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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PEDAGOGY IS RESEARCH: INVESTIGATING THE
TEACHER-RESEARCHER IDENTITY AND
PEDAGOGY OF TEACHERS WHO
COMPLETED AN ACTION
RESEARCH PROJECT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Educational Studies

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This Dissertation by: Meagan Chelsea Brown Varona

Entitled: *Pedagogy Is Research: Investigating the Teacher-Researcher Identity and Pedagogy of Teachers Who Completed an Action Research Project*

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

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This research study explored the development of a teacher-researcher identity and investigated the pedagogy of two teachers who completed an action research course. I sought to investigate the development of a teacher-researcher identity in connection to the utilization of critical responsiveness in order to address the stifling of teacher agency that has resulted from standardization and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession. Through braiding the theoretical frameworks of cultural-historical activity theory, pragmatism, and critical theory, I examined the development of a teacher-researcher identity and how it impacted the pedagogical judgments and decisions of teachers. This multiple case study required data collection that included interviews, observations, and documents to understand and interpret how action research impacted the teacher identity and pedagogy of the participants. Findings of this study indicated that teachers' teacher-researcher identity was connected to their feelings about research as well as their perceptions of and interactions with their research community. In addition, this study demonstrated that teachers' acceptance or refusal of pedagogical responsibility influenced how they implemented action research, their perceptions of the impact action research had on their teaching, and their ability to critically reflect on their teaching practice and research. This study told the story of a teacher who became a self-identified teacher-researcher through action research and improved her pedagogical critical responsiveness to her students through an

acceptance of pedagogical responsibility. Simultaneously, another story was told, a story of a teacher who did not become a teacher-researcher and, as a result, rejected pedagogical responsibility as seen in a lack of critical responsiveness and critical self-reflection. Lastly, I utilized my experience conducting this study to advocate for the humanization of research and research communities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The concern of teacher educators must remain normative, critical, and even political — neither the colleges nor the schools can change the social order. Neither the colleges nor the schools can legislate democracy. But something can be done to empower teachers to reflect upon their own life situations, to speak out in their own ways about the lacks that must be repaired; the possibilities to be acted upon in the name of what they deem decent, humane, and just. (Greene, 1978, p. 71)

When we make a commitment to become critical thinkers we are already making a choice that places us in opposition to any system of education or culture that would have us be passive recipients of ways of knowing. As critical thinkers we are to think for ourselves and be able to take action on behalf of ourselves. This insistence on self-responsibility is vital practical wisdom. (hooks, 2010, p. 185)

The power hierarchy in education, cemented by neoliberal reforms, has drowned out the voices of educators, preventing them from proclaiming their knowledge and significantly contributing to the reformation of the educational world (Horn, 2002). Through in-service teacher education reform, we have the opportunity to emancipate teachers from this top-down power structure and support them in bridging the theory-practice divide by intertwining thought and action. However, current bipartisan reform efforts call for ivy league education over pedagogical knowledge, practice over theory, and standardization over judgment, which has resulted in a teacher population that lacks the knowledge and skills to address the needs of their diverse student population (Schneider, 2011; Schwartz, 2015; Smagorinsky et al., 2004).

Neoliberal policy reforms that advance the standardization of teaching practice and perceive high test scores as an indication of “good teaching” discourage and prevent teachers from responding to the context of their educational environments. The disenfranchisement of

teachers and the prioritization of uniform pedagogical practices that produce high test scores results in the deprofessionalization of teachers and the creation of a workforce of educators who become the implementers of pre-packaged curriculum. Through participation in these neoliberal activity systems such as alternative licensure programs, traditional teacher education programs, and test-based teacher evaluations, teachers fail to develop a professional teacher identity and are often incapable of performing the contextualized decision making that is essential to the improvement of teacher practice. As a result, not only do these neoliberal reforms impede the development of professional teachers, but they also widen the theory-practice divide by communicating to educators that those with a bird's eye view, at the top of the educational hierarchy, are most qualified to make pedagogical decisions that affect educational communities unilaterally. In order to dismantle the educational power hierarchy that regulates teacher voice through accountability culture, teacher evaluation through standardized testing, and the particular curriculum pursued in neoliberal policy reforms, it is crucial to reform teacher education to support teachers in becoming professional educators.

Purpose of Study

This research study explored the development of a teacher-researcher identity and investigated the pedagogy of two teachers who conducted an action research project. I sought to investigate action research as a tool to cultivate a professional teaching identity in teacher education programs in order to address the stifling of teacher voice that has resulted from standardization and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession. I explore and evaluate the extent to which a teacher-researcher identity developed among two teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's level course.

Rationale of Study

Current educational policy is driven by the standardization of teaching practice that is a direct consequence of the utilization of test scores as *the* measure of student success. The pedagogical standardization that results from this focus on standardized test scores was intended to provide an equitable education for all children regardless of geographic location, race, or gender. However, given the continued educational, economic, and social inequities among students in American society and the inability of teachers to address these needs, researchers and teacher educators sought to provide new perspectives to pedagogy.

Researchers in education have attempted to correct this standardization that fails to address the needs of a diverse student population, and in particular, the needs of culturally diverse students. Pedagogical perspectives that focus on the multicultural classroom such as culturally responsive teaching were developed to empower students from historically oppressed communities intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Gay, 2010; Grant, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Unfortunately, these pedagogical practices that focus on culture as a context for learning fail to address the problem that the standardization and the deprofessionalization of teaching have generated, teachers who are incapable of making contextualized pedagogical decisions informed by the lived reality of their students. Due to the separation of thought and action and the reliance on perceptions of culture to address student needs, culturally responsive practices often result in the essentialization of culture and race that perpetuate social injustice in education. Addressing the cultural pluralism among our student population cannot be achieved by adopting prescribed views of student culture; instead, this should be achieved through teacher judgment that is gained by investigating their students'

unique idiosyncrasies and complex, intersectional identities as well as developing a professional teacher identity.

To take on the responsibility of addressing the lived existence and reality of their diverse student population, teachers must unify thought and action to bridge the theory-practice divide and take ownership of pedagogical decision making. Researchers and educational philosophers, such as pragmatists and critical theorists, have argued that in order to liberate teacher voice and fuse theory and practice, teachers must become researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1998; Zeichner, 1983). This process of “becoming” a researcher is not a linear sequence of events for teachers to follow but instead a series of interactions between the teachers’ experiences, beliefs, values, as well as the educational contexts of their teaching journey (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Henry, 2016). Negotiating the construction of a new identity, such as a teacher-researcher identity, is a dynamic and sometimes volatile process that occurs as knowledge and learning are shaped by activity in social practice (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). I argue that teacher education institutions can support teachers in bridging the theory-practice divide by providing teachers opportunities to engage in legitimate, meaningful teacher research to initiate the development of a teacher-researcher identity. In becoming a teacher-researcher, educators disrupt the current power hierarchy in education by proclaiming their knowledge as professional educators and engaging in pedagogical methods that improve their teaching practice and contribute to the transformation of education reform.

Control over the narrative of education reform has placed power in the hands of those most removed from teaching and schools to dictate the education of students at large. Power is a theme that reverberates in the decisions of professional teachers as they develop responsive pedagogical practices that address the inequities their students face as well as the decisions of

teacher educators. Teacher educators can contribute to the dismantling of the power hierarchy by supporting the professionalization of teachers through the development of a teacher-researcher identity in teacher education programs and narrowing the gap between the researcher and the researched (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Horn, 2002). In shifting the focus of reform from curriculum and prescribed pedagogy to professional teacher judgment, we can cultivate a generation of teacher-researchers who understand that “ambiguity saturates their work, and that teaching requires hundreds of decisions to be made every day—decisions that have an impact on the well-being of students . . . there is no formula” (Sherman, 2013, p. 10). I believe that by instilling teaching as a moral and intellectual practice performed by professional teacher-researchers, we can support teachers to improve their pedagogy through self-evaluation and critical responsiveness to the context of their specific learning community.

Significance of Study

At present, our communities are experiencing the dire consequences that have resulted from the removal of professional judgment from teacher practice. Teachers are unprepared professionally and pedagogically to address the lived reality of their students in the face of distance learning, trauma, as well as the increased educational and economic disparities that have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Fortuna & Robles-Ramamurthy, 2020). The implementation of universal “best practices,” culturally responsive pedagogy, or the increasingly popular trauma-informed practices are inconsequential without the utilization of professional judgment to inform decision making.

Not only is it crucial for teachers to have the opportunities to critically reflect and make contextualized pedagogical decisions by merging thought and action through research, but it is also essential that they see themselves as professional teacher-researchers who are qualified to

carry out this moral responsibility. In this multiple case study, I sought to investigate and evaluate the extent to which a teacher-researcher identity developed among two teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's level course. I used this understanding to explore the development of their teacher-researcher identity in relation to their in-context pedagogical decision making, specifically their critically responsive teaching practices. Through interviews, observations, and document collection, I examined how my participants viewed the effects of research on their practice, critically blended thought and action, as well as the way in which they utilized the self-evaluation component of action research to improve their teaching practice.

Previous research studies have investigated teacher-researcher identity development and have suggested that there is a connection between pedagogy and teacher identity (Achirri, 2020; Keat, 2004). However, there has not been a study on the relationship between pedagogical decision making, specifically critically responsive pedagogy, and the development of the teacher-researcher identity. I define critically responsive teaching as a pedagogical strategy that uses critical reflection as well as responsive practices which require a “sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being” as tools to engage students in a meaningful learning path toward their zone of proximal development (ZPD; Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2003, pp. 11-12). The purpose of my study was to explore the development of teacher-researcher identity as a method of improving teacher practice through the braiding of thought and action, as well as intelligence and morality, as described in pragmatist theory and hooks's (2010) practical wisdom. In this study, I investigated the extent to which engagement with action research provided my participants, in-service teachers, a structure with which to critically reflect upon their practice as educators and improve their in-context pedagogical judgments and decisions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my investigation.

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?
- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?
- Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

Here I provide the origin and significance of each question as well as definitions for key terms.

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?

There is extensive research on teacher identity and the development of teacher identity in which many researchers discuss a common notion of identity as dynamic and shifting over time and in different contexts (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; van Veen & Slegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2003); however, there is an absence of a strict definition for teacher identity in much of that literature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004). While several researchers note that identity is both an individual's image of themselves and well as others' perception of them (Norton, 2016; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017), for the purpose of this research, I was only interested in participants' image of themselves and how this changed after their participation in an action research project. In this study I describe, interpret, and analyze the participants' personal and professional beliefs and experiences of becoming and being a teacher in the context of an action research project.

- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?

Teacher research provides teachers an opportunity to be generators of knowledge about their profession and conduct research to construct local and public knowledge about learning and teaching in order to improve their practice as well as educational institutions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). The purpose of teacher education is to support teacher's development of reflective action and support them in examining the "moral, ethical and political issues, as well as the instrumental issues, that are embedded in their everyday thinking and practice" (Dewey, 1933; Zeichner, 1983, p. 6). Action research is a form of teacher-research defined as "comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action" that provides an encouraging framework for teachers to critically reflect on their curriculum and pedagogy as well as to provide opportunities for them to participate in school development and reform collaboratively (Apelgren et al., 2015; Lewin, 1948, pp. 202-203). In order to understand, interpret, and evaluate the significance of the development of the teacher-researcher identity of my participants, it was essential to collect information about their understanding of how action research has impacted their teaching practice.

Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

I call the blend of critical reflection and responsive practices critically responsive teaching practices. Critical reflection in education can be described as the use of "a permanently critical attitude" to explore the connections between pedagogy and issues of race, gender, class, and other socially constructed identities (hooks, 2010). Responsive pedagogy is situated in teachers' intellectual and moral responsibility toward meeting the needs of individual students and promoting their cognitive development by addressing their zone of proximal development (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers that engage in responsive

teaching practices are expected to “(1) understand children and how they learn, (2) build relationships, (3) select and co-construct content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, (4) align learning and instructional tools to support pedagogical content knowledge, and (5) build self-extending systems” (Dozier & Rutten, 2005, p. 462). Therefore, teachers that implement critically responsive teaching use a critical attitude in their responsiveness to their students. In this study, I examined the extent to which a critical responsive practice was present in the pedagogy of my participants in regard to their decision making and their attention to their specific learning community.

The evaluation component of action research refers to the four key areas of self-evaluation achieved through action research, which include “(1) evaluating [their] own teacher roles and practice, (2) expressing practical failure in teaching, (3) evaluating beliefs and assumptions about teaching, and (4) evaluating [their] own personal characteristics” (Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019, p. 71). In exploring how my participants evaluated their action research project, I was able to understand their teacher-researcher identity as well as the interaction between action research and their pedagogical decisions.

Organization of Research Study

Through my examination of the relationship between the teacher-researcher identity and pedagogy, specifically critically responsive practices, I hope to illuminate a path forward for reforming teacher education. In Chapter II, I explore the intersection of thought and action theoretically through the braiding of pragmatism, critical theory, and cultural-historical activity theory as well as in conversation with literature investigating teacher education, teacher identity and identity formation, responsive pedagogy, and action research. Chapter III provides a rationalization for my qualitative methodology selection, a detailed description of the methods I

employed including descriptions of my participants, methods of data collection, and analysis of the data. In addition, I provide insight into my personal and educational perspectives as influenced by my complex, intersectional identities as well as by research bias. In Chapter IV, I present descriptions of my participants as individuals and as teachers as well as interpretations of their intentions as educators. I constructed narrative vignettes of my two participants through data obtained through interviews and observations and present their experience with action research and its impact on their teaching. Finally, Chapter V presents the cross analysis of my multiple case study and explores the themes and implications of this research study. The findings of this study indicated that teachers' teacher-researcher identity is connected to their feelings about research as well as their perceptions of and interactions with their research community. In addition, this study demonstrated that teachers' acceptance or refusal of pedagogical responsibility influenced how they implemented action research, their perceptions of the impact action research had on their teaching, and their ability to critically reflect on their teaching practice and research. Finally, I utilize my experience conducting this study to advocate for the humanization of research and research communities. My aim in pursuing this research was to conduct a study that aligns with my perspectives on teacher practice — a research study that is humanizing, personal, political, and transformative.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

This research study explored the development of a teacher-researcher identity and investigated the pedagogy of two teachers who conducted an action research project. I sought to investigate action research as a tool to cultivate a professional teaching identity in teacher education programs in order to address the stifling of teacher voice that has resulted from standardization and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession. I explore and evaluate the extent to which a teacher-researcher identity developed among two teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's level course.

In this review of the literature, I investigate the influence the development of a teacher-researcher identity has on the critically responsive pedagogical practices of teachers. This places my research at an intersection of several bodies of research including teacher education, teacher identity and identity formation, responsive pedagogy, and action research. In addition, I describe and provide definitions for various theories and perspectives that are essential to critically responsive pedagogy and the development of a teacher-researcher identity including pragmatism, critical theory, critical reflection, and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). Along the way, I explore how these theories lay a foundation for the intersections of thought and action, theory and practice, as well as intellect and morality. Finally, I discuss the potential for action research to support teachers in the construction of their teacher-researcher identities and why studying the

perceptions and decisions of teachers who have completed an action research project may improve our understanding of how teachers can improve their practice.

Introduction

In his book *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, Paulo Freire (1998) stated the following:

There is no such thing as teaching without research and research without teaching. One inhabits the body of the other. As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover. (p. 35)

Ideally, educational research and the development of pedagogical practices coincide, Freire suggests, creating a relationship of collaboration and respect between researchers and educators. However, due to the hierarchical nature of the educational world, there are distinct power differences between researchers and educators (Horn, 2002). The schism between the teaching practice and educational research has led to teacher distrust of researchers, teacher resistance to educational reform, and the devaluation of teachers' experiences by researchers and society at large (Horn, 2002; Schwarz & Ray, 2018). In order for teaching and research to be as one, we must support teachers in becoming researchers by developing their identity as a teacher-researcher (Banegas & Cad, 2019). As educational researchers, it is crucial that we investigate how to support teachers in not only conducting research but developing a self-identified teacher-researcher identity that permeates every aspect of their teaching practice. Through authentic teacher research, we can support educators in having a voice in their professional development

and the improvement of education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Additionally, as Freire states, they will be able to utilize research practices to reflect on their teaching practice critically (Schwarz & Ray, 2018).

The literature on teacher research is expansive ranging from democratizing research, empowering teachers, using teacher perspectives to develop pedagogical theories, teacher emancipation, teacher identity, and teacher self-evaluation and reflection (Banegas & Cad, 2019; Burns, 2010; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Esau, 2013; Schwarz & Ray, 2018; Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019; Suarez, 2017). While I explore the development of teacher identity, emancipation, and self-evaluation, my primary purpose is to investigate the development of teacher-researcher identity as a method of improving teacher practice through the braiding of thought and action, as well as intelligence and morality, as described in pragmatist theory and bell hooks's (2010) practical wisdom. Previous research studies have investigated teacher-researcher identity development and have suggested that there is a connection between pedagogy and teacher identity (Achirri, 2020; Keat, 2004). However, there has not been a study on the relationship between pedagogical decision making and the development of the teacher-researcher identity.

In this study, I sought to fill this gap in the literature and analyze the intersection of the development of the teacher-researcher identity and pedagogy, specifically critically responsive practices. I used cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to discuss how the activity systems educators participate in, even before they become teachers, profoundly influence their perspectives about education and shape their teacher identity. While no formula to good teaching exists from which teacher education programs can instruct their teachers, I discarded relativistic epistemological approaches to knowledge and instead utilized critical theory to acknowledge

some knowledge as false and argue for a critical lens of pedagogy that allows teachers and teacher educators to do the same. I selected action research as the vehicle through which to study teacher-researcher identity development and pedagogy due to the intersection of critical reflection in the implementation and evaluation process of action research. In this review of the literature, I place my study in the context of teacher education reform and teacher identity development. I provide an overview of the three intersecting theories that drive my study: CHAT, pragmatism, and critical theory. Finally, I describe how critical reflection, action research, and critically responsive teaching can be used to professionalize teachers and bridge the theory practice divide.

Teacher Education Reform

The Role of Teacher Education

Reform in teacher education has been in the spotlight given the national focus on student achievement, the inequity in the quality of education for children across the United States, and a staggering teacher drop-out rate of 30% to 50% within the first five years of teaching (Schwarz & Ray, 2018). The range in the solutions for teacher education reform varies significantly depending on whom you consult on the matter as it seems everyone from politicians and philanthropists to administrators and researchers have an agenda for teacher education. These solutions to teacher education reform include neoliberal deregulation of teacher certification, an emphasis on procedures and standards in teacher education, as well as an integration of theory and practice in teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Duncan, 2009; Schwartz, 2015).

Many politicians and philanthropists endorse reform efforts that provide a “market-oriented approach to social change” through a deregulation of teacher certification (Schneider,

2011, p. 92). This market orientated approach to education is demonstrated in the executive summary of the Race to the Top Program which states that the federal government will provide additional support to schools who “Identify alternative routes to certification in order to remove barriers to teaching for potentially strong teachers who might be impeded by existing systems or processes” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). This preference for alternative routes to teacher certification was affirmed by Arne Duncan (2009), the Secretary of Education under President Obama, in his comment, “if we agree that the adults in these schools are failing these children, then we have to find the right people and we can't let our rules and regulations get in the way” (para. 43). One of the alternative teacher recruitment programs Duncan supported is Teach for America (TFA). The TFA program is centered around the message that intelligent people from ivy league colleges make good teachers, regardless of their training, for students in low-income schools (Schneider, 2011). Although TFA won bipartisan support due to its lack of regulations and focus on low-income students, TFA struggled to retain their ivy league teachers and eventually had to alter their mission from improving teacher quality to providing experience to tomorrow's leaders (Schneider, 2011). Alternative teacher recruitment programs like TFA have failed to improve the quality of teachers and were not able to demonstrate that the deregulation of teacher education improved the quality of education for low-income students as seen in the shift away from improving teacher quality in their mission statement (Schneider, 2011).

Another popular approach to teacher reform is an emphasis on practice, standards, and procedures over theory and teacher leadership. Many teachers who subscribe to the behaviorist teaching model, argue that teacher education needs to focus less on theory and more on practice such as classroom management, rapport with children, well-prepared lessons, and having control

of the classroom (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). This focus on practice and procedures over teacher leadership and professionalism is also seen in accreditation bodies for teacher education. The Accreditation of Educator Preparation, formerly the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, was created in an attempt to standardize the teaching profession through mandates that are adopted by teacher education and teacher training programs (Schwarz & Ray, 2018). While some of the Accreditation of Educator Preparation standards and procedures for teachers make sense, the elimination of professional judgment by reducing teacher education and pedagogy to a measurable and allegedly neutral processes will not improve teacher education and teacher practice (Schwartz, 2015; Taubman, 2009).

In contrast to teacher education reforms that call for ivy league education over pedagogical knowledge, practice over theory, and standardization over judgment, there is a different base of teacher knowledge drawn from research conducted by teachers themselves (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Teacher research addresses one of the crucial, missing elements from many teacher education programs—teacher voice. Teacher research should be viewed as genuine inquiry that can result in teacher growth and not another standard to check off a list (Meyers, 1987; Schwarz & Ray, 2018). From this perspective, the essential purpose of teacher education is to support teachers' development of reflective action and support them in examining the “moral, ethical and political issues, as well as the instrumental issues, that are embedded in their everyday thinking and practice” (Dewey, 1933; Zeichner, 1983, p. 6). In asserting that teacher research is a potential solution for the reformation of teacher education, I acknowledge that teachers are generators of knowledge about their profession and can conduct research to construct local and public knowledge about learning and teaching in order to improve their practice as well as educational institutions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Teachers as Researchers

Teacher research can be defined as the “systematic, intentional study of one’s own professional practice” that provides school communities and researchers with unique perspectives on teaching and learning that are constructed through the professional expertise of teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 5). Teacher research is a tool that requires teachers to take a critical view through reflection and action in order to grow as professionals and improve schools (Schwarz & Ray, 2018). Unlike other types of teacher education reforms, the goal of teacher research is not “product testing” but instead “development, assessment, and revision of theories that inform practice” (Calkins, 1985, p. 143).

The existence of teacher-researchers was envisioned by many including education philosopher, John Dewey, who argued that teacher-researchers should share the responsibilities of teaching and administration and that the hierarchical positions that prevail in education need to give way to partnerships between scholars, citizens, teachers, administrators, and parents (Horn, 2002). In addition, Dewey argued that the experimentation that takes place by teachers when practicing research would naturally produce more effective student learning as well as a more democratic society (Horn, 2002). Teacher professionalism and growth suffer from the negative separation between theory and practice that has evolved through the stratification of roles in education and the quantification of teacher evaluation and student academic success. Simultaneously taking on the roles of scholar, citizen, teacher, and administrator, as Dewey suggests, would prevent this separation between theory and practice, which inhibits teachers from taking ownership of their practice and actively engaging in educational reform. Through teacher-research, educators can take on these intersecting roles and help to narrow the gap between the researcher and the researched (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Teachers must be

able to critically analyze the influence the structures of education have on their personal, educational environment to effectively problematize the learning needs and desires of their students, and of themselves. Authentic engagement in teacher research may allow educators to reclaim their professionalism and become theorists who are able to test their assumptions and find connections between theory and practice.

Teacher Identity

The divide between theory and practice is best exemplified in the experiences of teachers as they are confronted with the contradiction between the teaching perspectives gained in their teacher preparation programs and their student teaching experience in schools. Many new teachers face the challenging reality of the theory-practice divide as they navigate their conceptions between what teaching is and what it should be (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This growth in “becoming” a teacher during the course of teacher education is not a linear step by step process, but rather a series of interactions between the teachers’ experiences, beliefs, values, as well as the educational contexts of their teaching journey (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Henry, 2016). These experiences in the ongoing growth and development of teachers are described in the literature as the construction of a teacher professional identity. Given that identities are dynamic and shift through everyday interactions and experiences, it is essential that we recognize teacher identity as a complex and dynamic system and investigate some of the contributing factors to this identity construction (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014; Henry, 2016).

Teacher identity is both a product which results from influences on a teacher, and a process involving the person and the contexts in which that person learns professional characteristics in unique ways specific to the experiences of the individual (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Olsen, 2008). The development of a teacher professional

identity is at the core of the teaching profession because it “provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act ’and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Due to the importance teacher identity has in the pedagogical practice of teachers, previous research studies have explored the most volatile time in teacher identity construction, the pre-service and early-career stages of teaching (Flores & Day, 2006; Pillen, Beijaard, et al., 2013; Pillen, den Brok, et al., 2013; Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Smagorinsky et al. (2004) conducted a study of Sharon, a student teacher, as she negotiated the goals and values of her university teacher preparation program, her student teaching site, and her first teaching job in relation to conceptions of good teaching. As Sharon’s student teaching experience progressed, the constructivist teaching practices centered around engaged student-driven learning, which were promoted in Sharon’s university teacher preparation program, gave way to the behaviorist goals and objectives of the teachers at Sharon’s student teaching site (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Sharon’s identity development largely centered on her relation to the teacher identities of other educators at her student teaching site instead of becoming an agent of her own identity development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Smagorinsky et al., 2004). This process of a new teacher “consenting” to another teacher’s identity indicates that the context in which teachers construct their teaching identities is of great consequence (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Due to the volatility of teacher identity construction, it is essential for a professional teacher identity to be cultivated in the activity systems that in-service teachers engage in such as teacher education programs.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

The context in which a teacher’s identity is constructed plays a crucial role in their pedagogical perspectives as educators. Several previous studies on teacher professional identity

acknowledge there is a sociocultural component to teachers' identity construction and consider the contexts and activities in which teachers develop their identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006; L. Taylor, 2017). However, few studies utilize the rich literature of cultural-historical activity theory (activity theory, CHAT) to explore how activity systems shape identity. In one research study on exploration of the identity development of a student teacher, activity theory is mentioned in passing with the assertion that a teacher's construction of their teaching identity is formed as they navigate the various social settings of educational institutions where importance is placed on how the context of early experiences in education guide their perspectives about teaching and learning through practices that cement these beliefs into actions (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Cultural-historical activity theory provides an extensive framework that describes the interlinked relationships of collective activity and should be utilized more prevalently in educational research given that it addresses the divide between "individual and collective, material and mental, biography and history, and praxis and theory" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 191).

Cultural-historical activity theory is a conceptual framework for understanding and explaining human activity that centers on the premise that humans are enculturated in cultural values and resources that evolve over time and therefore situate activity in a specific cultural and historical context (Foot, 2014). Cultural-historical activity theory was substantially influenced by Lev Vygotsky's theories on action in what is considered first-generation activity theory, which was significantly expanded upon by two of his students, Aleksandr Luria and Alexei Leontiev, to include societal, cultural, and historical aspects of the human mind (Bakhurst, 2009; Roth & Lee, 2007). Due to the origin of CHAT being among Russian theorists, there is often a misinterpretation for the concept of "activity" as there is no direct English translation for this

word as it is conceptualized in Russian (Foot, 2014). In the CHAT framework, activity refers to a “process-as-a-whole, rather than a linear sequence of discrete actions” which occur in activity systems comprised of “tool-mediated actions through which actors engage, enact, and pursue an object or outcome” (Foot, 2014, pp. 333, 335). Cultural-historical activity theory is centered on three core tenets established by Vygotsky (as cited in Foot, 2014): (a) “humans act collectively, learn by doing, and communicate in and via their actions”; (2) “humans make, employ, and adapt tools of all kinds to learn and communicate”; and (3) “community is central to the process of making and interpreting meaning— and thus to all forms of learning, communicating, and acting” (p. 330). This perspective on activity and meaning making within a community has significant implications for learning and identity construction of teachers within activity systems.

Cultural-historical activity theory helps to address the divide between theory and practice as well as thought and action due to its fundamental assumption of the unity between consciousness and activity (Kapetlinin, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007). While other theories assert that learning precedes acting, activity theorists argue that activity precedes learning because consciousness emerges through interactions with the environment (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Activity and consciousness are mutually supportive through a feedback loop between our actions, the knowledge we gain, and the effect that this knowledge has on our future actions (Fishbein et al., 1990; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Consciousness is manifested in practices that are embedded within a social matrix; therefore, it is crucial to analyze activities within the environmental, cultural, and historical context (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). For example, teachers at a small private school may see themselves differently than teachers at a large public school because the goals, needs, and beliefs within the activity systems of their educational institutions change the nature of their perspectives of self (Jonassen & Rohrer-

Murphy, 1999). This self-perception in the context of activity systems is why the CHAT framework can be used to understand the construction of teacher identity and utilized to support teachers to develop teacher-researcher identities through engagement with action research.

Given the nature of learning within the CHAT framework, activity theorists argue for learning to occur through participation in “legitimate activity,” activity that is meaningful and of value (Roth & Lee, 2007). Participating in legitimate activity can initiate a change in identity; for instance, if teachers participate in meaningful, authentic teacher research, their identity may change from that of a teacher following prescribed steps in a research project to a teacher-researcher who utilizes research to make judgments and decisions about their pedagogical practices. As indicated by cultural-historical activity theory, activity and knowledge are quite literally inseparable and their interaction is central to the learning process. I argue that in order for education institutions to help teachers overcome the theory-practice divide, teachers must be provided with opportunities to engage in “legitimate,” meaningful teacher research to initiate the development of a teacher-researcher identity. In this study, I utilized the CHAT framework by studying the activity and activity systems of two teachers who engaged in action research in a master’s degree program, hoping that this activity would be “legitimate” and would result in meaningful shifts in their teacher-researcher identity for the purpose of merging theory and practice.

Teaching as an Intellectual and Moral Practice

Pragmatism

If educational reformers seek to improve teacher practice through teacher research, we must recognize teaching as an intellectual and moral practice through which teacher-researchers make judgments to deliver effective pedagogy. Cultural-historical activity theory helps us to

understand how the unity of activity and consciousness affects the learning and identity development of teacher-researchers; however, it does not directly address the theory-practice divide. Therefore, I will introduce the American intellectual tradition of pragmatism into my conversation with CHAT to bridge this divide. Pragmatism is an American philosophical tradition that, like CHAT, recognizes the interlocking existence of thought and action and has been utilized by educational philosophers like John Dewey to address the intersection of theory and practice in education. In my research, I seek to use pragmatism as a form of cultural criticism, and I have selected Black intellectual, Cornel West, as my guide through which to interpret the significance of pragmatism, given Dewey's problematic anti-Black tendencies.¹

In *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, West (1989) begins his description of pragmatism as an Emersonian conception that emphasized the “embodiment of ideals within the real, the actualization of principals in the practical--in short, some kind of inseparable link between thought and action, theory and practice” (p. 10). The pragmatists' acknowledgment of the link between thought and action, theory and practice is one of the reasons I believe pragmatist thought can play a key role in how we address teacher education reform and support teachers in becoming teacher-researchers.

Like many researchers before me, I am drawn to pragmatism's moral emphasis and its meliorative impulses that support a call to intellectual and moral leadership for the purposes of inquiry, reform, and political judgment (West, 1989). Pragmatism is well suited for education research and the teaching profession given the moral and intellectual demands of the educational world as well as the relationship between thought and action in the construction of knowledge. I have a social constructivist epistemological perspective and assert that the multiple realities of individuals are constructed through their lived experiences and interactions with others, a belief

held by pragmatist Eddie Glaude Jr. who argues that knowledge is an activity constructed within the context of our experience and therefore, knowledge cannot be predetermined or static (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glaude, 2007). Like pragmatism, the cultural-historical activity theory framework also fits under the umbrella of social constructivism as it acknowledges the impact that our experiences in activity systems have on our perspectives and forms of learning (Foot, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). This intersection between knowledge, experience, and learning was famously articulated by Dewey (1938) who argued that “all genuine education”—and more specifically knowledge—“comes about through experience,”; consequently, the braiding of thought and action is essential not only for knowledge, but also for the teaching practice (p. 25).

Throughout the history of American education, the education of our young citizens has been a method to create change in the social and democratic progress of the nation. Dewey (2017) attested to this argument in stating, “I believe that— education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (p. 39). Like education, Dewey argued that pragmatism is an “instrument of social progress” that should be used to improve democratic life and individual self-development (Glaude, 2007, p. 6). Pragmatism can manifest as a form of cultural criticism used by intellectuals as a response to social and cultural crises that emerge in our democratic life and lies in opposition to other forms of philosophy that deal with the problems of philosophers instead of the problems of human beings (Glaude, 2007; West, 1989). In addressing the problems of human beings, Dewey envisioned a world guided by intelligence grounded by the inseparability of thought and action as well as “an acknowledgment of the role of consequences in reflective deliberation” (West, 1989, p. 98). This emphasis on thought and action is reflected in Dewey’s perspectives of teacher-researchers who bridge the theory-practice divide. However, given Dewey’s anti-Black perspectives, it is difficult to imagine he intended the experts that are

produced through the cultivation of critical intelligence to be Black educators.¹ Therefore, I utilized a critical lens to engage with pragmatism and support my assertion that we need to study

¹ The body of Dewey's work in education centered on experience, intellectualism, and democracy. In addition, Dewey was a staunch critic of vocational education programs that trained students for "narrow industrial efficiency" (Dewey, 1978a, p. 102). However, this commitment to democratic education all but evaporates in Dewey's review of a vocational education program for Black students in a public school. Dewey and his wife endorsed a public school for Black children that focused on skills such as carpentry, sewing, and cooking, rationalizing that it would teach them "to do something that will enable them to earn some money" (Dewey, 1978b, p. 342). James Anderson (1988), a Black historian, asserts that vocational education for African Americans as promoted by John Dewey operated to preserve white supremacy within the post-slavery American society. Anti-Black White Americans, like Dewey, were able to be early members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and point to Black intellectuals, such as Booker T. Washington (1895), to defend their beliefs regarding the education of Black Americans. In his infamous "Atlanta Exposition Address," speaking to a predominantly White audience, Washington argued for Black Americans to focus their attention on economic prosperity and indicated they would have to earn their right to life from White people in stating, "It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges" (para. 17). Dewey's alignment with Booker T. Washington's acceptance of the "alleged inferiority of the Negro races" through his support of vocational school for Black students demonstrates a compromise on his pragmatic and democratic principles and indicates that his revolutionary child-centered pedagogy was created with White students in mind (DuBois, 1903, p. 41; Margonis, 2009).

In bell hooks' (2010) essay "Learning Past the Hate," she argues that we can appreciate and reference work from sexist and/or racist writers by approaching "their work from a standpoint that includes an awareness of multiple intentions" (p. 106). In addition, hooks does not excuse racist and sexist perspectives through historicism and reminds us that "when writers of any historical period use their work as a medium to express dominator culture, they are making a political choice. There is no historical period where we cannot find a thinker or a writer who dared to imagine beyond the constraints of the dominator culture of his or her time" (p. 107). For instance, Josiah Royce (1906), a White professor of philosophy at Harvard University and American pragmatist, understood the problem that racism posed to society and democracy (Glaude, 2007). In an essay entitled "Race Questions and Prejudices," Royce argued that the "concept of race is the key to the comprehension of all history" and that "white peril . . . threatens the future of humanity" (p. 266). Unlike Dewey who justified his perspectives of Black education by echoing the assertions of Booker T. Washington, Royce endorsed W.E.B. DuBois' claim that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line" (DuBois, 1903, p. 3; Duquette, 2004).

Although Royce (1906) was an idealist who overemphasized unity and failed to address the relentless otherness Black Americans faced, I agree with his assertion that anti-Black racial violence can be countered when the culture of power questions their assumptions of moral practices that prioritize emotion over reason (Duquette, 2004; Gooding-Williams, 1991; Neville,

the journey of teachers in becoming teacher-researchers as well as utilize the principles of pragmatism to guide a culture in which all teachers are intellectuals who bridge the theory and practice divide.

Critical Theory

Dewey's interpretation of pragmatism is essential to the theoretical foundations of my research in allowing me to deploy "thought as a weapon to enable more effective action . . . the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy" (West, 1989, p. 5). However, given that John Dewey was a perpetuator of the "culture of power," who did not uphold his principles of democratic education for all students regardless of race, the addition of critical theory to my investigation of teacher-researchers is essential (Delpit, 1988). Critical theory has shaped the analysis of my literature review and guides the analytical and reflective process of my research findings. Furthermore, critical theory shapes the epistemological perspectives in which I ground my research practice.

Critical theory was established at the Institute for Social Research in Germany under the directorship of Max Horkheimer in 1930. While I cannot point to a single description of critical theory that was shared among all the members of the Frankfurt School, there was a "common attempt to assess the newly emerging forms of capitalism along with the changing forms of

2018). I think that pragmatism has a role in deconstructing racist ideologies and can provide oppressors an opportunity to address *the* ontological problem and re-perceive Black people as beings (Warren, 2018). This is why the work of John Dewey, like all other philosophers and theorists who express dominator culture, requires a critical lens. I find that it is even more crucial to critically analyze Dewey's perspectives on pragmatism, given that the very foundation of pragmatism rests on the pillars of intellect and morality. We cannot allow these pillars to crumble because the founders and significant contributors to American pragmatism could not uphold the very ideals they espoused.

domination that accompanied them” (Giroux, 1983, p. 8). Critical theory is unique in that it is both a “school of thought” as well as a process of critique that seeks to “develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation” through self-conscious critique of its own canonical assumptions (Giroux, 1983, p. 8). Horkheimer (1972) boldly described the goal of critical theory as “man’s emancipation from slavery” (p. 245). This emancipation can be realized through social inquiry and critique between the way things are and the way they should be. While critical theory defies the neutrality of positivism by “openly tak[ing] sides in the interest of struggling for a better world,” it also dismisses relativism and its assumption that all ideas should be weighed equally (Giroux, 1983, p. 17). Instead, critical theorists utilize dialectical thought to establish a link between knowledge, power, and domination within cultures, which allows them to acknowledge some knowledge as false, given that the ultimate purpose of knowledge should be critical reflection for the advancement of positive social change (Apple, 2012; Giroux, 1983). Due to the reliance on education as a tool to advance social progress, and teachers’ role in cultivating the knowledge of new generations, teachers are in a unique position to advance positive social change. Given the assertions in the CHAT framework that we learn collectively by doing and that these activities take place in social systems that have profound implications on identity construction, teachers need to engage in practices that support the development of a critical lens within their teaching identity (Vygotsky, 1978). Critical reflection is a tool teachers can use in taking responsibility for their part in advancing social progress and developing a critical lens through meaningful activity (Roth & Lee, 2007).

Critical Reflection

The application of critical theory is invaluable for educational theorists and classroom teachers alike as critical theory provides us the opportunity to engage in the “hard and

disciplined (and sometimes dangerous) work of putting theory and practice together” (Apple, 2012, p. 27). Leading critical theorist Paulo Freire (1970) dedicated his life and research career to exploring the role of critical theory in reforming society and argued that through praxis, reflection and action, people can alter the order of social forces. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire asserted that the central aim of education is humanization. The pedagogy that supports this humanization is termed emancipatory pedagogy, for which there are two requirements: (a) it “enables both students and teachers to develop a critically conscious understanding of their relationship with the world” and (b) it “enables students and teachers to become subjects consciously aware of their context and their condition as a human being” (Au, 2007; Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014, p. 79). While emancipatory pedagogy establishes educational aims that include humanization, critical conscientization, and the establishment of a problem-posing education system, it does not provide a social practice to support teachers in transforming their pedagogy to achieve these aims (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014). Freire’s lack of a structured social practice to support teachers in critiquing their practice is problematic given the competing activity systems in which teachers construct their identities and develop their practice.

Critical thinking, the application of critical theory for the advancement of positive social change, is a term that requires a detailed investigation given the multiple meanings it has in the field of education (Apple, 2012). In the introduction of *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, critical theorist bell hooks (2010) stated that within this book she sought to “explore the connections between engaged pedagogy and issues of race, gender, and class, as well as the impact of Paulo Freire’s work on [her] thinking” (p. 4). It is important to consider this information when determining the meaning of the phrase “critical thinking” in the title. Given hooks’ direct reference to Paulo Freire, we can infer that the term critical refers to an application

of critical theory on one's thinking process. However, I believe that the term critical thinking to describe one's participation or application of critical theory is problematic in the field of education. Oftentimes, critical thinking refers to "careful goal-directed thinking" or problem solving that helps you to make judgments (Hitchcock, 2018). When I use the word critical, I am referencing Freire's body of critical pedagogy. Henceforth, I will utilize critical reflection instead of critical thinking to avoid confusion and to align myself with research terminology surrounding action research.

Critical reflection can be utilized in tandem with pragmatism to support teachers in their journey to become teacher-researchers. In addressing what she calls practical wisdom, bell hooks (2010) cited Freire arguing that we need to have "a permanently critical attitude" and that "When we accept that everyone has the ability to use the power of mind and integrate thinking and practice, we acknowledge that critical thinking is a profoundly democratic way of knowing" (p. 187). Like Dewey, hooks acknowledged that "thinking is action" and asserts that "intelligence [is] a resource that can strengthen our common good" (pp. 7, 22). In my opinion, not only is bell hooks's practical wisdom pragmatism by another name, but it also goes a step beyond Dewey in her inclusion of critical theory. She argues that theory and fact are interdependent knowledge that cannot be separated from experience and that "ultimately there is the awareness that knowledge rooted in experiences shows what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know" (hooks, 2010, p. 185). While hooks's assertions provide a critical lens on Dewey's perspectives regarding experience and education hooks, like Freire, struggles with the action that results from critique, the "how we use what we know."

This void in the literature of critical theory fails to address what Cornel West (1989) described as the "role of consequences in reflective deliberation" (p. 98). Following critically

reflective deliberation, teachers must act upon this judgment that is formed by their acknowledgment of the role that power and domination play in knowledge. If teachers are to utilize the critical reflection championed by Freire and hooks, they need a social practice that supports them in negotiating their professional teacher identity, navigating the tumultuous educational climate, and empowers them to bridge the theory-practice divide. I assert that this social practice is research.

Merging Pedagogy and Research

In this section, I discuss responsive pedagogy, a pedagogical approach that can support teachers in using what they know about students to make decisions that pragmatically combine thought and action. First, I discuss the intersection of thought and action by describing the connections between responsiveness, Dewey's (1933) reflective thought, and critical reflection. Next, I describe the faults of responsive pedagogy, namely its lack of a critical lens to respond to the needs of students. I question the effectiveness of other responsive pedagogies such as culturally responsive teaching and finally, I assert that action research is the medium that serves to blend critical reflection and responsive pedagogy in what I call critically responsive teaching.

The integration of context with thought and action as a form of knowledge and teaching practice appears in several bodies of literature. Dewey's (1933) reflective thought, Sherman's (2003) responsive teaching practices, and Gay (2000, 2010) and Ladson-Billings' (1992) culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy will be explored as pedagogical approaches to address the actions associated with the deliberation in critical reflection. Critical reflection is not a pedagogical practice but rather a form of engaging with and critiquing the world and therefore, needs to be utilized alongside teaching practices that have more specific aims and actions.

Reflective Thought

Dewey (1933) argued for the utilization of reflective thought in education as a form of problem solving to “set us free from the limiting influence of sense, appetite, and tradition” (p.157; Howard, 2003). Dewey defined reflective thought as “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it” (p. 6). Through reflective thought and reflection-in-action, teachers can make thoughtful judgment and decisions to improve their teaching in the future or during the active teaching process (Amobi, 2005). Reflection-in-action is in “conversation with the materials of a situation” and therefore provides teachers an opportunity to continually consider the situational contexts of their actions and modify them accordingly (Calderhead, 1989; Howard, 2003; Schon, 1987, p. 31). While reflective thought and reflection-in-action provides teachers an opportunity to evaluate their past and present actions and decisions, it does not provide them an opportunity to be proactive instead of reactive to the most important aspect of the situational context of their teaching practice—their students.

Responsive Teaching

While teachers can use reflective thought to improve their practice through self-evaluation, it can also be utilized as a proactive tool to make pedagogical judgments. Responsive teaching practices connect reflective thought and action to pedagogical decision making while acknowledging the moral and intellectual component of judgment in teaching. In the opening chapter of her book *Teacher Preparation as an Inspirational Practice*, Shelley Sherman (2013) quotes Maxine Greene: “The teacher who wishes to be more than a functionary cannot escape the value problem or the difficult matter of moral choice” (p. 3). Sherman acknowledges

Greene's perspectives on moral judgment in education and argues for the utilization of responsive teaching practices to drive the intellectual and moral core of teacher education.

Responsiveness is a complex and inclusive framework that provides teachers the opportunity to consider the quality of their pedagogical decisions and the impact they have on holistic student growth (Sherman, 2013). Responsive pedagogy is situated in teachers' intellectual and moral responsibility toward meeting the needs of individual students and promoting their cognitive development by addressing their ZPD, the "area" in which a student may develop with assistance from a teacher (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Reflection is but one tool teachers utilize to engage students in a meaningful learning path toward their ZPD as responsiveness requires a "sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being" in addition to reflective logic (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2003, pp. 11-12). Teachers that engage in responsive teaching practices are expected to (a) understand children and how they learn, (b) build relationships, (c) select and co construct content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, (d) align learning and instructional tools to support pedagogical content knowledge, and (e) build self-extending systems (Dozier & Rutten, 2005). Responsive teaching practices support teachers in making in-context pedagogical decisions regarding the learning needs of their students through reflective action.

Researchers of responsive teaching practices do not substantially address the moral and intellectual challenges associated with race and culture even though they acknowledge the moral and ethical components of teaching (Ball & Wilson, 1996; Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Hansen, 1999; Sherman, 2013). Sherman (2013), for example, referenced the extensive literature on culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy in her text and categorized responsiveness to race and culture, culturally responsive teaching, as one branch of the tree of responsive pedagogy. In

reality, race and culture are the very soil from which the tree is nourished, determining the root structure, the stability of the trunk, and the ability of the branches to support the leaves' tendencies toward sunlight. Race and culture cannot be analyzed nor reflected upon separately from other factors that determine student success, such as learning disabilities, socio-economic status, and individual preferences (Nieto, 2018). The intersection of power, domination, and knowledge, lacking in Sherman's responsive pedagogy, is required to support teachers in making "judgments every day regarding what ideas are valuable to pursue, what are less valuable, and what are not worthwhile at all" (Sherman, 2013, p. 19). Teachers' pedagogical decisions require a moral responsiveness to address the intersections of power, knowledge, and identity that are essential to student learning.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Other educators and researchers recognize the gap of a critical lens in pedagogical practices and seek to implement practices that are responsive to students' identity, most specifically their race and culture. For example, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a form of teacher practice that was developed to address the needs of a multicultural classroom (Gay, 2010; Grant, 1992). Culturally responsive teaching was created with the purpose of empowering "students to the point where they will be able to examine critically educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 106). Culturally responsive teaching is intended to achieve this purpose by "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 them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Teachers that practice CRT highlight the situated and contextual strengths of their ethnically diverse students by teaching to and through their strengths by validating and

affirming their cultural perspectives (Gay, 2000). While culturally responsive teaching empowers students, from historically oppressed communities, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, it does not always recognize that the struggle for power extends beyond culture to include other facets of human life such as gender, sexuality, ability, citizenship status, as well as their intersections (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Hall, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Although CRT allows teachers to think multiculturally about student culture, which is crucial considering the pervasiveness of the null and hidden curriculum, it does not demand critical responsiveness to their cultural identity, their gender and sexual identity, their personal interests, and their abilities. Culturally responsive teaching does not require teachers to critically reflect on the unique qualities of their individual students. This is highly problematic because culturally responsive teaching without the utilization of critical reflection is “extremely difficult, if not impossible” (Howard, 2003, p. 198). In addition, CRT’s responsiveness to culture instead of individual students can reduce complex cultures to well-intentioned stereotypes when put into practice.² I believe that “critical reflection should inform all facets of teaching” and teachers

² Ladson-Billings (1992) is a leader in the field of culturally responsive teaching whose research has provided foundational perspectives for other researchers and educators who seek to study and implement CRT. One of her most prominent essays, *Culturally Relevant Teaching: The Key to Making Multicultural Education Work*, was cited, according to Google Scholar, by scholars 416 times, including prominent researchers Sonia Nieto and Robert T. Carter. In this essay, Ladson-Billings acknowledges the essential role of critical theory in allowing students to critically examine their educational content and process; however, this critical lens was not modeled for students by the teachers Ladson-Billings quotes. Specifically, culturally responsive teaching did not individualize Black students to the white teachers whose perspectives are held up as examples for successful implementation of CRT.

The following quotes are from interview transcripts obtained by Ladson-Billings (1992) which she utilizes to demonstrate teacher understanding of student success as “helping students make connections between themselves and their community, national, ethnic and global identities” (p. 109).

[Black children] have always complemented my classroom because they’re willing to express themselves [yet] the way that they express themselves other people think that they’re out of control, rude and disrespectful...[Sp2–3] Black children bring a sense of

need to be responsive to more than a culture, they need to be responsive to students (Howard, 2003, p.200).

cooperation [to the classroom]. They're very willing to help. They're very open-minded... They're very verbal ...[Sp7-2] ...they're just full of life...enthusiasm. And they're not afraid to show their feelings. [Sp3-2] ...I think that black children are themselves, more than any other type of child. To compare them [with other children], many other children look to see what you want and then they do it, where a black child, at least the ones I've come in contact with, they [sic] look to see what you want and if they agree with it they'll do it but if they don't, they waste no bones in telling you that they don't agree. [Teachers] have to know that. They're [the children] not being rude—that's the way they are. [Sp4-1] .

These quotes provided by teachers that Ladson-Billings (1992) claims utilize culturally responsive teaching are highly problematic for a number of reasons. Taken as a whole, these quotes describe Black children as “open-minded,” “expressive,” “verbal,” “not afraid to show their feelings,” and authentic in that “black children are themselves, more than any other type of child” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 109). While these teachers may have been well-intentioned in describing these “special strengths” of Black children that are often seen as “out of control, rude and disrespectful,” there are negative consequences to describing an entire race of children in this manner (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 109). Let's consider the characteristic of expressiveness; not all Black children express themselves openly. How would a teacher who assumed this respond to a shy Black child? Would they consider them the exception to the rule? If Black children who are described as “not afraid to show their feelings” don't express their grievances of racism in the classroom, can one assume racist remarks and actions are not occurring, that they don't exist?

In addition, Ladson-Billings (1989) argues that culturally responsive teachers take a critical view of knowledge by helping students develop skills through content that is related to their students' lives. She argues that this critical view is apparent in the following statement made by a teacher she identifies as practicing CRT, “...well, I always had the feeling with black children that they were always under... we always underestimated what they could do... I found that another avenue for them was sometimes something that didn't necessarily have to do with academics...” (p. 110). This perspective that Black children are less academic than other groups of children is problematic because it assumes a supposed deficit on the part of Black children instead of critically reflecting and analyzing the conditions that create barriers for Black children to be successful. Instead of working to break down these barriers, or at least acknowledge them, this teacher has chosen to focus on nonacademic tasks to engage her Black students, something that would benefit children of all races and cultures. While engaging Black students in curriculum and acknowledging the ways in which they have been underestimated is crucial, this is not an example of critical reflection that considers the dynamics of power, domination, and knowledge.

Pedagogy Is Research

Action research is the medium that serves to blend critical reflection and responsiveness that allows educators to teach with the intention of addressing their students' unique idiosyncrasies and complex, intersectional identities. The integration of critical reflection with responsive pedagogy is necessary to address the multifaceted nature of power as well as the strengths, perspectives, and identities of individual students; however, it does not address the lack of a structured social practice in responsive pedagogy. Researchers and educators suggest that teachers conduct observations, journal, and reflect to participate in responsive practices but provide no systematic procedures to support teachers in this endeavor (Sherman, 2013). Like academic researchers who engage in a social practice of investigation that allows them to produce rigorous, trustworthy studies within their community, teachers also need structured procedures to support them in connecting and practicing critical reflection and responsiveness in their educational communities. Cultural-historical activity theory demonstrates the significance of identity development through meaningful participation in activities regulated by social and historical contexts, therefore, it is crucial for teachers to navigate their identity as a teacher-researcher through structured social practice (Foot, 2014).

Although action research is not directly referenced by educators and researchers who seek to advance responsive pedagogy, there is a clear connection between responsive practices and teacher-research. In the foreword to Sherman's (2013) book on responsiveness for teachers and teacher educators, David Hansen states that Sherman utilizes her personal experience of incorporating action research into her own classroom as well as other research studies on teacher education to construct her perspectives regarding responsiveness. It is Hansen who recognizes that the systematic inquiry Sherman utilizes for her own responsive teaching as that of action

research and his usage of the term “action research” is the only time it appears in Sherman’s entire book. In addition to providing a social practice for teachers to participate in as they engage in responsiveness, action research has been studied in connection with critical reflection and the improvement of teacher practice (Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019). Action research might be the social practice that fulfills the gap in responsive teaching. Action research might be the essential component to support teachers in taking on the immense responsibility of critically reflective pedagogical decisions in their journey of becoming teacher-researchers. In conducting this research study, I explored how action research provided my participants a social practice to critically reflect upon their practice as educators. Due to the connective thread critical reflection strings between action research and critically responsive teaching, I investigated the extent to which critically responsive practices appeared in the pedagogy of my participants in connection to their perceptions of their teacher-researcher identity.

Action Research

Action research is a method of teacher research that could help to bridge the theory-practice divide given its aim of improving “practice through the application of practical judgment and the accumulated personal wisdom of the teacher” (Halbach, 2016; Leitch & Day, 2000, p. 183). Action research is defined as “comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” that provides an encouraging framework for teachers to critically reflect on their curriculum and pedagogy as well as to provide opportunities for them to participate in school development and reform collaboratively (Apelgren et al., 2015; Lewin, 1948, pp. 202-2203). Through legitimate activity in action research, teachers can deepen their understanding of issues in their classroom or educational community they find puzzling, problematic, and/or intriguing to enable them to

make an impact on student learning (Burns & Westmacott, 2018). Action research methods are highly structured and operate through the use of cyclical practices that include planning, acting, observing, and reflecting which equip teachers with a social practice for observing the operations in their classroom and the effects of their actions, behaviors, and perspectives on student learning and school culture (Burns, 2010; Burns & Westmacott, 2018). The systematic, structural approach to addressing the in-context educational needs of students and communities that action research provides addresses some of the inadequacies of responsive teaching practices and emancipatory pedagogy as well as support the development of the teacher-researcher identity.

The utilization of the perspectives and skills gained through research practice has the potential to advance the responsiveness of educators to their specific educational environment and their students as complex individuals. In many teacher education courses on action research, teachers are able to select teaching concepts from their coursework, apply them in their classroom, and reflect upon their approach with the purpose of improving their teaching practice (Halbach, 2016; Leitch & Day, 2000; Luneberg et al., 2007). Action research provides teachers the opportunity to not only reflect on their teaching practice but also, to self-evaluate their teaching practice, a skill that is crucial in making in-context pedagogical decisions. The four key areas of self-evaluation achieved through action research include “(1) evaluating [their] own teacher roles and practice, (2) expressing practical failure in teaching, (3) evaluating beliefs and assumptions about teaching, and (4) evaluating [their] own personal characteristics” (Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019, p. 71). This self-evaluation establishes a safe space for critical reflection in which teacher- researchers can “freely articulate their weaknesses or failures, which would normally be suppressed” (Senaydin & Dikilitaş, 2019, p. 72). With this freedom to explore criticism without punishment, teachers can use critically responsive practices to unpack the

challenges they and their students face and utilize it as an expressive outlet to articulate their concerns and goals for their local educational community as well as larger educational institutions.

The self-criticism that action research encourages teachers to explore through reflection and self-evaluation allows them to question their assumptions about teaching and make change possible (Leitch & Day, 2000). When educators lack critically reflective tools, they find themselves in search of solutions they can apply to all students or a group of students such as culturally responsive teaching. Pragmatists remind us that knowledge is an activity constructed within the context of our experience and therefore, knowledge cannot be predetermined or static; therefore, pedagogy cannot be predetermined or prescriptive requiring teachers to make pedagogical decisions in the context of their specific teaching community (Glaude, 2007). In-service teachers that are in search of solutions, the formula for “good teaching,” are susceptible to merely adopting the pedagogical perspectives of the educational environment in which they practice without careful evaluation of these methods. And, as activity theory suggests, not only are they susceptible to adopting pedagogical perspectives, they are at risk of “consenting” to the identities of others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). When teachers conduct research as a facet of their role as a teacher, they become theorists who are critical of their assumptions, informed by current research, less likely to accept uncritically the perspectives of others, and more confident in their own assessment of pedagogy and curriculum (Goswami & Stillman, 1987).

Previous research studies on action research have investigated how action research in graduate school programs support teachers to observe and reflect on their practice, and how teacher perceptions of action research change the more they learn about it (Halbach, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2015). Additional research studies have been conducted that explored the development of

the teacher-researcher identity in relation to their sense of agency in action research as well as how engagement with action research can improve teachers' poor self-beliefs about their ability to conduct research (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2015). Research has demonstrated that legitimate participation in meaningful, personal, and context driven action research can support teachers in developing an identity as a teacher-researcher. Could an educational activity system that provides authentic opportunities for action research, support teachers in developing a teacher-researcher identity and bridging the gulf between thought and action, as well as theory and practice, and allow them to take on the responsibility of being critically responsive to their students? This lengthy question was the inspiration behind my three research questions and drove the investigation of my research study.

Teacher-Researcher Identity and Pedagogy

The development of a teacher-researcher identity is possible through “legitimate activity” that results in a change in teacher identity (Roth & Lee, 2007). However, due to the complexity of identity construction within an activity system, action research can be “destabilizing, leading to an unpredictable shift in identity as teachers encounter research, often for the first time” (Banegas & Cad, 2019, p. 25). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to begin constructing their identity as a researcher in teacher education programs with the encouragement of their professors or the support of their mentor teacher during their student teaching experience.

This development of a teacher-researcher identity during teacher preparation programs has been observed through student reflection of their research experiences. Schwarz and Ray (2018), for example, share the experiences of two teacher educators who implemented practitioner research among pre-service teachers through a project on action research during their

student teaching. One of these pre-service teachers described the value she found in conducting teacher research in the following statement:

The beauty about research is how much one learns throughout the process. Research intensified my internship experience; it brought meaning and purpose to what I was doing. I had a mission and a goal, and this mentality is perfectly mimetic of the teaching profession I gained a sense of purpose during my internship, and I also learned the importance of research. Research is actively acknowledging the realm of immense possibilities and options in life. I have learned to always question, because my research revealed new ways for me to teach and to empower students and others around me. My research was the highlight of my internship experience. (Schwarz & Ray, 2018, pp. 53-54)

This pre-service teacher demonstrates the deep reflection and analytical thinking that is made possible through research experiences such as action research. In addition, we can take notice of the preliminary construction of her identity as a teacher-researcher through this positive and meaningful approach to teaching.

Previous studies on teacher-researcher identity have demonstrated the hybridized identity of teacher-researchers that was constructed as they engaged in practitioner research (Achirri, 2020; Banegas & Cad, 2019; Schwarz & Ray, 2018). Previous research findings on educational contexts and reflection suggest that there is an intersection between pedagogy and identity regarding how change comes about in one's teaching practice (Achirri, 2020; Keat, 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Missing from the literature is an investigation into the impacts of a self-identified teacher-researcher identity on teachers' pedagogy. In conducting this research study, I sought to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the self-identified teacher-researcher

identity of my participants as well as the ways in which they engage with research, critically reflect, and self-evaluate their practice. In addition, I investigated the pedagogical consequences of critical reflection and self-evaluation through action research.

Cultivating Responsibility

Why aren't teachers critically responsive practitioners who wield wisdom gained through their integration of theory and practice? I believe that the power hierarchy among teachers, reformers, administrators, and researchers, prevents teachers from proclaiming their knowledge and significantly contributing to the reformation of the educational climate. The prevalence of accountability culture in American education imperils critically responsive teaching practices and the professional growth of educators by reinforcing the hierarchical roles of stakeholders in education. Neoliberal educational reforms "display little confidence in the ability of public-school teachers to provide intellectual and moral leadership for our nation's youth" as they present "teacher proof" curriculum and standardize teacher education (Giroux, 1988, p. 121). Even when teachers are allowed to enter the debate on educational reform, "they are the object of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life" (Giroux, 1988, p. 121). Teachers must be emancipated from this objectification that minimizes their perspectives and roles by devaluing them as professionals while simultaneously holding them accountable for student success. Participation in authentic teacher research has the potential to emancipate educators by providing them a voice in their professional development and a platform to transform their educational environment through critically responsive teaching practices (Schwarz & Ray, 2018). This encouragement of teacher voice through teacher research can support them in negotiating their teacher-researcher identity instead of "consenting" to the

identities of other teachers in their activity system. Most importantly, the opportunity to partake in teacher research may allow teachers to take ownership of their researcher identity and cultivate pedagogical responsibility.

Progress towards this emancipation of teacher voice and the merging of theory and practice may be upon us. The status quo in education and society at large is being questioned through the current reckoning of White supremacy and the social justice inequalities that have become highlighted and exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quarantine mandates of the COVID-19 pandemic have provided educators and researchers across the United States an opportunity to virtually connect and share their research, perspectives, and hopes for the reimagining of education. This reimagining includes the abolitionist teaching movement, spearheaded by Bettina Love, a Black LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning) professor, as well as the resurgence of culturally responsive teaching.

Unfortunately, the concerns I discussed with early research in CRT continue to emerge in contemporary research. In a recent webinar (Love et al., 2020) entitled “Abolitionist Teaching and the Future of our Schools,” Gholdy Muhammad (2020), author of *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, argues that “in terms of pedagogy, in an ideal world we’ll get this culturally and historically responsive curriculum handed to us as teachers. We don’t have to sprinkle it with equity dust. But [now] we have to usually modify or revise the curriculum that is given to us.” While I too believe we need to have content that addresses the historical and cultural diversity of our world, which often remains the hidden or null curriculum, it is problematic to focus on curriculum that seems almost “teacher proof” in that teachers should not have to modify or revise it. This focus on a change in curriculum that is independent of pedagogical responsibility is problematic because it takes the

intellectualism out of teaching that is essential to the creation of curriculum that is critically responsive to students. The power that is stripped from teachers when educational reform focuses on new curriculum instead of teacher education disrupts the professionalization of teachers and prevents them from bridging the theory-practice divide.

Summary

To support teachers in combining theory and practice, as well as intellect and morality to make pedagogical decisions, we—educators, administrators, researchers, evaluators, and reformers—must take on a critical responsiveness and humanizing approach towards our teachers that does not undermine their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences in the classroom. To achieve this, we must reform teacher education and engage teachers in research (Calkins, 1985; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Meyers, 1987; Schwarz & Ray, 2018). In my research study, I sought to contribute to the research on teacher research as teacher education reform and utilize cultural-historical activity theory, pragmatism, and critical theory to guide my review on teacher-researcher identity formation, critically responsive teaching practices, and action research. I seek to build on the previous studies that investigate teacher-researcher identity development through an exploration of their meaning making of research and its integration into their practice (Achirri, 2020; Banegas & Cad, 2019; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Schwarz & Ray, 2018; L. Taylor, 2017). I intend to investigate the connections between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and pedagogical decision making, specifically, critically responsive teaching practices. I define critically responsive teaching as a pedagogical strategy that uses critical reflection as well as a “sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being” as tools to engage students in a meaningful learning path toward their ZPD (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2003, p. 11-12). This term is a combination

between Sherman's (2003) definition of responsive teaching and my own inclusion of the critical reflection bell hooks (2010) terms practical wisdom. My study addresses the gap in previous literature that has not investigated the intersection between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and changes in their pedagogical practices. In this study, I explore the development of a teacher-researcher identity of two teachers who have completed an action research project and investigate their ability to blend theory and practice through their pedagogical judgments and decisions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodology Overview

In this chapter, I discuss my rationale for selecting qualitative research and discuss the methodology of multiple case study. I utilized this methodology to explore the influence that the development of a teacher-researcher identity has on the critically responsive pedagogical practices of in-service teachers who have completed an action research project. Previous studies have investigated the development of the professional teacher identity and the teacher-researcher identity as well as the way in which engagement with research changes the professional practice of teachers (Achirri, 2020; Guilbert et al., 2016; Hanks, 2017; Schwarz & Ray, 2018; Tanner & Davies, 2009). In addition, Achirri (2020) and Pennington and Richards (2016) have suggested that an intersection between pedagogy and identity exists in regard to how change comes about in one's teaching practice. However, the existing literature overlooks the intersection between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and changes in their pedagogical practices. The development of a teacher-researcher identity through engagement in "legitimate activity" is crucial in creating change in pedagogy and is radically different from passively participating in research practices (Roth & Lee, 2007). I conducted a multiple case study of two practicing teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's program to understand how the development of their teacher-researcher identity intersects with their in-context pedagogical decisions.

In this chapter, I explain how the methodology of multiple case study was used to explore and address my research questions. Then, I present the study's design, including the research setting, participant selection process, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss the trustworthiness and research ethics of my study as well as its limitations, implications, and my stance and bias as a researcher.

Qualitative Educational Research

To maintain rigor in my study, I chose to conduct a qualitative research study because qualitative methods align with my epistemology, theoretical framework, and research questions (Bhattacharya, 2017). My qualitative research study is founded on the constructivist epistemology that people construct knowledge as they “engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). In addition, qualitative research acknowledges that research is situated contextually, which supported my investigation into the development of a teacher-researcher identity among my participants and their in- context pedagogical decision making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patel, 2016). Like pragmatism, qualitative research supports the nature of research as a relational, cultural, and political practice that “does not exist outside of trajectories of thought and action but firmly within” (Patel, 2016, p. 49). The relational and political qualities of research require a critical lens, which can be used to reframe our perspectives about learning and teaching, given the colonial nature of schooling. As educational researchers, we are responsible for “mov[ing] beyond discourse and language to practice and action” and pursuing the decolonization of education and educational research (Battiste, 2013; Patel, 2016, p. 73). In her text *Decolonizing Educational Research*, Leigh Patel (2016) argued that educational research is answerable to learning as transformation and knowledge as impermanent and contextual. To address learning as a process of transformation,

and the connection between the relational aspects of learning and identity construction, I investigated and evaluated the development of a teacher-researcher identity among my participants as an active ongoing process (Ellsworth, 2004). The intentions of my research study were grounded in recognition of knowledge as impermanent and contextual in a changing world as I explored and interpreted the contextual “coming-into-being” of my participants and their own understanding and reflection on their pedagogy and action research (Patel, 2016, p. 80). Given the importance of situational context in my research study, I selected the multiple case study methodology with which to pursue my research questions.

Multiple Case Study

I conducted a multiple case study to examine the relationship between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and the practice of critically responsive pedagogies. A case study is a type of qualitative research in which the investigator conducts an in-depth contextual study of people, an issue, and place within a predetermined scope, which is often referred to as a bounded system (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The bounding of the study is specific to case study research and is essential in providing clarity regarding the parameters of the study, what the researcher was trying to study, and how the researcher drew the boundaries of their bounded system (Bhattacharya, 2017). Case studies are information-rich sources that utilize multiple forms of data such as interviews, observations, and documents to create thick descriptions of the phenomenon studied, allowing readers an opportunity to vicariously experience interactions with the participants and providing the researcher with detailed sources for an in-depth understanding of the bounded system (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This in-depth understanding is essential for

creating themes that emerge through inductive analysis of the data via coding and analytical thinking (Bhattacharya, 2017).

My research study was particularly well suited for the case study methodology because it was impossible for me to separate the phenomenon — the relationship between the development of a teacher-research identity and in-context pedagogical decisions— from their context — the activity systems in which participants construct their identity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). In this multiple case study, I provide an in-depth understanding of the complexities of two participants as individual cases, as well as a comparison across both cases. I utilized the thick descriptions required of case study research to provide an in-depth understanding of the bounded system I investigated in order to assess the significance of the thought processes, decisions, actions, responses, and events that took place during my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My decision to employ a multiple case study to investigate the relationship between the construction of a teacher-researcher identity and critically responsive teaching practices is consistent with the literature and previous studies on similar topics. Multiple case studies have been utilized by other researchers to explore teacher engagement with research, the construction of a teacher-researcher identity, and the integration of research and pedagogy (Achirri, 2020; Hanks, 2017; Tanner & Davies, 2009). I employed the multiple case study methodology to investigate the development of a teacher-researcher identity among two practicing teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's program and how this identity development impacted their pedagogical decisions.

Methods and Procedures

Research Questions

In this study, I explored the relationship between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and critically responsive teaching practices among two teachers who had conducted action research in a master's degree course. The research questions listed below guided my investigation.

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?
- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?
- Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

Below, I provide a description and rationale indicating how I answered my research questions.

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?

After I selected two practicing teachers who completed an action research project in a master's level class and obtained their consent, I conducted semi-structured interviews, virtual classroom observations, and collected documents to learn about participants' perceptions of their professional teaching identity after completing their action research project. First, I collected documents from the course in which they completed the action research project such as the class syllabus and course readings to provide insight into the principles of action research the participants learned about. Then, I interviewed participants to gain insight into their demographics, professional and educational background, their perspectives on teaching and action research, as well as their professional teaching identity. After this initial interview, I

conducted an observation of their teaching practice to determine how their perceived self-identity manifests in the decisions and actions that occur during the act of teaching. A second interview focused on the participants' action research project and explored why they chose their topic, their rationale for the project design, how the project influenced their teaching, and whether they would consider conducting another action research project. During a second observation, I continued to observe how their self-described teaching identity was presented in their teaching practice. In a final interview, I had participants critically reflect on their project and self-evaluate their own teaching in light of their action research project and their future professional and educational goals. As I interviewed and observed participants, I collected additional documents such as the curriculum students engaged with during my observations and compared data gained from these documents to information obtained during the interviews and observations.

Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?

The forms of data collection that helped me to answer my second research question include interviews and documents. During interviews, I collected information regarding how the participants feel about and perceive action research, and what they have gained from their action research project. I described and analyzed these answers and perspectives collected from data obtained from interviews and documents. In addition, I collected assignments the participants submitted for their master's class over the course of the study. I compared participants' perspectives on action research found in their coursework with the information they provided me during their interviews. This comparative analysis helped me to understand what participants hoped to learn from their study, what they took away from the findings, and how their professional practice was impacted by this experience.

Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

To answer this third research question regarding pedagogy, I utilized data from interviews, observations, and documents to construct a full picture of the participants' utilization of critical responsive pedagogical approaches in this bounded system. I asked questions that provided me insight into their rationale for selecting their research topic to determine the extent to which their specific learning community influenced their research questions. I observed participants and collected documents such as their action research presentation and curriculum students engaged in during my observations to see how information they learn about their students through their action research project was used to inform their teaching practice, if at all. Finally, interviews provided key information regarding participants' utilization of critical reflection in their action research project and in their pedagogy.

Participants and Selection Process

Participants in this study were two teachers in the English Education Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program. Both teachers were enrolled in the graduate level course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (CLD) in which they conducted an action research project. I chose two because multiple case study methodology requires a small sample size for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the cases (Patton, 1990). Many researchers conducting a multiple case study have selected two participants to investigate related cases such as “how two teachers experienced the process of becoming teacher-researchers within a master’s degree program” and the impact of teacher research in teacher education (Keat, 2004, p. 43; Schwarz & Ray, 2018). Although I had a small sample size, I was able to collect sufficient data from my two participants to answer my research questions. In addition to following the models

of other research studies before me, I collected varied types of data through triangulation to ensure I collected enough data to fulfill the purpose of my study. My decision to utilize an n of two for my sample size was consistent with my methodology selection, the purpose of my study, as well as the choices of other researchers who explore teacher education and the teacher-researcher identity.

I employed purposeful sampling, also described as purposive sampling, as the method of participant selection for my study. Purposeful sampling is described as a unique sample that represents the phenomenon of interest and allows the researcher to investigate different perspectives of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling enabled me to utilize my judgment in selecting participants that aligned with the criteria of my study and were “likely to provide data that [would] lead to desired understanding and insight about the case” (Keat, 2004, p. 43; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Purposeful sampling has been used by qualitative researchers to select participants for studies investigating the construction of a professional teacher identity and the experience of becoming teacher-researchers (Cantú, 2019; Keat, 2004). Through purposeful sampling, I was able to select information-rich cases from which I addressed the central purpose of my study of exploring the relationship between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and critically responsive teaching practices of two teachers engaged in action research (Patton, 1990).

In the fall of 2020, I was the graduate teacher assistant for a 500-level graduate course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. I was able to select students from this course as participants for my study because the requirements of the semester-long action research project correlated with the type of action research I outlined in my literature review which requires teachers to critically reflect on and self-evaluate their teaching practice (Şenaydın

& Dikilitaş, 2019). One of the goals of this course was for students to “engage in critical reflection” and “apply what they have learned to their own teaching contexts” which fulfilled the requirement of needing my participants to engage in critical reflection (University of Northern Colorado [UNC], 2020c). I recruited students from the class after grades had been submitted and the course had officially ended. In purposefully selecting my participants, I read and watched all the action research presentations submitted by students and made a list of potential students to recruit whom I thought created a well-developed action research project that fulfilled the requirements of the course. I sent a standard email (see Appendix A) to the student’s school email accounts from my student email account asking them to participate in my study. I was successful in finding two graduate students from this graduate course. The first participant who agreed to participate in my study was Rosie Rodriguez, a Mexican American female who at the age of 26 was in her third year as an English teacher. She agreed to be a participant right away and we began the process of interviews, observations, and sharing documents in February of 2021 after the approval of my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application. It was challenging to find a second participant as it took other students from the graduate course several months to respond to my invitation email. Eventually, in March of 2021, I found a second participant for my study. The second participant who agreed to participate in my study was Ally Adams, a White female who was in her sixth year of teaching at the age of 31.

I obtained approval for conducting research through the IRB prior to recruitment of my participants. After the IRB application for my proposal was approved (see Appendix B), participants were reviewed and signed the consent form (see Appendix C) and site permission letter (see Appendix D) which outlined the purpose of my study as well as how they would be required to participate. To maintain the confidentiality of my participants, pseudonyms were

utilized. Rosie selected her own pseudonym while Ally requested that I create one for her. To protect participants' privacy, all identifying information was stripped from the written data. Participant information including consent forms, audio files and transcribed interviews, will be kept in password protected electronic file.

Given the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on physical distancing, all correspondence with the participants of this study was virtual. I collected data that were interview and document heavy since my observations were conducted virtually. In the next section, I go into further detail regarding the data collection methods utilized in this study.

Data Collection

I utilized multiple data collection methods as consistent with the multiple case study methodology to investigate the relationship between the development of a teacher-researcher identity and critically responsive teaching practices among two teachers who had conducted action research in a master's degree course (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection included semi-structured interviews, observations, and document collection. Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection tools used in this study in correspondence to my research questions.

Table 1*Data Collection Tools*

Theoretical Framework	Research Questions	Participants	Data Collection Tool
Social Constructivist	Q1: How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?	2 practicing teachers taking an action research course.	Interviews 3 interviews were conducted after students completed their action research project.
Cultural-Historical Activity Theory			Observations 2 virtually attended classroom observations were made after an interview had taken place. Documents Documents include all assignments submitted for the master's course, teaching materials, course syllabi, and course readings.
Social Constructivist	Q2: How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?	2 practicing teachers taking an action research course.	Interviews 3 interviews were conducted after students had completed their action research project.
Cultural-Historical Activity Theory			Documents Documents include all assignments submitted for the master's course, teaching materials, course syllabi, and course readings.
Critical Theory Pragmatism			
Social Constructivist	Q3: To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?	2 practicing teachers taking an action research course.	Interviews 3 interviews were conducted after students have completed their action research project.
Cultural-Historical Activity Theory			Observations 2 virtually attended classroom observations were made after an interview had taken place.
Critical Theory			Documents Documents include all assignments submitted for the master's course, teaching materials, course syllabi, and course readings.
Pragmatism			

Interviews

Previous research studies exploring identity construction of teachers utilized interviews to allow participants to voice their own experiences and perceptions; therefore, I conducted three

one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Achirri, 2020). The decision to conduct three interviews is consistent with other case study methodologies exploring similar topics such as the construction of a professional teacher identity and becoming a teacher-researcher (Cantú, 2019; Keat, 2004). During the first interview, I collected data on participants' demographics, professional and education background, as well as their perspectives about teaching and research. In the second interview, I collected data about the participants' action research project including why they chose their topic, rationale for their project design, and how the project influenced their teaching. In the final interview, I had participants critically reflect on their project and self-evaluate their own teaching in light of their action research project; participants also shared their future professional and educational goals. The second and third interviews began with follow-up questions that addressed inquiries I had in regard to my observations. Additionally, the second and third interviews provided me an opportunity to request documents such as the Google Slide shows presented to students during observations.

Interviews were guided by a list of questions (see Appendices E through H), which were constructed from my "theoretical perspective, research purpose and questions, and information gained from literature review" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 132; Merriam, 2009). During the interviews, I asked questions that helped me gain insight into their self-identity as a professional teacher after having completed an action research project, their perceptions of how engaging in action research has impacted their professional practice, and the extent to which their pedagogical decisions are guided by critical responsiveness. Interviewing my participants provided me an opportunity to better understand their perceptions of self and their teaching practice and address any questions I had about the observations I conducted and the documents I collected.

In order to collect comprehensive data from interviews that allowed me to answer my research questions, all semi-structured interviews were guided by structured and unstructured questions that address Patton's (2015) six types of good questions, which seek information about the participants' (a) experience and behavior, (b) opinions and values, (c) feelings, (d) knowledge, (e) background and demographic information, and (f) sensory information. The open structure of a semi-structured interview was crucial in allowing me to listen actively, respond to the emerging knowledge of the participants, and address the ideas created in "the space between" us, the participants, and I, which humanizes the research process (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p. 24; Merriam, 2009). Like other qualitative studies, these interviews were approximately one hour in length (Cantú, 2019; Moroye, 2007).

Due to the physical socializing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place virtually through Google Meet and were audio and video recorded. All audio and video recordings are saved in a password protected Google Drive that only I have access to. I utilized the transcription service Temi to transcribe all interview audio recordings. Participants had the opportunity to view each interview transcript before the next interview occurred which provided opportunities for reflection (Moroye, 2007).

Observations

In order for me to fully understand, describe, and interpret the context of my study, it was essential that I conduct observations of my participants. Given the intention of my first research question of understanding the participants' perceptions of their professional teacher identity as it changes over time, it was important that I understand the context in which their identities were constructed, what cultural-historical activity theory calls the activity system (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, I conducted two classroom observations of participants actively

teaching to better understand how activity in the classroom shapes their teacher identity. In addition, observation played a key role in addressing my third research question as it allowed me to make my own judgments regarding the participants' pedagogical decisions and perspectives. Classroom observations provided me the opportunity to visually observe the participants' pedagogy in action and compare my interpretations of their decisions in the classroom with the pedagogical decisions they describe in interviews and documents regarding their teaching practice.

Given the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted two virtual non-recorded observations of my participants through the Google Meet platform as well as through Zoom. These observations were not recorded. During these observations, I was a peripheral member, which means I was minimally involved in the group I was observing and did not participate in any of the activities seen while documenting what I observed from the sidelines (Bhattacharya, 2017; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). During Rosie's observation, I used the Google Meet platform to observe her teaching her students. She situated the computer on a desk at the front of the room which allowed me to see her when she stood at the front and provided a visual of the smart board in her classroom. Due to the circumstances of COVID-19, I was not able to use the Google Meet Platform for Ally's observations as I had initially planned. During the spring of 2021, Ally was teaching students in person and virtually at the same time. She used a laptop to connect with her students virtually through Zoom. Ally asked if I could use the Zoom platform to observe her class since it would be less complicated for her to manage. When I was on the Zoom platform with Ally and her students, I disabled my video camera to show a black screen so as not to distract her and her students. During my interviews with Ally, I observed her students working

from home and was able to see Ally in the classroom working with students who were learning in person.

During these observations, I looked for evidence of the perspectives participants shared during their interviews and described in the documents I collected. For example, I looked for evidence of the participants' self-described teacher identity in their actions and decisions made in the classroom while teaching. I used observation data to determine the extent to which the teaching practices participants described in their interviews were evident during the class lessons I observed. Given the restrictions of physical distancing and my need to observe virtually, observations were used to confirm data obtained through interviews and documents, the main forms of data collection in my study.

In addition to observing participants, I collected observational field notes to record observational data for analysis. These observation field notes were documented using a two-column chart, with the left-hand column containing descriptive notes of activities, and the right-hand column containing reflective notes. Both columns will be headed by date, place, and time of the observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My observation procedure was guided by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-factor Observation Checklist including (a) the physical setting; (b) the participants; (c) activities and interactions; (d) conversation; (e) subtle factors (i.e., symbolic meaning of words, nonverbal communication, what does not happen); and (f) the behavior of the researcher. I used the Observational Checklist (see Appendix J) to focus my observations on data that would help me answer my first and third research questions by creating thick descriptions for interpretation, evaluation, and thematic analysis.

Document Collection

In qualitative research, document collection refers to collecting an array of visual, written, digital, and physical material relevant to the investigation of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout this study, the documents I collected included the following items: all assignments related to the action research project and addressing the needs of diverse learners, curriculum the participants' students worked on during my observations, the graduate course syllabi, and course readings. The graduate course syllabi and readings provided me insight into the theories and perspectives that shaped the participants' self-identity as professional teachers as well as their perceptions of the impact of action research on their teacher-research practice. The assignments submitted for the master's level course helped me to understand their perspectives on research and the extent to which the context of their teaching environment drives their research interests. The participants' curriculum helped me to understand the impact of research on their teaching practice as well as the extent to which their pedagogy reflects critically responsive teaching.

When describing the documents in my research journal, I considered some of the following questions for future analysis: What is the history of the document? Who was/is the author? What was the author trying to accomplish? For whom was the document intended? What was or is the maker's bias? (Clark, 1967). I also critically analyzed these documents because documents are "social products" that embody the ideologies, values, and interests of their author (Saldaña, 2016, p. 61). In addition to analyzing the documents myself, I discussed some of the documents I collected from my participants during our interviews. For example, I asked the participants questions about their action research project PowerPoint presentation to gain clarity on their intentions and reflections on their action research. I also used interviews as a time to ask

for access to documents such as the Google Slide shows that I did not have a clear visual of during my virtual observations. I used the collected documents to help me understand the participants' perceptions of action research and critical reflection as well as their use of action research in their classroom as a tool to reflect on their teaching practice. The documents were crucial in supporting my response to my second research question regarding participant reflection on the impacts of action research to their professional practice. Table 2 outlines the timeline for my dissertation.

Table 2

Timeline for Dissertation

Date	Activity
November 2020	Proposal Defense
December 2020	Institutional Board Review Submission Send Recruitment Email to Potential Participants
January 2021	Institutional Board Review Approval
February 2021	Obtain Consent Form & Observation Site Permission Rosie Initial Interview Rosie First Observation
March 2021	Rosie Second Interview Rosie Second Observation Rosie Third Interview Ally Initial Interview Ally First Observation Code and Analyze Data
April 2021	Ally Second Interview Ally Second Observation Ally Third Interview Code and Analyze Data
May- September 2021	Code and Analyze Data Write Dissertation
October 2021	Dissertation Defense

Data Analysis

In this multiple case study, I employed categorical aggregation to analyze the within-case analysis as well as the cross-case analysis. This includes thick descriptions as well as emergent themes. Like previous qualitative studies, the process of data analysis began when I started gathering data and actively engaged “in on-going decision making and reflection activities through writing reflective memos and weekly reviewing my notes” (Achirri, 2020, p. 1700). In addition to reflective memos, analytic strategies I took notes while reading, summarizing field notes, identified codes, highlighted noteworthy quotes, reduced codes to themes, captured emerging thematic ideas, and interpreted themes in the context of my research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the within-case analysis, I treat each case as a comprehensive case in and of itself and present detailed, thick descriptions of each individual case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The within-case analysis includes narrative descriptions of each case as well as vignettes to establish an inviting entry point for the reader and convey “to the reader what experience itself would convey” (Stake, 1995, p. 39). In addition to providing thick descriptions to help inform my understanding of each case, I interpreted the significance of the development of the teacher-researcher identity and critically responsive teaching practices within each case (Stake, 1995). The emergence of themes began during this within-case analysis but was not finalized until the cross-case analysis was completed.

When conducting the cross-case analysis, I built abstractions across the cases to construct themes and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Categorical aggregation allowed me to seek a “collection of instances from the data, hoping that the issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 206). I organized this information using the Dedoose

application which allowed me to see codes and themes that applied to both cases. After constructing themes via data analysis, I interpreted the themes in the context of my research questions and concluded with naturalistic generalizations, which will allow my readers to learn from the cases themselves and transfer their learning to similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). Thematic development across the cases was not used for generalizations but for understanding the complexities of the cases and establishing points of transferability for readers. It is my hope that the evaluative perspectives and thematic knowledge that emerged from the data analysis of my study are helpful to teacher educators who seek to support in-service teachers as they develop their teacher-researcher identity and establish a connection between theory and practice in their pedagogy.

Trustworthiness

Internal Validity and Transferability

In order for the results of my study to be utilized to their fullest potential in teacher education reform, it is essential that I establish trustworthiness in my research methodology. To establish trustworthiness in a study, the qualitative researcher must be concerned with internal validity, the question of "how research findings match reality" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242). In addition, they must establish transferability by providing "sufficient descriptive data" to make transferability possible for other researchers who seek to apply their findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest eight strategies for promoting validity and reliability in qualitative research. Of these strategies, I selected five: triangulation, member checks, researcher's reflexivity, an audit trail, and thick descriptions. A description of each strategy is provided below.

Triangulation

I utilized two of Denzin's (1978) types of triangulation: multiple methods of data collection and multiple sources of data collection. In utilizing multiple methods of data collection, I compared the data I collected from my interviews to my observational field notes and the information I gathered through reading documents to check for confirmation of consistent findings. I used multiple sources to demonstrate internal validity by "cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or places" as well as comparing "interview data and follow-up interview data collected from the same people" to ensure cohesive conclusions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245).

Member Checks

Through member checks, I elicited feedback from my participants on my emergent findings to prevent any misinterpretation in the "meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 126-127).

Researcher's Reflexivity

The researcher's reflexivity is described as a "critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). It is appropriate that I engage in my own critical self-reflection as a researcher, given my personal and professional belief that critical self-reflection is an essential component of improving teaching practice. My theoretical foundation was outlined in Chapters I and II. Additional information regarding my personal and educational background as well as my biases will appear later in this chapter in a section entitled "About the Researcher."

Audit Trail

I recorded a detailed account of the methods, processes, and decisions I made throughout the research process and compared them to the approved IRB proposal methods. My study focuses on teachers' in-context pedagogical decisions as seen in critically responsive teaching practices; therefore, it makes sense that I engaged in reflection practices that require me to evaluate the rationale of my decisions and determine the extent to which they follow the approved IRB proposal.

Thick Descriptions

Not only are thick descriptions required for the multiple case study methodology, but they are also essential in establishing validity in my evaluation and thematic analysis of the data I collected. In addition, thick descriptions allow the transferability of my research findings to other cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research Ethics

Given the history of researchers' abuse of power, establishing, and practicing ethical research is essential for the trustworthiness of a study, the continuance of research practices, and, most importantly, respecting, and honoring participants' safety and humanity. This abuse of power has ranged from severe bodily harm, such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment—a study that has had long-term effects on the health of Black men, to the misrepresentation of individuals, communities, or entire cultures (Newkirk, 2016). Although the misrepresentation of participants by researchers may be unintentional, it does not excuse the often colonizing nature of researchers' perspectives. Celebrated ethnographers, such as Margret Mead, have been criticized among members of the communities they have studied due to their own ethnocentrism and the way they imposed their Western perspectives on other cultures (Bhattacharya, 2017).

While I made interpretations on the development of the teacher-researcher identity, I critically reflected on my perspectives, judgments, and actions, and accurately represented the perspectives and meaning-making of the participants I selected for my study to the best of my abilities. In addition to this critical reflection, I established trustworthiness through the utilization of triangulation to inform my analysis, member checks to prevent misinterpretation of data collected, and an audit trail to record the decisions I made throughout the research process.

It was crucial for me to engage in ethical research practices to build positive relationships with my participants and conduct research that is trustworthy in academic and non-academic communities. To ensure my commitment to ethical research was actualized, I used Creswell and Poth's (2018) three principles for ethical research: (a) respect for persons, (b) concern for welfare, and (c) justice. I demonstrated respect for my participants by obtaining their consent, appreciating their right to withdraw from the study, providing them the opportunity to review their transcripts prior to the next interview, and encouraging them to provide feedback on my emergent findings through member checks. I maintained genuine concern for my participants' welfare by designing a study that minimizes potential harm, creating a safe space that encourages cooperation, and protecting their privacy by creating pseudonyms and securing my data in password-protected files. I cultivated justice through the equitable treatment of my participants, conveying my study's purpose to the participants, and utilizing humanizing research practices that build "relationships of care and dignity and dialogic consciousness raising" for both researchers and participants (Paris & Winn, 2014, p. xvi).

Limitations

There are limitations to my investigation of the teacher-researcher identity development and its relationship to critically responsive teaching practices. One potential limitation is the

inability to conduct interviews and observations in person. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing prevented me from effectively and safely interviewing and observing participants in person. Interviews and observations are crucial to the multiple case study methodology. While I am confident in my ability to gain quality data virtually, I know different data would be obtained if I had the opportunity to interview and observe in person.

Another limitation is the demographic of educators I was able to find that fit the participant criteria of my study. In selecting teachers that had conducted action research, I hoped to select demographically diverse participants. However, both participants in my study were young women who identified themselves as non-religious and politically progressive. While teachers did not share ethnicity, one being of Mexican descent and one being White, I think it is important to gain the perspectives of demographically diverse teachers to better understand how action research impacts the identity and pedagogy of teachers. In addition, both participants had experience as English teachers for students in middle school and high school. It is important to note that teachers of different subjects and grade levels may interact with action research differently. In analyzing the data collected from my participants, I maintained an awareness of the intersectional nature of their identities including aspects such as race and ethnicity within the context of the activity systems they participate in.

About the Researcher

Given my extensive literature review and intention to explore the development of teacher-researcher identities among teachers conducting action research, I am deeply cognizant of the complexities of identity development, which is negotiated through historical and cultural activities, as asserted in cultural-historical activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978). I recognize that my own complex identity development as an educator, researcher, and biracial Black woman has

been socially and historically constructed through activities that have shaped my teaching perspectives. In conducting this multiple case study, I maintained mindful consideration of how my personal perspectives and positions as a researcher and as a teacher may influence my study. In establishing trustworthiness through triangulating data collection, conducting member checks, and keeping an audit trail, I monitored the ways in which my personal perspectives regarding the importance of critical reflection and in-context pedagogical decisions may manifest and provide transparency for these beliefs. Therefore, providing a brief description of my personal and educational background is essential in providing context for my perspectives.

I knew I wanted to be an elementary teacher at the age of seven after experiencing the magical qualities of an educator who sees and values children as unique human beings. While I did obtain a bachelor's in liberal studies and a multiple subject teaching credential for elementary education, my desire to learn more and do more propelled me to continue my education. I pursued a single subject math credential because, as a "late bloomer" in math, I genuinely understood the emotional trauma students experience when they perform poorly in mathematics. In addition, I understood math to be a content area teachers rarely viewed as anything but discrete skills to be checked off and moved through, a perspective that excludes many students from the curriculum. I then obtained a master's degree in special education with an emphasis in learning disabilities to better understand our neurodiverse student population's needs. As a teacher and the sister of a young woman with special needs, I understood that pedagogical practices and curriculum did not always fit the context of a classroom and students' and communities' needs. Therefore, I sought to widen my sphere of influence and become a leader in the field of education.

As a pessimistically hopeful, driven, and reflective individual, I began my doctoral program seeking theories and research to inform my practice and change the landscape of mathematics curriculum and pedagogy. Along the way, I fell in love with aesthetics education, place-conscious education, theories of care, pluralism, and Maxine Greene. Towards the conclusion of this journey, I came to believe that my research could be personal and political; that I could address the challenges of our neurodiverse pluralistic communities, and the critical emancipation of teachers through the intertwining of theory and practice, thought and action, as well as intellect and morality. The purpose of this study is personal due to my intention to use its results to inform my own teaching and research practice, and the evolution of the topic, which paralleled my growth as an educator and researcher. This research study is unapologetically political in that I seek to understand and make judgments about the teacher-researcher identity and its relationship to critically responsive pedagogy for teacher education reform and the improvement of teacher practice.

In planning and implementing this research study, I carried along my own assumptions and biases based upon my experiences as a student, my pedagogical practice that involves critical responsiveness, and my own conceptual framework that is guided by critical theory and pragmatism. I believe critically responsive teaching to be a practice of care that addresses the needs of a diverse student population. As a child, I was often the only biracial student in my class and rarely had teachers that could understand I did not fit in any of the usual boxes. As a teacher, I make certain to be responsive to who students are as individuals while taking into account their intersectional identities. As a result, I have a positive bias towards critically responsive teaching as the most effective and humanizing pedagogical strategy to address the needs of students.

Concluding Thoughts

In conducting this research study, it is my hope to contribute to the literature regarding teacher education reform and the essential merging of thought and action to bridge the theory-practice divide. In the following chapters, I seek to present cases that provide clarity on the relationship between the development of a teacher-researcher identity through action research and critically responsive pedagogy. I believe that the disjointed nature of thought and action in education is one of the factors that prevents teachers from seeing, understanding, and being responsive to their students' reality. James Baldwin (1963) addresses this challenge with hopeful promise in *The Fire Next Time*: "I know that people can be better than they are. We are capable of carrying a great burden, once we discover that the burden is reality and arrive where reality is" (p. 338).

CHAPTER IV
DESCRIPTIONS AND INTENTIONS

Introduction

In my pursuit of humanization, to acknowledge the personal and political nature of research and teaching for myself and my participants, I selected qualitative methodology and case study in particular, which provide the framework to inquire for the purpose of understanding (Stake, 1995). I utilize understanding as a “form of empathy or re-creation” of the “mental atmosphere, the thoughts and feelings and motivations” of my participants, teachers who have engaged in action research (von Wright, 1971, p. 6). The descriptions and intentions of my participants are evidence of my understanding of my participants' empathetic re-creation of their experiences with action research and its impact on their pedagogy.

Throughout the completion of this study, I was guided by the following research questions:

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?
- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?
- Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

Upon reflection, I noticed that my first two research questions center on participants' self-reflection and evaluation of their teaching practice. Since my focus was investigating the professional teacher identity or teacher-researcher identity and the potential for critical reflection

promoted in action research, the first two research questions are intertwined. Ideally, teachers who identify as teacher-researchers will have the ability to evaluate the impacts of action research on their teaching practice. In this chapter, I describe the extent to which this occurred with each of my participants, the implications of which are discussed in the final chapter.

Upon analysis of my data, I was surprised to realize that the majority of my study focused on this third research question, the exploration of the pedagogical practices, and specifically the existence of critically responsive teaching practices of my participants. With further reflection, I realized that my third research question required all three forms of data collection interviews, observations, and document analysis while the first two research questions did not require observation. This focus on my third research question is seen in the final chapter of this research study as the majority of the themes that emerged address the third research question.

Organization of the Chapter

My interpretations were guided with a critically reflective eye and the aim of exploring a variety of intersecting activity systems within which my participants operate. Describing the context, the activity system, in which the teachers' identities are constructed is essential in promoting understanding of their pedagogical perspectives and identities as educators. The first activity system I discuss is the graduate course in which the participants conducted their action research project. First, I provide descriptions and aims of the course and the action research project. Next, I provide descriptions for and intentions of each of my two participants, beginning with a personal reflection of meeting them, following with a description of each teacher and their teaching environment. The majority of this chapter is broken down into categories that describe the participants' pedagogical perspectives and practices, experience with action research, and their identities as teachers. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided to highlight key ideas.

Graduate Course

While crafting the proposal for this dissertation research study, I had the opportunity to work as a graduate teaching assistant for a 500-level graduate course. This was my first experience working with graduate students in a professional capacity. In the fall of 2020, I was a teacher assistant for a master's course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. The culminating semester-long project this course concludes with is an action research project. The participants I selected for my research study were identified in this Fall 2020 class of this graduate course. In the following sections, I provide descriptions of the graduate course, the class's central text written by Sonia Nieto, and the action research project students conducted.

Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Students taking this course are typically enrolled in graduate programs that center on culturally and linguistically diverse teaching; however, students from other graduate programs may be enrolled in the course as one of their electives. Both of the participants I selected happened to be students enrolled in an English Education Master of Arts in Teaching program. One participant purposefully selected the course in teaching diverse students in as an elective for her MAT and the other participant added the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Endorsement to her master's degree which required her to take this graduate course. The graduate course was described in the syllabus in the following statement:

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Content knowledge covers the fields of ESL, bilingual, and multicultural education and provides examples of effective practices and their underlying research knowledge base. Students are encouraged to engage in critical reflection on

classroom practices related to linguistic and cultural diversity, and to apply what they have learned to their own teaching contexts (UNC, 2020c).

I was able to select participants from this course, given that one of the goals of the course was for students to “engage in critical reflection” and “apply what they have learned to their own teaching contexts” (UNC, 2020c). This was a key component for participant selection because I needed to select students who participated in the type of action research, I outlined in my literature review and my methodology which requires teachers to critically reflect on and self-evaluate their teaching practice (Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019).

The syllabus outlines seven objectives of the course, which highlight what students who complete the class will be able to do and align with Teaching English as a Second Language and CLD educational standards. The fourth objective explicitly requires critical reflection by stating, “Engage in critical reflection on classroom practices related to linguistic and cultural Diversity” (UNC, 2020c). Other objectives include “Demonstrate understanding of how language and culture are connected to teaching and learning in educational contexts,” “Describe how the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of language teaching understand may affect student learning and achievement,” and “Analyze the effectiveness of policies, school structures, and program designs related to linguistically diverse learners and their families” (UNC, 2020c). These objectives corresponded to the 13 content points of the course, which ranged from theories of intersection, multiculturalism, and advocacy. A complete list of the course content is provided below:

1. The intersections of language, literacy, and culture
2. The complex identities of culturally and linguistically diverse learners
3. Multicultural/multilingual education and school reform

4. Program models for CLD students
5. Historical background and federal/state policies related to bilingual/ESL education in the United States
6. Introduction to theories of first and second language acquisition
7. Introduction to instructional approaches to teaching a second language
8. Teaching language arts in the CLD classroom
9. Teaching mathematics and science in the CLD classroom
10. Teaching social studies in the CLD classroom
11. Bilingual Special Education
12. Identification, placement, and assessment of CLD students
13. School and community, partnerships, and advocacy

Nieto's Language, Culture, and Teaching Critical Perspectives

While two texts were required for course on teaching diverse students, Nieto's (2018) *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives* was the text most utilized, most cited by students, and most helpful to students according to the students themselves. Nieto's text focuses on supporting teachers in educating our growing multicultural and multilingual student population in the United States. Her text is an informational and inspirational blend of theory, real-life dilemmas, critical questions for teachers to ponder, and activities for teachers to implement in their classrooms and communities. This third edition of Nieto's original text comes after consequential events such as 9/11, the elections of President Barack Obama, as well as the election of his successor. Due to this historical context, Nieto notes that now, more than ever, teachers are "equally unprepared to understand—or deal effectively with—the significant learning gaps that arise from unequal and inequitable learning conditions" (Nieto, 2018, p. ix).

To support teachers in addressing their students' "abilities and social and cultural realities," Nieto outlines five goals of her text:

1. Explore how language and culture are connected to teaching and learning in education settings.
2. Examine the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of language and culture to understand how these contexts may affect student learning and achievement.
3. Analyze implications of linguistic and cultural diversity for classroom practices, school reform, and educational equity.
4. Encourage practicing and preserve teachers to reflect critically on their classroom practices, as well as on larger institutional policies related to linguistic and cultural diversity based on the above understanding.
5. Motivate teachers to understand their ethical and political responsibilities to work together with their students, colleagues, and families for a more socially just classroom, school, and society. (p. x)

Nieto (2018) asserts that "new times deserve new textbooks that respect the professionalism of teachers and other educators, honor the identities of students and their families, and validate the nation's claim to educate all students of all backgrounds" (p. xiv). This lofty and admirable premise with which Nieto concludes the preface of this text, aligns with my perspectives on increasing the professionalization of teachers to respond to our diverse student population. The fact that Nieto's text guided the course that my participants selected to take is quite ideal. While Nieto's text does focus on multicultural education without significantly addressing other aspects of identity such as gender, disability, immigration status, and sexuality, she does so without the checklist and essentialist approach of many others in similar fields,

including culturally responsive teaching. After reading this text for the first time as a teaching assistant, I was confident in selecting students from this course as participants for my research study as they would have been exposed to the ideas and aims of Sonia Nieto.

Inquiry and Action Research Project

The Inquiry and Action Research Project was described in the syllabus in the following statement:

Students will conduct a semester-long inquiry and action project in the community served by your school to explore the people, culture, and issues that are important to them.

Projects will be based on “Community Based Activities and Advocacy” suggestions in Nieto (2018). Drafts will be submitted throughout the semester, with revisions often required. Your project will be presented to the class in the form of a multimedia product using iMovie, PowerPoint, or other multimodal software application that allows you to combine sound, image, and text. Extra credit will be given for a public, community-targeting sharing of your project. More details and the rubric are available in Canvas Assignments. (UNC, 2020c)

It is clear that Nieto’s (2018) text informs the structure of the semester-long action research project conducted by students in this graduate course. The content section of the rubric for this project directly states that students must create a project that “shows careful consideration and development of an important line of inquiry addressed in this course, specifically, in Nieto’s *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical perspectives* (UNC, 2020b). In addition, the topic requirements for the action research project called for students to draw on “suggestions made by Nieto in the Community-Based Activities and Advocacy, or Classroom-Based Activities at the end of each chapter” (UNC, 2020a).

An example from the Community-Based Activities and Advocacy section of Nieto's (2018) text is as follows: "Attend a school board meeting in your town or city. Inform yourself about the questions being discussed. How would your students be affected by the board's decisions? What can you do about it? How can your students be involved?" (p. 14). An example from Nieto's Classroom-Based Activities is included below: "Speak with your students about multicultural education. Do they know what it is? How do they define it? Do they think it is important? Why or why not? What can you learn from this discussion?" (p. 49). The majority of the students from the course—my participants included—selected classroom based or community-based activities directly from Nieto's text.

The action research project rubric provided guidelines for students that kept the ideas from the central texts and articles of the course in focus. While students were allowed to gather information from outside sources, they were required to "incorporate key concepts from the readings [from the course] (include references) and demonstrate an understanding of significance of these concepts for linguistically and culturally diverse education" (UNC, 2020b). As a result, the majority of the texts students utilized in their action research project supported the aims of this graduate course.

A couple students from the course participated in the extra credit option offered in the action research project. The extra credit portion of the project required students to make their "presentation to colleagues or another audience such as community members, school board, or families" (UNC, 2020b). With this extra credit extension, it is clear that an aim of the project was to support teachers in implementing action research beyond the boundaries of their graduate class's activity system and into their own teaching profession.

In following sections, I introduce the participants of this study: Rosie Rodriguez and Allison Adams, nickname Ally. Data collected from interviews, observations, and documents reveal their perceptions of their teacher-researcher identity, the impact of action research on their pedagogy, and the extent to which critically responsive pedagogy appears in their teaching practice. All data were collected after the completion of the graduate course and the required action project. When drawing from data gathered from interviews, documents, and reflections of my personal interactions with the participants, I call each participant by their first name—Rosie and Ally. When crafting vignettes from data gathered through observation, I refer to them by their professional names: Mrs. Rodriguez and Ms. Adams.

Participants

Rosie Rodriguez

Rosie was the first participant I interviewed and observed for my multiple case study. As a graduate teacher assistant for her course, Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners, I was impressed with her self-reflection and insights into her action research project and was driven to gain a deeper understanding of her and her teaching. At the beginning of our first interview, I was struck by Rosie's gentle, assessing, yet hesitant disposition that was apparent even through our Google Meet video chat. By the end of our first interview, I was appreciative of her strength, compassion, and courage that flourished in challenging times and led to her journey as a teacher. The soft-spoken woman who apologized for her conversational tangents in interviews transformed into a confident and skillful teacher during observations. With reassurance, these tangential thoughts bloomed, providing me inside knowledge into Rosie's thought process and the connections she creates with little need for clarification. In our brief time together, we formed our own research community, feeding off of each other's love for teaching

and a shared political perspective. Interviews with Rosie gave me something to look forward to during a time of political and social unrest and gave me the feedback I needed to remember my love of research and teaching. In concluding my work with Rosie, I was inspired and relieved—inspired by her care, passion, and skills and relieved she chooses to be a teacher every day.

Introduction to Rosie Rodriguez

In this section, I provide an introduction to Rosie Rodriguez that includes her personal demographics, her educational background, her current teaching position, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of this study. Activity theorists argue that the activity systems educators participate in, even before they become teachers, profoundly influence their perspectives about education and shape their teacher identity (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Therefore, this background information is essential to understand Rosie's identity as a teacher and her perspectives about teaching.

When I met Rosie, she was in her third year as an English teacher, she was also in the final semester of her master's degree. She is a young woman of 26 born to parents who immigrated from Mexico before she was born in Texas. Rosie identifies as Mexican, female, and as politically leftist and progressive. In addition, Rosie is married to a White man. Though she strongly identifies as Mexican, she acknowledges challenges in her relationship with her Mexican community: "I kind of had that whole being a little—like white, Mexican—so I am very much too white for the hardcore Mexicans, and then I'm too Mexican for like white people. So, I'm very much in the middle, and I, but I definitely identify as Mexican." Rosie describes speaking Spanish as one of the connections she has to Mexican culture: "My first languages were Spanish and English together, although it was pretty difficult to maintain Spanish being that English was mostly spoken at school, and my parents didn't want to detract from that. So, they

kept speaking English to me.” In selecting her pseudonym, Rosie selected the last name Rodriguez even though she changed her name to her husband’s non-Spanish last name. Perhaps, this was Rosie’s way of making her Mexican identity known in this study as she mentioned she regretted changing her last name, a tie to her Mexican heritage.

Education Background

A teacher’s professional teaching identity is shaped by their personal educational experiences; therefore, I will provide background information regarding Rosie’s educational journey (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). After a traumatic early adolescent experience, Rosie describes high school as a time of high emotion and anxiety. She dropped out of high school for a couple of months and completed her degree through an alternative online program at a community college and went straight into an associate degree. Initially, she thought she would pursue journalism because she loves to write but did not think she could do enough “good” following that path. Rosie describes a professor who saw her potential as a future teacher: “One of my freshman professors was like, you help people really well, and they understand what you're saying, and it looks like you're having a good time. You should think about becoming a teacher. So, I was like, okay. And so, I just kept at it.” As people who “absolutely hate” reading and writing, Rosie’s parents were not initially supportive of her desire to be an English teacher because they knew “she was smart and that teachers are not paid enough.” Despite this, Rosie knew her parents were proud of her writing abilities because they had many undocumented friends for whom Rosie would write letters of recommendation. Rosie’s personal educational experience is deeply tied to her decision to become a teacher and profoundly shapes her teacher identity. Rosie’s decision to become a teacher will be elaborated upon further in the section outlining her teaching purpose and perspectives.

Having made the decision to become a teacher, Rosie obtained a bachelor's degree in secondary English education with a writing minor. During the time of this study, Rosie was completing her English Education Master of Arts in Teaching and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Endorsement. In addition, she decided to continue to pursue graduate studies and enrolled in the Teaching English as a Second Language certificate program for the 2021- 2022 school year. In reflecting on the end of her master's degree and CLD endorsement, Rosie made the following comment:

I definitely felt like I was, um, everything I was doing was to benefit, like not to just, you know, benefit my grade and my, um, my program. The whole reason that I'm going to school is to better my instruction, um, learn pedagogy I might not have known. It, it made me happy that I didn't feel like I was wasting my time, which I haven't had a lot of this year— with the craziness of the past year.

This emphasis on pedagogy as the purpose of Rosie's pursuit of graduate education and as a way to better her teaching practice is reflected in her perceptions of and her relationship with research.

Current Teaching Position

In order to understand Rosie's pedagogical decisions and perspectives it is important to understand the dynamics of her current teaching position and the way in which her environment and her students impact her teaching. Rosie is an English teacher at a middle school in a rural area of a western state. Rosie's current school is the same middle school where she completed her student teaching. As a well-liked student teacher and staff member, she was hired the following year for her first official year of teaching. This past 2020-2021 school year, she taught four periods of sixth grade English as well as two multimedia writing classes that were

intermixed with sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. As a result, Rosie often teaches the same students in multiple classes and teaches students she has taught in previous school years. In the past years, Rosie taught mini elective classes based on her interests and the interests of her students, such as Mexican culture and video games. As a teacher in a rural school, Rosie has small class sizes of 15-20 students, a teacher-to-student ratio she really values. The other teachers in the English department at Rosie's school are older, White, male teachers, and she describes interactions and collaborative meetings with them as experiences of being dominated by them without allowing her to "get her 2 cents in." Overall, as her third year of teaching neared its end, Rosie described feeling more comfortable in her teaching and remembered having a lot of really good days in the classroom.

Rosie's use of critical reflection to describe her observations of the school she teaches at is reflected in her use of critical reflection to make informed decisions about her pedagogy. Rosie described her school as a rural Title 1 school with many students from low-income families and many emergent bilingual students. In addition, she works with many students with individualized education programs (IEPs). Rosie is cognizant of the racial power structures in her school and expressed concern over the White conservatives of the town "that say what goes, and everyone listens to them," considering the large Mexican population in the town and in her school. Those in power cultivate a competitive school culture where Rosie's middle school is compared to the sister middle school at the north end of town with a higher population of White students. This critical reflection of her environment is echoed in later descriptions of Rosie's teaching and research practice.

Rosie's application of critical reflection is also connected to the care she expresses for her students. For example, in addition to her concerns about the racial power structure, Rosie noted

challenges with the testing culture of her school, particularly how it affects the evaluation of student learning.

A lot of the times, our instructional coach meetings are driven by the tests that we have given, whether it's a unit test or the iReady or CMS. So, it's a very, um, test driven test culture, which I wish it wasn't. I see the advantages and the purpose of the test and how to make it meaningful. But when it's just done to that extent, it loses its meaning. I feel when it just becomes, um, really torture for my students with, I mean, this year already being how it's been.

She went on to describe how testing culture impacted diverse groups of students in her classroom.

A lot of my, um, [high] performing students have a difficult time beating those scores because they're at grade level. And so, they become really discouraged when they see they haven't grown or, or they lost a couple of points, and it feels so arbitrary. And then there's those students that did not try whatsoever, but then they grew like 50 points, but it looks amazing to them. . . And that's not even accounting for what, um, our emergent bilinguals get with WIDA testing and then our, our IEP students also have more testing, um, to see where they've grown and where they're at for their meetings. So, it feels like the populations that really, like, don't want it are getting it the most.

The insight Rosie shared into the various experiences her students have with testing is indicative of the care and notice she takes with her students.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID)-19

Like teachers across the country and around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on Rosie's teaching experience during the time of this study. Rosie's school

began the school year with a rotating hybrid model in which students went to school in person and did distance learning. Around November, the sixth grade students came back to school four days a week while students in seventh and eighth grades remained in the hybrid model. This change in model led to many teachers getting COVID and sent the entire school back to distance learning. At the time of the study, Rosie was back in the classroom full time with her sixth grade students, and her administration was beginning discussions about how to reintroduce the seventh and eighth grade students back to in person learning before the end of the school year. Rosie mentioned a staff meeting in which they discussed the new plan for in person learning and expressed a lack of confidence in the administration because they still did not have everything figured out and had cut back the cleaning regimen that was put in place. This year Rosie second guessed her initial decision to stay because of COVID and how the staff and students had been treated. “But” Rosie said, “I just love the kids so much...and a big factor about staying in my school is that small classroom is really ideal.” Rosie’s care for her students is evident in her decision to remain at her school despite the challenges she faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rosie’s Teaching Purpose and Perspectives

In order to understand Rosie's pedagogical perspectives, and the evolution of her professional teaching identity as a result of her participation in action research, it is essential to explore her teaching purpose. In particular, Rosie’s experience in private religious education and her transition to public school greatly influenced her decision to become a teacher. Rosie’s challenging experiences in school led her to pursue a pedagogy of care that fueled her desire to be responsive to the needs and diverse identities of her students.

Rosie's Teaching Purpose

Rosie's love of learning and her belief in the importance of education are imprints left from her childhood when she did not receive high quality learning experiences. During our first interview, Rosie cryptically stated, "Religion has played a pretty big role in my life and in kind of a strange way." Fortunately, we had quickly developed a good rapport, and Rosie felt comfortable sharing her story. Like many Mexican immigrants, Rosie's parents grew up Catholic, but they converted to an independent fundamentalist Baptist group when they lived in Texas. Rosie described this religious group as "not good" and consisted of an almost all White membership. Rosie's family began membership into this religious group when she was 10 and at 15, they left—or rather, Rosie was kicked out. By 15, Rosie did not get along with the ideas and practices of her family's church as well as the school she attended through the church and was asked to leave. Here, Rosie describes her upbringing in the church in the context of who she is now:

I feel being in this religious group there, there wasn't a lot of Mexican people and, and having that side of me definitely made me not want to conform with their ideology. And it kind of shows me that I was different, and I couldn't be in that box. I think it made me kind of just a little bit different than everyone else in my upbringing. And yeah, people are usually really like shocked find out. 'Cause, I kind of present myself as just like a very quiet person that is kind of like just quiet and gentle and I'm like, no, I was like kicked out of the church at fifteen, and they're like, that's insane. But yeah, I think being Mexican has been like one of those things that I've grabbed onto that's always been like the basis of like how I see myself.

Rosie's strong connection to her identity as a Mexican woman helped her to navigate the constrictions to her personal and educational experiences in adolescence. Rosie's strong sense of her personal identity has made her aware of and responsive to the diverse identities of her students.

Before attending school through the church, Rosie excelled in her academics and loved writing and reading. She describes the education through the church as something she hated, as very controlling and completely self-paced where students were responsible for their own learning. In reflecting on this time and her decisions to pursue higher education, Rosie stated that "there was that big chunk of time where I felt like I missed out a lot of like fundamental learnings that other people, in middle school and beginning of high school. And I just really valued education because that's not something I had for like a large gap of time." Although she wanted to leave the church and their school, she experienced fear and culture shock upon attending a public school after spending so much time in "a box where you're away from everybody, and you were given a packet, and you worked on it for eight hours a day." After reentry into public school, Rosie's love of learning was awakened; however, as a quiet student, she did not make the connections to her teachers she was longing for. Rosie described this experience saying:

When I got to high school, the teachers were fine, but I always felt like I wanted, like, some kind of relationship that I just didn't really get from anybody. I was just, you know, with the quiet kids. So, it never really, they didn't really talk that much to me. So, I was just thinking, I would like to be an adult who was, you know, had a relationship, and made a kid happy to come to school.

The caring relationship Rosie sought as a child would be the motivating force behind her decision to become a teacher and her drive to improve her teaching practice through higher education.

Establishing Caring Relationships

Rosie's perspective on cultivating caring relationships with her students is the key motivation behind providing critically responsive pedagogy. Rosie's practice of care is infused with a critical reflection of the school environment that is evident in her awareness of the impact race and gender have on the lives of her students. Rosie's caring relationships with her students align with her teaching purpose, her drive to be the "teacher she never had" and is reflected in her critically responsive pedagogical practices.

The desire to cultivate caring relationships with her students is evident in Rosie's speech as well as her actions. Not only does Rosie care, she creates an environment in her classroom that allows what Nel Noddings (2005) describes as caring relations containing a carer and cared-for, to flourish. Noddings' requirement for a caring relation is that the care is received by the cared-for. Rosie cares for her students, and they know it. They receive it, and they care for her in return. Rosie's care for her students is apparent in the way she talks about them, the way she talks to them, the way she includes them, the way she values their feedback, the way she shares her time and heart, and in the way she advocates for them.

Rosie calls her class "her team." She values their feedback and opinions and includes them in her experiences as a teacher and student by sharing and allowing them to contribute to her decision-making processes. For example, Rosie was very honest about her experience in her graduate course, telling her students, "I'm taking this class, and we're doing these kinds of, um, we're doing these different things I've never done before. And it's like been eye opening and

changed my perspective. Um, and that's going to be ongoing even when the class is done.” Rosie explained that her students seem to listen more in class when she provides rationale and shares her thought process and that they understood that the action research project she assigned was not just busy work that it could “change the way you think, and you go about your life.” Rosie sought to make the action research project as meaningful to her students as possible and was very intentional about how her students would be grouped for the assignment. Rosie describes her thought process in the following statement:

So, um, we first came up with like a list of like school policies and issues. And I wanted my team to know that I wanted them to be grouped, um, with people that they wanted to be grouped with, but at the same time that they should be, um, concerned with the same cause, and it should be meaningful to them. So, to just choose to be with someone, because they're your friends, but, um, to be in a group where you feel like you can make the most change and then with people, um, that you can work best with. And, um, they were really mature about that. And I think they picked the right group.

From Rosie’s positive reflection of her students’ self-selected groupings, it is clear they rose to the occasion and valued their teacher’s the trust and care.

The students in Rosie’s class are receptive to her care and reciprocate care of their own. For example, Rosie mentioned that her students really care when she has teaching observations and they do their best to represent her class well when she is being observed. Rosie reflected that after my virtual observations of her classroom, her students would ask how it went and hoped that went well for her. Rosie appeared to be touched that they reciprocated care for her and her teaching.

Rosie enjoys “seeing them happy and feeling safe and feeling like they’re learning and getting something out of it that is going to help them.” She tells students that she does not expect them to become writers or teachers but that the goal is to teach them and make it an enjoyable experience and that hopefully, they will love reading for fun. If she succeeds in this, Rosie said she would have done something good. While Rosie wants all her students to feel happy and safe at school, she knows that this is not true for all of them. Her classroom seems to be a safe harbor for students who struggle with feeling seen and treated fairly. Rosie recalled a student, a Black female student, who shared with her about being dress coded. The student noticed that she and another Black girl were being dress coded more than other students. This was a very personal issue for Rosie, given her experience in a conservative religious school. Rosie stated that she never dress codes any student, despite the way it upsets other teachers. Rosie explains her reasoning for her adamant refusal to dress code students and her struggle with her schools’ policy in the following statement:

It’s always, you know, students who are Black, students who are Mexican, students that [have different bodies] I mean, I, I told you on our first meeting about, um, getting kicked out of my religious school pretty much. And that was a big issue is I’m the only Mexican girl and, in a school, full—full of white girls and a different body and clothes just looked different. And it was that following the devil and making grown men think things that they shouldn’t, which is just inherently wrong on its own. So, it was just, it was also just another very like personal like, like, yeah, ...it was nice to have that community and environment where like, they, like, my students felt safe to talk and like be heard. . . And yeah, she was, it was so hard because she was like the best student ever. And I, I love her so much, and it was just really upsetting it’s yeah, ...I know I’m listening, I’m listening to

her, and I'm sharing with her my own experience and then telling her like it. But yeah, I'm just like, um, I wanted to be doing enough, but I know that I'm in a situation where I can't do tons but be that support for her.

Rosie described the conversation she had with this student as evidence they feel safe with her, something she values greatly. After this conversation, the student emailed Rosie telling her thank you and that her class was one of her favorites. Rosie expressed happiness upon receiving this student's email. Rosie's description of this dress code incident demonstrates how her personal educational experiences motivate her to implement a pedagogy of care that is infused with critical reflection.

Rosie's Teacher-Researcher Identity

Rosie's identity as a teacher-researcher comes into full view with her reflections on the action research project she completed in her graduate course as well as her descriptions of a future action research project she hopes to conduct. Thought and action are inseparable for Rosie as she intuitively employs critical reflection and advocates for students. The theories and research she learned about from her CLD Endorsement coursework, and specifically the course on Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners, seemed to be absorbed into her pedagogical decision-making process. The care she has for her students is evident in her passion and determination to do good by them, especially student populations she feels are disenfranchised. By the end of our interviews, Rosie had a solid idea and plan for a future action research project, a topic based on the context of her current teaching position and the needs of her specific student population.

Rosie's Action Research Project

Description of Project. Rosie's attention to and desire to uplift student voice was central in the topic selection and structure of her action research project. The guiding inquiry question of Rosie's project was taken directly from the Nieto text she read in her graduate class and is as follows:

With your students, investigate some of the school policies and practices that they feel are unfair. Why do they think this? What can they do to change things? Come up with a list of suggestions for advocacy and action" and "Present the results of the previous activity to your school council, administrative or leadership team, or local school committee. (Nieto, 2018, p.161)

This theme of student voice was reflected in the PowerPoint presentation of her action research project in which Rosie asserts her intention in teaching this project was to help her students "learn by doing, collaborating, and through feeling empowered." She sought to do this by employing the principles of Critical Pedagogy and cited Ovando and Combs (2018), who described it as "problem posing, reflective thinking, knowledge gathering, and collaborative decision making" and that "it helps students and teachers find and express their voice in oral and written form" (p. 101). When creating the unit plan for the project, Rosie was cognizant of her "students' cultures and the social issues that they are passionate about" and saw the benefits in the student-centered aspect of the project in stating that "students that regularly shy away from conversation become more vocal about their chosen issue."

When introducing the project to her students, Rosie was up front in telling them that it was connected to a class in her MAT program. First, she collected data from her students regarding policies, rules, and experiences in school they felt were unjust. Rosie was honest in

confiding that she had some ideas already in mind but that she remained open to her students' perspectives because she knows everyone experiences things differently. She told students that in discussing these topics, their class could be a place to vent through frustrations and gain an understanding of common ground, but that the real goal of the assignment was for them to create tools or a plan to improve these injustices. After students selected their groups, they began to create plans around minimizing the injustices they felt were important. In describing how she supported students' learning and development of their action plans, Rosie touched upon the cyclical nature of research, activism, and reform:

We kind of just kept circling back and talking about what are we gonna do? How are we going to do it? And what are we gonna do then on, after, to make sure that this isn't a, um, mess? Like a unit project that just goes away, and we never think about it again. Because these are big issues that we can, we can help change. But at the same time, there's going to be constant need for, um, implementation and change and review and editing and, yeah, all that stuff.

After students completed their project action plan, they presented it to a small student led leadership group and her school that has the power to make the change her students advocated for a reality.

Choosing a Topic. In the year of COVID-19, Rosie felt really frustrated with what was going on at her school and imagined that her students probably felt even more helpless. She found the questions from Nieto's text (2018) thought provoking and deeply connected to the topic she chose because, given the challenges of learning in a pandemic, she wanted students to have a "voice and contribute and change the way they see [their] school." She expressed that many of the ideas in Nieto's text were not necessarily revolutionary but that they helped her take

what she was thinking and put into words—it gave her a framework for the ideas she had already been thinking about, such as students being able to take charge of their learning and being the ones to implement change.

Beyond the circumstances brought on by COVID-19, Rosie’s topic selection was also influenced by her experiences in school as a student and as a teacher. She has felt frustration with aspects of teaching, most specifically, the impact of test scores and testing culture. In addition, feeling like a minority in school and being treated unfairly led her to question the educational process and consider how her students feel about their own education. Rosie sought to change her students’ educational experiences by trying a more student-centered approach to teaching, even though she was nervous. Rosie acknowledged her nervousness had to do with giving up a form of control that [she] thought was necessary for classroom management. However, through reading theory on Critical Pedagogy, [she] could clearly see that this “control” served more to oppress thinking and learning than it helped manage behavior. She found that seeing students find their voice in using critical thinking skills and effectively communicating their ideas empowered herself as well as her students and “positively contributed to [her] own self-efficacy as a teacher.” Rosie plans to continue to employ Critical Pedagogy in her teaching and “connect content to students’ interests, cultures, languages, and overall life in the hopes that they will be able to see school as not an obstacle in their lives but purposeful to it.” Here, Rosie demonstrates a complex understanding of pedagogy—she reflects on her decisions regarding the curricular aspect of pedagogy as well as how the curriculum is implemented in her teaching practice.

Research Reflections and Feelings

When planning her action research project, Rosie hoped that she would be able to create a unit that was applicable to students’ lives, engaging, meaningful, and provided them an

opportunity to share their voice with her, their class, and their school. In addition, Rosie sought to try a new-for-her pedagogical strategy, student centered teaching. However, she had not anticipated the connection she would make between research and her teaching.

Prior to conducting action research, Rosie had thought of research and quantitative data as going hand in hand. She saw herself as someone with an “ELA brain” who saw things as abstract and not easily defined. She did not connect to her vision of unwelcoming educational research that “masked people” by placing a number on them, putting them in a box, and was removed from being personable, being human. In her first research class, Rosie found research daunting; however, she felt that her graduate course, through the action research project, made research more “humane and more applicable to teachers’ day-to-day rather than a person who’s working from the district level that doesn’t see the child, that sees their scores and numbers.” Rosie describes her current relationship with research as a positive one. When asked what she found helpful as she completed her action research project, she mentioned her graduate course work and its community of teachers. As the only sixth grade ELA teacher at her school, she feels isolated and does not have anyone to plan with. She described the planning meetings with the other ELA teachers as being behavior management focused in which teachers say horrible things about their students instead of asking each other, “What can we do to make things better?” Rosie felt like the teachers in her graduate class were really helpful, and she enjoyed seeing the different types of research that were done in the class, comparing it to her own research, and seeing how the overall fundamentals of research varied across projects.

Outside of the complications produced by COVID-19, such as a revolving door of students in person and doing distance learning, Rosie said that conducting her action research project felt natural. Despite her nervousness about a more student-led pedagogical strategy, she

found that the direction the class chose flowed naturally and that she was able to provide support when students needed it— that it was “seamless.” This she attributes to high student “buy in” into the project as she did not have to “try to get them to do it” — they were engaged. Rosie’s success with implementing critical pedagogy and student-centered teaching helped her to reevaluate how she saw pedagogy and teaching. Rosie reflected that before the action research project, when thinking of pedagogy, she would ask herself, “What are the best instructional strategies or ‘best practices’ to help students learn a concept?” and would search for an answer by reading research on what other teachers had found successful. She recognizes that she did not “completely enter them [her students] into the equation until [her] action research project.” After completing her research project, she began to think more of the student, the person, and how she could incorporate her students into her planning by understanding their needs and goals and how they could accomplish this as a team.

In shifting her perspective of pedagogy from a focus on “best practices” to a focus on her students, Rosie learned new things about the students in her multimedia class. In providing students an opportunity to share their passions through her action research project, she learned about the issues her students felt strongly about and gained a deeper understanding of the hardships they endured. Prior to the action research project, Rosie had thought she really knew her students and their personalities, as she had taught many of her students for several years, yet Rosie found there was still more to know. Student-led projects and instruction are now at the forefront of Rosie’s mind as the experience with action research and the graduate course “really stuck with her” and was “very impactful.”

Now, Rosie does not find research unwelcoming or challenging. Rosie’s overall feelings about research in teaching are best expressed in her own words:

I feel like conducting research now, um, isn't as like scary or daunting that it is something that we already do as teachers...something that I kind of do already as a teacher, but, um, like it had a name and it was more formal, and there was a place for my ideas, and it was all very like, um, more concrete instead of being in my head. It wasn't just me saying, "I think they think this," no, I have documentation that they [students] think that, and they feel that...it [research] feels more important, and it feels more of like a cyclical kind of process rather than you gather what you need, you get some numbers and then, there you go. So, I can kind of just like personalize it to like what I need, um, because research looks really different, um, person to person.

Rosie's ability to personalize her research during this action research project not only provided her students the opportunity to share their voice but also provided Rosie the means of sharing her voice as a teacher-researcher

Leadership, Advocacy, and Research

Rosie's near completion of her master's degree gave her more confidence to take on a bigger leadership role at her school. She describes the challenge in taking the lead as a young teacher and stated that now she has more experience, and almost has a master's, she feels "more confident to be on like leadership teams and voice [her] opinions without getting fired." This year she joined a leadership committee that was discussing the transition to standards-based grading. She stated that her purpose in joining the committee was to better understand the grading system they planned to adopt and also to make sure the decision moved the school in the "right direction." Rosie elaborated with the following statement:

I just want to make sure that we're looking out, that, I mean, that I'm looking out for the kids and their interests and thinking about everything being done with them in mind. And

thinking about all of our students, because a lot of them go unnoticed and a lot of our veteran teachers they're a lot older, and they're a lot more experienced, and they have great, they have great instructional practices, but I don't think they really understand like the social and emotional needs of our kids right now. And I just want to make sure that's a priority in our school.

Rosie's attention to the mental health of students is reflective of her pedagogy of care and led her to join the school's health committee that discusses mental and emotional health as well as nutrition.

Rosie describes the professional development opportunities at her school as focusing on broad topics such as student engagement and socio-emotional learning instead of specific content related development. An area of professional development that Rosie wishes her school would focus on is writing. As a result, she has been doing independent research on writing strategies, specifically for her emergent bilingual students. When asked if she would be interested in conducting another action research study, Rosie stated that she could "definitely" see herself doing that.

When contemplating the focus for a future action research project, Rosie reflected on changes her school planned to make to the English program for students learning English as a second language. During a passing period, the principal of the school told Rosie that they were considering an isolated English class for emergent bilingual students. Rosie's initial reaction was a resounding "No, that's wrong." She thought of her parents who came to the United States without knowing any English and tried to imagine how they might have felt if they were placed in an isolated English class. Rosie considered her coursework from her CLD Endorsement and asked herself, "What is the most equitable way to teach?" She tried to understand the intentions

of the ESL specialist at her school, a White woman from a town that is known to be very “closed-minded” to diverse populations. Rosie reflected on the power structure at her school, her own perspective as a probationary teacher, and how many of the tenured, veteran teachers did not know how to teach sheltered instruction and were vocal in their arguments that this was best for the students and “Why would you want them to be lost in these [mixed ELA] classrooms?” Rosie felt left out of the conversation because she was not part of the leadership team that makes decisions on this topic, and no one bothered to consult her, the teacher of these emergent bilingual students. She felt it was important for more research to be done on segregation in schools, especially the Latino population, and why it continues. She felt like the other teachers and administrators had “misguided but good intentions” and that they are not always informed. Rosie’s topic for a future action research project demonstrates her responsiveness to her specific learning community and how this critical responsiveness drives her research practice. In concluding this conversation on her future action research project, I volunteered to support her in any way she thought would be helpful.

Despite Rosie’s pursuit of graduate education, she clearly expresses that she does not have the aspiration to be a principal or work at the school district as an administrator. She admitted that the thought crossed her mind but that administrators, in her personal experience, are far removed from being a teacher, and she does not want to end up like them. She believes that she can best implement positive change where she is now as a classroom teacher. She toys with the idea of pursuing a doctorate which she thought seemed like “a lot of work” but that she would probably “love it.” Rosie envisions herself as a teacher who is deeply involved with their teaching and uses what they have learned to become a better teacher. She tries to present herself

to her students as someone who is imperfect and is not finished learning and who values all that she learns from them, her students.

In describing her professional teacher identity, Rosie asserts that she tries to be someone who is kind and caring. A teacher who tries her best to help students learn and takes that responsibility seriously. She embraces her nerdy side and knows her students sometimes think she's a "dork." She is young and can relate to her students by sharing memes and having "deep conversations about kindness and being good people and the importance of responsibility." Rosie describes herself as a "teacher who's flexible and changing" who is "prepared to change" and delivers instruction differently based on the needs of her students. Rosie is a self-identified teacher-researcher who asserts that although research was something she did prior to her action research project, action research was key in helping her to formalize her research into a cyclical process for her teaching practice.

Rosie's Pedagogy in Action

During her reflection on her action research project, Rosie stated that prior to engaging in action research, she tended to focus on best practices instead of responding to the needs of her individual students. After completing her action research project, Rosie used her lens of critical reflection to understand the needs and goals of her students and develop pedagogical practices that are responsive. Rosie's pedagogical practice is critically responsive to the diverse learning needs of her students and centers student voice. In the following vignettes of Rosie's teaching in action, I will refer to her as Mrs. Rodriguez.

Taking Notice: Critical Reflection.

Meagan: Do you feel like you notice those kinds of things often? That you're pretty in tune with those kinds of, like, changes in the classroom dynamics?

Mrs. Rodriguez: I think so. Yeah. I notice very strange things.

Mrs. Rodriguez notices everything: the student who is protective of their seat, the students who need extra help, the students who need encouragement to share with the class—all this in addition to the class dynamics that involve gender, race, and ability. Mrs. Rodriguez's observations about her students are guided by a lens of critical reflection which are then used to inform her responsive teaching practice.

For example, Mrs. Rodriguez notices that she has a few more boys in most of her classes than girls and that the boys are more willing to participate than the girls. She notices that not only is class participation affected by gender but that those who want to talk to her the most and share her confidence are usually those whose first language is English. Given this observation, Mrs. Rodriguez is working on helping her quieter students who are female and/or students who speak English as a second language to participate more in class. One way she does this is by reading the work of quieter students aloud to the class, with their permission, because “they're brilliant too, and everyone needs their time to shine.” She encouragingly tells them that they “have such great things to say, can't let those boys say, everything.” On the day of our second interview, Mrs. Rodriguez made a new observation about the participation of students in her class:

I noticed, like today, I had some of my, my more gifted students absent in one class, and I think they got pulled out for like AP testing or something. And so, my students who have an IEP or are emergent bilinguals felt more confident, like being the ones with sharing knowledge because, you know, those kids weren't there for that. And I was just like, how can I make this where you're comfortable, and you feel like you can, you can give the answers, and you can talk about what you feel? That's what was interesting today.

Mrs. Rodriguez states that the majority of students in Advanced Placement classes and those who are considered gifted and talented are White. She argues that this is because those parents know about those programs and push for those students to be tested. She does not accept that these students are innately more gifted.

The students in Mrs. Rodriguez classes are incredibly diverse. She has students with IEPs, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, as well as emergent bilinguals and high achieving gifted students. Mrs. Rodriguez attends to these diverse groups as well as students who are at the intersection of them. She pays close attention to a student who has an IEP and is also an emergent bilingual learner. And for those rare cases, Mrs. Rodriguez has those too. She attends to the learning and emotional needs of a student with a traumatic brain injury and works very closely with him. Mrs. Rodriguez addresses the intersections of a wide variety of factors including race, gender, personality, language, and ability to meet the needs of her students.

Critical Responsiveness: Addressing Diverse Learning. “Voices off and eyes on me” comes the gentle command from Mrs. Rodriguez. Though I cannot see the students in her sixth grade English class from the camera on her computer, they must follow her directive as she begins her lesson. Mrs. Rodriguez reminds her students that she will be standing up at the front of the classroom more than she normally does because I am virtually observing her teaching today. Mrs. Rodriguez directs students to the warmup on the Google Slides presented at the front of the classroom. Students are greeted with a quote from John Dewey³ on inferences and have 1.5 minutes to write what it means to infer. Calming, trendy music plays while they type, and

³ Rosie is big on quotes, something her students make fun of her for and Rosie finds humorous. They laugh about her quotes and then analyze and share their opinions.

Mrs. Rodriguez walks around answering questions. In particular, Mrs. Rodriguez has a student she always goes to right after she has given any directions. He has an IEP for a specific learning disability and is also an emergent bilingual learner. She says that he is amazing at sports history and that the week before the current lesson, he was able to share about Jackie Robinson, and it was “a really cool like moment of his to shine.” Mrs. Rodriguez would later reference the previous week’s lesson on Jackie Robinson during her lesson on inferences.

Mrs. Rodriguez gives students a warning before the timer on her phone goes off. Students voluntarily share what they wrote about inferences before they are directed to a short, interactive video on what it means to infer. Mrs. Rodriguez pauses the video to provide a more relatable, personal example of inference, stating that when someone gives you a short text response, and it’s different from how they usually act, it makes her think maybe they are mad at her. This, she asserts, is inferring and that while she may be jumping to conclusions, she is making an inference based on what’s happening and what she knows about how that person usually texts. As the video concludes, students are directed to open their Chromebooks to Google Classroom and access the text they read earlier that week, an autobiography from one of the Little Rock Nine. As they discuss each section of the text, Mrs. Rodriguez tells them which paragraph to scroll to, as they have all been numbered, and highlights the specific text evidence students refer to as they share their thoughts, a strategy that supports executive functioning skills. Next, she presents an inference graphic organizer at the front of the classroom to guide students in partner discussions on inferring why guards escorted the Little Rock Nine to school. She reminds them to close their chrome books to “show respect and that the words of our speakers matter.” Following their think-pair-share, students are instructed to write their response to the question. On their Google Classroom, students find a prepared document with a textbox and a sentence frame that restates

the question for their topic sentence. Mrs. Rodriguez plays quiet music as students work independently and reminds them to add a transitional phrase to the sentence stem provided. The music is turned off briefly, a nonverbal cue to look up and listen. Mrs. Rodriguez presents a sample of a high-quality paragraph written by a student the previous week on the Jack Robinson autobiography they read. She highlights the correct capitalization and periods and reminds students to use academic writing as the student from the example had done.

“Give me a thumbs up if you’ve gone on to citing the text for our answer—okay, a couple of you,” Mrs. Rodriguez announces out of view from the camera. A new song begins to play, this one in Spanish. I cannot see Mrs. Rodriguez during this time and thought that the murmurs I heard were her conversations with students. I received clarification during our second interview in which Mrs. Rodriguez discussed supporting students one-on-one:

Yeah, I was trying to just, um, I was checking in with my IEP and ELL students, making sure they understood directions and just having that one-on-one like note, like making sure they knew what was what, what they were supposed to do and also checking, um, a lot of people's work because it, um, I always feel like I miss my more like middle-of-the-road students because my students that really want that attention are either like those on the lower end or those on the very higher end. They're like, “Check my work. I know like I really need to have this done correctly.” And then my other students are like, “I really don't know what's going on. Can you help me?” And I feel like I missed those like middle-of-the-road students who are just like right there, which I feel horrible about because it's always the either or, um, yeah, helping, checking, redirecting in case there were students kind of like in space.

Mrs. Rodriguez comes back into view of the camera, and she has turned up the music just enough for me to make out “Just the Two of Us” by Bill Withers and Grover Washington Jr. playing as students give a thumbs up, down, or sideways update on how they feel about their work. Mrs. Rodriguez provides some clarification to the students who worked ahead about how to submit their work while she supports other students in the final and most challenging portion of their inference paragraph, providing an explanation and analysis of their citation in context of their inference statement. Mrs. Rodriguez changes the presentation slide at the front of the classroom as more and more students begin to ask questions about submitting their work. As the lesson comes to an end, she asks the class to remind her what it means to infer. Before students pack up, she reminds them to clear their desks so she can spray them down with disinfectant.

Although the Google Meet video format somewhat limited the scope of what I was able to observe, this was by no means a major impediment. In the first lesson I observed Mrs. Rodriguez teaching, I saw: multimodal learning and scaffolds, tools that support executive functioning, class discussions, partner discussions, independent work, whole class directives as well as one-on-one, multicultural music and texts, and a warm classroom environment provided by Mrs. Rodriguez’s gentle, steady presence. During our follow-up interview, Mrs. Rodriguez stated that when planning this inference lesson, she considered students’ writing strengths and weaknesses as well as their ability to comprehend the key question and the text. She commented that this class, in particular, is a really hard-working group and that they show amazing work when they try. She thought that, in general, the lesson went well and that while a few students did not meet the writing expectation, they knew which resources to use to improve their paragraph. In retrospect, she reflected that she could have spent more time talking to the students

about the key question and analyzing and attacking the prompt more before they began writing independently.

Everything I saw during my first observation of Mrs. Rodriguez and heard during our follow-up interview confirmed what Rosie told me she was during our first encounter—a teacher who notices her students and acts on these observations. This was further verified by the following comment:

With my teaching, I try to base it off of like what worked and what didn't work. And a lot of times, I'm not going to understand what did and didn't work based um, unless I see, like, if they understood it or they didn't, or they found meaning in it, or they didn't. So, just kind of like looking at what's worked and tweaking it and changing it and seeing how to go about it in a better way. But yeah, I, um, my school's very — well, they say data-driven, but I think the only data that they're thinking of is like from the test. So, I, I look at that for sure, but yeah. Looking at their projects and their writing and saying, “Are they getting what we're doing?” Um, and then trying to reteach or help in whatever way that I can see, like fill that gap that might be present or not.

Critical Responsiveness: Student Voice. In addition to this observation of her sixth grade English class, I was able to observe Mrs. Rodriguez's multimedia class. When I asked Mrs. Rodriguez if she approached her multimedia writing class differently, she stated that she approached it very differently, elaborating,

Compared to my ELA class, I feel like, in my ELA class, I have a lot more, um, structure. I know what—I feel like I know what's going to be happening like every other moment throughout the lesson, but with my elective class, since I have a lot more freedom with that class, I come at it with more, um, more freedom for us to kind of like go where we

need to go. And then, um, considering that my ELA class, we have our essential learning and our CFA's our unit tests, our scope and sequence that needs to be done at a specific time. And that makes for a lot more like rigid planning and a more rigid approach. Um, but with my elective class, I feel like I'm able to, um, we can just, uh, stay on a topic and go with, go wherever we need to go more organically versus my ELA class. So, it's more open, more free, and, um, less tied to these like essential learnings that have to be done and have to be tested on. So, I have a lot more freedom there, which is really nice.

This freedom allows Rosie to address an aspect of learning that is at the heart of her teaching, student voice.

It is important to Mrs. Rodriguez that her students are happy and feel like what they think matters, whether they have an opinion about a small issue or a big one. The freedom Mrs. Rodriguez has in her multimedia class is why she conducted her action research project in this course. During my observation of this mixed class of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, I was able to see evidence of Mrs. Rodriguez's value of student voice in the content of the lesson, in the structure of the lesson, and Mrs. Rodriguez's genuine interest and encouragement during her interactions with students.

Mrs. Rodriguez began the lesson by presenting students with the professional recording microphone they used in a previous project—this garnered considerable excitement from the students. The key objective for the lesson I observed was represented by the writing prompt, “If you had a podcast, what would your topic be?” In previous weeks, students had been listening to podcasts of their choosing with the purpose of learning how podcasts are structured and the types of podcasts that exist. In future lessons, students would be doing research for and creating their own podcasts. This lesson I observed was the introduction to this class project. Music and timers

from Mrs. Rodriguez's phone continued to keep the pace of the lesson moving forward. During my observation, students were tasked with demonstrating their understanding of what a podcast is, how it is different from other forms of media, and making a preplan for their podcast by creating a short list of potential topics.

Like the first lesson I observed, students were given an opportunity to share their thoughts about podcasts and their potential podcast topics through independent writing, think-pair-shares, and whole class discussions. To direct their thinking in selecting a podcast topic, Mrs. Rodriguez provided them with guiding questions such as "Tell us a story about your school or community that you would like your audience to know about," "What is a moment of history all students should know about?" "What do you want to change about the world?" and "What is something that kids know about that adults don't?" These questions guided student thinking towards complex topics while providing ample opportunity for them to share their own interests, thoughts, and perspectives.

Mrs. Rodriguez remarked that she is always thinking of how she can show her students that what they are learning goes beyond the four walls of their classroom and that they can use their voice, whether speaking or through writing, to do something greater than themselves, something bigger than getting an A on a project and getting all the check marks on the rubric. The introduction to the podcast project I observed provides students the opportunity to share something with the world that lives beyond the classroom. One aspect of uplifting student voice that Rosie struggles with is letting go of some of the control. During planning, she asks herself:

How are my students guiding instruction, um, rather than how am I guiding instruction?

That's also another difficult one, especially depending on the group of students, um, that I

have, 'cause some classes they'll be like, you guys can, you know, take control here and other ones I'm like, no, we're not there.

This is a work in progress, and Mrs. Rodriguez acknowledged that she uses what she has learned in her master's program to think about the best and most engaging instruction, especially for her emergent bilinguals, as they are one of her groups that feel the most disenfranchised. She hopes that giving these students the ability to take control by developing skills such as writing, speaking, and using different forms of media will help them find their voice. She seeks to create a space in which what she is learning through school and what she is doing in teaching all “co-exists.”

Supporting student voice by helping them to reflect upon their own lives is important to Mrs. Rodriguez. She wants students to create a stir that promotes change. She semi-jokingly told students that “there are more of you than there are of us [teachers] and admin and superintendents,” not that she wants them to “create a rebellion, but letting them know that they have the power to do that.” Through student centered assignments such as this podcast project, Rosie is able to see passion build over the apathy of her students, even her seventh and eighth graders, who are sometimes “over it all.” She expressed happiness at seeing them come back to a place of joy and engagement.

Rosie Rodriguez's experience with action research led her to develop a self-identified teacher-researcher identity. As a result, Rosie indicated that her experience with action research impacted her pedagogical practice. After engaging in action research, Rosie relied less on “best practices” and increased her responsiveness to her students as complex individuals through a lens of critical reflection she began to utilize prior to engaging in action research. Rosie's pedagogical practice is driven by her pedagogy of care and her desire to address the diverse needs of her

students and promote student voice which is indicative of a critically responsive teaching practice.

Allison Adams

An iconic meme, a mittened, masked Bernie Sanders sits legs and arms crossed in a fold up chair as he watches the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. I am greeted with this image stamped on my second participant's sweatshirt as we sign onto Google Meet for the first of our virtual interviews. I breathe a sigh of relief. As I had hoped, I was able to secure two participants of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Ally, who I had interacted with only through email during my time as a graduate teacher assistant for her class, I knew to be White. While I cautioned myself and was careful not to make assumptions about Ally and her beliefs, I could not disregard the hope and comfort I felt in seeing a mittened Bernie Sanders on the sweatshirt of my White female participant. Does she acknowledge my reality? Do I have an opportunity to be my authentic self and create a genuine environment for research in community? The desire to be beyond the veil is ever present. And while the veil was not lifted nor dissolved in meeting Ally, a shared view of reality was established—one which required critical analysis of our world.

An Introduction to Allison Adams

In this section, I provide an introduction to Allison Adams that includes her personal demographics, her educational background, her current teaching position, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of this study. A review of Ally's personal, professional, and educational background is in line with my theoretical framework of activity theory which requires an understanding of the activity systems teachers participate in as they shape teacher identity and practice (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Therefore, this background

information is essential to understand Ally's identity as a teacher and her perspectives about teaching.

Ally is a high school English teacher with six years of experience. At 31, she was in the process of completing her master's degree in English education. She identifies as a White female and feels pride and happiness at having a Mexican heritage that comes from her mother being half Mexican and half German. Her students are surprised to see her eating conchas, Mexican sweet bread, a treat that reminds her of her Mexican culture. Although she was raised Catholic, she considers herself "pretty agnostic at this point" and politically progressive. In the last couple of years, Ally feels like she is "more involved with like politics and, like, aware of what's going on." She describes herself as someone who is philosophical, bad at small talk, and has a little social anxiety. Ally has numerous and highly visible tattoos that cover her arms as well as her chest to her collarbone. When she first began teaching, Ally covered her tattoos, but after learning her principal did not care, she felt free to wear short sleeves. As a result, her students always ask about them and view her as "the cool teacher." Ally's tattoos are part of her identity, and she shares some of the stories represented by her tattoos with her students. Students also share that she is "much shorter than they thought," and at 5'3", they often tower over her.

Education Background

In this section, I provide background information regarding Ally's educational journey due to the influence of a teacher's personal educational experiences on the development of their professional teaching identity (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Ally always knew she wanted to work with kids. When she graduated from high school, she initially wanted to become a pediatrician; however, when she attended college at a state school, she found she was not good at chemistry. Deciding medicine was not the path for her, she switched to a community college and

moved back home. Ally found herself failing out of that semester and decided to try joining the air force. She attended boot camp but was not successful. She expressed feeling like a failure because she had tried multiple avenues for a career and had not found success. Although she did not find her future career in the air force boot camp, it was there that she realized she wanted to be an English teacher. Upon returning home from boot camp, Ally told her mom she wanted to be a teacher. Her mom was hesitant, suggesting that Ally work for a bit instead to figure out what she wanted to do. But Ally had a plan, and she has not “looked back since then.”

Although her path toward finding her career “got off to a rocky start,” Ally enrolled in college and fell in love with the English program for teaching. She had always been a huge reader and thought she could be a good teacher. She believed her college to be a great teaching college and “one of those underrepresented schools out there.” After completing her bachelor’s degree in English education with a minor in philosophy, she decided to return to college to earn her English Education Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT). In reflecting on the program’s course work, Ally stated that the English MAT program is “a really open program. Like, they let you kind of like pick your own track, and I’m very happy with the program.” Ally considered adding a full CLD endorsement but decided to just add some of the courses offered into her flexible MAT program; this included graduate program about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. In reflecting on why she decided not to pursue the CLD Endorsement, Ally described the lack of motivation she was experiencing due to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ally expressed a love of being in school and honestly disclosed that the initial reason she wanted to complete a master’s degree was the additional pay she would receive as a teacher. In the end, she really enjoyed her English MAT because she was able to take the courses she was

interested in, including courses on diversity, to create a program that was “hand chosen by [her].”

Current Teaching Position

In order to understand Ally’s pedagogical decisions and perspectives it is important to understand the dynamics of her current teaching position and the way in which her environment impacts her teaching. Due to her exploration of different careers early in her college education, Ally believes she got a “late start” to teaching at the age of 26. Ally began teaching at a middle school but has spent the last four years of her teaching career teaching high school English. She currently teaches 10th and 12th grade students at a predominantly White school in a community she describes as “not too diverse.” Ally describes her school as one of the “north schools” in the city that separates itself from the “south schools” that have a more diverse student population. As a member of the equity committee, she discusses the disparities between the “north schools” and the “south schools.” Ally emphasizes a desire to work and live in a more diverse community.

Ally co-teaches four sections of 10th grade world literature with a history teacher. These are massive lecture style classes with at least 60 students in each class. Ally expresses a dislike for the structure of this class because she finds it difficult to create more opportunities for student centered learning given the large class size and the structure of the classroom that is set up like a college lecture hall. Although she co-teaches the class, she and the history teacher split up the teaching time into two separate classes with connecting themes when possible. For example, Ally had her students read *Things Fall Apart* when the history teacher was instructing on colonization and had her students read *Night* when they learned about World War II. Choosing texts for students is of great importance to Ally, and she tries to bring a thematic approach to her text selection and refuses to read texts like *The Odyssey* because she does not find them relevant.

Ally has had a new co-teaching partner every year she has taught this class which makes it challenging to plan and prevents long term growth in the teaching relationship, which has caused “burnout” for Ally.

In addition to teaching high school English, Ally teaches a media studies course that is targeted towards seniors as an alternative to AP English. As a result, the students in this course are “high end students” and not typically those with an IEP or those who are English language learners. Ally describes a specific period of 10th grade English that has a high population of students with 504s and IEPs and a special education teacher that comes for one hour a day to support those students. At her school, students who speak English as a second language are placed together in the “ELL core,” a class that Ally does not teach. Ally expressed feeling at a loss with one of her students who has an IEP but has “exited” the special needs program at her school. This has been made especially challenging given that she has never met this student as he had been doing remote learning the entire school year.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID)-19

“It’s been such a crazy year.” Ally confessed to feeling “super overwhelmed” this school year, given her mentorship of a student teacher, the near completion of her graduate degree, and the challenges of teaching in a pandemic. Although remote learning brought its own complications, the transition to full in person learning was challenging given the movement constraints and the fact she had not taught in person in over a year. She asked herself, “Could I have done a better job?” and answered with “One hundred percent.” Though most of her students are back in person, several students chose to remain fully online for distance learning. She describes the challenges with teaching students in person online and in person simultaneously, especially given that several of her online students are nothing but a black screen on her

computer. Ally describes the pandemic as having “changed the entire dynamic of how [she] teaches” in the following statement:

They [students] just like, don't interact with anyone. Like you put them in breakout rooms like kids don't chat. Um, and so I think it's, it's made it super awkward because not only like, I feel like now all of a sudden I'm at the center of the classroom, which I don't like, and I'm like, that's not my role as a teacher. Um, but like, it makes questioning like super awkward because like kids aren't talking in school and it's just, I feel like it's changed like the entire dynamic of like how I teach. . . . Um, so a lot of times, like, I feel like I'm kind of giving them the answer rather than them, um, kind of coming up with it on their own. And not that they're not capable.

Despite this challenge with student engagement, Ally still “tried out” Socratic seminars and other strategies to improve student engagement. Some days, including the first day I observed her teaching, Ally’s students “buy in” to the lesson and take their learning to the “next level” which Ally takes great pride in.

Personally, Ally described herself as being a “mess.” During one of our interviews, Ally apologized for having “brain fog” and feeling “out of it” as she had just received her second vaccine. She admitted embarrassment at not having done “such a great job” with some of her graduate school assignments, though she did redo some of them due to her struggle with motivation. The challenging reality of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected Ally’s teaching, her graduate coursework, and her personal life.

Ally’s Teaching Purpose and Perspectives

In order to understand Ally's pedagogical perspectives, and the evolution of her professional teaching identity as a result of her participation in action research, it is essential to

explore her teaching purpose. In particular, Ally's love of books, her personal politics, and commitment to diverse perspectives are at the core of her teaching purpose. Ally's desire to cultivate a love of literature among her students and her dedication to explore and advocate for social justice are the driving factors in her teaching practice.

Ally's Teaching Purpose

Ally's personal love of reading profoundly influenced her decision to become an English teacher. Growing up, Ally remembers reading extensively. Every summer, she would go to the library, get a ton of books, and shut herself into her bedroom to read all summer long. She describes books as being a part of her identity as a teacher and that her love of books and experience helping her younger brother with his homework made her think, "Oh, I think I would be like a pretty decent English teacher." Being more aware of "what's going on in the world" has affected how she is as a teacher and the kind of books she reads and wants her students to read. Ally asserts that one of the things that makes her a good teacher is that she thinks about the now as well as "who people are going to be in the future." She allocates significant time to learn about authors, especially young adult authors. She sees herself as knowing what "kids care about" and asserts that they "don't connect to depression era books about a white girl." Ally's love of books, political beliefs, her research on young adult texts, and her understanding of kids today cemented the idea that "we need to teach diverse texts."

Sharing a Passion: Reading and Social Justice

Ally remembers gaining interest in anti-racist work, prior to the summer of 2020, as inspiration for her desire to teach diverse texts: "I had been really interested in like, um, like anti-racist work, and this was like the summer before everything had happened. I was just like really getting interested in that and like starting to read all these diverse books." Ally believes it is

important to teach “more relevant books” she thinks students will enjoy and select diverse texts for students to read. Given Ally’s progressive values and her belief that students do not connect to traditional texts chosen for English classes, she argues that selecting current, diverse texts for students to read will improve their reading. She argues that discussions on reading test scores, which she acknowledges are racially biased and do not improve students’ reading abilities. She believes conversations on changing the curriculum are more important than the discussions her district has on test scores. She asserts that students have to read more to improve their reading abilities, and in order for them to do that, they have to want to read.

Given that Ally is an avid reader and constantly researches new authors, she is highly aware of new texts being published and new authors in the young adult genre. Ally describes this research as a lot of work but believes it is a worthwhile effort. Authors she plans to incorporate in future semesters include Jason Reynolds, Elizabeth Acevedo, and Angie Thomas. In comparison, most teachers in her school district are reading the same texts they have been reading for the “past 30 years” such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Ally “just doesn’t understand why” if they truly want to improve reading test scores. Ally explains that some teachers argue it is “too much work for them” or they “just want to keep doing the same things that they’ve always done,” which to Ally “just sounds like a crap excuse.” Ally believes that teachers like this are part of the problem. When she asks some of her colleagues if they feel they need more diverse texts, some say yes, but do not do anything about it. This seems to frustrate Ally.

Ally asserts that reading diverse texts is important for students of color as well as White students. She elaborates in the following statement:

I feel like, I feel like a lot of diverse texts, like, yes, they're written for the people of color because we need to have people of color see themselves in the books of literature. But I also feel like we need like to teach white students how to deal with people who are different from them so that they don't feel like they're the center of the world. Like I was watching something, um, yesterday I think, um, with it was based on, I think it was, it was a black author, like Maya Angelou (I corrected her as the video was of Toni Morrison), I think maybe it was, um, and then like asked like, why don't you write about like [white people] and I'm like, what? Like, are you kidding me? Like you would never ask like a white author. Like, why aren't you writing about black characters? Why aren't you writing about Brown characters? . . . it just baffles me that we're like in 2021 still having this conversation about race. Like, and I feel like because of like the political thing that's been going on in this country for the past four years, like, I feel like we've almost gone backwards instead of forwards. And I'm like, why are we still having this conversation? Like, why is this still like part of it? And then I'm like, you know, then I feel kind of ignorant that like, why like, well, of course, I don't think it's a problem, but it's been a problem for, you know, Black and brown people forever and it's, you know, and so I just feel like I've tried to like delve into some research into that on my own.

Ally went on to state what she believes her role in this conversation is in the following statement:

And I'm like, are you like, how are we still having these conversations in 2021? And I just feel like, because, to be honest, like white people haven't taken it as like a priority. Like they haven't made it a priority for them. I feel like it's my job for like all white people. It's like, I'm going to take this on, you know, like, but I also think it's important,

not just because I'm stubborn, but I also like, think it's important. Like, you know, like every book that I've been reading this year, like I've, and I've made it a point to like read these diverse authors, not because like they're diverse, but because they're good books, you know, like they're just good books. . . I don't know what, I don't know where that came from. Like why I got so passionate about it. I don't, I don't think I have an answer for that. I just, I feel like the more I've been learning about all these things, like the more passionate I've gotten about it. And now, I'm like the spokesperson for diversity at my school. No one else is listening, and I'm just like up here like we need to teach more diverse texts, and everyone else was like, teaching the same thing they've always taught. And I'm like, well, I could still teach my diverse texts, then that's fine.

Ally believes that she can learn to be a better teacher by teaching diverse texts. Ally's focus on diverse texts as the method of improving teaching is reflective of educators who advocate for culturally responsive teaching which seeks to empower students through the "creation of culturally and historically responsive curriculum" (Muhammad, 2020). It is clear that Ally's passion for diverse literature crosses over from her teaching and into her personal life.

One of the aspects of teaching that Ally really enjoys is planning. She described feeling discouraged when students are not excited about the lessons she puts a lot of effort into creating. While many students are receptive to the diverse literature Ally selects for her English classes, not all students are eager to participate in this change of curriculum. During the fall semester of 2020, Ally had selected books by all Black authors. She found that this angered some of the students, and one student asked the administration for permission to leave her class when she found out the texts that would be taught. Without talking to Ally, the administration allowed this student to leave her class. Ally did not believe this was an appropriate response to the situation

and wished that the administration had sought her opinion or at least consulted with her prior to making this decision. Ally makes it a point to be involved in the decision-making processes in her school as a leader and advocate for diverse literature.

Ally's Teacher Identity

Components to Ally's teaching identity include a love of books, a desire to promote independent thinking, continuous growth, and advocacy for what she believes in. After completing her action research project, Ally did not identify as a teacher-researcher. Ally views research as something she engages in to learn more about diverse curriculum and social justice issues.

Ally describes being a reader as a big part of her teaching identity. Like a true book addict, Ally is continually purchasing books, most of which feature themes of social justice and offer diverse perspectives. Not only does Ally read numerous adult texts, but she also reads young adult books to preview them prior to assigning them to students. Ally plans to continue to focus on diverse curriculum as a method for improving student engagement and expanding their horizons.

Ally describes an effective teacher as a teacher who does not talk the entire time they teach, knows how to ask good questions, teaches to different kinds of students, and connects with their students. Ally's focus on student engagement and promoting "critical" and independent thinking is at direct odds with the idea that a good teacher is the "sage on the stage." The importance she places on "critical" thinking also connects with her idea that asking good questions is an important quality in an effective teacher.

I think the questioning skills are like important, um, 'cause then you can like build off of what they said to like create other questions. They should be able to, um, like get the

students like, get the kids to like talk to each other rather than like . . . it shouldn't be teacher led all the time.

Ally feels like she is a good teacher most of the time and knows how to ask good questions that promote students to be independent thinkers.

As part of her professional teacher identity, Ally values growth. She believes that she will “always be learning” and that “it’s okay to always be learning and growing.” Ally asserts that most of her growth as a teacher has been due to her graduate program and independent reading and research on young adult books. During the summer of 2020, Ally attended multiple webinars on anti-racism including those hosted by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds to better understand and support the current social justice movement. One aspect of growth Ally acknowledges she needs to make progress is in addressing the needs of a diverse student population. Ally struggles with supporting the needs of students who learn English as a second language and students who have an IEP to support their learning needs. Ally states that she “absolutely care[s] about like being able to teach multiple types of learners . . . like teaching kids on IEP” but feels like she does not have the training. Ally asserts that since she teaches 10th and 12th grade students and focuses on how to teach students to “write multi-paragraph essays and how to like really analyze text,” she struggles to support students who do not know how to read or construct a good sentence. This struggle to differentiate instruction is one of the reasons Ally decided to take the graduate course about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Advocacy is a huge part of Ally’s teacher identity. In addition to her desire to teach students to be advocates, Ally is an advocate for her beliefs at the school where she works. In the graduate course on culturally and linguistically diverse teaching, Ally learned that soon we would have more students of color in the United States than we will White students. This has

pushed Ally to advocate for the selection of diverse texts in her school. She received a lot of pushback from other teachers at her school because Ally describes herself as stubborn and refuses to let the issue go. Due to a population of mostly White teachers and “really horrible professional development,” Ally believes it is crucial for her and her colleagues to do anti-racism professional development. Although her administration has not included anti-racism as part of their official professional development, Ally took matters into her own hands and created a small book club with a few other teachers. At the time of this research study, this small anti-racism book club was reading *Not Light, But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom* by Matthew R. Kay. Ally describes the book as the perspective of a Black, male teacher who teaches “people about race and like how to have those conversations and that you have to like, build up, like you have to, you have, your kids have to feel comfortable in order to talk to you about some of these things.” Ally confided that even though she does not have the full support of the administration, she wants to advocate even more for her students because she “cares so much about students.”

At the conclusion of her action research project, Ally did not identify as a teacher-researcher. Ally described having a negative relationship with research though she did enjoy and see benefits from the concepts taught in the graduate course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. In addition, Ally critically reflects on the content she teaches but not her pedagogical decisions. Ally’s lack of critical reflection as a tool to self-evaluate her own teaching and her belief that her action research project was really an activity for students indicates that Ally misapplied her action research project. The following sections elaborate on Ally’s action research project and her reflections on the project and practicing research.

Ally's Action Research Project

Description of Project. Ally's action research project was centered around one of the class activities from Nieto's (2018) text. The prompt Ally selected required her to "Think of some curriculum ideas that conform to the definition of multicultural education as social justice. And how might students be engaged through the curriculum to consider and act on issues of social justice?" Ally had students focus their social justice project around the idea of how to make the United States a "more perfect union," how to make it a better place to live in.

First, students brainstormed ideas in a Jam Board, an online bulletin board that allows students to create sticky notes and post them virtually. Some of these ideas included: accepting all body types, free public colleges, improving racial strife, more affordable living, and LGBTQ+ rights. Since this class is a comparative media studies course, Ally had students learn about their chosen topic through a variety of media that included documentaries, podcasts, and the books they read during sustained silent reading (SSR). Ally provided a list of 13 documentaries students were able to choose from: *A Secret Love*, a film about LGBTQ rights; *Thirteen*, a film about the 13th amendment and prison reform; *The Social Dilemma*, a film about media and its effects on society; *Waiting for Superman*, a film about education, and *After Parkland*, a film about the infamous school shooting. Students analyzed the documentaries according to the artistic choices, the central argument, the creator's point of view and bias, the overall effectiveness of the documentary, as well as their opinion of the documentary and its topic.

Then, Ally had students repeat this analysis with a student selected podcast that addressed their project topic. Finally, students did their own research and completed a research paper on their "more perfect union" topic. Ally describes the purpose of this project as supporting students in "thinking about how they can actually become better citizens in the world, um, through

actually acting on these issues” of multicultural perspectives. Ally expressed disappointment that while some students chose topics that centered around a multicultural perspective, most students did not and chose topics such as the negative effects of social media and climate change.

Choosing a Topic. “I knew that a lot of my students, um, really needed some diversity in their life, and this is why I particularly chose this topic. Um, but also, I think that I want it [the project] to be inclusive so that everyone in my class does feel welcome.” Ally expressed appreciation for Nieto’s (2018) *Language, Culture, and Teaching Critical Perspectives* as it “affirmed like a lot of things [she] was already thinking.” She selected her topic on helping students to consider and engage in topics of social justice because it spoke to her, and she had already completed an inquiry-based research project with students prior to this action research project. In previous assignments, she had not had the opportunity to support students in actively advocating for a cause, especially given the reality of COVID-19.

Ally liked the idea that students were learning and researching independently and was interested in the additional advocacy piece of the project that called on students to act on social justice issues. Ally wanted to provide students an opportunity to advocate for themselves and issues that were important to them. Additionally, Ally’s project selection was influenced by her desire to promote “critical”⁴ thinking and engagement:

I want everyone in general, like that I teach to learn like “critical” thinking skills and like how they can eventually like, make a difference in the world. Um, like I feel like we're not just like teaching the kids, the content we're teaching them like how to interact and like the small little world of high school. And then they're going to go out with the bigger

⁴ Ally’s use of the word critical does not refer to an application critical theory. Therefore, I will use quotes around the word “critical.”

world and like, you know, hopefully, like make change . . . so I feel like it's important to me that like kids go out there and they like fight for the things that they care about. Um, and I think that's like really like the advocacy piece that, that the Nieto text like mentioned in there. Like that's what I ultimately want my students to do. . . And that's like, what the Nieto text kind of like made me realize, like, I need to not only like talk about these issues, but then like have them bring it out into the actual world.

Ally decided to expand upon the action research project she conducted in the fall semester and created extension assignments throughout the remainder of the school year.

Research Reflections and Feelings

The Research Project. One of the questions Ally was trying to answer in conducting her action research project was “whether or not [her] students would be more engaged with the curriculum. Um, if they had to think about how they could advocate or really do something about some of those social justice issues” they were learning about. Ally believes that most of her students wanted to pursue actions of advocacy for the topic they selected and that they were engaged in the project even given the difficulties of learning during a pandemic:

I do think that my students are staying engaged with this because they know that this, this does have some real-world implications, that they can actually start doing something about it. They could start doing their own research, they can advocate for people in their community. And this really was, um, an eye-opening experience for me because I do want my students to not only think about these issues, um, but then to go on and act on them. When we talk about multicultural education, we really want our students to become better citizens in the world. Um, which I do think that my students are gaining a little bit of understanding on how to do that.

In selecting this project topic, Ally hoped to be inspired by her students. She feels that a lot of the content she chooses in her class centers around the idea of “having hope for kids’ futures.” She mentioned that the news and politics are very depressing, and she wanted to create an opportunity for her students to do some good in the world. As a professional teacher, she hoped this project would improve her skills in supporting students as advocates.

Although Ally found the process of supporting student advocacy to be “an eye-opening experience” she states that she felt like she “knew what [she] was going to learn” before she conducted the action research project. Ally expressed some frustration at some of the topic choices students made. Given that the project centered around the idea of a “more perfect union,” she did not like that some students focused on international issues such as sex trafficking overseas. She stated that if a student wanted to research sex trafficking, they could have studied sex trafficking in the United States. The most helpful factor in the completion of her research project was the Nieto (2018) text used in her graduate course and the encouragement of the professor of the course.

When asked how the action research project impacted her teaching practice, Ally reflected that it helped her to persevere during a challenging social and political time as well as through a pandemic. Ally said that the research project provided something positive for her to focus on and that there isn’t anything she would change. An overall takeaway Ally made about action research is that it is “less about the topics and things that [she] learned and more about, [students] kind of like going out on their own and doing their own research.” Ally’s reflections on teaching center around evaluations of her students. For example, when reflecting on how a particular lesson could have gone better, she stated that “students could have talked more.”

“Bad at Research.” “I don't know. I feel like, I keep feeling like my research project like wasn't a research project if that makes sense. So, like, come on, like what action research project did I do? And I know that I like did something, but I'm still uncertain about like what it is that I like gained or gathered from that.” The most rewarding aspect of the action research project for Ally was that she was able to choose her own topic and lead her own investigation. This indicates that Ally appreciated the opportunity that action research provided to express her voice as a teacher. However, despite the appreciation Ally had to express her voice during her action research project, she considers herself to be “bad at research” and that she does not feel like she really understands what action research is because it did not correlate with her previous understanding of research:

I feel, I still feel like, and I don't know why, like, I think action research in general, it's just like really hard, um, like as a, of a concept for me to grasp. And I think it's just like, you don't know where you're going to go with it. It's like you have to like do the research and then you have to like, like...I remember, I think when I was learning about it, like in my first [research] class, it's like, you have to like, get all the data and then you have to like separate them into like sort like smaller groups or whatever. And like that, I just, maybe it's because I don't have experience doing that or like the project that I did—I didn't feel like it fit in with that.

Ally explained that prior to her action research project, she thought of research as something that was more structured, something that centered around a specific question from which you drew conclusions: “I've always been kind of bad at research. Like I don't know why I've been so bad of it. I just feel like I love to read and like read different kinds of research, but then I think it's, I don't know. I think it's like coming to that conclusion that I'm kind of bad at.”

Ally's further reflections on action research demonstrate that she is not confident in teaching research as seen in the following statement:

I love teaching like arguments. I love teaching, um, like analysis, kind of based things. Um, and so I, I feel like I'm not great at like the research thing, so I didn't feel too comfortable with it. Um, but I do feel like after I was done with that research project, like I felt more familiar, and like, like looking at other people's projects. . . now I feel like I have some more skills that, like, helped me, um . . . I obviously feel better about doing or creating like an action research project.

Although Ally states that she does not fully understand what action research is, she expresses positive feelings in being able to do research in a community that allowed her to see other graduate students' action research projects. Ally states that she is hyper critical of herself and is naturally a self-reflective person who is always looking at how she can improve in her teaching. Finally, Ally reflects that the action research project did not change how she sees herself as a teacher but gave her an opportunity to inspire her students to advocate for themselves and issues they cared about.

Continuing Advocacy Curriculum. After completing her graduate course in which she presented her action research project, Ally continued to think about ways in which she could extend the project's goals even further. Ally intended to continue to use the "More Perfect Union" project as a research activity for students, not as the type of teacher-oriented action research that is focused on improving teacher practice. Ally had students incorporate a fiction or non-fiction text into their project that would provide additional information on the issue they had selected to advocate for. Ally expressed excitement in continuing the project throughout the spring semester so that "the work does not end just here."

Ally planned for her students to continue their research project by going out into the community to learn more about their topic. Given the restrictions of the pandemic, she suggested to students that they create a survey through Google Forms and share it with people in their community and through their social media platforms. Ally hopes that in connecting their research project to people in their local community, students will go out to make “positive changes in their own community.” The active advocacy component of this project is important to Ally:

I feel like this is how they learn to be like democratic citizens is like through the education system. And I feel like if we're trying to teach them, like, okay, here's what's going on. But I feel like a lot of times like America, or Americans in general; they get so caught up on like, I want to argue my point. I want to, you know, make my point come across. But it's like, it only does so good unless you're like going out and like advocating for people and like doing something about it.

Ally argues that teachers need to do a better job of teaching students how to be advocates and does not think that educators and administrators in her school district are making this a priority.

Ally hopes to collaborate with the other English teachers in her department to create an advocacy component for the yearly senior research project. And although she expressed negative feelings toward her self-perception as a researcher, Ally stated that if she were to conduct another action research project, she would want to help students conduct their own research project on the use of diverse books in curriculum. She would want to ask students questions such as “What do diverse texts mean to you?” and “Why are diverse texts not being taught?” Ally emphasizes that she would like to delve into the perspectives of her students and the texts they appreciate and would enjoy reading in English class.

Ally's Pedagogy: A Focus on Curriculum

In Ally's reflection on her action research project, she notes that her action research project did not impact how she sees herself as a teacher. Ally's action research project gave her an opportunity to introduce new curriculum to her students, curriculum that focused on issues of social justice and provided an opportunity for student advocacy. When asked questions about her pedagogical perspectives during our interviews, Ally focused on the curricular aspects of pedagogy such as lesson planning, what she hopes students take away from her class, and the skills she wants them to learn. This focus on curricular aspects of pedagogy correlates with Ally's purpose in teaching—infusing diverse texts and perspectives into her class and cultivating a love of reading. Ally's pedagogical decision-making process occurs before she enters the classroom and is largely independent of who her students are. Instead of critical responsiveness, Ally implements what she considers best practices such as diverse texts, independent thinking, and engaging assignments. In the following vignettes of Ally's teaching, I will refer to her as Ms. Adams.

Crafting Curriculum: “Critical” and Independent Thinking. Ms. Adams begins her comparative media studies class with the objective for the day and announces, “I will be able to engage in a seminar today. When I am on the outer circle, I will write down three things that I agree with or noticed.” Students in class arrange themselves for the Socratic Seminar discussing the play and film *Hamlet*.⁵ An inner circle of students, who will be leading the discussion, is surrounded by an outer circle of students who reflect on their conversation. Ms. Adams prompts

⁵ Ally had previously confided that despite her desire to change all her texts to reflect a more diverse perspective, by the second semester of a pandemic school year, she was exhausted and felt she needed to teach something she had taught before.

students to put away their cell phones, noting that they will be marked down if they take them out while others are talking. Ms. Adams asks students to be mindful of their conversation and to “make sure everyone in the circle gets to take part in the conversation.” Before students begin, Ms. Adams reminds them of her grading system, stating, “If you talk once you get a *C*, if you talk twice a *B*, if you talk three or more times you get an *A*.” Although I cannot see the students who are learning in person, I assume they get right to work as I do not hear Ms. Adams provide any further prompts.

I have joined the conversation of the three students who learn remotely in Ms. Adams’ class. On my Zoom video chat, I see the faces of two students and a black screen. My own screen is left black as not to distract students. After providing clear, direct instructions to the students physically in her classroom, Ms. Adams turns her attention to the students distance learning. Ms. Adams communicates to these students in the Zoom chat box, typing four separate directives:

Okay so you guys who are in here, you need to unmute yourself and have a conversation.

There is no inner and outer circle since there are only three of you.

Come on, lets unmute ourselves and turn our cameras on.

I’m watching but I can’t hear you guys :).

After a few awkward moments, the students distance learning begin their Socratic Seminar, and the student whose screen was black fills with the image of a face. Students take turns reading questions from a shared document and share their perspectives using evidence to support their claims. I noticed that the students addressed several of the same questions and had unique questions. Ms. Adams later confirmed that she provides her students with seminar prep sheets to guide them in their conversation. The role of students in the center of the Socratic

Seminar circle is to answer these questions with the use of quotes from the text as evidence and to create three to four questions of their own to promote additional conversation.

Midway through class, Ms. Adams checks in on her students on Zoom, typing in the chat box, “You guys still good in here? We’re switching but I am okay with you guys if you are still talking.” Students do not respond to her message and continue talking and working through their seminar prep sheet questions. In a private message to me in the Zoom chat box, Ms. Adams apologized for the awkwardness of having students participate at home. I assured her this was not a problem and responded that the online students were doing great. A few minutes later, Ms. Adams types in the chat box, “When you guys are finished talking, you are free to leave whenever! Thank you guys for being awesome and talking the entire time.” Once students see this message, they say goodbye to each other and leave the video chat.

After the online students leave, Ms. Adams turns on the microphone to her computer so I can listen to the students learning in person as they proceed with their Socratic seminar. Through Zoom, I can see Ms. Adams working on her computer and looking over to monitor students as they talk. In our Zoom chat, Ms. Adams mentioned she was multitasking, “trying to do like three things at once...taking notes and grading, leading seminars online and in class hahaha.” I responded, “Wow. That’s a lot!” Ms. Adams turned her attention back to the students, noting that a question had been asked that no one responded to. She prompted students to respond by calling out their names. The students found the awkward moment of silence funny and laughed. Ms. Adams’s laughter soon joined. With two minutes of class remaining, Ms. Adams asks students if they have any closing thoughts. When no students respond, she directs them to turn in their seminar sheets and observation sheets. “Make sure your name is on it!” she reminds them. The masked students walk about turning in their work. They continue to hang around in conversation,

checking their cell phones. Ms. Adams has to shoo them out of class, saying, “I’ll see you on Thursday,” before students begin to leave.

When asked why she has her students engage in Socratic Seminars, Ms. Adams responded that it helps students practice their oral communication skills, a key language arts skill that she is supposed to assess. In addition to helping her assess ELA skills, Ms. Adams went on to elaborate that it’s fun for her to listen to students, and it helps to generate conversation:

It's just like fun for me because I feel like you never really, like, get to just like hear students talk the entire time. And I like, love like, hearing them talk like what they have to say. ...I like to hear them chat and, like it, not only like assess it, like, I feel like I can assess like, okay, how are they're talking? Are they speaking? Are they using the actual text? Then, it also like gives me a good idea of like, okay, this person clearly has read, this person I'm like, hasn't really read depending on their responses. ...You can like tell who the BSers are and the ones who have actually like read the texts.

Ms. Adams went on to explain that she wants her students to be “critical” thinkers who “think about, no matter what, what it is that they're consuming.” She wants them to ask themselves who the author of the text is and to be self-reflective as they read. Ms. Adams wants all of her students to be challenged and for teachers to have high expectations of their students. She remembered reading work by Lisa Delpit (1988) in her graduate studies and stated that “the reason that a lot of, um, black students aren't doing well is because teachers don't have high expectations from them.” When I asked her to clarify what she meant by critical thinking, Ms. Adams asserted,

Um, I think for me, um, critical thinking is like, they think about things that like that they're not going to just like accept something for face value. They're not just gonna like

read a text and be like, okay, that's, I'm just going to accept that that's a hundred percent true or whatever. Like I want them to constantly be asking questions about the things that they're reading, like even if they agree with it basically to like be questioning, like, "Why is this happening?," "What is going on here?" Um, "Why did the author choose to write this?" Why, you know, like they have to ask all those questions. I guess they have to like think for themselves, have original thoughts. Um, to me that's kind of what critical thinking means.

Ms. Adams' interpretation of "critical" thinking reveals that she is not referencing the body of work on critical theory, which focuses on analyzing and reflecting on systems of power and oppression.

Ms. Adams hopes that in supporting the "critical" thinking of her students, she helps them to become more independent learners who make decisions for themselves, especially given that the students in her comparative media studies class are seniors.

I feel like I definitely like want my kids to like, make those decisions for themselves, especially when they're seniors. I'm like, you guys are going out into the real world. Like, I, for example, let them sit wherever they want to sit, because when they're going to college. You know? ...a lot of them are adults at this point. I'm like, I shouldn't have to tell you where to sit. That just seems silly. You know? ...Like they're internally motivated. I haven't done anything to like motivate them this year. Like they're motivated intrinsically.

Ms. Adams continued to credit her students' independence and self-motivation and described how this impacts her teaching:

So, it's comparative media studies class, which, um, usually kids who don't want to take AP lit take comparative media studies. So, I would say that this year it's like, I only have like very smart kids in that class. Um, but it's like all girls and this, this totally sounds like a stereotype, but I feel like traditionally, like girls do better predominantly like overall than boys do. And so, I think that that like, um, that just like kind of impacts the way that like, I am able to teach the class 'cause like they pay attention all the time. ...like my seniors, aren't hard. Like they came in with like all these skills and I'm just like, kind of like, okay, here's the last bit before you're going off to college.

Ms. Adams provided additional critical reflection on the population of these students in acknowledging that most of them come from upper middle class White families and that only one student in the class, one of the students distance learning, has an IEP. Ms. Adams's belief that having students who are smart, self-motivated, and independent learners allows her to teach effectively connects to her avoidance of pedagogical responsibility that allows her to reject responsiveness and focus on predetermined "best practices."

Crafting Curriculum: Engaging and Rigorous Content. In addition to high expectations created through curriculum that centers "critical" thinking and independent learning, Ms. Adams crafts curriculum with the motivation of engaging students. Ms. Adams describes student engagement in content as the key to learning:

I think first of all, like if students aren't engaged in the topics that, that we're learning about, like there's really like no point. ...I want them to be engaged. I don't want them to be just like passive learners. I want them to like, care about things that they're learning about, to care about, like the world around them. And so, it's like really hard to like get them to like care about something. ...this year it wasn't as challenging to get kids like

come up with project ideas. Um, but in years past, they were like, well, I don't care about anything. I'm like, yes, you do. You just don't know what you care about.

Ms. Adams went on to explain that in order for students to be engaged in their learning, they have to be the ones leading class conversations:

I think that's why it's important to me because I want them to be engaged in the learning. Cause, I just, I don't like the whole like "Sage on the stage" thing. Like I don't wanna, I don't have like all this information to like pass on to them. Like I feel like with English like they have to be engaged with learning in order for us to like have a conversation and talk about all these things. ...Like, I feel like they have to be like, they have to be engaged because like that's kind of part of the process.

One of the methods in which Ms. Adams engages students is through SSR, which occurs for 10 minutes at the beginning of every class. During my second observation, I was able to witness students during SSR. Students knew Ms. Adams' class routine, and as soon as she greeted students, she reminded them to take out their SSR books and that she would "start the timer when everyone is quiet." While students read their SSR books, Ms. Adams took out her own book to read, describing it as a chance to get her own reading in and an important act of modeling that shows students "how it looks to just like read for fun." During this class, Ms. Adams read *Anxious People* by Fredrik Backman. Ms. Adams is dedicated to doing SSR because she strongly believes that "every single student needs to learn the joy of reading rather than like reading to like answer some kind of questions or projects." She does not agree with Lexile levels and argues that students need to love reading which she hopes to inspire by allowing them to "read whatever they want every single day." During my observation, many students were reading books that aligned with the advocacy project she created for their research project.

Ms. Adams describes SSR as part of the culture at her high school and is an engagement strategy she plans to continue in future years. At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Adams has students complete a survey asking them questions such as “How often do you read?”, “What are your favorite books and authors?”, and “How many books do you have in your house?” Ms. Adams noticed that students who do not have many books at home tend not to be readers. Then, Ms. Adams has students write a paragraph describing who they are as readers and writers. Most students respond that they do not have time to read as most of their time is spent doing homework and participating in extracurricular activities. Towards the end of the school year, Ms. Adams received positive emails from students saying that they appreciated SSR, and it was something they looked forward to doing every day.

Beyond developing an appreciation for reading, Ms. Adams believes that developing rigorous content is a key factor in creating opportunities for engagement for both students and herself. Ms. Adams confided that she gets a “little bit bored” with the standards because she does not think they are challenging enough. This year, she adapted an old project she found in her school’s curriculum and created an assignment on literary criticism for her unit on Hamlet.

I was able to observe students participating in challenging literary criticism during my second observation. In continuing their analysis of Hamlet, Ms. Adams utilized the online discussion platform Padlet, and required students to craft arguments according to seven critically reflective approaches that included the Psychoanalytic Approach, the Feminist Approach, the Archetypal Approach, the Moral and Religious Approach, the Historical Approach, and the Sociological/Political Approach. On this Padlet page entitled “Hamlet Critical Theories,” students were instructed to “Answer one of the questions about the critical theories with a claim, have a quote to support it, and then 2 sentences of analysis! Please use proper MLA citations for

your quotes (Act, Scene, Lines).” Students were required to create a “quote sandwich,” which Ms. Adams described as a claim that provides context, includes a quote, and contains at least two sentences of analysis as well as a citation for their quote.

Students completed this assignment silently and independently without any redirection from Ms. Adams. She announced to the class that she would help them find quotes if they were having a hard time finding one that supported their claim, and a couple of students took her up on her offer. Ms. Adams seems to be aware that the assignment was challenging given the depth of analysis and Shakespeare’s challenging language. She asked the students in person, “Do you want to read by yourself for Act 5, or do you want to do a read/watch together?” Students collectively decided that they wanted to do the read/watch, which meant they would read an act from the play as a class and then watch the corresponding scene from the Hamlet movie. Ms. Adams walked around the classroom throughout the class, standing behind students to look at their screens. She sent a Zoom message to the students online, “Everyone in here doing, okay? Anyone need help?” to which no one responds. It appeared easier for Ms. Adams to engage the students who were in person than it was for her to engage students who were distance learning.

Ally Adams’s experience with action research did not lead her to develop a teacher-researcher identity. Ally used her action research topic as curriculum for her students, an opportunity for students to research issues of social justice and advocate for those causes. Ally reflected that her experience with action research did not change how she thought about herself as a teacher but did inspire her to continue to provide opportunities for student advocacy in her classroom. Ally focuses on the curricular aspects of pedagogy which includes promoting a love of reading, teaching diverse texts and perspectives, encouraging independent thinking, and crafting highly engaging activities. Ally does not implement critically responsive teaching and

instead implements best practices that are determined independently of individual student needs. Ally's focus on diverse texts and her desire to support students in advocating for social justice causes is reflective of the purpose of culturally responsive teaching which seeks to empower students through the "creation of culturally and historically responsive curriculum" (Muhammad, 2020).

Summary

In Chapter IV, I provided an account of the descriptions and intentions of Rosie and Ally, teachers who had participated in action research through a graduate course. The stories of these two teachers revealed divergent experiences in how they identify as teachers, their perceptions of action research, how they implemented action research, the impacts of action research on their teaching, and their pedagogy. I presented an overview of several overlapping activity systems that influenced teachers in the ongoing development of their teaching identity including the graduate course in which the participants conducted their action research study, the educational environment they teach in, and their personal journey in becoming teachers. In addition to my use of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), which requires an investigation of activity systems to understand identity, I utilized pragmatism to highlight the interlocking of thought and action in the study of the in-context decision making of my participants. I implemented critical theory as the theoretical tent that housed the theories of CHAT and pragmatism, allowing me to acknowledge the political nature of education and "openly take sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (Giroux, 1983, p. 17).

While Rosie and Ally's experiences with action research do not reflect the perspectives of all teachers, they tell important stories of one teacher's journey in becoming a teacher-researcher and another teacher's struggle to implement, connect with, and understand action

research. In narrating the descriptions and intentions of Rosie and Ally as teachers and as researchers, I became aware of the differences in how they implement and reflect on their pedagogy as well as how they understand and implement action research. This has ramifications for their views of themselves as teachers and as researchers.

Rosie takes pedagogical responsibility by utilizing a lens of critical responsiveness to make pedagogical decisions that are inclusive of who her students are and what they need. Ally rejects pedagogical responsibility and instead relies on her lesson plans, text selection, and activities she crafts to address the needs of her students and accomplish her goals of social justice. Ally heavily relies on her judgement of students' needs that occurs prior entering the classroom and is centered around "best practices." Rosie's experience with action research led her to develop a self-identified teacher-researcher identity that impacted her pedagogical decision making by helping her to increase her critical responsiveness to students and decrease her reliance on "best practices." Ally's misapplication of action research led to her utilization of her action research topic as a research activity for her students and the belief that action research did not impact her self-identity as a teacher. In addition, Ally was not able to engage in the self-evaluation component of action research and rejected personal implications of critical reflection. The implications these stories have for teacher education, and teacher research will be analyzed further in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V
THEMES AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This research study explored the development of a teacher-researcher identity and investigated the pedagogy of two teachers who conducted an action research project. I sought to investigate action research as a tool to cultivate a professional teaching identity in teacher education programs in order to address the stifling of teacher voice that has resulted from standardization and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession. I explored and evaluated the extent to which a teacher-researcher identity developed among two teachers who had completed an action research project in a master's level course.

During the data analysis portion of my research study, I pored over the data from interviews and observations to re-experience our conversations and my virtual classroom visits. Next, I set their action research presentations on replay, watching, and listening to their experiences conducting their first action research project. Finally, I began to code the data using descriptive coding, to find common topics, concept coding to highlight the “big ideas,” and value coding to interpret my participants’ attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs. While I intended to use the Dedoose app to house all my analysis and reflections, I often found myself thinking about my participants as I moved throughout my day. I scribbled ideas on Post-its, I wrote reflections in the notes section of my iPhone, I discovered inspiration, and I wrote my “Meeting Ally” section while at a restaurant with my husband. My analysis and reflection proved ongoing, begging for

attention, even when I felt unmotivated. Chapters IV and V were constructed from this ongoing process of data analysis.

In Chapter IV, I provided descriptions for and discussed the intentions of my participants, Rosie and Ally, two teachers who had conducted an action research project. I told their story in teaching, their decision to become teachers, the life events that led them to the teaching profession, and their educational background. I narrated classroom experiences that highlighted their teaching style and their vision for educating their students. I documented their experiences with conducting action research and its impacts on their teaching and teacher identity. I concluded with a short comparison of their experiences with action research, their teacher identity, and their perspectives on pedagogy.

In this final chapter, I provide an overview of my research study to set the stage for thematic analysis. The themes that emerged in my study are organized according to the research question they responded to. Following the discussion on themes and responses to my research questions, I reflected on the implications for my multiple case study regarding teacher education and the professionalization of teachers. I conclude this chapter with my thoughts on humanizing research and reflections on my multiple case study.

Overview of the Study

In a country determined to prove it has reckoned with its racial trauma through the closing of the achievement gap, teachers find themselves deprofessionalized and left out of the conversation regarding student learning. As a result, teachers might feel pressured to “teach to the test” and use cookie cutter curriculum to preserve their position of employment. Although some teachers seek to move beyond this model of preplanned curriculum that does not address the needs of their students, many are unprepared professionally and pedagogically to address the

lived realities of their students. To take on the responsibility of addressing who their students are instead of what they are, they must bridge the theory-practice divide and take ownership of pedagogical decision making. I argue that in order for teachers to meet the needs of their diverse student population, we must support them in rejecting pedagogical standardization by merging thought and action as teacher-researchers. I assert that the development of a self-identified teacher-researcher identity should occur through the support of teacher education programs for pre-service and in-service teachers.

Unlike other education researchers and practicing teachers, I advocate for a focus on pedagogical responsibility and in-context decision making instead of curriculum reform as the path towards supporting our diverse student population and professionalizing teachers. A multitude of researchers and teachers advocate for the diversification of curriculum as the method for achieving social justice, such as the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (Muhammad, 2020). One of the participants of this study is one of these teachers, and her primary focus for leadership and advocacy is integrating diverse texts and perspectives into the curriculum of her classroom and her school. While it is important for the pluralistic world to finally be reflected in the classroom, adopting a new culturally relevant curriculum does not necessarily encourage teachers to see their students' unique idiosyncrasies and complex, intersectional identities and often essentializes culture. My argument is in alignment with educational researchers and philosophers, such as pragmatists and critical theorists, who have argued that to liberate teacher voice and fuse theory and practice, teachers must become researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1998; Zeichner, 1983). I define teacher research as the "systematic, intentional study of one's own professional practice" that provides school communities, researchers, and the teachers themselves, with unique perspectives

on teaching and learning that are constructed through professional expertise (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 5).

The purpose of my study was to explore the development of teacher-researcher identity as a method of improving teacher practice through the braiding of thought and action, as well as intelligence and morality, as described in pragmatist theory and bell hooks's (2010) practical wisdom. I accomplished this by investigating the experience of two teachers who completed an action research course and whether it provided them with a structure to critically reflect upon their practice as educators and improve their in-context pedagogical judgments and decisions. To accomplish this goal, I crafted the following three research questions to guide my investigation:

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?
- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?
- Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

In using the term action research, I am referencing the method of teacher research that could help to bridge the theory-practice divide given its aim of improving “practice through the application of practical judgment and the accumulated personal wisdom of the teacher” (Halbach, 2016; Leitch & Day, 2000, p. 183). In addition, the term critically responsive teaching refers to a pedagogical strategy that uses critical reflection as well as a “sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being” as tools to engage students in a meaningful learning path toward their ZPD (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2003, pp. 11-12).

The theoretical framework of my study was crafted through the intersection of three theories: cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), pragmatism, and critical theory. Cultural-

historical activity theory assisted me in addressing the divide between thought and action due to its fundamental assumption of the unity between consciousness and activity (Kapetlinin, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007). Activity theorists argue that activity and consciousness are mutually supportive, and that consciousness is manifested in practices that are embedded within a social matrix; therefore, it is crucial to analyze activities within the environmental, cultural, and historical context (Fishbein et al., 1990; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). The CHAT framework argues that learning occurs through social practice termed, “legitimate activity,” and that a person’s identity can undergo change through participation in “legitimate activity” (Roth & Lee, 2007). As a result, I sought to investigate teachers who had participated in action research, with the guidance of a professor and graduate level course work, hoping that this activity would be “legitimate” and might result in a shift of their teaching identity.

Since CHAT does not directly address the divide of theory and practice, I utilized pragmatism, an American philosophical tradition made famous by Cornel West (1989), to argue for the professionalization of teachers through inquiry, political judgment, and reform to bridge this divide. Encompassing the theories of CHAT and prophetic pragmatism in a theoretical umbrella is critical theory. I utilized critical theory to “develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation” through the social inquiry and critique between the way things are and the way they should be (Giroux, 1983, p. 8). The intersection of these three theories allowed me to implement a critical lens in the study of the development of the teacher-researcher identity in hopes that this shift in identity supports teachers in being critically responsive to their students and bridging the theory practice divide.

I selected the qualitative methodology of multiple case study to investigate the development of the teacher-researcher identity and the impacts of action research on teachers’

pedagogical practices. The multiple case study methodology allowed me to explore the phenomenon—the relationship between the development of a teacher-research identity and in-context pedagogical decisions—and its context—the activity systems in which participants construct their identity. I utilized purposeful sampling as the method of participant selection in my study. During the fall semester of 2020, I was a graduate teacher assistant for a graduate course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. The central focus of this course was a semester-long action research project conducted by teachers in their classrooms. I selected two participants from this group of students, Rosie Rodriguez and Ally Adams, two English teachers.

All data collected in this study occurred after participants completed their action research course. I collected data from my participants from February through April of 2021. The data included three semi-structured interviews, two virtual observations following the first and second interviews, and documents such as their coursework from their graduate class and their action research project. My interviews were guided by a set of initial questions crafted during my research proposal as well as follow-up questions that addressed events I observed during virtual observations (see Appendices E- I). My observation procedure was guided by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-factor Observation Checklist, which included (a) the physical setting; (b) the participants; (c) activities and interactions; (d) conversation; (e) subtle factors (i.e., symbolic meaning of words, nonverbal communication, what does not happen); and (f) the behavior of the researcher (see Appendix J). The documents I collected included the graduate class's course syllabus, the action research project rubric, assignments on the class's CANVAS portal including their action research project, and participant created activities for their students that occurred during my observations.

After completing data collection, I utilized the application Dedoose to support me in organizing and coding the data. I utilized this analysis to create in-depth descriptions for each of my participants. In Chapter IV, I described who my participants are as teachers and made interpretations to discuss their intentions as teachers. I conducted member checks for each of my participants and both agreed with my descriptions and interpretations of their teaching.

Themes and Responses to Research Questions

In the previous chapter, I provided descriptions of my participants and discussed the intentions of their teaching practice. As outlined by case study methodology, I sought to provide an understanding of my participants that included their “mental atmosphere, the thoughts and feelings, and motivations” (Stake, 1995; von Wright, 1971, p. 6). In this section, I describe the themes that emerged through cross-analysis as categorized by the research question each theme addressed.

Research Questions 1 and 2

- Q1 How do teachers perceive their professional teaching identity after engaging in an action research course?
- Q2 How do teachers who have engaged in an action research course understand and make meaning of its impacts on their professional practice?

In this section, I discuss the teaching identity of my participants after engaging in action research as well as their understanding of the impact that action research had on their teaching practice. Rosie and Ally’s understanding and implementation of action research is connected to whether they identify as a teacher-researcher. In addition, their understanding of pedagogy prior to engaging in action research significantly impacted their ability to correctly conduct action research as coursework for their graduate school class.

Teacher Identity

The use of research, and specifically action research, as a method of developing a teacher-researcher identity depends on how teachers think and feel about research as well as the way in which they engage in the research process. Rosie, the first participant I interviewed and observed, had a positive perception of research following her engagement with action research. As a result, Rosie described effective teaching as going “hand-in-hand with being a teacher-researcher.” Ally described a more negative perception of research and saw herself as being “bad at research.” In addition, Ally misapplied her action research project as a research activity for her students. Consequently, Ally did not mention being a researcher as an important quality for effective teaching. In the following section on conducting action research, I describe the impacts action research had on each of my participants. I conclude this section with an interpretation of how their experience with action research impacted their teaching identity.

Conducting Action Research

Rosie Accepts Pedagogical Responsibility. “The whole reason that I'm going to school is to better my instruction—learn pedagogy.” Rosie’s experience with action research transformed her identity as a teacher into that of a teacher-researcher and changed the way in which she reflected on and implemented her pedagogy. Prior to taking the graduate course and completing her action research project, Rosie viewed pedagogy in terms of “best practices.” When she thought about how she could improve her pedagogy and teaching, she would research the “best instructional ways to do it.” Rosie insightfully acknowledges that she did not completely enter her students “into the equation” when making pedagogical decisions. Before her action research project, Rosie would search for best practices by researching strategies other teachers had used and found successful. Now, Rosie incorporates her students into her decision

making to create student driven instruction that takes their needs and goals into consideration. She asks herself, “How can we like do this as a team?” and states that this desire to shift her pedagogy to be more student centered was “definitely strengthened” after completing her action research project.

Rosie correctly sees action research as a social practice that informs the judgments she makes in the classroom. She applies action research as a cyclical process that includes planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and self-evaluates her practice through critical reflection (Burns, 2010; Şenaydın & Dikilitaş, 2019). Rosie sees action research as something she and her students “go through together.” Rosie is more confident in conducting research now. She sees research as something necessary for teaching, something that teachers already do, but now she has a more formalized method and way of thinking about getting feedback. Rosie asserts that research feels important to her and is a cyclical process that requires personalization and must go beyond quantitative data. Rosie uses action research as a way to “get a general sense of, um, your students and how they're responding, and knowing how to, um, knowing how to respond effectively to your students in that way.” This description of action research as a way to address the needs of students connects to Rosie’s implementation of critically responsive practices, which I will further elaborate upon in the themes addressing my third research question.

Ally Rejects Pedagogical Responsibility. Ally’s negative perception of herself as a researcher and her misapplication of her action research project contributed to her understanding of the impact action research had on her professional practice. Prior to taking her graduate course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, Ally had taken one other research course in her English MAT program. She recalls having no idea what she was doing during that course and left the class with little “information on like how to do research and how to do it as a

master's student.” After completing the action research project with her class, Ally still felt like she was not good at research; however, she did see research as something important for students to conduct to heighten engagement and support them in pursuing activism. Ally implemented action research as an activity for her students to do instead of a social practice to improve her teaching through critical self-evaluation. Ally’s perception of action research as an activity for students. is best captured by the following statement: “I think by the way that the action research was like less about like the topics and like things I learned and more about, like them [students] kind of like going out on their own and doing their research.” Ally’s uncertainty regarding what she “gained or gathered” from the action research experience may be due to misunderstanding of the purpose of action research and her implementation of action research as an activity for her students.

Ally’s rejection of pedagogical responsibility is connected to her misapplication of action research as a research project for her students as well as her understanding of the impact action research had on her teaching. Ally relies on her lesson plans, text selection, and the activities she creates to address the needs of her students. Ally critically reflects on the content she teaches, which led her to include diverse texts; however, she does not critically self-reflect or evaluate her own teaching. Ally commented that her experience with action research did not “change [her] perception as a teacher” and that she was already a self-reflective person. However, Ally’s example of self-reflection is not consistent with the critical self-evaluation required of teachers implementing action research. The example of the self-reflection Ally gave was “Oh, my lesson could have gone better if my students were talking more.” Ally’s example of self-reflection indicates that she reflects on students’ participation but not her own teaching. Ally places her focus on creating engaging, rigorous lessons and then observes whether students were engaged.

Ally's creation of this engaging curriculum occurs independently of who her students are and what they need. Ally's self-proclaimed knowledge of what kids connect with comes from research she does on young adult books, not observations and reflections of her students.

Ally's rejection of pedagogical responsibility and focus on the curricular aspect of pedagogy is further demonstrated in her appreciation of the opportunity her action research provided in allowing her to take the lead in creating content for her students. When asked if action research changed her teaching, Ally discussed how Nieto's text confirmed for her the perspective that all students need to be challenged and be "critical" thinkers but that "nothing has changed" in her teaching practice. I will further explain Ally's perspectives on and uses of critical reflection in the response to my third research question.

Teaching Identity Continued

Prior to conducting action research through their graduate course, both Rosie and Ally viewed research more negatively and as something that required quantitative data collection. Now both teachers have a more positive perception of research, specifically action research, although it did not equally impact their teaching practice and teacher identity. Cultural-historical activity theory argues that the activity we participate in through social practices impacts our identity construction due to the connection between activity and consciousness (Fishbein et al., 1990; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Rosie and Ally's experience with the social practice of action research significantly contributed to their thoughts and feeling about themselves as researchers.

Rosie describes herself as a "teacher who's flexible and changing," who is "prepared to change," and delivers instruction differently based on the needs of her students. Rosie is a self-identified teacher-researcher. Ally describes her role as a teacher as someone who teaches about

equity and diversity. Action research did not change Ally's teaching identity as she views action research as an activity for her students to do, not something for her to use to reflect on her pedagogy and teaching practice.

The impact action research had on the teaching practice of the participants connects with their perspectives and understanding of pedagogy. Rosie takes pedagogical responsibility by critically reflecting on her actions and decisions as a teacher. As a result, action research greatly impacted Rosie's teaching practice by increasing her responsiveness and changing her identity to that of a teacher-researcher. Ally rejects pedagogical responsibility and focuses exclusively on the curricular aspects of pedagogy which is highlighted in her focus on diverse texts, creating engaging and rigorous content, and cultivating independent thinking. Ally's rejection of pedagogical responsibility is connected to her misapplication of action research as an activity for her students, not as a social practice to improve her teaching. Consequently, Ally seemed uncertain of how her experience with action research impacted her teaching practice and stated it did not change her identity as a teacher. In the implications section, I discuss why teacher educators need to be concerned with teacher's understanding and implementation of pedagogy as it may impact their understanding and implementation of action research and therefore the impact that action research is able to have on their teaching practice.

Research Question 3

Q3 To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research course?

In this section, I address the extent to which critically responsive teaching practices appeared in Rosie and Ally's pedagogical approaches. The components of critically responsive teaching are addressed in the following themes: the political nature of education, humanizing

teaching, and critical responsiveness to students versus critical responsiveness to the times. Both Rosie and Ally demonstrate aspects of critically responsive teaching in their pedagogical approaches; however, only Rosie demonstrates a responsiveness to her students' unique needs and identities.

Education Is Political

Given the emphasis activity theory places on the connection between action and consciousness, it is important to consider the participants' choices to take part in the graduate course on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students (Kapetlinin, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007). The graduate course about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students has a strong social justice focus. The type of teacher and person who would make the decision to participate in such a course would most likely be one that values social justice in their life and in education. This was true for both Rosie and Ally, as social justice played a key role in their leadership as teachers as well as their action research project topics. The pursuit of social justice and the use of a critical lens is inherently political. In this section, I discuss how education as a political action is a central component of my participants' pedagogical perspectives.

Personal Politics. Like myself, both Rosie and Ally identify themselves as politically progressive. During our interviews, we discussed the challenges we have faced in teaching in a conservative environment as individuals with progressive values. Rosie mentioned the difficulty she experiences in approaching controversial subjects in her classroom in the following statement:

I had so many students talk about, um, gender, class, and race and, um, I really, I kind of had like a difficult time knowing how to approach these subjects, um, being in this school. Um, so I, there was definitely things that I like had to skirt around sometimes, or

just usually use wording, um, that was a little bit more neutral in some sense, um, as, as much as I could get without like being fired pretty much, but still like having my ideas and opinions be known. So, um, yeah, that was really, um, that was really difficult. All of that understanding what they were going through and then teaching and using, um, real life, well using current events and using them because they are meaningful and we are living in a time where, um, all of those, um, intersect and there's clear issues going on... So that's been really difficult this year actually as a teacher in my specific school. So, like, I mean, I know the kids know how I feel and there's probably some parents that are not that happy with me, but oh, well.

Here it is apparent that it is important to Rosie that she shares her political perspectives with her students given current events and her students' reactions to those events. Rosie is determined to do this even though a conservative White majority runs the school she teaches at and some of the parents at the school are not happy with her sharing her perspectives.

Ally feels that “teaching is kind of political” and that she “need[s] to teach about different perspectives and point of views as well. So that kids don't grow up thinking like, ‘Oh, mine's the only perspective that matters.’” Ally believes that we are experiencing the third wave of civil rights activism and that it is her duty to talk to students about events such as the January 6th capitol insurrection, the murder of George Floyd, and the hate towards Asian Americans due to the spread of COVID-19. Ally wants her students to know that these events will be in future history textbooks, that they are living through history and must talk about it. Like Rosie, Ally acknowledged that parents complain to her principal that she talks about racism in her class; however, this does not deter Ally from having these conversations with her students.

Schools and Students Perpetuating Supremacy. Due to the conservative environment in which Ally and Rosie teach, the idea of students, parents, and schools as perpetuating White supremacy became a theme in our discussions. Ally’s school is one of mostly middle-class White students and White teachers. Rosie’s school has a diverse student population, with the majority of the students speaking English as a second language. Although Rosie has a diverse student population, the teachers and leaders of the school are mostly White. Despite the differences in teaching environments, both Ally and Rosie discuss facing challenges with White supremacy.

Ally has been advocating for the use of diverse texts in her school’s English curriculum and has even started an anti-racism book club with a couple of teachers and students. Students have asked to leave Ally’s class due to her book selection that includes many Black authors. Without consulting her, the administrators at Ally’s school allow this to occur, providing an “out” for students and parents who do not want to learn about Black perspectives. Ally expresses frustration with the administrators’ decision and wishes they would include her in their decision making about allowing students to leave her class due to the diverse curriculum. In addition, students that remain in Ally’s English class often complain about her book selection. Here she discusses the complaints students made to the book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe:

Kids who were like complaining that, that they like couldn't pronounce the names in there and that it was really hard and all of these things I'm like, and I don't blame them like individually as students, I blame our school system. But like how, like, just because it's a different culture, doesn't mean you don't have the ability to learn and like learn how to say those names . . . Like we're going to create a character maps so that you understand who was who, and what's places versus who are people. And I, we like said the names out loud. Like we did all of these things and like, they were still complaining about it. I'm

like, look, sometimes when we learn about different cultures, like, okay, you can't say their names correctly, you know, it's like the accents, like whatever, like, like the linguistics part of it. Like, I can't say like, I am horrible at accents. Like I've always been horrible, like learning them because I sound like an idiot. Um, but you know, it's like, it's okay. Like I'm shy. I messed them up before, but it doesn't mean that I don't try to do it, you know? And I feel like that's the same with like everything.

In addition to direct complaints from students, Ally has received “nasty emails” from parents about content in her class such as the viewing of the *13th*, a documentary about the history of slavery and the criminal justice system, and an article about the purpose of blackface. Again, despite the backlash she faces in regard to her chosen content, Ally perseveres and plans to continue to teach diverse perspectives in her classroom.

Like Ally, Rosie noted that she struggled with some of the perspectives her students expressed in her classroom. Rosie describes her students in her multimedia writing class during the fall of 2020 as “open-minded.” She stated that she is grateful that she was able to conduct her action research project with the students during this fall semester because the students during the spring semester of that class were “the opposite” of open-minded. Even though Rosie described these students as open-minded, she found it challenging to engage students in conversations “where they're respectful to other people.” Rosie elaborates on this challenge in the following statement:

And I know that they're just imitating things, what they hear from their parents. Um, and I keep reminding them when like you've got to think for yourself it's, and I try to like slip it in. I'm like, are we thinking a certain way because our friends or family think that way and really just trying to, um, unpack and dissect what we think without it coming out,

like, your parents are racist. So, it, it's like so tricky. Um, and I feel like, like it shouldn't be because there's just basic things that are, that should just be accepted and not at all, like just not at all controversial, yet they are. And yeah, it's made teaching, um, difficult and instruction a lot more difficult.

Rosie also faces challenges with White supremacy from her administrators and colleagues. Towards the end of our third interview, Rosie discussed a future action research project she would want to conduct based on what she perceived as an unjust decision to track students. Rosie expressed distress that the EL support teacher and principal intended to separate all the emergent bilingual students into their own English class. Rosie described trends in the segregation of the Latino population due to language differences, and she argued that instead, teachers should be required to teach sheltered instruction for those students so they would not be segregated. Rosie's concerns are valid as this "racialization of language can push minoritized populations to the lowest and most peripheral points" of society (Rosa, 2019, p. 126). Rosie expressed frustration that she, an English teacher with experience and educational knowledge in addressing the needs of students learning English as a second language, was not consulted in the decision-making process.

Given their struggle with White supremacy at their schools, both Ally and Rosie selected their action research topic with social justice in mind. Ally wanted her mostly White students to investigate a cause they could advocate for to shift some of their perspectives. Ally was disappointed to find that many of her students selected topics that did not address multicultural perspectives and often addressed injustices that occur outside the United States, despite the project title "A More Perfect Union." Rosie hoped that by allowing students to discuss and act upon the injustices they see in their own school environment, she could support her students of

color and students who speak English as a second language in having a voice in their community. Rosie was pleased to see that most of her students took this task seriously, and she learned more about who her students were which impacted her pedagogical decisions.

Social Progress Through Education. As a pragmatist, I believe that education, like pragmatism, should be used as an “instrument for social progress” and reform that should be used to improve democratic life and individual self-development (Glaude, 2007, p. 6). In discussions with Rosie and Ally, I came to understand that they shared this perspective. Both of my participants saw their teaching as a way for them to create positive change in society.

Rosie expressed this belief in promoting change as one of the goals for her action research project in the following statement: “While I did want my students to feel heard by me, each other, and our school, it was critical that they understood that our intention was to see tangible change come about through time spent cultivating a plan and effectively communicating that plan.” Rosie connects student voice and student led teaching as a method to promote social progress in her students’ school environment.

In coming to terms with her limits as a teacher, Ally declared, “I can’t do a lot, but I can at least teach my kids to be good humans and not be racist jerks.” Ally went on to argue,

We live in a democracy, and like, we need, like, [schools are] kind of like, it's like a smaller, like little community, but like, I feel like this is how they learn to be like democratic citizens is like through the education system. And I feel like if we're trying to teach them, like, like, okay, here's what's going on. But I feel like a lot of times like America, or Americans in general; they get so caught up on like, I want to argue my point. I want to, you know, make my point come across. But it's like, it only does so

much good unless you're like going out and like advocating for people and like doing something about it.

It is clear Ally believes education is one of the tools in creating democratic citizens, and she sees advocacy and activism among students as a crucial factor in bringing about positive social change.

Humanizing Teaching: Care and Connections

The process of humanizing the teaching and learning experience is a component of critically responsive teaching. Not only does responsiveness require reflective logic, but it also requires a “sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being” (Sherman, 2003, p. 11-12). Building relationships is one component of humanizing teaching through responsiveness (Dozier & Rutten, 2005). Both participants in this research study expressed a desire to humanize their teaching experience. Care was a central theme in Rosie’s teaching, and her care for students was a determining force in her decision to become a teacher. Ally described creating connections to students as an important quality for an effective teacher, which she believes she possesses. In this section, I provide direct commentary from Rosie and Ally that demonstrates their feelings and beliefs regarding care and connection.

In deciding to become a teacher, Rosie reflected, “So I was just thinking, I would like to be an adult who was, you know, had a relationship and made a kid happy to come to school.” Rosie revealed feelings of empathy for students who felt overlooked or treated unfairly, especially given her history in a school run by a fundamentalist Baptist religious group. Rosie creates a caring environment for her students through the connection she establishes, the effort she makes to get to know them, and her warm, gently, welcoming presence. I argue that Rosie cultivates Noddings’ (2005) caring relations because Rosie’s care is received by the cared-for,

her students. Rosie's classroom is a safe harbor for her students as they feel comfortable sharing their personal struggles with her. After talking with a Black female student who shared with her about her unjust experiences being dress coded, Rosie was incredibly upset and disclosed that she hoped she was doing enough for her:

I love her so much, and it was just really upsetting it's yeah, ...I know I'm listening, I'm listening to her, and I'm sharing with her my own experience and then telling her like it. But yeah, I'm just like, um, I wanted to be doing enough, but I know that I'm in a situation where I can't do tons but be that support for her.

Ally argues that an effective teacher is a teacher that takes the social and emotional needs of their students into consideration and seeks to establish a connection with their students. After students arrived on campus for the first time, halfway through the school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ally shared that she felt like she did not really know her students. As a result, she found herself spending time getting to know them:

I think that you know, minus this year, like I generally connect with my students—I know this about myself. Like I will always be like talking about like, oh, how was this? And I'll like, talk about like, what's going on in their personal life. And I'm like, okay, you got to get back to work now. And they're like, I will distract them. And I'm like, I'm sorry, I'll have to apologize to like to my teaching partners. And I'm like, I am sorry. I totally got them off task. Um, but I feel like those are also important, like small moments in teaching, but like, like they help with those relationships, just like taking two minutes out of your, your time and asking them questions about themselves.

Ally believes that her students appreciate the extra time she takes to make connections with them. She recalled a specific student who thanked her for noticing that she was having a hard day

when no one else seemed to notice. Rosie and Ally approach care and connection differently; however, both teachers see care and connection as key components of their teaching.

Critical Responsiveness: Bridging Thought and Action

In this study, I define critically responsive teaching as a pedagogical strategy that uses critical reflection as well as a “sympathetic, human, ethical response to another human being” as tools to engage students in a meaningful learning path toward their ZPD (Dozier & Rutten, 2005; Sherman, 2003, pp. 11-12). This term is a combination of Sherman’s (2003) definition of responsive teaching and my own inclusion of the critical reflection bell hooks (2010) terms practical wisdom. Rosie and Ally share many of the characteristics of critically responsive professional teachers:

1. They both see teaching as a moral practice and understand the responsibility they have as teachers, given the impacts education has on students and the future of humanity.
2. Both see teachers as professionals who should be guiding and determining the education of students, which is seen in their use of teacher voice to lead and advocate for causes in their educational communities.

However, Rosie and Ally differ in the following ways:

1. Rosie sees critical reflection as a tool she uses to inform her pedagogical decisions and a tool students use to reflect on and advocate for change in their environment. In contrast, Ally uses critical reflection as a tool for students to advocate for change, and a tool for literary criticism—not a tool for self-evaluation.
2. Although Rosie and Ally both combine thought and action in their teaching, they differ in what they are responsive to. Ally collects knowledge from “best practices,”

her experiences and values, and from the political world. Rosie collects knowledge from these sources as well; however, she includes an important factor that Ally does not, who her students are as individuals.

In the following sections, I provide explanations and evidence that support my claim that Rosie is responsive to her students and Ally is responsive to the times. Rosie and Ally's perspectives on pedagogy contribute to the ways in which they reflect on their teaching and make decisions.

Critically Responding to Students. When asked how she would describe the relationship between her teaching and her research, Rosie responded that she makes decisions based on “what worked and what didn't work.” Rosie accomplishes this by trying to understand if students understood the material and if “they found meaning in it or they didn't.” She reported that she is constantly tweaking and changing her instruction to find a better way to help her students. Here Rosie discusses how her school makes decisions:

My school's very—well, they say data-driven, but I think the only data that they're thinking of is like from the test. So, I, I look at that for sure, but yeah. Looking at their projects and their writing and saying, are they getting what we're doing? Um, and then trying to reteach or help in whatever way that I can see, like fill that gap that might be present or not. So, yeah, you definitely using that as a tool.

Rosie disagrees with using test scores as *the* tool to learn about students and how to serve them better. Rosie collects data on her students to better understand how they learn and who they are. Rosie collects feedback directly from her students; she observes their participation and their ability to communicate effectively in her classroom. Rosie tries to determine if her students feel happy and safe and whether or not they believe they are getting something out of their learning

experience in her classroom. Rosie comments that “a lot of the times they [her students] do have really good like criticisms that [she] didn't think about. And then [she] get[s] to change that and see them happy when [she's] implemented that change.” Rosie describes herself as being “receptive of what they're feeling and thinking.” In Rosie's action research presentation, she states:

Considering how well students performed, especially my CLD students, I will continue to employ Critical Pedagogy in my teaching and continue to connect content to their interests, cultures, languages, and overall life in the hopes that they will be able to see school as not an obstacle in their lives but purposeful to it.

In this statement, Rosie discusses how she intends to use Critical Pedagogy to inform her teaching practice. This perception correlates to Rosie's views on critical reflection and action research. Rosie sees critical reflection as a tool students use to learn about their world and a tool she uses to learn about her students and inform her pedagogy. In reflecting on her action research project, Rosie said that she felt that students used critical reflection as they began to see how race, gender, and class were intertwined and that they were important and significant in understanding and seeing themselves. In turn, Rosie used critical reflection to observe her students and how they interact with each other. Here, Rosie describes an observation she made about the gender make up of a specific class that she identifies as an example of using critical reflection:

I taught, like one class, um, was almost all female. Um, and this was the only class that was ever like that. And I saw that they, um, that was like a big topic that we talk about like almost all the time was what, like, um, being a woman being female and what that meant and how that, how there was a lot of, um, stigmas related to different areas. And,

um, it went really well; all of my students were very different, but they all had this, uh, perspective to share on that. And then, um, yeah, it was, it was really interesting. I don't know if I, if I told you that I had a class that was mostly female and how that impacted, um, kind of like the community. Um, once we got back to, um, full time, sixth grade, I had like three boys in that class, and these boys were like the sweetest softest boys. So, they really didn't like change the dynamic all that much because they have like this very like soft and feminine, um, way about them, but yeah, and then I also had, um, I had so many students talk about, um, gender class and race and, um, I really, I kind of had like a difficult time knowing how to approach these subjects, um, being in this school.

From this observation, we can see that Rosie observes and critically responds to the needs of her students based on who they are and how they interact as a community.

Rosie's acceptance of pedagogical responsibility and her positive perception of research allowed her to correctly implement action research and increase her responsiveness to her students through self-evaluation. Rosie is a self-identified teacher-researcher who sees research as a cyclical process that teachers personalize to learn more about their students. Although Rosie was already responsive to her students before conducting her action research project, she reflected that she now enters her students into "the equation" more when she is making decisions about her teaching.

Responding to the Times. Ally implemented her action research project as a research activity for her students to complete instead of a tool to improve her teaching practice. In addition, Ally views critical reflection as a tool her students use to engage in independent thinking that is driven by analysis and learning about and advocating for social justice issues.

When asked to critically reflect on the findings of her study, Ally discussed how her students use critical theory as a form of literary analysis. Ally elaborates on this in the following comment:

Yeah. I, um, I feel like, I mean, that's kind of all I ever do in my class. I feel like it does reflect on race, gender, and class. Like in Hamlet, we're talking about like, not only the class issues that are happening in Hamlet but also like the gender. And like my kids are noticing that like, um, like the two main [female] characters are like not being treated equally. And so, they're like actually like using the feminist lens, to like reflect on that. Um, and then also I think there's one that's like social and political, which is kind of talking about like the different classes, um, in this society that was like going on during Shakespeare's time. Um, they're not really able to with race because, you know, there's only white people [students] in here.

In this comment, we can see that Ally perceives critical reflection as a tool for students to use, not as a lens for her to self-evaluate her practice and make pedagogical decisions. Ally went on to say: “I don't think I necessarily like found anything critical with this study. Um, particularly because it's more about, like, how do we advocate for different groups of people.”

This closing statement about critical reflection indicates that Ally struggles to understand how to use critical reflection as a pedagogical strategy for reflection and growth as a teacher. It also correlates to her misapplication of action research as an activity for her students which is reflected in her statement: “Action research was like less about like the topics and like things I learned and more about, like them kind of like going out on their own and doing their research.”

Ally's teaching is driven by implementing diverse curriculum that reflects our current political and social landscape. When asked to describe the most rewarding part of her action research study, Ally reflected that the experience gave her hope for the future, that seeing her

students wanting to advocate for causes gave her hope that she could make the world a better place. Ally's central focus of advocacy and leadership is changing the English curriculum at her school to include more diverse texts and diverse perspectives. She believes that it is important for her White students to learn diverse perspectives and that it is her role as a White teacher to fight for diverse curriculum. This perspective on changing curriculum to promote social justice aligns with advocates of culturally responsive teaching who focus on changing curriculum to be culturally and historically responsive (Muhammad, 2020). Ally heavily relies on her selection of diverse texts to do the work of social justice for her.

While Ally uses a basic level of critical reflection in recognizing that the race of her students impacts what they should be learning, she does not focus on the diversity among her White student population. For example, Ally mentioned being disappointed that many of her students did not choose topics about the United States or about social justice in their "A More Perfect Union" action research project. Clearly, this implies that there were some students who were more inclined to care about issues of social justice than others, and yet, Ally did not address or talk about these students. She was not responsive to these differences among her population of White students in that she did not change her teaching to address these different perspectives and beliefs.

Ally has expressed that she hopes to teach in a more diverse environment to a racially diverse population of students and among teachers that share her views on curriculum and politics. It is apparent that Ally seeks to improve democracy, support students of color, and inform White students through her advocacy of diverse curriculum. I believe that in order for Ally to be responsive to the needs of students of color, it is important for her to recognize that critical reflection is a component of pedagogy, not just skill for students to use in literary

criticism, and that it is an essential tool in seeing students of color as individuals and not as a broad monolithic community.

My first and second research questions regarding the extent to which my participants developed a teacher-researcher identity and the impact action research had on their teaching were addressed simultaneously. The extent to which a teacher-researcher identity was developed had a direct impact on the participants' perceptions of action research. Rosie's identity as a teacher-researcher correlated with her belief that action research impacted her pedagogical decisions. Rosie's experience with conducting action research led her to be more responsive to the identities and needs of students in her classroom and rely less on "best practices." Ally did not self-identify as a teacher-researcher following her experience with action research. Consequently, Ally indicated that her teaching practice was not impacted by action research. In addition to the connection between participants' teaching identities and their perception of action research, there was connection between the participants' perspectives on pedagogy and their implementation of action research. Rosie accepts pedagogical responsibility and utilizes the tools of critical self-evaluation, therefore she correctly implemented action research and utilized it to improve her pedagogical decision making. Ally rejects pedagogical responsibility and relies on her text selection and the activities she creates for students to address their needs. In Ally's classroom, critical reflection is a tool students use in literary criticism, not a tool used by Ally to self-evaluate her own teaching. As a result, Ally was not able to correctly implement action research; instead of using action research as a tool to learn about her teaching and her students, she used her action research topic as a research activity for her students to engage in.

My third research question, "To what extent do critically responsive teaching practices appear in the pedagogical approaches of teachers who have engaged in an action research

course?” was the heart of my study as most of the data I collected centered around this question. Both participants understand the political nature of education, a key understanding for engagement in critically responsive teaching practices. This knowledge occurred independently of their engagement in action research as evidenced by Ally’s decision to enroll in the graduate course and Rosie’s decision to add an entire Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Endorsement to her master’s degree. Rosie and Ally implemented aspects of humanizing teaching into their teaching practice, another key component of critically responsive teaching. Rosie cultivated Noddings’s (2005) caring relationships with her students—relationships in which her students, the cared-for, accepted her care. Ally took time to make personal connections with her students given the lack of in-person teaching that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Rosie and Ally differ significantly in who or what they are critically responsive to. Rosie is critically responsive to her students which connects to her acceptance of pedagogical responsibility. Rosie uses a lens of critical reflection to make in-context decisions about her teaching that are dependent on who her students are and what they need. Ally is critically responsive to the times which is seen in her desire to create an anti-racist book club amongst her staff and use diverse texts in her classroom. Ally’s lack of responsiveness to her students connects to her rejection of pedagogical responsibility as she relies on her text selection and classroom activities to do the work of addressing students’ needs and issues of social justice.

Implications

Teacher Education

I argue that action research should be taught in teacher education programs in order to support teachers in navigating their teacher-researcher identity in community. It is clear from the feedback of my participants that the structure and content of the graduate course and its action

research project proved helpful and supportive to the participants as they implemented an action research study for the first time. This perspective is supported by researchers who study teacher identity who argue that due to the complexity of identity construction within intersecting activity systems, action research can be “destabilizing, leading to an unpredictable shift in identity as teachers encounter research, often for the first time” (Banegas & Cad, 2019, p. 25). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to begin constructing their identity as a researcher in teacher education programs with the encouragement of their professors and classmates as well as the support of the course structure and course texts.

My participants’ divergent experiences in forming a teacher-researcher identity are suggestive of the importance of community regarding the successful application of action research for the desired identity development. Rosie’s journey demonstrates that it is possible for teachers to become teacher-researchers within supportive teacher education experiences that promote a supportive research community and provide content that guides teachers in conducting action research. Rosie’s development of a teacher-researcher identity demonstrates the shift in identity due to the connection between activity and consciousness as argued by cultural-historical activity theorists (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). Ally’s negative self-perception as a researcher and her struggle to critically reflect on her teaching demonstrates that a teacher’s identity as a researcher may impact their ability to accept pedagogical responsibility therefore impacting their understanding and implementation of action research as well as the impact action research is able to have on their teaching practice. Action research is meant to be a practice through which teachers critically reflect on and improve their teaching therefore, conversations about pedagogy must occur alongside the implementation of action research to support teachers in correctly conducting action research. Pedagogy *is* research.

My study illuminates the complexity of utilizing action research in teacher education programs as a method to cultivate teacher-researcher identities and ultimately support teachers in taking pedagogical responsibility through critical responsiveness. The emergence of a teacher-researcher identity is directly connected to the acceptance of pedagogical responsibility. When a teacher takes ownership of research and truly integrates it into their practice, it transforms their identity, turning them into a teacher-researcher. This ownership leads to an acceptance of pedagogical responsibility, an acceptance of their duty as a teacher to critically respond to the needs of their students and to critically self-evaluate their own pedagogy as a social practice for improving their teaching. Participation in action research is a method to support teachers in developing a teacher-researcher identity though it does not guarantee this outcome, as seen in the case of Ally. As argued by activity theorists, identity transforms when one participates in “legitimate activity” or a social practice (Roth & Lee, 2007). Action research is a social practice that has an objective and a process; however, action research does not necessarily implicate teachers in having responsibility. The personal ownership of research that comes with the development of a teacher-researcher identity directly implicates teachers in being personally responsible for their pedagogical decisions. For teachers who do not take on a teacher-researcher identity, action research may just be an activity they do in a course or the professional learning community at the school they teach at. This study demonstrates that action research is not just another box to check on the path towards becoming a “good teacher.” The possibility of developing a teacher-researcher identity and the cultivation of pedagogical responsibility that action research provides addresses a gap in our educational community. There is a gap between the agency teachers feel they have, given the external pressures of neoliberal policies, and the massive responsibility that is placed on them to help students learn and be successful. The

development of a teacher-researcher identity-- developed through the social practice of action research-- can support teachers in navigating this political educational landscape by supporting them in accepting pedagogical responsibility.

Cultivating Pedagogical Responsibility for Social Justice

Throughout my study, it was evident that Rosie and Ally envisioned themselves as professional teachers. Both participants value growth and learning, and independently seek out professional development and research to better themselves as teachers. In addition, Rosie and Ally seek leadership opportunities in their work environment and are advocates for social justice issues and causes they believe in. Although both participants see themselves as professional teachers, only one participant, Rosie, accepts pedagogical responsibility. Rosie magnifies her voice as a teacher by accepting pedagogical responsibility through critical responsiveness. Rosie's acceptance of pedagogical responsibility allows her to positively contribute to social justice through her use of teacher voice and the humanizing pedagogical practice of critical responsiveness.

Although Ally also seeks to support and advocate for social justice through her teaching, her rejection of pedagogical responsibility limits her ability to do so. Ally's reliance on the curriculum aspect of pedagogy such as lesson planning and text selection to do the work of social justice is inadequate. While diversification of texts is crucial in promoting the realities and histories of people of color, this is a small step toward social justice. Text diversification, like culturally responsive teaching, does not require teachers to change how they teach, nor does it require them to critically self-examine their own perceptions about students, educational institutions, and learning communities. Changes to curriculum do not personally implicate teachers in accepting the responsibility of personal change through critical reflection that is truly

necessary for social justice. Given Ally's goal to promote diversity and equity, her strong belief in advocacy for marginalized communities, and her desire to take responsibility for her whiteness, it is clear she seeks to be an ally. Ally's rejection of pedagogical responsibility prevents her from critically reflecting on her teaching practice and responding to her students as complex individuals even though she has good intentions in wanting her teaching to support social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter. It is essential for educational research communities to support teachers like Ally in accepting pedagogical responsibility, so they can use their teaching voice to advocate for the social justice causes they care about.

Future Research

This study illuminates connections between research and pedagogy as well as teachers' experience with research and their perception as a teacher-researcher. This study demonstrated how teachers' teacher-researcher identity is connected to their feelings about research as well as their perceptions of their research community. This study also revealed how a rejection of pedagogical responsibility might prevent some teachers from being responsive to their students as individuals and from critically reflecting on their teaching practice and research. This rejection of pedagogical responsibility is also connected to teachers' ability to correctly implement action research due to the overlapping goals and purpose of action research and critical responsiveness. And finally, we followed the journey of a teacher who grew to have a positive perception of research, is becoming a teacher-researcher through the implementation of action research in community and became more critically responsive to the needs of her students.

Future researchers might investigate teachers' perceptions of pedagogy and their ability to critically reflect on themselves as well as the content they select and their students. Further exploration into the teacher research communities formed during action research courses could

provide teacher educators with information on how to support teachers as researchers in community and as independent researchers and may provide insight into their critical reflection of research earlier in the course. Additionally, a theoretical lens of care could provide an interesting method of discussing pedagogical responsibility and the use of critical responsiveness. And finally, to bring teacher voice to the forefront, it would be interesting to work with teachers in community and collaboration to understand how we, as researchers and teacher educators, can better guide and support them to bridge the theory practice divide.

Humanizing Research

The personal is political (K.-Y. Taylor, 2017, p. 9).

Teaching is kind of political (Ally Adams, participant).

Research does not occur in isolation. My own independently conducted dissertation research was crafted within intersecting activity systems that included: my doctoral program, my doctoral cohort, my dissertation committee, the school I teach at, my personal experiences and history with school and with research, etc. In this section, I argue three key methods in which I humanize my dissertation research study and advocate for a more humanistic perspective of research moving forward.

1. Being a researcher in community.
2. Being critically responsive to participants.
3. Acknowledging the participant-researcher connection and collaboration.

Being a Researcher in Community

Research can be competitive, stressful, and exclusionary in one's pursuit of transformative knowledge and ideas. In moving to a decolonized, humanizing vision of research, I believe it is important to think of "researchers moving beyond doing work for a purpose or for

people to researchers doing work with and alongside others.” (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p. 24). This perception of a research community is reflected in Vygotsky’s (1978) assertions regarding human activity, specifically that “humans act collectively” and that “community is central to the process of making and interpreting meaning— and thus to all forms of learning, communicating, and acting.” As a doctoral candidate conducting my dissertation, I found my community in my doctoral cohort. My cohort’s GroupMe text chat kept me sane and provided consistent support for my emotions about research and resources for conducting research. I have received and given constructive feedback within my cohort community in the forms of written and verbal feedback as well as mock dissertation defenses.

Engaging with research in community was discussed by both participants of my study. Rosie and Ally commented that it was important for them to see the ideas and presentations of the other teachers in their graduate course for them to better understand how to do their own project. Ally elaborated on her perspective on researching and learning in community with the comment, “I feel like I'm a person that like needs to talk to people to like, make sure like my ideas — they're like good, they're on track. Like, what am I doing? Um, so I think the community part is important for me, but also, it's just so hard when you're like fully in an online programs. Like, to feel like you have a sense of community with the people that are in there.” Perhaps, if Ally had felt a better sense of community in her graduate course, even though the course was online, she might have held more positive perceptions about research and herself as a researcher.

Being Critically Responsive to Participants

In Paris and Winn’s (2014) edited text of *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, I read a conversation between two researchers:

A participant in my pilot research told me that he looked up to me and thought of me as an advocate, as someone who pushed him to do better. I wonder what I had done up to that point to become that person to him. “Perhaps you listened,” Valerie said. A silence falls between us, filled by reflections on a simple statement. ...I have often thought about the power of listening. Often what we want as human beings is to have someone hear our stories, connect with us, pay attention to us. I wonder if by listening to his stories and asking follow-up questions that further the conversation, I had become something more than just a researcher. ...Simply offering verbal and nonverbal cues...and nodding your head give me confidence to continue my train of thought because you are listening. You are showing me that you are connecting with me. We need others to reflect back onto us who we are. (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, pp. 23-24)

This passage on active listening best describes the moments I shared with Rosie when she described her experiences growing up in a fundamentalist Baptist congregation. I was honored that she trusted me with her story, and I hope she felt that I was truly listening.

After reading this statement on active listening, I felt a shift occur in how I perceived and wanted to conduct my interactions with participants. Beyond acknowledging them as people, I had to be responsive to who they are as individuals. I tried to empathize with them, teachers who had never been a part of a research study and knew that if I expected them to share themselves with me, I would have to share myself with them. After a few email exchanges with Rosie, I knew she was extremely nervous about our first interview, so I decided to send her the interview questions in advance to calm her nerves. She expressed her appreciation. Although Ally did not seem nervous about the research study, I also sent her the first research questions in advance since I had done so with Rosie. Throughout our time together, Ally responded best to genuine

bonding over shared interests, so I took the time to allow conversations that drifted from our research questions. Ally and I made an immediate connection talking about her Bernie meme sweatshirt and shared a love of books and buying books, a separate addiction. Prior to asking Rosie and Ally about their intersectional identities, I shared mine; a Black-biracial woman, who is non-religious though technically Jewish, and politically progressive. Rosie shared that she appreciated hearing who I am and reflected that this is something she models for students when she asks something of them.

I remained conscious that I had an agenda as a researcher and that I could not talk too in-depth about my study before collecting data. When asked by Rosie and Ally about my study, I provided as much information as I could and then honestly told them I could not share more until after I had completed my data collection and analysis. I will conclude this section with a conversation between Rosie and me during our first interview, after Rosie's discussion of her dislike of quantitative research in education due to its focus on numbers instead of students.

Rosie: Did you have any other questions about anything I said or that you can think of now? I don't know. I, I feel like I kind of go off onto a tangent, and I'm sorry if I do that. Yeah, I'm also really nervous. I'm sorry.

Meagan: No, no. Don't be I figured you would be. That's why I sent you that email earlier. I was like, she's going to be, she's going to be so nervous.

Rosie: I know. I'm just, and I'm just like naturally a nervous person too, so yeah. I'm sorry.

Meagan: Oh no, no. I, what I actually found was you were so thorough in your responses. I didn't have many follow-up questions to be honest because I felt like, you know, things, ideas, or tangents that I might have had you most likely already addressed them. And I don't think of them necessarily as random tangents. I really see them as you making connections. And I feel like that is, that's what I'm really looking for. I'm looking at "What kinds of connections are you making?" and "How do you see yourself and your study and your teaching?" It's all about you. Like, literally, it's all about you; it's called a case study. And so, I'm just interested in what does this one person think and feel and do and believe and how does that affect their teaching and their research and all of those things. So, there is no wrong way to be here, in this kind of study. And just to let you

know, you know, the, the type of research that you do, that you did during your class, is a qualitative study. And that's exactly what I'm doing. I don't have any numbers hiding anywhere. There's no, you're not going to be a number to me in any way.

What I hope is that this conversation demonstrates authentic responsiveness and my genuine desire to comfort Rosie and alleviate her nervousness in participating in my research study.

Acknowledging the Participant- Researcher Connection and Collaboration

In acknowledging that the personal is political and education is political, I acknowledge the relationships I built with my participants as we navigated the politics of our lives and our profession. Ally, Rosie, and I are all politically progressive, and while that does not mean we agree on everything, it did create a sense of an overlapping reality. In addition, I was able to talk to both of my participants about our struggle with the pandemic and teaching during the pandemic. The other ways in which I connected with Rosie and Ally were different as our relationships are based on our shared interests, beliefs, and personal experiences.

Since Ally and I share a love of books, we discussed the authors and books she enjoys extensively. Ally recommended several books to me and mentioned she would be interested in reading any books or texts I suggested for her to read. I promised that after the study, I would be sure to provide her with some recommendations for teaching and for personal enjoyment. In addition to our shared love of books, Ally and I bonded over the struggle to connect to conservative members of our family we do not agree with.

Ally: Like it's like all these things are coming to the surface. Um, now, which, you know, I obviously care about a lot. Um, like I even get in arguments with my dad and my mom about it. And I'm like, I don't know why I keep like picking fights, but I'm like, mom, you're half Mexican. Like you should, you should know where I'm coming from. And she was like, I came here legally, and I'm like, okay. I'm like, I don't get where your perspective comes from, but I guess I don't have to.

Meagan: Yeah, no, those are, those are hard conversations. . . definitely, I got to the point I can't talk to them [some family members] about almost any current event because it's quite contentious. Yeah. That's frustrating. Very frustrating. So, I definitely get that.

Ally: Especially when you're not that way. And you're like, I feel very strongly about these things because that's who I am. And then someone else is like, you don't even care about this.

Rosie and I bonded over teaching and research. I had to be especially careful in my conversations with Rosie to refrain from sharing my perspectives on teaching practice as we share many similar views. Given Rosie's authentic interest in pursuing research and maybe even a doctoral degree, I offered to collaborate with her on a research project after I completed data collection and analysis, and she had completed her member check. As a doctoral student, I have had wonderful research opportunities to work with other students who have more experience in the field as well as professors and have gained immense knowledge and confidence in my research practice from these experiences. I wanted to pass an opportunity to research in community to Rosie, and I was excited she said, "Yes!" and I am looking forward to the way in which our relationship will evolve as we conduct research together.

Closing Reflections

This research study was not the dissertation I imagined for the majority of doctoral studies. As recently as February 2020, my interests centered around aesthetic education, place-conscious education, multimodality, and care theory, all with the lens of critical theory. However, as social tensions surrounding ideas of social justice seemed to reach their peak, I began to realize I wanted to pursue a different kind of dissertation study, in response to the times and in response to the students, the little humans who are caught in the wave. When the crest became a hill in comparison to the movement that was the summer of 2020, I knew I had made the right choice in my new topic. My intention was to investigate a way to support our teachers

to learn to see the reality of their students' lives and beings and to respond to them humanely and responsibly. I believe that action research has the potential to support teachers in developing a teacher-researcher identity and cultivating pedagogical responsibility through engagement with critically responsive practices that meet this goal. I argue that action research should be taught in teacher education programs in order to support teachers in navigating their teacher-researcher identity and accepting pedagogical responsibility in community.

When entering a new wave of civil rights advocacy, everything seems to matter both more and less than it used to. While this study is just one small slice of the research I hope to conduct, I wanted it to speak to those in the movement of education reform who I believe are well intentioned but tend to create checklists that reduce who we are, as people of color, to a trend. I believe my study articulates the blend of thought and action as an essential requirement for humane teaching. In seeking to support teachers in humanizing their teaching and research, I simultaneously sought to humanize my own research and feel pride in the relationships I built with my participants and the work we did in community. I recognize that this study is the braided reality of us, three teachers at various stages in their teaching practice, who hope to make a positive change in education.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi _____,

I hope you enjoyed this graduate course, I know I enjoyed being the teacher assistant and reading the course readings alongside all of you students.

I wanted to reach out to see if you would be interested in being a participant for my dissertation study. I am interested in teachers who engage in action research, such as the project you completed at the end of this class, teachers' perspectives about teaching, and their own teaching identity.

I think you did excellent work in your inquiry and action research project, and I would love to learn more about the decisions you made during this project and how it has impacted you and your teaching.

If you agree to be a participant, here is what I will ask you to do:

- three virtual interviews
- two-three virtual observations of you teaching
- documents about your inquiry and action research project and any curriculum/ lessons plans you developed that are related.
- potentially a short survey (decided not to include)

I will be providing a small gift card as a thank you to my participants.

Participating in my dissertation study could be an opportunity for you to actively participate in research, reflect on your own teaching, and become more involved in the education research community.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me: meagan.brown@unco.edu

Thank you!

Meagan Brown Varona, M.S.
Graduate Teacher Assistant
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: 01/28/2021

Principal Investigator: Meagan Brown

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 01/28/2021

Protocol Number: [2012018432](#)

Protocol Title: Pedagogy is Research: Investigating the Teacher-Researcher Identity & Pedagogy of Teachers Who Have Completed an Action Research Project

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).



- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

University of Northern Colorado

Study Title: Pedagogy is Research: Investigating the Teacher-Researcher Identity & Pedagogy of Teachers Who Have Completed an Action Research Project

Researcher:

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Research Advisor: Derek Gottlieb, Ph.D., Educational Foundations & Curriculum Studies
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Purpose and Background:

This study explores the relationship of teacher-researcher identity development and in-context pedagogical decision making of teachers in an action research course. The purpose of this study is to explore the development of teacher-researcher identity as a method of improving teacher practice through the braiding of thought and action, as well as intelligence and morality, as described in pragmatist theory and bell hook s practical wisdom. The researcher plans to investigate how action research might provide teachers a structure with which to critically reflect upon their practice as educators and improve their in-context pedagogical judgments and decisions.

Data will be collected for analysis using three methods: one-on-one interviews, virtual classroom observations, and gathering of documents. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to develop themes for understanding and evaluating the construction of a teacher-researcher identity and the practice of critically responsive teaching. Interviews will be approximately 50 minutes long. In addition, there will be two 30 minute virtual observations that will take place in the participants' classrooms. The final type of data collection will include the documents that may include, but are not limited to assignments for the action research course, lessons plans, emails to professors, and teacher selected curriculum.

Participants and researchers will mutually agree to a pseudonym before the research study takes place, for all analysis and reporting purposes. Transcripts of interviews will be kept in a locked file in the Research Advisor s office for three years.

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be observed two times in 30 minute increments during classroom instruction.
- You will be asked questions about your teacher identity, research practices, and pedagogical decisions during three 50 minute interviews.
- You will be asked to provide documents of your teaching and action research course work.

(Participant Initials)

Confidentiality: By participating in this study, you have given the researcher permission to release information to the research team. Although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms for the participants. The notes from the observations will be kept in a password protected Google file. In addition, the interview audio recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password protected Google file. Audio recordings will be deleted once transcripts have been written and analyzed. When in use, all original recordings will be kept in a password protected file in the respective researcher's home office. The results of this study may be published in professional literature however, no publication will contain information that will identify you. After transcription, identifying information will be removed. All files related to participant interviews will be kept for three years and then deleted. Any paper documentation will be shredded at the three year mark.

Risks: The foreseeable risks in this study include possible stress as participants are being observed by researchers and audio recorded during interviews. If emotional distress occurs, the UNC Counseling Center may be contacted for free counseling services. Contact information is listed below.

UNC Counseling Center
1901 10th Ave., Greeley, CO 80639
970-351-2496

Benefits: The foreseeable benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to discuss and reflect on your own teaching practices and the possibility of forming new perceptions of your own approaches to teaching. By participating in this study, you are helping build a professional teaching database in this area of study.

Costs: The cost of participating in this study is the time invested to participate in the interviews and send documents to the researcher via email. Compensation will include a gift card.

Questions: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by phone or email. You may also contact the research advisor, Dr. Derek Gottlieb, by phone or email.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO; 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____
Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D
RESEARCH SITE PERMISSION LETTER



RESEARCH SITE PERMISSION LETTER for the UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

School Name

Address

_____, 2020

Dear University of Northern Colorado IRB,

Based on our review of the proposed research by Meagan Brown Varona under the supervision of Dr. Derek Gottlieb, Ph.D. I give my permission for the researcher to conduct the study "Pedagogy is Research: Investigating the Teacher-Researcher Identity & Pedagogy of Teachers Who Have Completed an Action Research Project" within _____ School. I authorize the researcher to conduct virtual classroom observations as well as virtual interviews with one faculty member. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I understand that our organization's only responsibility includes providing available personnel for observation and interviewing purposes. A pseudonym will be used when reporting for both the participant and the school site. I reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if circumstances change.

I understand that the research will include two observations and three interviews with one teacher about her/his teacher-researcher identity and pedagogical decision making.

This authorization covers the time period of February 2020 through June 2021.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Site Coordinator/ Principal

Email address

APPENDIX E

**ROSIE AND ALLY'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:
INTERVIEW #1**

Interview Questions: Interview #1

1. Can you describe your social identities and other factors that contribute to your identity? These can include aspects such as your race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.
2. What led you to pursue a career in education?
3. Could you give me a brief description of your professional career?
 - a. Years of experience teaching.
 - b. Subject matter and grade level.
 - c. Types of communities.
4. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? What are your future career goals?
5. Could you give me a brief history of your professional development experiences prior to this action research course?
 - a. Degrees held and areas of study.
 - b. Conferences, professional organization affiliations, and inservice programs.
 - c. Independent reading and research.
6. Would you describe the context of your current teaching position?
 - a. Grade level and subjects taught.
 - b. Description of the community and school.
 - c. Description of the classroom context.
7. What inspired you to pursue a master s degree?
8. How did you feel about conducting research prior to completing your action research project?

APPENDIX F

ROSIE'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: INTERVIEW #2

Rosie's Interview Questions: Interview #2

Follow up questions regarding observation.

1. What was the age group/ grade of students? How many in the class? Class demographics, race, language, and gender?
2. Do you teach this class for more than one period? This grade level?
3. Had you taught that lesson before? This objective? This exact activity and structure of the lesson?
4. What did you consider when designing/ planning this lesson?
5. What do you think went well?
6. What would you do differently next time?

Questions regarding Inquiry and Action Research Project.

7. Could you describe how you came to your research question/topic?
 - a. Had you thought about the question/topic prior to your project?
 - b. To what extent did your course work (class discussions, activities, or required readings) help you to formulate your question?
 - c. To what extent did your experience at your current teaching position help you to formulate your question?
8. Why is this topic important to you?
9. Please describe your action research project.
10. Prior to conducting your research, what did you hope to gain personally and/or professionally?
11. What did you learn from conducting your research study?
 - a. How has this knowledge impacted your teaching practice?

b. How might this knowledge impact your educational community or the greater educational research community?

12. What did you find most helpful as you did your action research project? Most challenging? Most confusing? Most rewarding? Most surprising?

13. If you could redo your action research project, is there anything you would change or alter? Why?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your action research project?

Follow-up Questions Regarding Documents

15. Can you explain the slides in your PowerPoint presentation you did not have a chance to describe during your video?

16. Can you explain your preplanning document? Your project overview document?

APPENDIX G

ALLY'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: INTERVIEW #2

Ally's Interview Questions: Interview #2

Observation Follow Up Questions:

1. Number of students and demographics.
2. How many days a week do you have this class?
3. Are students usually online?
4. Did you tell students I would be there to observe? What was their reaction?
5. How did you set up the seminar?
6. What type of planning and preparation goes into preparing students for a good seminar- especially for such a complex text?
7. Prior to the seminar, how had students interacted with the play Hamlet?
8. Did students have a list of questions they had to come prepared to answer?
9. How successful did you think this seminar was in comparison to others?
10. Would you say this is a pretty typical class in terms of it being student led?
11. Why do you have students engage in seminars?

Questions regarding action research project:

1. Could you describe how you came to your research question/topic?
 - a. Had you thought about the question/topic prior to your project?
 - b. To what extent did your course work (class discussions, activities, or required readings) help you to formulate your question?
 - c. To what extent did your experience at your current teaching position help you to formulate your question?
2. Why is this topic important to you?
3. Please describe your action research project.

4. Prior to conducting your research, what did you hope to gain personally and/or professionally?
5. What did you learn from conducting your research study?
 - a. How has this knowledge impacted your teaching practice?
 - b. How might this knowledge impact your educational community or the greater educational research community?
6. What did you find most helpful as you did your action research project? Most challenging? Most confusing? Most rewarding? Most surprising?
7. During your presentation, you talked a lot about student engagement- why is student engagement important to you?
8. During your presentation, you talked a lot about advocacy- what does advocacy mean to you? What is the place of advocacy in education? For you as a teacher? For you as an individual?
9. Project update- You had mentioned in your presentation that you wanted to continue this work throughout the next semester. How were you able to incorporate this better union project into the spring semester?
10. If you could redo your action research project, is there anything you would change or alter? Why?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your action research project?

APPENDIX H

ROSIE'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: INTERVIEW #3

Rosie's Interview Questions: Interview #3

Observation Follow Up Questions:

1. Can you send me the PowerPoints from each of the lessons I watched?
2. How do you approach the two classes I observed pedagogically? Do you approach them in the same way? If not, how is your teaching and/or planning different?
3. What are the demographics of the class I observed during the second observation?

Teaching and Research:

1. How would you describe your beliefs about teaching and pedagogy before beginning your action research project? Have these beliefs changed in any way? Please explain.
2. How do you feel about conducting research after having participated in an action research project?
3. How would you describe the relationship between your teaching and your research?
4. How has your knowledge and experience with action research impacted your self perception as a teacher?
5. Could you imagine yourself conducting another action research study? If so, what topic might you explore?
6. Critical reflection in education is described by bell hooks (2010) as an exploration of the connections between pedagogy and issues of race, gender, and class. Please critically reflect on the findings of your study.
7. In your opinion, what types of pedagogical skills should an effective teacher have? Of the skills you mentioned, which are the most important to you? Why? Do you think you possess these skills? Why or why not?

8. How do you think your personal identity and professional teaching identity impact your teaching practice?

APPENDIX I

ALLY'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: INTERVIEW #3

Ally's Interview Questions: Interview #3

Observation Follow Up Questions

1. How long is SSR? How often and why do you have older students do SSR?
2. Why do you read during SSR?
3. Are the students online expected to do everything that students in the classroom do? For example, SSR? Why or why not? How do you evaluate them?
4. I noticed that your tattoos were visible. Do your students ask you about them? How do you handle that? What do they think about them? How do you think that impacts their perception of you?
5. Can you explain what a quote sandwich is and how students make one?
6. Can you explain what Padlet is and how you use it?
7. I noticed that you shared your potential lesson plans with your students. You let them know you were considering having them write an essay with the critical approaches they were using for the Padlet activity. Why did you share this information with them?

Teaching and Research:

1. How would you describe your beliefs about teaching and pedagogy before beginning your action research project? Have these beliefs changed in any way? Please explain.
2. How do you feel about conducting research after having participated in an action research project?
3. How would you describe the relationship between your teaching and your research?
4. How has your knowledge and experience with action research impacted your self perception as a teacher?

5. Could you imagine yourself conducting another action research study? If so, what topic might you explore?
6. Critical reflection in education is described by bell hooks (2010) as an exploration of the connections between pedagogy and issues of race, gender, and class. Please critically reflect on the findings of your study.
7. In your opinion, what types of pedagogical skills should an effective teacher have? Of the skills you mentioned, which are the most important to you? Why? Do you think you possess these skills? Why or why not?
8. How do you think your personal identity and professional teaching identity impact your teaching practice?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX J
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol
 Merriam & Tisdell's Six-Factor Observation Checklist (2016)

	Activities	Reflective Notes
Physical Setting	Time of day/class being taught Desk set-up Lighting Technology Anchor charts Student samples	
Participants	Number of students Demographic of class Grade level Organization of students Teacher/support/other	
Activities & Interactions	Student-Student interactions Student- teacher interactions Structure of activity Demonstration of learning	
Conversation	Content of student-student interaction Content of teacher-student interaction Who speaks to whom? Who is listening? Note direct quotes, silences, and non-verbal communication	
Subtle Factors	Informal or unplanned activities Nonverbal communication What is not happening that should be?	
Observer's Behavior	Role in the room? How does this role affect the scene? Thoughts during observation	