), which means restructure their beliefs so they can resist their negative attitudes toward diversity, there is no evidence in the findings to show the need for eliminating teachers’ negative attitudes toward diversity. Instead, the findings pointed to the ongoing work that CSP requires teachers to do. While teachers may feel that they are enacting CSP in their classrooms, at the same time, they may also be perpetuating unconscious stereotypes.

Woven throughout this study are illustrations of how elements of CSP, like tapping into students’ funds of knowledge and their interests, multicultural perspectives, providing support for diverse learning needs, civic engagement, building relationships with students and their families, were present in curriculum development and instructional practices. The findings demonstrated that teachers develop their CSP capacity through the process of PL and experiences. Research highlighted the inadequacy of teacher preparation programs that often fail to expose pre-service teachers to diverse perspectives (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Moses & Chang, 2006). In addition, teachers often belong to the White dominant culture and may struggle with promoting the values of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity (Carter, 2015; Gay, 2010; Zuniga, 2018).

Therefore, both prior research (Bassegy, 2016; Fiarman, 2016; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and the findings of this dissertation point to the importance of PL in shaping teachers’ attitudes toward diversity and addressing personal biases. It is also important to note that the prior research revealed the significant role of personal background and lived experiences

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of teachers in the process of learning to recognize different perspectives for the benefit of all students (Bassey, 2016; Callaway, 2017; Heitner & Jennings, 2016). Evaluating the data and placing them in the context of the literature led me to conclude that acquiring CSP skills and the ability to enact these skills in a diverse classroom is a long and complex process. However, as a result of teachers' conscious efforts and actions, they may become successful in creating a productive learning environment and improving their preparedness to work with diverse student populations.

Contributions to Theory

The findings of this research contribute to the theoretical framework of CSP as derived from the seminal work of Paris's (2012) *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice*. The findings confirmed Paris's statement that "a pluralistic society needs both the many and the one to remain vibrant" (p. 95) by demonstrating the participants' belief in the power of diversity in the classroom. The findings also revealed the participants' goal to develop CSP skills despite the biases and challenges they need to overcome in this process. While there is substantial research and literature on what CSP is and what elements identify it, less is known about how teachers enact CSP in diverse classrooms and how they support students in a diverse learning environment. The findings connected to the four CSP tenets demonstrate how teachers use a variety of visual, oral, and hands-on instruction, invite and facilitate classroom discussions that acknowledge multiple perspectives, and plan lessons that tap into their students' interests and funds of knowledge. The findings also pointed to teachers' efforts to participate in critical self-awareness of implicit biases, promote an inclusive school environment, and engage in and maintain relationships with community members and parents in culturally relevant ways.

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Less research has explored how teachers prepare to become culturally proficient and what factors shape their ability to integrate CSP. Thus, this study builds on the existing knowledge of CSP and offers insights into how it could be implemented in a diverse classroom. In a broader sense, it also adds to the knowledge on the attitudes and dispositions teachers need to adopt and develop to become culturally sustaining pedagogues. The study also gives insight into challenges and successes teachers experience when working in diverse classroom. While they have to overcome challenges resulting from difficulty in communication with ELLs, the constraints of the prescribed curriculum, or racialized tracking policies, they also experienced successes in providing support and establishing relationships with students and families that often reach beyond students' high school careers.

Unanticipated and Surprising Findings

Within this section, I provide an analysis of the unusual problems and surprising outcomes that emanated from the study's findings. There was one uncontrolled variable related to school closures during the COVID-19 health crisis that may have influenced the results. There were also three unanticipated outcomes that I noted in the findings. The first one was related to the definition and perception of diversity, the second to the teachers' experiences with diversity, and the third was connected to the practice of CSP.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Health Crisis on Education

School closures from March 15th to the end of June 2020 forced teachers to move to online instruction, which was an uncharted territory for U.S. public schools. As reported by the participants, remote learning posed challenges for educators who were not prepared to switch to this mode of teaching and learning within a noticeably short period of time. Remote learning also shed light on various social and economic problems, experienced especially by families of low

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socioeconomic status that lost all or part of their income due to COVID-19. As a result, the families could not pay for phone or internet service, which led to the students' inability to participate in remote learning.

Teachers faced a great challenge when trying to use online platforms to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption in their education. Teachers reported that their first priority was to ensure that the students and their families were doing well, and secondly, they tried to provide online instruction. Relationship building, always a vital component of CSP, was difficult or impossible during this time because of technology access problems. Many students did not connect with their teachers despite several attempts to text students or call them personally on their cell phones. Even with the help of the administration and guidance counselors, there were students that teachers had not heard from for two, three, or more weeks. The participants reported that school closures had negatively impacted student learning outcomes and the disadvantages were disproportionate for learners who had fewer educational opportunities outside of the school setting (Kozol, 2012; Ravitch, 2013; Stitzlein, 2012). However, during school closures, teachers were faced with even more responsibility to enact CSP in virtual classroom and ensure that all students were provided access to education. Therefore, communicating with students using different platforms, providing differentiated assignments, and showing empathy for students and their families became essential skills that were helping students navigate the challenging reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Surprises

The first surprising finding was the generic ways the participants talked about diversity, how differently they defined it, and how adamant they were when stating that it was not just race that defined diverse students but other factors like language, culture, learning needs, family

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structure, personality, or gender. At the same time, the findings revealed that the participants seemed to be downplaying race as an important aspect of diversity and pointed to the fact that White students were not considered in teachers' definitions of "diverse" students. Even as teachers talked about positive aspects of diversity, they also claimed that the district resisted fundamental changes in the practices that are at the foundation of segregation and inequity (tracking, excluding certain religious holidays from the school calendar) and which are often discussed in the literature (Berrey, 2015; Hughey, 2014; Moses & Chang, 2006).

Another surprising finding was related to how important the 11 White teachers' background was in shaping their views on diversity. Since some of them did not grow up in diverse neighborhoods, their families' immigrant roots and open-mindedness inspired or motivated them to pursue friendships with diverse people and embrace diversity when working as public school teachers. Their positive attitude to diversity was manifested in their willingness to become culturally proficient and engage in PL opportunities.

The third surprising finding related to the concept of CSP and how it was enacted by the participants in their diverse classrooms. Although many reported and observed instructional practices aligned with CSP and included elements (such as empathy, tapping into students' interest and funds of knowledge, civic engagement, whole-child philosophy, providing support for diverse learners, or parental engagement), few participants brought up or revealed practices related to critical thinking, like debate, dialogic teaching, or small group projects. Encouraging students' critical thinking is an important element of CSP, but it was not highlighted in the participants' responses and it did not clearly stand out in the questioning strategies used with the students or the ways classroom activities were designed.

Limitations of the Study

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As with any study, there were several limitations to this dissertation that I would like to acknowledge. One limitation was that I collected data only in a single suburban school district. Had the study been conducted in an urban context, it might have generated different findings. Dictated by the context of the district where 90% of teachers are White, the participants were selected from the predominantly White population of teachers and therefore resulted in a sample of mostly White teachers. Another limitation was the inclusion of five high schools that have different demographics, leading the teachers to have different ranges of diversity in their classrooms. It was not possible to compare teachers with high-track classes versus teachers with low-track classes because there was significant variation among the different school and classroom demographics. Because the teachers taught different tracks with different demographics, their definitions of “diversity” could vary across the five schools and within their different classrooms. For example, one teacher could have considered a class to be “diverse” if there were 15 out of 20 White students, while another could have described a class as “diverse” with 12 out of 20 Asian students. I did not have access to the information on classroom demographics and could not compare their definitions with the actual numbers. As a result, the variation in the demographics among schools and classrooms could have affected the findings on teachers’ perceptions and definitions of diversity.

Since the methodological principles that guided my research approach involved constructing meanings of phenomena within an interpretive paradigm, I was limited to the participants’ interpretations of meanings of objects, actions, and symbols in their world (Cohen & Mannion, 1989). In accordance with this view, the collected data may be somewhat subjectified in a sense that participants relayed stories, possibly not as they were but how they

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perceived them. Therefore, I tried to apply and combine several research methods, such as interviews, observations, and lesson plans analysis to ensure more objectivity.

Another limitation of the study was that the data collection process was disrupted due to school closures as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis. After conducting the initial face-to-face interviews, I had to resort to online interviews via Zoom instead of conducting them face to face, as originally planned. In-person classroom visits were not completed for all participants. Some participants were observed via Google Hangouts and Google Meet. In other cases, I was limited to participants' self-reported perceptions of their experiences with diversity and to the analysis of lesson plans that the participants shared with me.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I assert practical implications for professional practice regarding attitudes toward diversity and teachers' preparedness to enact CSP in diverse secondary classrooms. I also propose unique considerations for how teachers can develop CSP skills to effectively work with diverse students and how the administration can support teachers' efforts in this process. The conclusions drawn from the findings are especially significant to me as a classroom teacher who works with diverse students, as I constantly reflect on my own practices and the practices of other members of the school community with whom I collaborate.

The findings from this study revealed that several teachers have embarked on the journey to cultural proficiency, but they still hold biases and colorblind views that shape their perceptions of diversity. My findings also paint a picture of the district as not always offering diverse students an adequate learning environment. This situation results from the fact that the administration is ineffective or uninterested in taking steps to embrace the growing diversity of the student body. Therefore, there is a need for preparing both the administration and the

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teachers to accommodate diverse students' needs. I analyzed the findings related to teachers' perceptions of PL programs they had participated in and identified several recommendations the participants made for making these programs more successful. The actions I recommend are based on the participants' direct suggestions regarding PL to increase teachers' cultural proficiency. This section also includes implications for action derived from my overall analysis of the themes that emerged from the data.

Teachers' Recommendations for Future PL Workshops

A few participants made recommendations as to what they would like to see in teacher education programs, student teaching, and future PL workshops. First, they criticized the absence of courses on diversity, cultural proficiency, and understanding the needs of diverse students in pre-service teacher education programs. Therefore, they would like to see more focus on these issues as an integral part of teacher preparation. They also recommended matching teachers with diverse schools in their student teaching to give them an opportunity to gain experience of working in a diverse classroom.

In PL workshops, teachers would like to hear more first-hand accounts from students and proposed using a prepared edited video with students talking about their perspectives, including their feelings and experiences. The participants believed there was a lot of untapped potential in letting teachers hear students' own accounts or hear about things teachers say but may not realize how students perceive them. The participants also shared that they would like to see more people involved in cultural proficiency trainings, not the same core group who always volunteers for workshops. They believed PL should zoom in on those educators who have a hard time with a diverse group of people. They suggested that the department chairs and the administration work with the educator, put the educator in a diverse context, with a diverse group of people, and see

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how effective they are. The participants suggested making the educators who struggle with their biases or cultural incompetence aware of what they are doing, trying to help them see what they could be doing differently.

The workshops that seemed to have been perceived as the most effective were the interactive ones where the participants were put in the activity and they had to talk about how they felt. They thought it was the best way to make people have a moment of recognizing their own biases and they recommended having more workshops of this format. Since it seemed that implicit bias was a recurring theme, deeply woven into several participants' perceptions of the workshops on cultural awareness, it seems important to highlight the recommendation for a future workshop on White privilege, which the participants thought was the key to building cultural awareness. The participants also believed it would be helpful to organize "a network of allies," groups of people committed to best practices for diverse students, to disseminate best practice and challenge implicit biases and color evasiveness so that teachers' ability to work with diverse students would be enhanced.

Concerned with the need to focus on equity in the curriculum, the participants who were English teachers felt a workshop on culturally responsive literary works would be helpful to gain more access to the existing literature. They believed a lot of teachers do not know how to be more culturally responsive with the curriculum because they just do not know the readings and do not know how to find them. Unhappy with the lack of specific workshops for math teachers, the participants who taught math made a claim that the district could have workshops with math-related topics to train teachers how to help the students with different learning needs and levels of math knowledge.

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Some participants remembered the district used to highlight differentiation in PL workshops and they would like to bring back more training on differentiation, small group instruction, one-on-one instruction, and project assessment to allow for student choice and a fairer way to evaluate students' progress. The participants expressed their suggestions to gather data regarding assessment of students' cultural needs. Since the district does not offer an instrument that teachers might have access to, they suggested a survey or another type of assessment that would give them a better idea of what the cultural needs of their diverse students are. They believed it would assist them in better curriculum development and a better alignment of their instructional practice to meet students' needs.

Further Implications for Practice

The literature pointed out that, on the national scale, achieving educational equity has been both elusive and complex (Burris, 2010; Wells et al., 2019). As a result, schools are becoming not less but more segregated, and the nation has witnessed the racial isolation of Black and Latinx students from White students. Based on the findings of this dissertation study, I put forth several further recommendations and implications for action. The findings revealed a gap between teachers' understanding of benefits resulting from diversity and the racialized tracking practices still perpetuated within the district. Although the district has engaged in reforms designed to close the achievement gap while improving learning for all, tracking is still a persistent issue and the teachers reported that high-track and low-track classes are not equally diverse. To alleviate this problem, I propose providing more equitable access to challenging classes for all students and detracking the curriculum. Eliminating disproportionalities between students who get recommended for high-track classes could be done by extending the opportunity for all students to take at least one AP class within their school career and using

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multiple measures to select students instead of solely depending on teacher recommendations. These practices might help break down barriers and include all students in a more rigorous curriculum.

Although the student population is demographically changing, the district's faculty remains predominantly White. Therefore, I propose diversifying the faculty and hiring a better representation of teachers of color who can provide all students with a unique experience and enact CSP by providing different perspectives. In addition, the schools in the district are currently segregated because students are zoned depending on their place of residence. As a result, some schools have more White students, often of a higher socio-economic status, while other schools have more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students, often of lower socio-economic status. While teachers demonstrate and often perpetuate their own biases, the existing structures and policies keep students separated and segregated, and can even re-segregate students within and between classroom tracks. Desegregation of the high schools might benefit not only teachers in this study by providing them with the opportunity of exploring various student perspectives, but it may also potentially lead to better educational outcomes for all students.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this research study contribute to the literature on teachers' ability and preparedness to translate their knowledge about diversity and CSP into a diverse classroom environment, given how much teachers say they value diversity and CSP in the teaching and learning process, their background knowledge and experiences to translate CSP in the classroom, and the role of administration in helping them do this work. The study broadens the knowledge on how teachers enact CSP in racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse classrooms, and what

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contributes to their challenges and successes. However, there are several ways the study can be improved upon, and several future studies can be designed to contribute to the field. These recommendations for future research, which present themselves as worthy endeavors, stem from limitations imposed on my study and include insights regarding different methods and research questions, different populations, different contexts, or further confirmations of my findings. Based on the collected and analyzed data, themes, and the findings of this study, I propose the following recommendations for future research grouped by (a) different methods, (b) different contexts, and (c) different populations.

Different Methods

Quantitative studies or mixed-method studies could be performed to empirically demonstrate (a) how CSP impacts student achievement; (b) whether there are differences in reported and observed use of CSP across teachers and classrooms; (c) whether these results hold true for different samples of teachers across other districts; and (d) whether teacher background, preparation, or years of experience in the classroom are significant predictors in enacting CSP.

Different Contexts

Future studies might also be performed in different contexts. It might be worthwhile to explore teachers' perceptions and definitions of diversity in high-track versus low-track classes. Conducting the study in an urban district, as opposed to a suburban district, or in a district that has experienced an influx of Asian, as opposed to predominantly Latinx and Black students, might also lead to different outcomes and reveal different findings.

Different Populations

An essential topic that my study alluded to but provided no data for is the effect of CSP on students' social and academic progress. Therefore, more research needs to be done to ensure

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that the findings pointing to the benefits of diversity for all students can be extrapolated to the perspectives of the student population. Since many teachers reported linguistic diversity as a challenge, further studies could investigate how to support teachers in providing CSP to linguistically diverse students. Further studies could also be conducted with a more diverse group of participants, including different ethnicities as opposed to a predominantly White sample. Another implication for further research involves exploring the perceptions of different stakeholders (e.g., administration, students and families, or social support staff) to get a different perspective. Exploring various perceptions might allow to make sense of the administration's perspective and find out if they promote CSP training, or why they offer it to teachers, but not other stakeholders.

Concluding Remarks

The research findings pointed to a core group of teachers who feel the need for PL opportunities to enhance their preparedness for working with diverse students. Having embarked on their journey to become better prepared, these educators have the potential of spreading the movement to other teachers and mobilize them to change structures and policy for the common good. Consistent support from the administration, manifested in providing a wide selection of PL opportunities, embracing diversity, and highlighting its benefits might make teachers' work more effective. The findings of the study pointed to a promising example of a group of teachers interested in learning more about how to enact CSP, but their journeys are at different stages of the process and most are incomplete. The findings displayed different levels of racial awareness and a range of CSP skills.

This study expanded the body of existing research on how CSP is enacted in diverse secondary classrooms by providing an analysis of reported and observed examples of CSP in

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curriculum development and instructional practices, and how teachers prepare to become culturally sustaining pedagogues. The findings demonstrated that perceptions of diversity, teacher preparation to work in a diverse classroom, as well as the presence of CSP in curriculum development and instructional practices are governed by several factors shaping teachers' ability and preparedness to develop CSP skills and internalize them in the classroom. These factors are also reflected in the existing research on teaching diverse students (Gay, 2013; Heitner & Jennings, 2016; Kea & Trent, 2013; Milner, 2014) and aligned with the research findings on how teachers need to challenge personal biases and lack of preparation, and improve their ability to integrate CSP into their diverse classrooms for the benefit of all students (Gay, 2002, 2012, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). The findings identified teacher preparation and PL needs and provided data to improve practices at the school and district levels. The findings may offer suggestions on how to create effective PL opportunities for teachers to help them enhance diverse students' learning.

Within the findings of this case study, the participants placed great importance on challenges and successes of working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and revealed how they enact CSP in the classroom. To address the challenges and enhance their successes with diverse students, teachers need to understand the issue of implicit bias and stereotype threat when working with students from diverse backgrounds. Teachers need to understand their students' cultural needs and build on student diversity as an asset instead of seeing it as a deficit and trying to adjust students' values, behaviors, and learning preferences to their own and the school's Eurocentric practices. In addition, teachers must acknowledge that they have the power to utilize the benefits resulting from student diversity. Without the teachers' conscious effort to create a positive and effective learning environment for all students, *the*

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power of diversity may remain an empty concept. Finally, teachers need to encourage dialogue and foster communication among diverse groups in their classrooms. They are responsible for raising awareness and having the courage to address the issue of existing conflicts. Within the teachers' responsibility lies the need to educate students about respecting different perspectives and eliminating biased language and intercultural conflict that arise from cultural differences. It is also the teachers' responsibility to embark on a journey to a better pedagogical approach to help all children thrive in a reimagined educational system. This study is a testament to understanding that profound shifts in teachers' attitudes are possible in the process of PL and reflection. As a result of this learning, teachers may become successful in creating a productive learning environment and improving their preparedness to work with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol**Introduction:**

1. Can you start by stating your name, current job position, and experience in education?

Probe: How long have you been a teacher in this district?

2. What attracted you to this career?
3. Tell me what it is like to be a teacher today as opposed to the time when you began your teaching career.

Probe: What have you observed in terms of demographics and student racial and cultural diversity over the years?

4. How would you describe this school to someone who is not familiar with schools and districts on Long Island?

Probe: Student racial and cultural diversity

Diversity Definition:

5. How would you define “diversity” in a classroom setting?

Diversity in the Classroom:

6. If I walked into your classroom, what kind of diversity would I see or experience?

Probe 1: How do the classes you teach compare to each other in terms of diversity?

Probe 2: How do your classes compare to the demographics of the school?

Curriculum and Instruction:

7. How do you develop your curriculum?
8. To what extent does your curriculum include multiple perspectives, diverse points of view, and multicultural content?

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Probe: Do you recall any specific lessons or topics that include diversity-related themes?

9. What do you do to address diversity in your instructional practices?

Probe: Differentiation, visual aids, discussions that invite multiple perspectives, classroom management, calling on students

District and School Level Attitudes about Diversity

10. How do you perceive the role of the administration in shaping the perception of diversity in your school?

11. Who else in your school/district is important in affecting attitudes toward diversity?

Professional Learning:

12. I would like to know about the factors that may have influenced your ability to work with diverse students. Let's begin with pre-service teacher preparation.

Probe 1: Of all the course work you did at the college/university level, which have been the most helpful in preparing you to work in today's classroom?

Probe 2: Was a specialized program available to you at that time to prepare you for working with diverse students?

13. How have your own lived experiences influenced your ability to work with diverse students?

Probe 1: How does your background contribute to your effectiveness in working with diverse students?

Probe 2: In your opinion, are there important personal characteristics that school teachers need to possess or develop to effectively work with a racially and culturally diverse students?

Probe 3: Do your lived experiences help you or hinder you in becoming effective in a diverse classroom? How?

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Probe 4: Of the lived experiences you have had, which do you consider to be the most helpful? Please describe one.

14. How do you perceive the role of professional learning in helping you to effectively work with diverse students?
15. Have you participated in district implemented professional learning that focused on diversity?
16. What strategies have you discovered as a result of this learning that help you work with diverse students?
17. Which strategies have you chosen to implement and why?
18. What suggestions would you like to offer to designers of future professional learning programs that focus on diversity?

Successes and Challenges of Working within a Diverse Learning Environment

19. What gives you the most satisfaction in your work as an educator teaching a diverse population of students?
20. What challenges do you face or anticipate when working in a diverse classroom?
21. If I were a new teacher starting out in your school, what advice would you give me to address what works in your classroom?
22. Describe the most satisfying experience that could point to the power of diversity in your classroom.
23. Is there anything that I missed or did not ask? Anything else you would like to add?

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Appendix B: Classroom Observation Protocol

- Interview
- Board Meeting
- Observation
- Other:

Date:

Researcher:

FIELD NOTES

District:

Observations

Reflections/Write-Up

Person(s) Present:	
<p>Context/Larger Community (Neighborhood characteristics, surrounding businesses/churches, safety, cleanliness, green space, playgrounds, etc.)</p>	<p>Reflections</p>

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Space (Describe the inside of the school, classrooms, physical arrangement of classroom, environmental text and language supports, educational posters or student work on walls, hallways, cleanliness, security, etc.)	Reflections

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People (Teacher Demographics, Dress, Language, Eye	Reflections
Contact, Body Language, etc.)	

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Actions and Interactions (Instructional planning,	Reflections
Instructional presentation, Curriculum goals/modification, differentiation strategies to support diverse learners: visual, oral, and hands-on instruction, discussions to invite differing opinions and multiple perspectives, including all students)	

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Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval

Molloy College IRB
Approval Date: March 3, 2020

Expiration Date: March 3, 2021



1000 Hempstead Ave., PO Box 5002, Rockville Center, NY 11571-5002
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Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.
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DATE: March 3, 2020

TO: Mariola Krol
FROM: Molloy College IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1565924-1] Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Secondary Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions, Preparation, Current Practices, and Challenges

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: March 3, 2020
EXPIRATION DATE: March 3, 2021
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 6 & 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy College IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

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Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of March 3, 2021.

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Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or peckardt@molloy.edu.

Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN

Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Molloy College IRB's records.