ABSTRACT

Michael W. Moon, ISLANDS OF INNOVATION: EXAMINING THE NEXUS BETWEEN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND COGNITIVELY DEMANDING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which participants built meaningful culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) relationships with students and to what extent those same participants engaged in cognitively demanding academic discourse with their students. The participatory action research (PAR) study took place in a rural middle school in eastern North Carolina serving approximately 550 students in grades 6-8 over a period of two academic years from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022. The co-practitioner researcher (CPR) team comprised four eighth-grade teachers and the school principal as lead researcher. The CPR team met biweekly as an Equity-Centered Networked Improvement Community (EC-NIC) (Bryk et al., 2015) and engaged in three cycles of inquiry using Community Learning Exchange methodology and pedagogy (Guajardo et al., 2016) to develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as warm demanders (Delpit, 2012; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006) in support of equitable, cognitively demanding academic discourse (Resnick et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978; Zwiers, 2007). The findings from the PAR study revealed: (1) Participants demonstrated high empathy but inconsistently high expectations; (2) when a teacher is a warm demander, cognitively demanding academic discourse is much more likely to occur; and (3) teachers created islands of innovation (Fullan, 2001) or pockets of success to develop culturally responsive relationships with students and develop discourse opportunities. The study has implications for principals, teachers, and other school leaders to develop school-wide systems of support to improve their internal capacity for facilitating EC-NICs to cultivate CLR relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse.

ISLANDS OF INNOVATION: EXAMINING THE NEXUS BETWEEN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND COGNITIVELY DEMANDING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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DEDICATION

For my wife, Elizabeth, whose love and support mean everything to me; for my daughters, Olivia and Evelyn, who make me want to leave the world a better place than I found it; for my parents, Rita and Stanley, who have believed in me from the very beginning; and for all of my students (past, present, and future) who inspire me to be the best leader I can be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the never-ending support and encouragement from my parents, wife, and children. I do not have the words to adequately express my endless gratitude for my wife's unconditional love and support, and I hope my oldest daughter, Olivia, will one day know how much it meant to me for her to sit on my lap while watching me write and calling me "Dr. Daddy." Looking up from my laptop to see my youngest daughter, Evelyn, smiling at me from her high chair also kept me going during the long nights of writing and editing.

The Project I^4 team became something of a second family during the past four years, starting with Larry's mentorship in the first year. I couldn't have asked for better mentors than Matt, Lynda, Larry, Jim, Ken, and the rest of the Project I^4 team. My amazing editor, Katie, helped me coalesce my thoughts into something presentable and has been a life-saver on more than one occasion. Finally, I am truly indebted to Janette for her endless revisions and words of encouragement as well as Leon, Norman, Kim, and the entire Project I^4 cohort for the texts, phone calls, and Zoom check-ins as we pursued this important equity-centered work.

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CHAPTER 1: FOCUS OF PRACTICE

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main" – John Donne, Meditation XVII

My sixth-grade language arts teacher introduced us to John Donne (n.d.) and metaphysical poetry sometime in the Spring of 1993. Several months earlier, she introduced herself to my parents at one of my Little League games and made sure I saw her in the bleachers. I don't remember whether I struck anyone out or whether I reached base, but I remember vividly how I felt knowing my teacher was taking an interest in my interests. Before we ever attempted to unpack Donne's meditations or decipher "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," we discussed the finer points of the hit and run and whether it was a good idea to bunt a runner to third base with less than two outs. Just as Donne's meditation stated that we are all connected – that "no man is an island entire of itself" – my teacher, too, saw the importance of those connections. She understood the importance of building relationships and investing herself in her students' interests. Warm demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006) and culturally and linguistically responsive practices (Delpit, 2006, 2012; Gay, 2002, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009) were still years away from being widely discussed, but she knew the importance of building relationships in getting the best out of her students in the classroom. While this brief anecdote from my own childhood is personal to me, it has shaped my understanding of the importance of building culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with all students in my school, something I have strived to integrate fully into my vision in my roles as teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal. When these relationships are present in the classroom, it opens doors for students and creates opportunities for equitable, cognitively demanding academic discourse to occur. With a foundation in change

leadership, the intersection of relationships grounded in culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) and academic discourse creates an environment in which high cognitive demand is possible (Figure 1).

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, including the focus of practice and the assets and challenges. Additionally, I examine the significance and context of the study as it relates to practice, policy, and research and the nexus between equity and the PAR's focus of practice.

Rationale

Since July 2020, I have served as the principal at a Title I middle school in rural North Carolina that enrolls roughly 550 students in grades 6-8. The school educates a diverse array of students; however, student diversity is not reflected in staff demographics. Enrollment fluctuates slightly from year-to-year, with an average student population of 550-575 students. Compared with other schools in the district and region, the school's student population is culturally and racially diverse; however, the instructional staff demographics (teachers, counselors, and other certified support staff) do not mirror the student population (see Table 1).

Building meaningful teacher-student relationships has been a focal point of professional growth, reflection, and development since my arrival at the school, but the racial and cultural disparity that exists between students and staff contributes to a lack of consistent culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, which leads to an inherent inequity in teachers' collective ability to build relationships with all students. Toward the end of my first year as principal, a student came to my office to discuss an incident in which she had been arguing with a teacher. The student, a Black girl in sixth grade, told me that the root cause of the argument was that she felt the teacher, an older White woman with more than 20 years of classroom

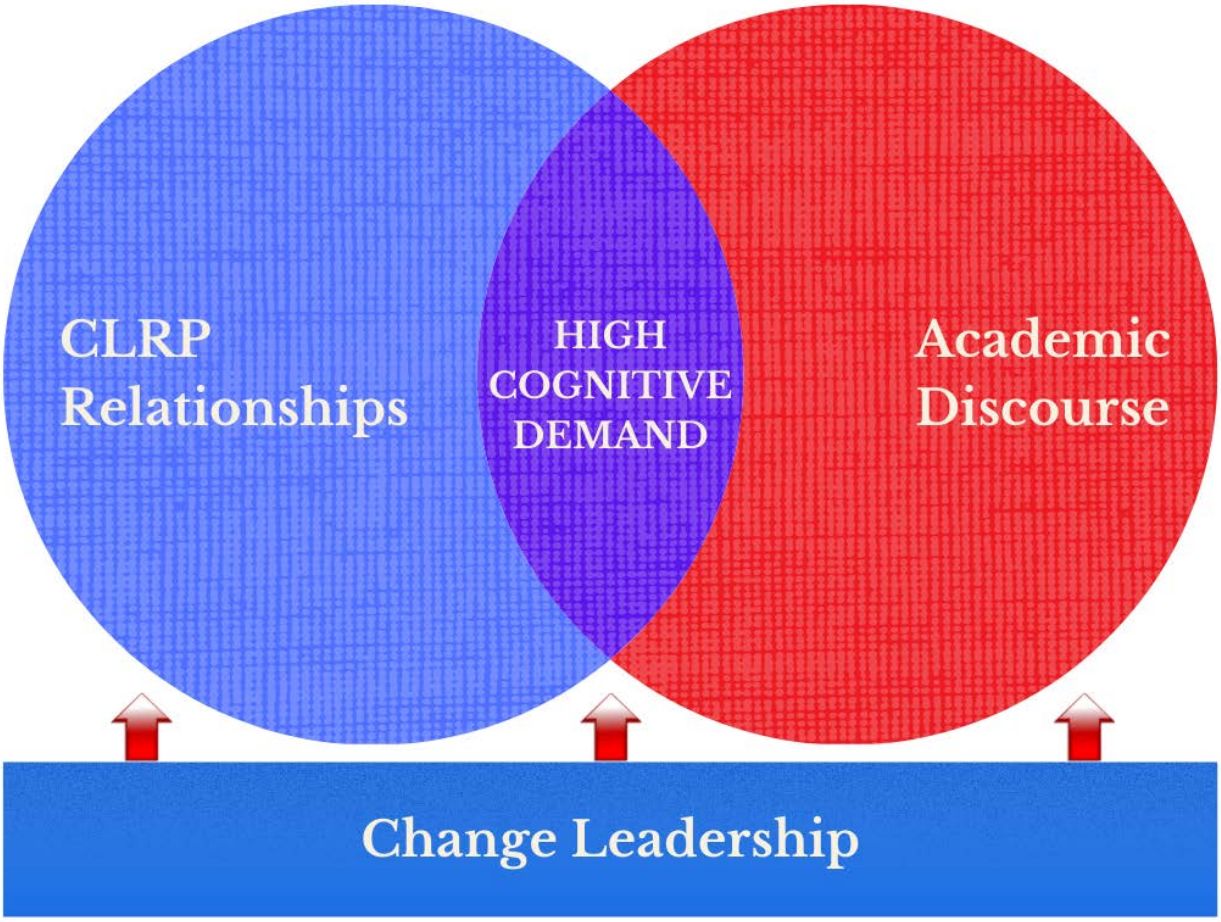


Figure 1. Relationship between change leadership, CLRP relationships, and academic discourse.

Table 1

Student and Staff Demographics

Race	Student	Staff
White	38.4%	62.5%
Black	37.5%	34.4%
Latinx	18.9%	3.1%

experience, “doesn’t like kids.” The student implied that the teacher’s perceived dislike of students was at least in part racially motivated. Only the teacher can say whether this is true; however, it was apparent that she had failed to build a rapport with this student. The student clearly felt unwelcome in her classroom. This lack of meaningful relationship building between teachers and culturally and linguistically diverse students is often problematic, and it is against this backdrop that I conducted the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. The focus of the PAR study is on the dual goals of improving relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse opportunities for all students, and the disparity between staff and student demographics means teachers must be particularly cognizant of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices for everyone in their classrooms.

When I arrived at the school as a new principal in July 2020, I found that work was already underway that directly impacted teachers’ relationships with students. The district’s assertion was that a focus on relationships would lead to increased student achievement; however, the assertion neither explicitly stated the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive practices nor bridged the complementary roles of CLRP relationships and academic discourse in student learning – nor did it provide concrete systems of support for building teachers’ internal capacity in either area. This Participatory Action Research (PAR) study addressed both, thus extending the work already started by the school and elsewhere in the district.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey administered to all teachers in the spring of 2020 indicated that the school staff felt there were deficiencies in teachers’ capacity for building effective relationships with students. Also, multiple indicators on the School Improvement Plan addressed teacher/student relationships and indicated inconsistencies in

academic discourse in many classrooms. The two are inextricably linked, and teachers indicated a strong desire for additional professional learning opportunities in both relationship building and student discourse.

Upon my arrival, I required all teachers to submit a Professional Development Plan (PDP) goal for the 2020-2021 academic year that addressed relationship building. The goal read: "I will implement at least two specific, measurable strategies or techniques for building and maintaining relationships with students and parents that are supported by evidence." Teachers reflected on progress toward meeting this goal in January and May 2021. Additionally, I regularly share information with teachers such as articles and anecdotes about building relationships in weekly staff newsletters, best practices in the classroom that highlight quality instruction, and examples of how teachers are working to build meaningful rapport with students. During staff meetings, I began using the five Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) as another way to model relational trust between teachers and administrators while centering the important work we were doing on those closest to the issues.

The PAR study built on the work that was already underway and strengthened teachers' relationships with students, which, when paired with professional learning opportunities centered on effective discourse practices, led to higher cognitive demand in the classroom. There exists a strong nexus between teachers' ability to build meaningful relationships with students and student learning in the classroom. Delpit (2012) summarized the connection succinctly, noting that students, and especially students of color, don't necessarily learn *from* a teacher as much as they learn *for* a teacher. Hammond (2015) stated, "culturally responsive teaching is about being a different type of teacher who is in relationship with students and the content in a different way" (p. 52). Teachers do not build relationships for the sake of building relationships. Instead, as

Hammond noted, relationships are directly tied to students' academic potential. Working with teachers to build capacity for culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) practices in the classroom is vital because "our students are dependent learners who are not able to access their full academic potential on their own" (Hammond, 2015, p. 52). Rather, teachers must first create relationships before assisting students in unlocking their full academic potential. Many teachers have prioritized relationships with some students over others, creating disparities in students' experiences in school and thus their access to equitable discourse opportunities. When inequity exists in teacher-student relationships, it follows that inequity exists in academic discourse practices. Over the course of the PAR study, I explored the connections between CLR practices and academic discourse strategies such questioning and calling-on practices, student talk, and cognitively demanding academic tasks. Next, I examine the macro, meso, and micro assets and challenges that will drive the PAR and focus of practice (FoP).

Analysis of Assets and Challenges

An analysis of the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges reveal the factors at the school, district, and state or national level that influenced the study as shown in Figure 2. A deeper analysis of the micro, meso, and macro challenges revealed how each contributed to the overall success of the PAR study.

Micro Assets and Challenges

At the micro level, teachers have discussed a culture of empowerment that allows them to "try and fail" and develop relational trust, both between teachers and administration and between teachers and students. However, there exists a contingency of veteran teachers who are resistant to change and a culture that has contributed to equity gaps and equity traps for years (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

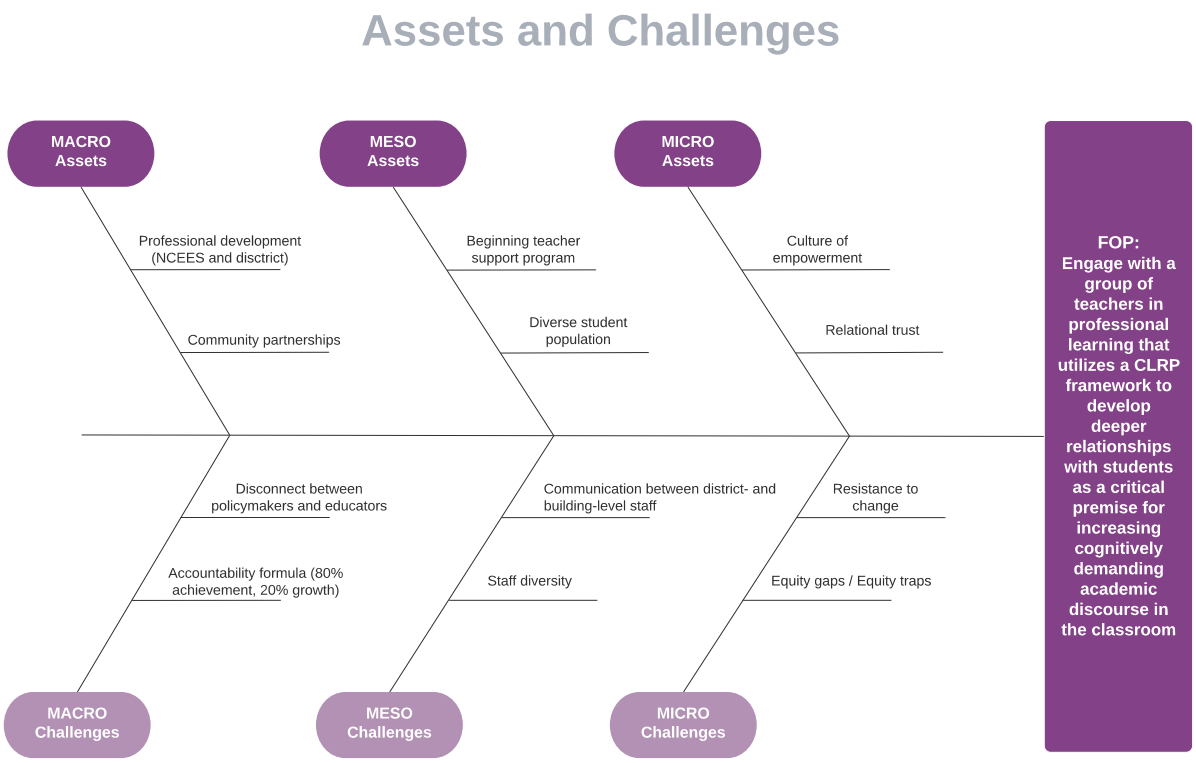


Figure 2. Fishbone diagram: Analysis of assets and challenges of focus of practice.

The most significant assets at the micro level are the overall perception of an atmosphere of relational trust that exists between teachers and students as well as teachers and administrators and a culture of empowerment. “We have been very fortunate the last several years to be empowered by the mantra, ‘try and fail,’” a veteran teacher said. “If you fail, it’s a learning experience.” When teachers feel as though they have the support of administrators, there exists an atmosphere in which distributed leadership can flourish (Halverson, 2003), and a climate of relational trust encourages them to take ownership of school improvement initiatives and take professional risks to improve their teaching practices. Teachers also discussed a strong sense of community at the building level, an asset that cannot be overlooked and that strongly correlates with the other assets in the school. “Teachers are willing to come to the table,” a veteran math teacher with 29 years of classroom experience said, “because we feel those connections with each other and with our students.”

I hosted a Community Learning Exchange in November 2020 that was open to the whole staff to discuss the school’s assets and challenges as they related to teacher-student relationships. While we did not collect data or identify participants for the PAR study during the CLE, it gave us an opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the CLE axioms. Later, I invited several of the teachers who participated in the CLE to participate in the co-practitioner research group for the study, as they embodied many of the assets discussed in this sub-section.

The greatest challenge was making an impact at a school-wide level due to a small but vocal group of teachers who were resistant to any change. Though well-meaning, these teachers embraced many equity traps as virtues, citing their “colorblindness” as evidence of equity in their classrooms. Their inability to form meaningful relationships with a diverse student population created inequitable outcomes in their classrooms, and these gaps manifested

themselves by limiting learning opportunities for those students most in need of additional support. Disparities in student achievement existed in most student groups, including Black, Latinx, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities. Many of our students with disabilities are disproportionately Black and Latinx students, and nearly all consistently demonstrated mastery below that of their White peers. Introducing professional learning at the school level and including these change-resistant teachers in the process ultimately led to more equitable academic discourse opportunities for all students. While these micro assets and challenges were central to the eventual success of the PAR study, assets and challenges at the meso and macro level could not be discounted.

Meso Assets and Challenges

At the meso level, the district has a robust beginning teacher support program that provides significant support at the school level. The district's beginning teacher coordinator and middle grades director are assets who supported the focus of practice in building relationships between teachers and students to increase academic discourse. Professional development opportunities existed at both the district and building level, and these professional learning opportunities were leveraged to the benefit of the PAR study. The assistant principal started a school-level beginning teacher support group to facilitate growth among teachers in their first three years of service. The school used Title I funds to offer half-day professional development at least twice per year. In both cases, professional learning opportunities related to relationships were integrated into existing protocols, which is a significant asset at the structural level.

A diverse student population and the district's recent addition of an equity officer at the district level were additional assets to the study. Challenges included a perceived lack of communication among some staff between district administrators and school-level staff and a

lack of staff diversity in comparison to the student population. Overall, communication between district administrators and building-level administrators is effective; however, some staff noted perceived gaps in this area.

Macro Assets and Challenges

Assets at the macro level included strong community partnerships with local businesses, churches, and other community organizations and a robust system of professional development that supported teacher growth and development. An example of these partnerships is the school's community outreach with the local Baptist church in which volunteers donate canned food, personal hygiene items, and other nonperishable items to students in need. Over the course of the PAR study, I extended existing professional development systems to support developing teachers' understanding of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices and academic discourse protocols. As discussed in the sections above, professional development is an asset at all three levels – micro, meso, and macro. Teachers continue to have access to a system that allows them to complete professional development that is personalized to their individual needs, and I required all teachers to submit a PDP goal specifically focused on relationships at the onset of the 2020-2021 school year. For the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years, teachers created PDP goals related to both teacher-student relationships and academic discourse.

The most significant challenge at the macro level was the nearly universal belief that the state's current accountability model, which assigns an A-F letter grade to all schools based on student growth and achievement, is inherently inequitable. The formula weighs end-of-year assessment data as 80% of the equation and growth accounts for the remaining 20%. This model correlates heavily with students' socioeconomic status and does little more than create a map of poverty in North Carolina public schools. Challenges at the macro level included a perceived

disconnect between policymakers at the state and national level and district- and building-level stakeholders who must implement those policies.

In sum, the assets provided a foundation upon which I built the PAR study, and the challenges are issues for which I had be keenly aware as I continued the work throughout the study.

Significance

In this sub-section, I discuss the significance of the focus of practice on CLR relationships and academic discourse and particularly the significance of practice, research, and policy within the context of the study. Schools in this district often struggle with implementing equitable teaching practices through a culturally and linguistically responsive lens, and as a result, questioning practices and other academic discourse protocols are often less equitable and less effective. The study had significance at the school level in creating *praxis* that allowed teachers and school leaders to work together to impact student learning. Freire (1970) defined praxis as how oppressed people, through meaningful relationships with teacher-students and students-teachers, can acquire a critical awareness of their own condition and struggle for liberation in a cyclical process of reflection and action. This iterative and generative cycle of reflection and action is a defining aspect of participatory action research.

Context

The PAR study is significant to the context because most teachers were at the time creating meaningful relationships with some students, but historically marginalized students were often ignored or overlooked. Because trusting relationships are essential to engaging in effective discourse opportunities, many of these students were missing out on high levels of discourse. Most teachers were effective at forming relationships with students who looked like

them, and these were the students who had typically achieved at a higher level academically. By analyzing how equity traps and deficit language played into teacher relationships (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004), I worked with participants throughout the study to create pathways for them to avoid these traps and increase academic discourse opportunities for all students, particularly those representing historically marginalized groups.

Equitable academic discourse is a powerful CLR tool, as Hammond (2015) noted, and teaching students how to learn is the goal of implementing CLR practices in the classroom. She discussed the importance of information processing and connected the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices to developing key academic skills. "All that work to build learning partnerships, become an ally and a warm demander, is so that culturally and linguistically diverse students have the space to grow their intelligence" (Hammond, 2015, p. 123). In other words, teachers do not focus on relationships in a vacuum. They focus on relationships and being warm demanders because doing so gives students room to grow academically.

Practice

The PAR study was significant to practice because I asserted that using CLR professional learning to create meaningful teacher-student relationships would lead to increased opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse. The Equity-Centered Network Improvement Community (EC-NIC) investigated current practices, using the Project I^4 CLRP framework (Appendix I), and used evidence to reflect on future practice. Additionally, the EC-NIC had space to influence meaningful change and a chance to see the nexus between the intentionality of building relationships with students and an increase in cognitively demanding academic discourse. The study changed practice at the school level by providing tools and protocols for the leadership team to be "warm demanders" (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015;

Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006), guiding school staff in professional learning opportunities, and assisting teachers in reflecting on their practice.

Policy

The study changed policy by examining and challenging then-current policies in the school that were inconsistent with CLR teaching practices and therefore causing disparate harm to students of color. Khalifa (2018) discussed the harm done by teachers having low expectations for their students, stating: "While some researchers have demonstrated the pervasive tendency of White teachers to lower expectations for Black students, I argue that all teachers, including White teachers, must maintain high expectations of minoritized students" (p. 95). Pairing CLR relationships with high expectations and then providing students with avenues toward success is a hallmark feature of warm demanders and is deeply embedded in the work of the PAR study. Through the study, I worked with the participants to build capacity through professional learning for teachers to increase relationships and thus increase cognitively demanding academic discourse in their classrooms. This had an impact on school and district policy that I discuss in greater detail in the final chapter.

Research

In this study, I sought to examine the implementation of CPR teaching practices and how that implementation impacted academic discourse at a Title I middle school in rural North Carolina. In doing so, I explored three key questions. In describing the model for Communities of Practice, Bryk et al. (2015) asked: "What specifically are we trying to accomplish? What change might we introduce and why? How will we know that a change is actually an improvement?" (p. 114). By using an EC-NIC as the basis for biweekly co-practitioner researcher meetings with the study's participants, I answered these questions in the context of

my research in a way that added value to the local impact on practice, policy, and research because of the study.

Connection to Equity

The PAR study was directly linked with equitable teaching practices at my school. White teachers in the school, who made up most of our faculty, often approached student relationships from a deficit mindset, and this inhibited their ability to form meaningful relationships with students of color, in turn creating inequitable academic discourse opportunities for these same students. Inconsistent and at times divergent teacher practices that rely on building deep, meaningful, and equitable relationships with students led to a school climate in which some students had more academic success than others, and the lack of equitable relationships disproportionately impacted students of color. Three equity frameworks supported my focus of practice. The first framework I discuss is philosophical, supported by Mills (2011). The second framework is an analysis of how the psychological framework (Steele, 2010) at our school influenced CLR practices as they related to teachers building meaningful relationships with students. The third framework is the political framework, supported by Gutiérrez's (2013) concept of conocimiento.

Philosophical Framework of the Focus of Practice

A significant number of students will go through their entire public-school careers with a disproportionately low percentage of teachers of color. This was true more than three decades ago when I started school, and it is still true today. It is borne of a system that has long relegated students of color to a status of "otherness" while elevating White students to a "default" status. Mills (2011) discussed this phenomenon:

> The racial contract throws open the doors of orthodox political philosophy's hermetically sealed, stuffy little universe and lets the world rush into its sterile white halls, a world populated not by abstract citizens but by white, black, brown, yellow, red beings, interacting with, pretending not to see, categorizing, judging, negotiating, struggling with each other in large measure according to race – the world, in short, in which we actually live (p. 131).

While dismantling this entire system was well beyond the scope of a single PAR study, it was entirely within the parameters of the study to work with a small of group of diverse teachers to ensure they were hyper-aware of the systems that either worked to benefit or oppress them and their students. Exploring professional learning through a culturally and linguistically responsive lens strengthened teacher-student relationships and had a positive impact on equitable and cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classroom for all students.

Psychological Framework of the Focus of Practice

Many teachers at our school prided themselves on being "colorblind" and treating all students equally. These and other presumptively well-meaning equity traps created an inherently inequitable and unsustainable learning environment for students in this rural Title I school. Teachers had varying degrees of success forging relationships with students from similar racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, but they were noticeably less successful in creating the same sorts of relationships with students of diverse backgrounds.

Steele (2010) explored the ramifications of the lack of representation and institutional "color-blind policies" in his work:

> [W]hen the company was depicted as having a low number of minorities, blacks' trust and sense of belonging were more conditional. Diversity policy became critical.

> Interestingly, the color-blind policy – perhaps America's dominant approach to these matters – didn't work. It engendered less trust and belonging (p. 146).

As Steele (2010) noted, Black students in schools where most teachers are White cannot "take color-blindness at face value" (p. 146). Steele (2010) stated that remedies are available. "If enough cues in a setting can lead members in a group to feel 'identity safe,' it might neutralize the impact of other cues in the setting that could otherwise threaten them" (p. 147). The work in this PAR study sought to create the sort of "principle of remedy" on which Steele wrote. Rejecting "color-blindness" and addressing stereotypes is critical work, Steele (2010) wrote: "When a stereotype indicts the intellectual abilities of your group, the implication is that, as a member of that group, you are like the lower-IQ students … you lack a critical fixed ability" (p. 168). If then, such stereotypes "discourage your taking on academic challenges" (Steele, 2010, p. 168), working to address the critical relationships that exist between teacher and student would invariably lead to increased access to higher cognitive demand for all students.

Similarly, Kendi (2019) wrote it is not enough to be *not racist*. One is either racist or antiracist, he wrote. His framing of racist ideology as either segregationist or assimilationist further illuminated the issues we face, either as victims or perpetrators of racist ideologies and policies. Teachers at our school tended to fall into several equity traps. Eubanks et al. (1997) discussed the ways in which these equity traps create systems of oppression for students of color. "They regularly, in the name of some acceptable cultural value, develop policies that result in continued sorting by race, class, and gender" (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 163). These practices often serve to maintain the status quo:

> '[H]egemonic cultural ways' work in hidden and oblique ways to maintain themselves. The ways of school reform and change that most of us know about and practice are

> basically those ways we have learned from our teaching and school cultures (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 164).

Poverty is consistently used as a stand-in for race, and Black students are often referred to in terms of their collective "low socioeconomic" status, and the two terms – their race and "poverty level" – are used interchangeably by teachers and community members to make excuses for why students cannot or will not achieve in the most rigorous courses offered at the school. Eubanks et al. (1997) stated that teachers must recognize these systems to dismantle them in favor of more equitable practices. More directly related to this PAR study, the authors concluded that "[t]here needs to be a focus upon creating learning conditions and relationships that do not sort and also provide high levels of intellectual development for every student" (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 166). Assimilationist policies are endemic and harmful in education (Kendi, 2019). Our Black and Latinx students neither need to be developed, civilized, nor integrated into a dominate, "default" White framework. What they need are the same opportunities as their White peers. Freire (1970) wrote on the same principle's half a century ago: "Functionally, oppression is domesticating" (Freire, 1970, p. 51). Freire discussed at length the need to act, to seek a *praxis* that extends beyond the theoretical and philosophical: "To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make the affirmation a reality, is a farce" (Freire, 1970, p. 50). Similarly, it was not enough for me to identify and isolate an issue for the PAR study. I had to address and correct the prevailing shortcomings in my school through professional learning in CLRP and effective academic discourse.

Political Framework of the Focus of Practice

We are all familiar with the definition of insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, yet many teachers continue teaching the same way they have always taught and not surprisingly, they continue getting the same results. In this sub-section, I examine the political framework, looking at Freire's (1970) definition of *praxis* and Gutiérrez's (2013) concept of conocimiento. To enact change, which is at the heart of what Freire (1970) called *praxis,* teachers must be willing to act. Gutiérrez (2013) warned that "any form of teaching that breaks with tradition can be seen as subversive" (p. 11). Further, she stated that "political conocimiento assumes clarity and a stance on teaching that maintains solidarity with and commitment to one's students" (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 11). The political framework has the potential to serve as both an asset and challenge. Political conocimiento seeks to understand how oppression occurs in schools not just at the individual level but at the systemic level. It seeks to deconstruct the deficit narrative associated with historically marginalized students and provides teachers and students with the tools to negotiate a world that places an outsized value on high stakes testing and standardization. By connecting with community members and explaining one's discipline to those in positions of power, conocimiento seeks to subvert traditional systems of power to fully advocate for students (Gutiérrez, 2013). The EC-NIC had to be aware of this political conocimiento to deconstruct some of the harmful systems that were in place and replace them with CLRP and discourse practices that would deeply impact student learning.

Participatory Action Research Design

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) study explored how deeper relationships between teachers and students that are culturally and linguistically responsive would provide an opportunity for increased academic discourse and student success. I worked with four eighth-

grade teachers as the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group, which will be called the Equity-Centered Network Community (EC-NIC) for the duration of the PAR study. Together, we worked to create cycles of inquiry centered around professional learning and dialogue that facilitated professional growth in developing equitable culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and effective academic discourse protocols for students. Effective discourse does not occur in a vacuum, and it is impossible to separate successful pedagogy from meaningful relationships in which warm demanders advocate for all students. When students feel safe to take chances, when they feel seen and heard, when they have space to collaborate, and when questioning practices are inclusive and equitable, rigorous learning will occur for all students. Building teachers' professional capacity for creating such classroom spaces was the cornerstone of the PAR study.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of the PAR was to answer the overarching research question: How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse? Within the framework of the study, I answered the following sub research questions:

1. To what extent do teachers develop deeper relationships with students?
2. To what extent do teachers implement and use cognitively demanding academic discourse?
3. How am I as a leader able to build internal capacity of teachers and establish spaces for deeper relationships and increased opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse?

Theory of Action

If the EC-NIC team engaged in professional learning to develop deeper relationships with

students that are culturally and linguistically responsive, then teachers would embrace CLR practices and develop classroom practices that support equitable, cognitively demanding academic discourse for all students. I assert that culturally and linguistically responsive teacher-student relationships are deeply intertwined with classroom practices that support cognitively demanding academic discourse. One is not sufficient without the other. Effective change leadership created the *praxis* needed to implement both in my school because of this study.

Focus of Practice

The focus of practice for the PAR study was to engage with a group of teachers in professional learning that utilized a CLRP framework to develop deeper relationships with students as a critical premise for increasing cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classroom. As the PAR study progressed, the EC-NIC analyzed numerous ways to measure strides in the development of equitable teacher-student relationships and academic discourse practices within a CLRP framework. By connecting CLR teaching practices with a focus on academic discourse, I began to develop school-wide systems and practices that impacted learning and created higher cognitive demand for all students.

Study Activities

The study utilized several tools to engage an inquiry cycle for CLRP professional learning to increase academic discourse opportunities in the classroom. During the Fall of 2020, I met with a group of teachers for a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) to create a baseline understanding of teachers' current philosophies and understanding of CLRP and teacher-student relationships as they currently existed in the school. While data was not collected during the first CLE, the protocol was successful, and the CLE axioms aligned with the stated goals of the study. Therefore, we continued to use CLEs as a protocol for the duration of the study. In the Fall of

2021, I utilized the Project I^4 CLPR framework (Appendix I) as a diagnostic tool with participants to further examine current beliefs in the school. In the Spring of 2022, I continued to meet with the EC-NIC biweekly, and we hosted a CLE in February 2022. In the Fall 2022 semester, I continued to meet with the EC-NIC team biweekly and collected and analyzed observational data using rubrics co-created by the EC-NIC team. This work ran parallel to the continuing work I am doing as a school leader with existing relationships in the school and building upon that foundation for the purpose of increasing academic discourse opportunities for all students. Over the course of 18 months from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022, I conducted three cycles of inquiry, which will be described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Throughout the study, I maintained confidentiality by utilizing pseudonyms for my school and all participants in the study. All notes, memos, agendas, transcriptions, and other artifacts generated for the study will be kept in a locked, secure location. Multiple data sources were utilized to ensure the accuracy of the study to the greatest extent possible. I collaborated with the other participants in the study and triangulated and analyzed the evidence collected in reflective memos, member checks, and other artifacts. Participation was voluntary, and participants could choose to leave the study at any time without penalty. The scope of the study was limited to the school and district in which I work.

Summary

Throughout the study, I relied upon improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015) and the CLE axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) to guide my work. The Project I^4 CLRP framework (see Appendix I) delineates much of the underlying CLRP philosophy and research that I have outlined in the above sections, and I utilized it throughout the study as a diagnostic tool to observe culturally

and linguistically responsive practices in teachers' classrooms. I used the Project I^4 Calling-On and Questioning Levels tools (see Appendices D and F) to measure participants' success in implementing cognitively demanding academic discourse strategies. Participants utilized the CLRP framework as a rubric for self-assessment several times throughout the study, and I coded and analyzed the results to measure participants' receptiveness and growth in the areas of creating and sustaining CLRP relationships and academic discourse strategies. I used the rubrics and discourse tools as reflective artifacts to guide the study, and I took care to ensure the tools did not become evaluative structures.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the theoretical, normative, and empirical research related to the focus of practice, including in the areas of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, academic discourse, and change leadership. I explored how creating meaningful relationships, when paired with effective academic discourse strategies, could lead to higher cognitive demand in my middle school in rural North Carolina. In Chapter 3, I detailed the research design of the participatory action research study – its design, data collection, and analysis methodology – and I discuss the three cycles of inquiry related to the study. Finally, I reviewed the PAR process for each cycle of inquiry, analyzed the findings, and reviewed the overall study in the final chapters. The work we completed will hopefully impact my school and district for many years to come. Through the PAR study, I worked to create a school climate and culture where all students will continue to have equitable access to CLR relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Archaic, entrenched, and inequitable systems have long stifled teachers' abilities to forge meaningful relationships with their students, and without those relationships built upon a foundation of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, all students will not have the same access to cognitively demanding academic discourse. These skills must be supported by effective school leaders, and teachers must be given the space to create these impactful teacher-student relationships to support classroom discourse. Many teachers, unfortunately, lack a keen understanding of culturally responsive teaching practices or simply choose not to implement them due to whatever inherent biases they possess. Kendi (2019) called them "assimilationists." Predominantly White, these teachers largely have good intentions, but statements alluding to "colorblindness" or "not seeing race" are both harmful and endemic in American classrooms. Kendi's work to identify this type of institutional inequity that is systemic in American schools echoes the seminal works from researchers such as Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2018), and Delpit (2006), whose pioneering research in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices sought to reframe the way we think about equity and equality in the classroom. By focusing on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, teachers will open doors that will lead to more meaningful relationships with all students. In turn, students will have access to more impactful academic discourse in the classroom and thus higher cognitive demand.

In this chapter, I examine the seminal works in the following areas:

- the significance of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) in classrooms and schools,
- the need for cognitively demanding academic discourse, and

- effective school leadership as a mechanism for change.

When meaningful teacher-student relationships grounded in a CLRP framework and academic discourse converge and a culture of change leadership exists to support the two (see Figure 3), I assert that teachers will have the tools necessary to create classroom environments that increase cognitive demand for students. For this to occur, the adults in the school must commit to systemic change in these areas. Next, I examine the seminal research in culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy

Effective culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices are paramount in creating and maintaining equitable, impactful teacher-student relationships. Ladson-Billings (2009) examined the ways in which teaching and culture intersected and studied the impact of focusing on culturally responsive teaching practices. The researchers (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Love, 2019; Paris, 2012) provided frameworks for thinking about culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning over the last two decades. In this sub-section, I explore how CLRP theorists and their work impacts teaching in the classroom and school leadership.

Ladson-Billings (2009) organized her research to illustrate the importance of culturally relevant classroom practices. Her study sought to understand how "culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). These negative effects include "not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 19). McKenzie and Scheurich

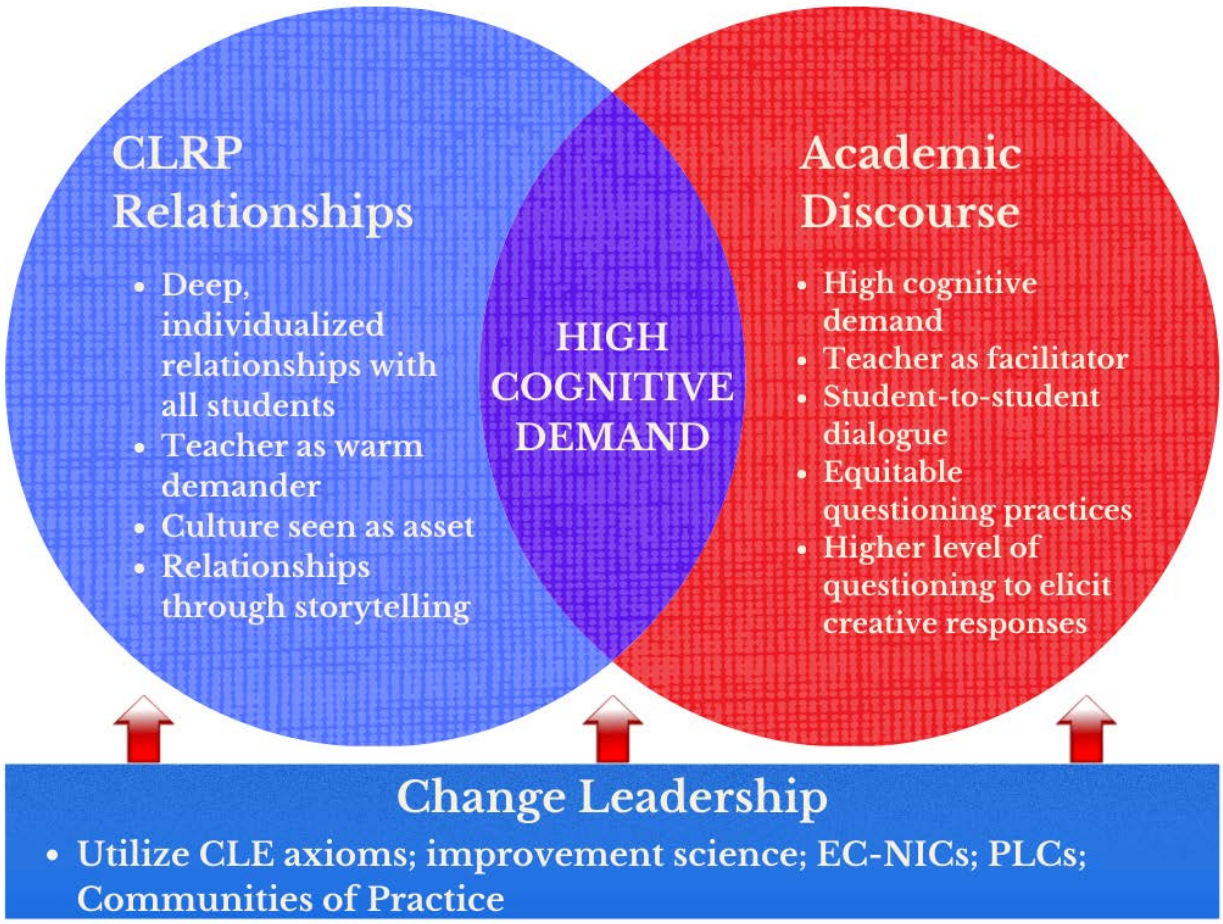


Figure 3. Relationship between three literature bins.

(2004) called this phenomenon “erasure,” and culturally responsive teachers must be highly aware of such equity traps if they are to nurture students in a way that is empowering from a culturally and linguistically responsive standpoint.

Low expectations for students of color are pervasive in American classrooms and are particularly impactful for Black students. Ladson-Billings (2009) analyzed the impact of low expectations and negative beliefs about Black students and how those negative beliefs invalidated their culture. Khalifa (2018) also warned against settling for low expectations for students and pointed to this mindset as one of many equity traps into which well-meaning teachers can fall. Conversely, culturally relevant teaching does not seek incremental change or assisting students of color in “climbing the ladder.” Rather, teachers who believe all students are capable of excellence serve as “catalysts” who help to propel students to higher levels of achievement in their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2009) sees every interaction in the classroom, “such as smiling at a student or showing disapproval of a student,” as pedagogy, and there exists a strong correlation between pedagogy and student achievement (p. 29). It is the role of culturally responsive teachers to unlock the potential relationships between pedagogy and achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Role of Culturally Responsive Teachers

How a teacher views himself or herself in the classroom impacts student learning. Ladson-Billings (2009) explores the dueling conceptions of culturally relevant versus assimilationist teachers. Where culturally relevant teachers see themselves as artists and teaching as an art, assimilationists see themselves as technicians and teaching as a technical task. Culturally relevant teachers see themselves as part of the community. They view teaching as giving something back to the community and encouraging students to do the same.

Assimilationist teachers see themselves as individuals who may or may not be a part of the community. This, Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote, encourages achievement as a means to "escape" community. Culturally relevant teachers "believe all students can succeed" and "help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38). Conversely, assimilationist teachers attempt to homogenize students into a singular "American" identity and believe failure is an inevitability for some. Freire (1970) discussed "banking" education as the idea that students are merely passive vessels into which knowledge is poured rather than active participants fully capable of taking on an active role in their education. Kendi (2019) tied this notion to that of assimilationists, who also view students as passive recipients of knowledge. Ladson-Billings (2009) contrasted the assimilationist practice of "banking" education wherein teachers "put knowledge into" students with the "mining" of culturally relevant teachers who "pull knowledge out" of their students. Ladson-Billings wrote about how that "invalidation of African American culture is compounded by a notion of assimilationist teaching, a teaching style that operates without regard to the students' particular cultural characteristics" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 24). Assimilationist teachers work "to ensure that students fit into society" – often on the "lower rungs" of society (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 24). Clearly, culturally responsive teachers cannot have an assimilationist mindset if they are to reach all students effectively and equitably.

This problem is compounded when one notices the disproportionality of White educators to students of color. Delpit (2006) examined a cultural landscape where White teachers vastly outnumber students of color and where progressive Black educators struggle to forge meaningful connections with *other people's children,* namely, Black students whose own cultural backgrounds do not mirror those of the teachers tasked with educating them. She introduced her

research with a series of vignettes describing the "deadly fog" that forms "when the cold mist of bias and ignorance meets the warm vital reality of children of color in many of our schools" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiii). Delpit examined how White teachers sometimes misinterpret the words and actions of their Black students. She pointed out that this is not a problem unique to White teachers; indeed, she stated, middle-class Black teachers have difficulty identifying with their culturally diverse students. The problem, as she saw it, was that "many of the teachers of black children have their roots in other communities and do not often have the opportunity to hear the full range of their students' voices" (Delpit, 2006, p. 17). Perhaps most salient to the research as it connects to other works on culturally responsive teaching practices is simply "not to assume that the voices of the majority speak for all" (Delpit, 2006, p. 20). Delpit (2006) illustrated that point with anecdotal evidence from several nonwhite teachers who discussed the ways in which their White colleagues attempted to maintain the status quo. Delpit (2006) called this a "culture of power" that is predominant in many schools and districts and advocated for a "diversity of style" as a countermeasure. This is important, Delpit argued, because "children have the right to their own language, their own culture" (Delpit, 2006, p. 37). This notion is not isolated to academic circles. Nearly 30 years ago, Rage Against the Machine sang about the pervasiveness of "Eurocentric" curricula in their politically charged song, "Take the Power Back" (de la Rocha et al., 1992). The band explored how "one-sided stories for years and years and years" caused lasting harm to nonwhite students and asked the question "I'm inferior? Who's inferior?" of an educational system that "cares about only one culture" (de la Rocha et al., 1992). In maintaining the status quo and avoiding the necessary work of building classroom relationships with their students, many teachers either intentionally or unintentionally erase the culturally and

linguistically rich identities of their diverse student populations, or worse, relegate them to second-class status.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Gay (2018) explored the pedagogical impact of culturally responsive teaching practices and outlined in a series of epigraphs: Culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical (pp. 36-46). Though each of the areas she explored is worthy of deep analysis, I focus on how culturally responsive practices can validate students' experiences in the classroom and how through focusing on the transformative nature of these practices, teachers can forge relationships that create an equitable learning environment for all students. Gay (2018) explained how culturally responsive teaching practices impacts student achievement: "Culturally responsive pedagogy simultaneously develops, along with academic achievement, social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community-building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring" (Gay, 2018, p. 52). The deep, meaningful connections students make when their cultures are valued have a direct impact on the rigor of classroom instruction, and it all begins with the relationships that teachers seek out in their classrooms. Gay (2018) was explicit in the ways in which teachers need to put culturally responsive ideas and philosophies into practice. Next, I explore the importance of creating meaningful teacher-student relationships through a culturally and linguistically responsive lens.

Teacher-Student Relationships

We must analyze what teacher-student relationships look like, and further define culturally relevant teaching practices. "The teacher-student relationship in the culturally relevant

classroom is fluid and 'humanely equitable'" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 66). Ladson-Billings (2009) utilized several examples to illustrate and define what these "humanely equitable" relationships look like. One teacher, for example, inverted the traditional teacher-student roles and encouraged Black students to stand at the front of the room and teach. Elsewhere, that same teacher asked about mathematics or language, questioned students about their cultures, or discussed the meaning of the words to a popular song. In another classroom, the teacher encouraged students to form "extended family groups" with their classmates and take responsibility for monitoring each other's academic work and behavior. Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed the importance of forming relationships that extend beyond the curriculum and oftentimes beyond the scope of the classroom itself. "Culturally relevant teaching encourages students to learn collaboratively and expects them to teach and take responsibility for each other" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 76), yet "teachers with culturally relevant practices are careful to demonstrate a connectedness with each of their students" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 72). In other words, creating a strong sense of community is balanced with creating individual connections with students based upon their rich, unique cultural backgrounds.

The importance of caring and teachers actualizing this "caring" in a culturally responsive way is critical. "Teachers need to begin the process of becoming more caring and culturally competent by acquiring a *knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity in education*" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 80). Again, this is not simply a matter of caring for the sake of caring or learning about students' cultural identities for the sake of expanding one's cultural horizons. The work is necessary and even foundational if all students are expected to achieve at their maximum potential.

Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed several equitable culturally responsive teaching practices that, when put into practice, can have a measurable impact on student learning. Some of the practices are that students rise and fall with the expectations teachers set for them. Students who are treated as competent will perform competently, and vice versa. When students are confronted with cognitively demanding tasks that extend their thinking and abilities and when the teacher can make meaningful connections between the content and the students' culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, student achievement can occur more consistently and at a higher level. Specifically, she discussed the importance of culturally relevant conceptions of knowledge. Teachers who embrace culturally relevant teaching practices see knowledge as an "evolutionary process" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 88), and know that recognize that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared between teachers and students. It is neither static nor passed solely in one direction, from teacher to student. Culturally responsive teachers view knowledge critically and are passionate about knowledge. Through that passion, they forge connections with students and help them develop the requisite academic skills. Finally, Ladson-Billings argued, academic excellence is a complex standard and must consider culturally and linguistically diverse students. Success is measured differently for each student, and teachers work to ensure that all students understand the high expectations set forth for them.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Black Males

In many eastern North Carolina schools, there is a disparity between the relatively high percentage of Black students and a relatively low percentage of Black teachers, particularly Black male teachers. This disparity can make it difficult for teachers to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices with students who, by and large, do not look like them. Howard (2013) explored the current landscape for Black male students in U.S. schools, and, while

cautioning against treating them as a monolithic group, he analyzed the ongoing achievement gap that exists between White and nonwhite students, and particularly Black male students. Nearly a decade ago, "the reading achievement scores for eighth-grade Black males [were] consistent with the reading scores for fourth-grade Asian American and White males" and "math proficiency scores of Black males continue to significantly trail behind their White, Latino, and Asian male counterparts" (Howard, 2013, pp. 60-61). Given the scope and breadth of available data, the status quo has not served students of color in general, and Black male students in particular, in an equitable manner. Therefore, Howard (2013) concluded, "it is imperative that teacher preparation programs give careful consideration to how teachers can build the capacity, skill set, and knowledge to work with males of color in general, but Black males in particular" (p. 79). He found that students of color are persistently exposed to curriculum that is "culturally and socially irrelevant and completely disconnected from their realities" (Howard, 2013, p. 80). Howard's research extended to culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices in general, and strategies that address the concerns he discussed for Black male students would benefit teacher-student relationships in schools comprising myriad culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Hammond (2015) noted, however, that it is not enough to simply add surface level cultural details to existing lesson plans. Instead, "students need regular opportunities to share their views and opinions about how the classroom culture and community is developed" (p. 151). In other words, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction must go well beyond "food, flags, and festivals" and reach a deeper level of discourse that engages students on their own culturally and linguistically diverse terms.

Mathematics Instruction and CRT

There is a strong correlation between cultural backgrounds and how students perceive themselves in an academic setting. While this is true for all content areas, Abdulrahim and Orosco (2019) used culturally responsive teaching practices in mathematics instruction. The authors found that the way students see themselves and their own cultural backgrounds shapes their mathematics identities. Teachers who successfully incorporated instructional styles that fostered students' understandings of their cultural identities were more successful at successfully promoting math learning. "Specifically, the teachers in six studies used their students' native language during mathematics instruction to facilitate their learning and reinforce the value of their bilingualism" (Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2019, p. 12). The authors found that mathematics instruction that connects to students' cultural backgrounds is a powerful indicator of how students think of themselves in relationship to mathematics. This supports a constructionist response to math instruction, and the authors warn against a "one-size-fits-all approach" that "separates students' cultural strengths and experiences from teaching and learning mathematics" (Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2019, p. 2). Brown et al. (2018) found a similar connection, noting that culturally responsive "mathematics education research has identified the synergies between the cognitive activities of mathematics and the nuanced cultural existence of students of color, which has provided valuable insight for understanding how to train mathematics teachers" (p. 779). The authors sought "an integrated framework [that] would cast these problems in culturally relevant ways" (Brown et al., 2018, p. 781). The framework linked mathematical instruction with a focus on culturally responsive teaching practices and served as a bridge between culturally responsive teaching practices and student achievement – the veritable *why* that drives our focus on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Though the authors focused on math instruction in this

study, the same principles extend to other content areas and are just as relevant in those teachers' classrooms.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Paris (2012) argued in his essay on culturally sustaining pedagogy that is it not enough simply to be culturally aware or culturally responsive. Paris (2012) posited that terms like "culturally appropriate, culturally responsive, [and] culturally relevant" (p. 95) are surface-level constructs that do not go deep enough in guaranteeing teaching practices that sustain the democratic ideals for all students championed in the work of previous researchers. Culturally sustaining pedagogy digs deeper, requiring that teachers' "pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). His model required "that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Gay (2018) stated that ongoing access to dominant cultural competence is "emancipatory" It opens doors for culturally and linguistically diverse students and centers culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in equity. It differs from culturally responsive pedagogy in that it has an explicit goal of sustaining "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). In setting students on equal footing and eliminating inequities, educators can sustain long-term growth by exploring heretofore surface-level ideas at a much deeper level.

Taking CLRP a step further, Paris (2012) stated that it should be the goal of teachers to seek out pedagogy that sustains the democratic ideas. Like McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who warned of "erasure" and other equity traps in education, Paris (2012) sought an alternative to the "dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by school" that "fell in line with

White, middle-class norms" (p. 93). These norms create a deficit approach, relegating students of color to a status of "otherness." The subsequent erasure of students' culturally and linguistically defining traits obliterate the rich cultural backgrounds that teachers should instead be celebrating and sustaining. Paris (2012) found evidence of both implicit and explicit deficit approaches that erased and obscured students' community and cultural heritage – "deficiencies to be overcome" (p. 93). This is a sentiment echoed by Kendi (2019) when he discussed assimilationist tendencies in spaces where White educators disproportionately represented learning spaces occupied predominantly by students of color, as well as by Steele (2010), who warned against "colorblindness" erasing the cultures of students of color. Delpit (2006) explored the harmful impact of cultural stereotypes in the classroom and how "child-deficit assumptions … lead to teaching less instead of more" (p. 172). Many well-meaning teachers, seeing these perceived "deficiencies," instinctively try to "protect" their students from rigorous instruction to the obvious detriment of their students.

Where Paris (2012) emphasized that current classroom models fall well short of his lofty goals, Muhammed (2018) discussed how to reframe literacy for Black students through a four-layered equity model: identities, skills, intellect, and criticality. Each of these components of the model are linked to one another in the pursuit of literacy, and each of the goals of learning served a specific purpose. Through identity, students learn who they are; through skills, they develop content-specific proficiencies; through intellect, they gain knowledge and become smarter; and through criticality, they learn to understand power, authority, and oppression through the reading of texts.

Muhammed (2018) expanded upon each of the four layers and their connections to one another as she examined the historical and contemporary significance of each. She analyzed

identity as a three-pronged definition: “who we are, who others say we are, and who we desire to be.” Identities are defined in terms of “racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, kinship, academic/intellectual, personal/individual, sexual, and community” (Muhammed, 2018, p. 138). Steele (2010) discussed at length the importance of identity, discussing the dangers of stereotypes and institutional “colorblindness.” Ultimately, every significant work centered on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices recognizes the importance of recognizing, celebrating, and utilizing students’ rich cultural identities as antiracist pedagogical practices.

Eight Competencies of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching does not occur without significant forethought and training, and specific competencies have emerged that successfully address culturally responsive teaching practices. Muñiz (2020) outlined in Figure 4 the eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching. She elected to illustrate the eight competencies using a circle, as there is no clear beginning or end. Just as participatory action research (hunter et al., 2013; Spillane, 2013) and praxis (Freire, 1970) establish cycles of reflection and action, Muñiz’s (2020) competencies are cyclical in nature. In Figure 4, she combines reflection and action with an acknowledgement of several key components of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Recent and hyper-relevant, Muñiz (2020) wrote against the dual and dueling backdrops of the unprecedented school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic and what she referred to as a “nationwide reckoning over racial injustice” (p. 15). This reckoning is an opportunity for educators to replace systemic racism and oppression with policies that are culturally and linguistically responsive – Paris (2012) would say sustaining – while working to reduce disparities in the classroom. The result is a resource that “will encourage and enable teachers and

Note. (Muñiz, 2020).

Figure 4. Eight competencies for culturally responsive teaching.

education leaders to leave behind the status quo and embrace a model of schooling that honors and empowers all learners, especially Black, Indigenous, and other students of color" (Muñiz, 2020, p. 15).

Overcoming Resistance

Teachers sometimes resist implementing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices; however, this resistance is by and large a risk analysis with too many educators concluding that pursuing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices is simply not worth the perceived resistance they may encounter from parents, community members, and reticent administrators representing traditional power structures. Neri et al. (2019) described five stages that occur throughout the process of implementing culturally responsive education: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Teachers must ground themselves in the knowledge of what it means to be culturally responsive, and leaders must be able to build consensus and provide a safe space in which to do the important work of implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. Incremental steps can be taken at the local level to encourage teachers to embrace culturally responsive practices. Hammond (2015) noted that "culturally responsive teachers have to understand their own cultural reference points to be effective" (p. 69). Noting that humans are hard-wired to connect with others, Hammond succinctly stated our challenges as educators as "knowing how to create an environment that the brain perceives as safe and nurturing so it can relax, let go of any stress, and turn its attention to learning" (Hammond, 2015, p. 50). If we are to create sustainability, teachers must be empowered to believe they will receive support in their work. Unfortunately, far too many teachers in rural North Carolina do not have that perceived support, either from community stakeholders, parents, or administrators. Next, I explore the role of school leadership in

implementing culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in the classroom and the impact doing so has on school culture and climate.

CLRP and School Leadership

Culturally responsive teaching practices are unsustainable without culturally responsive school leadership, an idea that I explore in this sub-section through the work of Khalifa (2018), Theoharis (2010), and Ladson-Billings (2009). Khalifa (2018) examined "how culturally responsive school leadership positively impacts schools and communities, and how it must be an integral part of any school reform" (p. 27). He challenged school leaders to engage in "critical self-reflection" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 27), particularly in schools where leaders serve minoritized students. This critical self-reflection takes on several distinct subsets: personal, content, structural, community-based, organizational, and sustainable. Khalifa (2018) argued that while the stated goal of most principals is to "lead an inclusive environment," such a goal is impossible without understanding "how identities and communities are minoritized" and taking an active stance against oppression (p. 81).

In his 2010 empirical study on school leaders, Theoharis explored the distinct constructions that principals used to disrupt four specific systems of injustice they encountered in their buildings. He noted that principals encountered resistance to any kind of significant social justice agenda and further described the resistance as "enormous," "never ceasing," and "often unbearable" (Theoharis, 2010, p. 339). Nevertheless, the principals persisted, noting specific, actionable strategies used to disrupt systems of injustice.

The first system that principals encountered were school structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement. In combating this system of injustice, they eliminated pullout/segregated programs, increased rigor and access to opportunities, increased student

learning time, and increased accountability systems on the achievement of all students. The second system of injustices were related to what Theoharis (2010) called "deprofessionalized teaching staff" (p. 341). Where these injustices were encountered, the principals addressed issues of race, provided ongoing staff development focused on building equity, hired and supervised for justice, and empowered their staffs. A third injustice the principals encountered was related to "a disconnect with the community, low-income families, and families of color" (Theoharis, 2010, p. 341). The principals combated this systemic injustice by creating a warm and welcoming climate, reaching out intentionally to the community and marginalized families, and incorporating social responsibility into the school curriculum. Finally, when the principals encountered "disparate and low student achievement," the response required a "confluence of all efforts and strategies" (Theoharis, 2010, p. 341).

Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed several other practical steps school leaders can take to attack systems of inequity that exist in our nation's schools. First and foremost, she noted the importance of recruiting teaching "candidates who have expressed an interest and a desire to work with African American students" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 143). Most schools in eastern North Carolina serve a significant number of Black students, yet many faculties do not mirror that diversity. Ladson-Billings did not argue against hiring White teachers. Instead, she stated that "we must encourage those who really want to teach African American students" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 143). Exploring "innovative and nontraditional" pathways to the classroom is the responsibility of equity-minded school leaders. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2009) stated that leaders must "provide educational experiences that help teachers understand the central role of culture" (p. 143). While much of this responsibility has historically fallen on teacher preparation programs, principals and building-level administrators must work to provide the training

necessary for teachers to embrace culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. As far back as 1995, Delpit noted the significant disparity between the percentage of nonwhite teachers in large metro areas compared with the number of students of color in those same districts. That issue persists today, some 25 years later, in eastern North Carolina. Next, I explore research on cognitively demanding academic discourse and how its application in the classroom can lead to greater and more consistent student achievement.

Academic Discourse

At its most fundamental level, academic discourse can be distilled into a handful of foundational questions: Who is talking to whom? What is the level of cognitive demand? How are students processing information and collaborating with each other and the teacher? How is the teacher facilitating discourse in an equitable manner for all students? Academic discourse occurs when students use academic language to discuss, debate, synthesize, and explain concepts they are learning in school. It is the language of school and the foundation for workplace language. Academic discourse transcends mere vocabulary instruction and looks closely at the skills necessary to move from simple, concrete ideas to more complex, abstract critical thinking. In this sub-section, I examine the fundamental ideas of academic discourse.

Academic Talk and Dialogue

Students retain knowledge at a higher rate when they are highly engaged, and they are highly engaged when they are allowed to discuss topics that are cognitively demanding and relevant to them. Resnick et al. (2015) examined the "shift in the classroom language game from recitation to reasoning" (p. 20). As the authors noted, no one is born knowing how to *do* academic discourse; that is, "no one is a native speaker" of academic discourse (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 20). Instead, students must be taught how to develop their reasoning skills by learning

how to explain their ideas using textual evidence and their critical thinking skills. To fully engage students in the process, teachers must shift away from what the authors call the "tripartite pattern" (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 20) in which interaction is teacher-led, with the teacher posing the question, the students replying, and the teachers evaluating. This feedback loop is summative by nature, and extended collaboration is shut off. Resnick et al. (2015) proposed largely keeping the first two instructional positions but changing "evaluation" to "feedback." In doing so, the teacher can elicit additional dialogue from students, scaffolding the responses in such a way that encourages collaboration and builds deeper understanding. Resnick et al. (2015) explored several model lessons in which the teacher posed a question and helped facilitate significant student-to-student talk. "In doing so, the teacher encouraged many types of responses from the students: claims, interpretations, explanations, and justifications" (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 26).

Zwiers's (2007) empirical study on academic language revealed several important findings, including a pattern that emerged in which classroom discourse progressed "from facts and concrete ideas to more abstract and complex ideas" (p. 101). Teachers often began by asking fact-based questions with clear right and wrong answers to provide a baseline for discussion before moving on to more cognitively demanding tasks that required students to explain, compare, and/or discuss cause and effect. From there, the teachers progressed to prompts that required students to persuade, interpret, and give perspective. Zwiers (2007) found that progression from concrete to abstract and simple to complex to be a natural progression, it also found that "English learners were asked more of the early fact-based questions while mainstream students were asked (and responded to) more of the cognitively demanding questions" (p. 101). Clearly, this revealed an issue of equity in these classrooms, as linguistically diverse students simply did not have the same access to cognitively demanding discourse as their mainstream

peers. Where learning goals are disparate, so, too, are the outcomes. Hammond (2015) addressed this disparity by focusing on what she called the "learning partnership alliance" (p. 94). In this alliance, the teacher works with her students to create a pact in which they work together on both a learning goal and a relational covenant between them. This ties back to Zwiers's work and makes it clear that teachers need to be thoughtful about not only the types of questions they're asking, but of whom they're asking them and whether they are doing so in a consistent and equitable manner.

Rigorous academic discourse is particularly rare in classrooms with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. In many academic settings, teachers have traditionally shown what Zwiers and Crawford (2011) refer to as the "Trivial Pursuit" model of learning, which focuses more on the accumulation of facts that can be learned quickly, as opposed to the more important exercise of teaching students what to *do* with the knowledge. Yet, the authors explored how teachers could teach culturally and linguistically diverse students to strengthen their faculties for academic discourse and explained that students must be taught how to elaborate and clarify. Both the speaker and listener must be aware of how much detail is needed and how to clarify the main idea. Further, ideas must be supported with examples and evidence that strengthens the ideas. When academic discourse occurs in the classroom, students should be able to build upon and challenge ideas in order to co-construct understanding. Paraphrasing allows students to prioritize ideas and negotiate meaning. Finally, students are taught to synthesize conversation points by organizing and shaping their ideas in a summarized form.

To achieve high levels of academic discourse, all students, regardless of their myriad cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, must have equitable access to cognitively demanding academic tasks. Cotton (1989), Lingard et al. (2003), and Weber et al. (2008) found that teachers

tend to give students from low-income backgrounds fewer opportunities to talk about content and engage in critical-thinking activities than teachers of higher-socioeconomic students. Further, they found that ELL students on average spent roughly 6% of the school day discussing academic content. Clearly, there is a significant gap that exists between students who are receiving instruction that encourages cognitively demanding discourse, and this gap significantly impacts culturally and linguistically diverse student populations – the very students who need access to rich academic discourse the most. Teachers regularly use think-pair-shares, small groups, and memorized sentence stems to engage students in limited ways; however, Zwiers and Crawford (2011) sought "to deepen and fortify these practices" (p. 8).

Zwiers and Crawford (2011) delineated the advantages of building a greater capacity for cognitively demanding academic conversations. Conversations build academic language, vocabulary, literacy skills, oral language and communication skills, and critical thinking skills, promote different perspectives and empathy, foster creativity and skills for negotiating meaning, build content understanding, cultivate connections, help students co-construct understanding, help teachers and students assess learning, foster equity, and build relationships, among several other notable advantages. Hammond (2015) recognized the importance of building relationships to create opportunities for students to learn at a consistently higher level of achievement. She stressed that it is the teacher's job "to find a way to bring the student into the zone of proximal development while in a state of relaxed alertness" (Hammond, 2015, p. 97). Put more simply, when students are comfortable and ready to learn, neurons fire in such a way that appropriately challenging cognitive tasks are more accessible to the students. The simple act of getting to know other students and providing opportunities for rich discussions break down artificial, yet very real, barriers in classrooms. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) found that "when students are provided

the opportunity to converse with other students with whom they might not normally interact socially, walls come down and new relationships can be forged" (p. 20).

Encouraging all students to participate in academic dialogue plays an important role in learning in the classroom. Resnick et al. (2015) state that "the social design of classrooms has been shown to influence students' achievement and their retention of knowledge" (p. 2). What students are saying is far more important than how they are saying it. "The kind of classroom talk that our authors investigated accepts students' emergent ideas regardless of whether they are framed in 'proper' speech – no grammar or vocabulary test is required to participate" (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 3). Such thinking is in line with the theory that culturally and linguistically diverse learners must be given the space to safely participate in collaborative student talk and that "dialogic teaching has the power to break the cycle of low demand/low performance too often experienced by children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, children who are ethnic minorities, and/or those who are not fluent in the dominant language" (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 3). That is, dialogic teaching serves as a vehicle of equity and has a direct correlation to increased academic achievement in our most vulnerable student populations. When cognitive demand increases so, too, do learning opportunities.

It is not enough simply to encourage student talk, however. Zwiers (2007) paid particular attention to the types of open-ended questions that allow students to craft personalized responses. In his study, he found that teachers typically asked open-ended questions that were categorized in one of four ways "personal (thoughts, feelings, opinions, and interpretations), justifying, clarifying, and elaborating" (Zwiers, 2007, p. 103). Each type of question served a purpose. Questions requiring students to justify their responses often followed personal questions. "Clarification questions required students to explain their responses" (Zwiers, 2007, p. 104), and

elaboration questions – which he noted were by far the most common type of open-ended question used by the teachers in his study – were often used in whole class discussions. In all scenarios, the teachers required their students "to think more deeply about a concept or to further define their understanding of it" (Zwiers, 2007, p. 104). He found that, over time and with practice, the teachers were able to increase the frequency they asked cognitively demanding questions that required students to utilize cognitively demanding academic discourse strategies (Zwiers, 2007). By increasing the level and frequency of student discourse in the classroom, teachers can reach "critical mass" and through rigorous and relevant student discourse in the classroom, increase student achievement and learning opportunities.

Muhammed (2018) discussed the idea of "criticality" and tied the concept to cognitively demanding student discourse. She further delineated criticality by conceptualizing and differentiating between Critical ("big C") and critical ("little c"). The lowercase critical denotes deep thinking whereas the uppercase Critical goes a step further and "signifies an ability and practice to understand and dismantle power and oppression and work toward antiracist, antihomophobic, and antisexist practices" (Muhammed, 2018, p. 138). Students must be able to think critically about the learning tasks in front of them, as effective teachers rightly have high expectations for cognitively demanding academic tasks; however, extending to "big C" criticality empowers students of color to push back against and dismantle the inherent inequalities they face. Teachers can use this framework in planning culturally and linguistically responsive lessons. Muhammed (2018) found that traditional classroom practices are typically both intelligent and skillful, but without a strong sense of self and knowledge of the identities of others, a climate exists where injustices thrive. The solution is to think more intentionally about identity and criticality in learning.

Teacher Practices

Effective teaching practices must be carefully planned, and academic discourse strategies are no exception. Smith and Stein (2018) analyzed five practices that can improve student discussions in mathematics classrooms by emphasizing the importance of teacher planning. The five practices are:

> anticipating likely student responses to challenging mathematical tasks and questions to ask to students who produce them; monitoring students' actual responses to the tasks…; selecting particular students to present their mathematical work during the whole-class discussion; sequencing the student responses that will be displayed in a specific order; and connecting different students' responses and connecting the responses to key mathematical ideas. (pp. 9-10)

By formalizing the process of planning for student discourse in the classroom, the authors create a structure that ensures "more coherent, yet student-focused, discussions" (Smith & Stein, 2018, p. 15) and creates systems of accountability for student-led discourse. Aguirre et al. (2013) note that "recognizing and positioning students' various mathematical background and competencies is a key equity-based practice" (p. 64) and argue that lessons that carefully plan student discussions are key to affirming students' mathematical identities.

Herbel-Eisenmann et al. (2017) explored specific teacher practices that are effective to encourage mathematics discourse in secondary classrooms. The authors suggested the following strategies for teachers to utilize to encourage academic discourse: waiting, inviting, revoicing, asking, probing, and creating. The steps are iterative, and each serves a specific purpose. By allowing wait time, students are encouraged to process the question before responding and elaborating. The teacher then invites participation from all students. This step can take several

forms, from creating safe learning spaces where students feel comfortable participating to explicit invitations to take part in the conversation; however, it is a step that must be available to all students. Once a student has provided a response, the teacher revoices and rephrases to check for understanding and then asks the student to rephrase. Then, the teacher probes the students' thinking to prompt for further elaboration and clarification. Finally, at the creating stage, students are given the opportunity to engage with one another's ideas more deeply. In their qualitative study, Herbel-Eisenmann and Otten (2011) noted that effective mathematics discourse practices typically fell into two major categories: *thinking* and *doing*. These tasks required a higher level of cognitive demand than lower-level tasks such as recalling and defining. Inquiry-based, collaborative exercises encourage students to learn by utilizing higher-order skills and collaborating with one another in teacher- and student-led academic discourse.

Questioning Strategies

To encourage cognitively demanding and equitable academic discourse in their classrooms, teachers must use a variety of calling-on and questioning strategies to elicit student responses. Depka (2017) examined the way teachers can impact student achievement through their questioning techniques. She used data from the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment to show that student achievement in both reading and math plateaued between fourth and eighth grade and concluded that a focus on the questions being asked in the classroom can improve rigor over time. She suggested questions that require students to transition from familiar approaches to more challenging strategies that require them to persevere beyond their initial comfort zones. Several strategies outlined in her book reference ideas already explored in this chapter, including involving students' "skills, imagination, and originality; requiring students to use skills that will prepare them for life; remain rooted in

realism; have a clear purpose that extends beyond the classroom; and increase cognitive engagement" (Depka, 2017, p. 14). Associating academic tasks with real-world problems make the content relevant to students, and this relevance creates room to increase rigor through more cognitively demanding academic tasks. Depka (2017) used two specific frameworks familiar to most teachers to illustrate the importance of effective questioning practices. She used Bloom's revised taxonomy to encourage teachers to scaffold from lower levels of thought (remember, understand, and apply) to higher levels of understanding (analyze, evaluate, and create). She also used Webb's (1997, 1999) Depth of Knowledge to examine how to address increasingly complex tasks, from Level 1 (recall and reproduction) to Level 2 (skills and concepts), Level 3 (strategic thinking), and Level 4 (extended thinking). While the levels were initially designed to evaluate standards, they are often used to create cognitively demanding tasks. Carefully planning questions – both for classroom discussions and on assessments – and effectively using calling-on and questioning strategies are key components of effective instruction that will lead to increased academic rigor.

Warm Demanders

The term "warm demander" was first used by Kleinfeld (1975) to describe the particular style of those teachers who were most effective in working with indigenous children from small villages attending urban schools in Alaska. Since the term was first coined, others (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006) have used the term to discuss impactful teaching methods for teachers who teach students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students. Ware's (2006) empirical study focused on several observational categories of warm demanders: "the ethic of caring; beliefs about students, teachers, parents, and community; and instructional practices" (p. 432). Additional categories emerged that went on to

further define “warm demanders” as “teachers who were successful with students of color because the students believed that these teachers did not lower their standards and were willing to help them” (Ware, 2006, pp. 435-436). Warm demanders were caregivers who were dedicated to students’ needs, and they held students to a high degree of accountability. Ware (2006) revealed the extent to which warm demanders could be culturally responsive. “This culture supports African American students who actively respond to the warm demander teachers’ high expectations by embracing a culture of achievement” (p. 454). Warm demanders also combined the seemingly contradictory methods of direct instruction and inquiry-based learning, but these dueling methodologies were successful because the teachers took the time to establish culturally responsive relationships with their students. Ware’s (2006) study on warm demanders and the successful meshing of direct instruction with inquiry-based learning directly correlates with the other practices of academic discourse in this sub-section and explains the connection between CLRP practices and classroom discourse. Hammond (2015) tied the idea of “warm demander” to the notion of “zones of proximal development” that led to a state of “relaxed alertness” (p. 97). It goes well beyond simple notions of being *firm* or *strict* or having *accountability*. Warm demanders recognize the myriad obstacles that stand in the way of their students’ learning, but they refuse to accept these hurdles as excuses or a lack of academic achievement. Warm demanders do what is necessary to remove those hurdles and clear a path for their students to learn. Additionally, “warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment” (Delpit, 2012, p. 77).

Bondy and Ross (2008) assert that teachers acting as warm demanders are central to sustaining academic engagement. Communication must be simultaneously warm with

nonnegotiable demands for accountability, effort, and respect. Warm demanders establish relationships that show students they believe in them. They build relationships based on students' cultural backgrounds but also recognize their *own* cultural backgrounds guide their interactions with students. While it is easier for many teachers to connect with students who have similar cultural backgrounds, warm demanders seek ways to connect with students whose backgrounds differ from their own. Bondy and Ross (2008) describe other characteristics of warm demanders: They communicate an expectation of success, insist students meet their high expectations, provide learning supports, support positive student behavior, and provide clear and consistent expectations.

High expectations alone are insufficient. In addition to making strong demands of their students, warm demanders must also have care and concern. When students know their teachers care, they rise to the occasion. Delpit (2012) cited empirical evidence showing the nexus between students who are fortunate enough to be in the presence of warm demanders and higher academic achievement. Several characteristics must be present in a warm demander's classroom. There must exist what Delpit (2012) calls an "academic press," in which learning goals and expectations are high and "students are held accountable for their performance and provided the assistance needed to achieve" (p. 82). Hence, the *demand* part of the *warm demander* equation. Next, teachers must work to attain strong social relationships with their students, both in and out of the school. The relationships must be characterized by mutual respect, trust, confidence, and space that allows students to take risks and learn from their mistakes. Delpit (2012) found that when both factors are present, students "made four times the yearly growth in math and three times the yearly growth in reading than when neither was present" (p. 82). When only one of the two elements was present, gains were significantly lower.

Beyond the clear academic benefits that are associated with warm demanders, these educators cultivate relational trust that extends beyond academics. Delpit (2012) found that warm demanders often see themselves as advocates for their students. They adopt quasi-parental attributes that focus on the child's "character, honesty, responsibility, respect, creativity, and kindness" (Delpit, 2012, p. 85). Perhaps one of Delpit's greatest revelations comes in terms of the relationships that are built between teachers who are warm demanders and their students: "Many of our children of color don't learn *from* a teacher, as much as *for* a teacher" (Delpit, 2012, p. 86). These relationships are authentic but exist in a delicate balance. They do not want to disappoint the teacher; conversely, they are disappointed if they perceive the teacher has given up on them. Where there is relational trust, there are positive relationships, and where there are positive relationships, academic achievement has room to occur at a much deeper level. Students who have been told they are "slow" live up to the label; conversely, students who are told they can achieve anything rise to the occasion and achieve because someone believed in them and, more importantly, they believe in themselves. In other words, warm demanders have built the relationships necessary to create a learning environment in which all students feel comfortable participating in academic discourse, and they have established a culture of high expectations and accountability that allow students to take the necessary risks to grow academically.

Conocimiento

It is through this conocimiento that teachers can build an academic space for culturally and linguistically diverse students to thrive in a rigorous classroom setting. The types of discourse students engage in are also important. Creating access and processes to explore relevant and challenging topics is a political act and one that directly attacks systems of oppression. Gutiérrez (2013) argued that mathematics and mathematics instruction is inherently

political, using the Spanish term “conocimiento” to denote “a stance on teaching” that “maintains solidarity with and commitment to one’s students” (p. 11). She used the term to denote an understanding of oppression that operates on both an individual and systemic level in schools, the process of deconstructing those systems, and how the multiple strands she explored interact when negotiating an academic space. Just as Freire (1970) discussed praxis as a “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 52), Gutiérrez noted that political conocimiento requires teachers to not only acknowledge its importance but to take action. Among the actions, she noted several specific examples, including ways in which teachers can make learning relevant, push back against deficit narratives, advocate for culturally diverse course syllabi, and work with other teachers to create a more rigorous learning environment for students. To effectively improve classroom practices, Gutiérrez argued that teachers must first know how to recognize politics at a micro level and then have the space necessary to enact meaningful change. Next, I discuss professional learning and leadership practices that lead to sustainable change toward culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices and academic discourse.

Change Leadership

In the first two sections of the literature review, I discussed culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices (CLRP) and connected that work to cognitively demanding academic discourse. In this sub-section, I explore change leadership strategies that can support both CLRP and academic discourse in the classroom, including Professional Learning Communities, change leadership, equity-centered network improvement communities, and communities of practice. Much of the leadership theory in these leadership strategies are related,

and each supports the collaborative nature of participatory action research, which will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

Leadership and CLRP

If teachers are to be invested in teaching practices that will impact culturally and linguistically diverse students, leaders must be equally invested in these practices. In an empirical study, Cooper (2009) examined strategies that equity-minded principals can use to build "coalitions with diverse groups to promote cultural responsiveness, educational equity, and social justice" (p. 696). She explored the cultural divide in schools that has "contributed to the marginalization of students and families of color in schools" (Cooper, 2009, pp. 698-699) that has persisted despite the trend toward greater racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in American schools than at any other time in history. This disparity between an increasingly diverse student population and the persistence of a continuing cultural divide has led to deep inequities in American schools. In both schools in the study, leadership made attempts to varying degrees to be more culturally inclusive. At one school, for example, the principal ensured the school's library had a culturally diverse collection and that teachers were culturally sensitive to Black students. The principal also sought to increase engagement in community involvement among Latinx families. In the other school, the principal acknowledged the need to increase family engagement among Black and Latinx families; however, the author pointed out implicit cultural biases and deficit thinking evident in both principals' words and actions, calling this apparent disconnect "a complex epistemological orientation" (Cooper, 2009, p. 715). Transformative school leadership requires leaders to move beyond surface level notions of "acceptance, caring, and inclusion" (Cooper, 2009, p. 716) and address cultural and social biases on a deeper, more meaningful level. Despite some of these shortcomings, Cooper (2009) stated that leaders in these

schools had the opportunity to perform "collaborative activism" by focusing on culturally relevant instruction across grade levels and "ensuring greater representation of diverse families within the leadership and governance structures" (p. 719). The first step in this sort of equity-oriented leadership is to recognize one's own implicit biases and work to move beyond them. The work is critical, especially in areas that are undergoing significant shifts in community and student demographics, and Cooper (2009) provides a roadmap for suggested transformative actions. First, principals must work to ensure that education is "democratic and emancipatory rather than marginalizing and oppressive" (p. 719). Second, principals "must also demonstrate the courage to facilitate and engage in hard dialogue about race, culture, class, language, and inequality with their staff and families and then make decisions that exemplify their commitment to equity and cultural responsiveness" (Cooper, 2009, p. 719). These critical conversations must occur both internally and externally; principals must be reflective and introspective so they may have difficult conversations with building stakeholders concerning necessary mindset shifts that will lead to sustainable change in their schools.

We must support the acquisition of these culturally and linguistically responsive teaching skills through professional learning and professional development opportunities in the schools. Additionally, leaders must provide teachers with opportunities to operate as agents of change while critiquing the status quo, teaching candidates must have "prolonged immersion in African American culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 146), and teachers must have "opportunities for observation of culturally relevant teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 147). Yet, Delpit (2006) noted that teachers continue to feel their voices are unheard and their needs unmet by the very institutions seeking to educate them. She made several suggestions for how to combat institutional biases while supporting professional learning, and some of those strategies – for

instance, “organizing students into cohorts, teams, or support groups” (Delpit, 2006, p. 123) – can serve to reduce or mitigate some of the factors that impede culturally responsive teaching practices. Further, they’re strategies that are widely available to school administrators hoping to implement culturally responsive teaching practices in their own schools or districts.

There are studies that examine culturally responsive professional development, notably Brown et al.’s (2018) empirical study that followed teachers at a STEM charter school in northern California and examined the efficacy of professional development centered around cultural relevancy for the school’s teachers. Teachers received background information on culturally relevant education, took part in a day-long session on the topic, and delivered a draft lesson plan to the research team. Finally, they taught a culturally responsive lesson while the research team observed. Notably, the researchers found that “although all teachers were familiar with the construct, few understood its pedagogical implications” (Brown et al., 2018, p. 787). During the professional development phase, the teachers were taught how to build “a synergy between science and mathematics concepts and the students’ culture” (Brown et al., 2018, p. 792). Despite the noted limitations of the study, Brown et al. (2018) found that “teaching STEM from a culturally responsive perspective is ripe with possibilities” (p. 799). This is consistent with Ladson-Billings’ 1995 empirical study that became the basis for her later work and that of her successors in the field. In her work with the eight classroom teachers that became the foundation for her book, Ladson-Billings found that students exposed to culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices outperformed their peers in several metrics of student achievement. However, she warned that “culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476).

Professional Learning Communities

When implemented with fidelity, Professional Learning Communities allow teachers to collaborate and base instructional decisions on learning rather than teaching. While this may sound like a subtle distinction, it is anything but. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a sustainable model of change leadership, professional development, and distributed leadership. According to DuFour et al. (2005), the PLC framework makes several significant changes to the classroom model, notably focusing on an embrace of learning as opposed to teaching as a school's primary mission. Second, teachers must work collaboratively in students' best interest to ensure that all students learn. To accomplish this task, frequent formative assessments are used to identify students who require additional support. Finally, teachers are tasked with acknowledging their inherent ability to shape student achievement in their schools. Professional Learning Communities differ from other department, grade level, and subject area meetings in several ways. Most notably, a PLC attempts to answer four critical questions: What do we want all students to learn? How do we know if they learn it? What do we do when they do not learn it? And, finally, how will we extend learning for students who already know it? Eaker and Gonzalez (2006) noted that leaders who have embraced PLCs "create processes to ensure those teams focus on the critical questions associated with student learning" (p. 9). This requires systematic processes "to ensure all staff members work together interdependently to improve professional practice and help more students learn at higher levels" (Eaker & Gonzalez, 2006, p. 9). Harkening back to distributed leadership, PLCs depend on leadership that "is distributed throughout the school" where "leaders are expected to set up their successors for success" (Eaker & Gonzalez, 2006, p. 10). Such leadership is ingrained in a school's culture, and leaders are empowered to collaborate with students' best interests in mind.

Brown et al. (2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995) specifically referenced culturally responsive teaching practices in relation to professional development, noting that a focus on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices were a requisite step in building meaningful teacher-student relationships and thereby increasing rigor and access to cognitively demanding academic tasks. However, regardless of the topic of the professional development, it must be sustainable and have a focus on student achievement (Whitcomb et al., 2009). "Many conceptual discussions of Professional Learning Communities identify respect and trust as essential features of a productive learning community" (Whitcomb et al., 2009, p. 210). This relational trust is a cornerstone of effective teaching, and strong leaders must encourage teachers to seek opportunities for themselves (Hammond, 2015). Hord and Hirsh (2009) discussed strategies that school leaders can use to do just that; namely, by extending blocks of time during the school day for teachers to engage in Professional Learning Communities. For PLCs to be truly effective, the authors stated that leaders must create a supportive culture and consistent time to meet. Additionally, school leaders must guide the communities toward self-governance, make data readily accessible, teach discussion and decision-making skills, show teachers the research, and take time to build trust.

Change Leadership Logics

Many of the strategies utilized by turnaround leaders are relevant in nearly all school settings. Woulfin and Weiner's (2019) qualitative study examines the "logics" of leadership required of turnaround leaders. They interviewed seven aspiring principals in a northeastern state during the 2014-2015 school year, with each aspiring leader being interviewed three times for a total of 21 interviews. The leaders were not observed in practice; rather, their responses are "self-reported beliefs, values, and practices" (Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, p. 240). Over the course of the

study, the authors chronicled the impact of three logics of turnaround leadership – managerial, instructional, and social justice – and discovered a fourth, "triggering change." The aspiring leaders tended to treat managerial leadership as a complement to the other logics that did not necessarily intersect with the other dimensions of turnaround leadership. Similarly, "participants rarely connected instructional leadership with other logics of turnaround, indicating that issues of instruction were isolated away from other leadership foci, including those of operations and equity" (Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, p. 234). Instructional leadership was frequently linked to school turnaround and was a dominant logic for the participants in the study. Principals were largely seen as the "educator-in-chief" (Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, p. 232). It is the fourth "logic," however, that warrants extra attention as it relates to participatory action research. The study framed the "triggering change" logic as a "comfortable push" to motivate school stakeholders to enact change in their schools (Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, p. 236). The participants in the study emphasized the strong correlation between triggering change and school culture and climate, with one noting "the necessity of shifting both the professional culture and school climate to enable transformational changes" (Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, pp. 237-238). Transformative change does not simply happen in a school. It requires distributed school leadership and a schoolwide culture that is dedicated to recognizing and addressing systemic shortcomings. Though most principals consider themselves instructional and managerial leaders, the study found that leaders must also possess separate capacities for both social justice and change leadership to be truly effective at sustaining meaningful, systemic change in their schools. By creating room for social justice and change leadership, principals are accomplishing several noteworthy tasks. They are creating relational trust and room for teachers to advocate for their students and for their instructional practices, and they are creating vehicles such as PLCs,

Networked Improvement Communities, or Communities of Practice where those closest to the issues (the teachers) can have the biggest impact on their students.

Distributed Leadership and Networked Improvement Communities

Increasingly, communities are expecting improved effectiveness, greater efficiency, and enhanced engagement out of our public education system. Reform initiatives have often failed in U.S. public education due to lack of planning, support, and follow-through. Educators can look to improvement science to drive school improvement. Networked Improvement Communities (NIC) help engage different stakeholders to build consensus and utilize different areas of expertise to solve a problem. Bryk et al. (2015) have written extensively on NICs and how they empower school stakeholders to make meaningful change from within. It is a powerful leadership framework and integral to the participatory action research in this study. Networked improvement communities "unite the conceptual and analytic discipline of improvement science with the power of networked communities to innovate and learn together" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 7). Using a NIC engages many different stakeholders in solving a problem together, shifting the experience towards "learning fast to implement well" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 7). Tangentially, Leverett (2002) made the case for distributed leadership as a vehicle for long-term, sustainable change, writing that the issue of short-lived change brought on by frequent principal turnover can be combatted by calling upon teacher leaders in various roles in the school to work toward equitable outcomes for all students. Spillane et al. (2004) focused on how school leaders can share – or *distribute* – leadership among key stakeholders in a school to address a situation. The leaders, followers, and situation comprise the key intersections of leadership practice, and it is in their relationship with one another that we see effective distributed leadership. "A distributed perspective presses us to consider the enactment of leadership tasks as potentially stretched over

the practice of two or more leaders and followers" (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 16). Bryk et al. (2015) note that a "network hub" is the support behind this distributed activity. "The hub is responsible for detailing the problem to be solved and for developing and maintaining the coherence of the evolving framework that guides efforts among many different participants" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 12). Distributed leadership requires the establishment norms and standards and requires leaders to provide technical resources. Teachers must have the support of school leaders, and protocols and procedures must be in place to allow teacher leaders to flourish within the confines of their respective spheres of influence.

Communities of Practice

Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Three crucial characteristics separate communities from communities of practice (CoP). To be a true CoP, the community must have a shared domain of interest, it must function as a true community, and its members must function as practitioners. "It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community" (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). Communities of practice are not exclusively an educational model; however, schools can function as communities of practice if they embrace the characteristics and embrace "deeper transformation" internally, with external partners, and over the lifetime of students.

Conclusion

Regardless of the specific ways in which professional learning and change leadership is organized in a school – whether through NICs, PLCs, CoPs, or some other method of distributed

leadership – the vehicle by which sustainable, transformative school leadership can embrace and enact change depends wholly on the teachers and leaders who are tasked with ensuring students have adequate access to CLRP practices and academic discourse that can effect long-term change. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology for the participatory action research study and elaborate further on the focus of practice.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I introduce the research design for the participatory action research (PAR) study. The study examines the nexus between creating effective teacher-student relationships and implementing cognitively demanding academic discourse in classrooms. I assert that effective teacher-student relationships are the foundation upon which effective classroom discourse grounded in culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) must be built. One cannot exist sufficiently without the other. The focus of practice for the PAR study was to engage with a group of teachers in professional learning that utilized a CLRP framework to develop deeper relationships with students as a critical premise for increasing cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classroom. First, I describe the context in which the PAR study took place, and then I explain why qualitative research in general, and specifically a participatory action research study, was the appropriate methodology for the study. I elaborate upon the components of a PAR study, describe the research questions, and discuss the action research cycles. Then, I describe the participants, data collection tools, and the processes of data analysis. Finally, I describe the study considerations, which include limitations, validity, and confidentiality and ethics.

Qualitative Research Process

Qualitative research was the best methodology for the study because, as both the lead researcher and principal, I am closest to the issues at my school and best situated to discover answers to the issues that the PAR study seeks to address (Guajardo et al., 2016). Using a qualitative approach, I was able to collect data over multiple cycles of inquiry, analyze it, and create *praxis* (Freire, 1970) – an ongoing cycle of reflection of action – with the Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group to impact change at the local level. Thus, I chose participatory action research (PAR), one form of qualitative research, as the primary methodology and used the

Community Learning Exchanges (CLE) and improvement science processes to engage participants in three iterative cycles of inquiry to answer the research questions.

Participatory Action Research

In participatory action research, the researcher is at the center of the research itself. Whereas some forms of qualitative research can be extractive in nature (hunter et al., 2013), the action research design systemically allows the researcher to gather information for the direct purpose of improving his or her practices and the practices of the participants with whom the researcher is working. Traditional research can be exploitive or even oppressive; action research (AR), particularly the activist form of action research, seeks to disrupt traditional power structures and is empowering by nature. Action research is a research approach "that works with a community on a common topic of interest, that is, engaging the community in finding answers and applying those answers to the point of concern" (hunter et al., 2013, p. 17). In this research study, I use the term networked improvement community for the small group of participants who will be fully engaged in the study, and we use the term Professional Learning Community for the additional teacher participants who attended Community Learning Exchanges. Throughout the study, I attended to the four processes of Foulger (2010) for PAR and the attributes of a co-practitioner research team, followed the axioms of the Community Learning Exchange, and modeled the characteristics of a networked improvement community to bolster my school's current PLC form and function.

PAR Process

Foulger (2010) discussed four processes of participatory action research: (1) *planning*, or deciding how to deal with a problem; (2) *acting*, or implementing our plan; (3) *observing*, or paying attention to and recording what is happening; and (4) *reflecting*, or analyzing outcomes

and revising our plans for the next cycle. Participatory action research is iterative, generative, and recursive in nature. Each cycle of inquiry was based upon the prior cycle, and each cycle provided further clarity for the overall direction of the study. The PAR study began with a plan, and through *praxis* (Freire, 1970), we acted upon it, observed the results, and reflected on the next step in the cycle.

To fully engage in the cycles, the EC-NIC team adopted attributes of what is termed a co-practitioner researcher. A key part of strong qualitative research is conducting member checks to ensure the accuracy of the lead researcher's evidence collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Members of the EC-NIC, serving as co-practitioner researchers, checked the data I collected and analyzed for accuracy and consistency; in other words, they ensured the trustworthiness of the evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Community Learning Exchanges

One key process for participatory action research is the use of Community Learning Exchange (CLE) processes; they are designed to be dynamic, social experiences in which participants have deep conversations with one another and work together to learn from one another. While all five axioms of Community Learning Exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016) are relevant to participants in this research study and offer guidance about how to proceed, three axioms are particularly relevant to my research design: Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes, the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns, and hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities. As the people closest to the issues in our school, the participants and I used CLE processes as the primary structure for the PAR study throughout each of the iterative cycles of inquiry, and I hosted CLEs to shape each cycle of inquiry.

Improvement Science

I used the underlying philosophy of improvement science throughout the PAR study to identify and improve upon an existing issue in my school. Bryk et al. (2015) noted that "improvement research entails getting down into the micro details as to how any proposed set of changes is actually supposed to improve outcomes" (p. 7). This is not always the case with other types of educational reforms, which often deal in "wishful thinking – gaps in understanding, questionable assumptions about causes and effects, and tacit beliefs of the form 'and then something good will happen'" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 8). Rather than dealing in assumptions and wishful thinking, improvement science asks core improvement questions, such as: "What is the specific problem I am now trying to solve? What change might I introduce and why? And, how will I know whether the change is actually an improvement?" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 9). As such, improvement science is a complement to participatory action research, and participants forge what Bryk et al. (2015) called a "colleagueship of expertise" (p. 9). Everyone involved in the study was both a participant in the research and someone actively involved in trying to bring about systemic improvement. Improvement science engages communities of stakeholders to build consensus and utilize different areas of expertise within an organization to solve a problem.

A key structure of the improvement science process is the networked improvement community, and I added the descriptor "equity-centered" to the NIC to engage in an EC-NIC. According to Gomez et al. (2016), networked improvement communities share several common features organized under two broad domains: the technical core and social participation. At the center of the NIC model is a problem of practice, which is explored through a shared theory of practice improvement. For the PAR study, I elected to change the language to "focus of practice," as this implies a more positive approach to an ongoing opportunity for change in my

school. In a NIC, members collaborate on a common set of methods and research tools and build a measurement and analytics infrastructure. NICs have shared values and commitments to leading, organizing, and operating the network. Finally, the group fosters the emergence of a shared culture, norms, and identity that is consistent with the network's aims. An NIC "unites the conceptual and analytic discipline of improvement science with the power of networked communities to innovate and learn together" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 7). Using an EC-NIC structure engages key constituents in solving a problem together, shifting the experience toward faster and more efficient learning and implementation. In this study, I embraced the central framework of an EC-NIC and addressed my school's shared values and commitment to embracing and centering equity in our work. Later in this chapter, I discuss the participants in the study. Within the framework of the study, the Co-Practitioner Research Group will function as an offshoot of a NIC (Bryk et al., 2015). Further, Community Learning Exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016) add another element to the more technical aspects of improvement science. It is at this intersection of EC-NICs, CLEs, and improvement science that the PAR process was most effective.

Activist PAR

PAR, whether *action* or *activist,* is about working collaboratively rather than in isolation and having a willingness to reach out and *act*. Throughout the 18-month study, we transcended typical *actions* and created a space in which *activist* research can occur. In their research, hunter et al. (2013) noted the difference, which emphasizes "facilitating *social change* through research" (p. 1). Activist research is "forged in collective action to challenge forms of authority and control that perpetuate inequalities and injustice" (hunter et al., 2013, p. 7). Activist researchers immerse themselves in political *praxis* and in making meaningful change rather than defaulting to what hunter et al. (2013) called "a fallback position that is technical, procedural, or

step by step" (p. 7). Action research with an activist focus is neither random nor accidental, nor does it happen in isolation. Rather, it is systemic *praxis,* research in action that involves all participants in identifying the problem, acting, observing, reflecting, and continuing the cycle of inquiry.

Role of Praxis

The role of *praxis* is what sets participatory activist research apart from other qualitative studies. It is the researcher as participant and the participant as researcher, and these dual roles create space for action. Freire (1970) termed this concept *praxis:*

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (p. 72)

Praxis requires that reflection is followed by action that lifts and liberates. In the process of instituting cycles of inquiry in the PAR process, I used iterative data to plan for subsequent actions, which implemented a habit of mind for teachers and myself to diagnose and design as a way of becoming participation action researchers in the school's context (Spillane, 2013). By shifting reflection to *praxis*, which requires a deep examination of the systemic structures that stand in the way of human progress toward dismantling oppressive practices, I, as the lead researcher, committed myself to transformative change as an equity leader (Shields, 2010).

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this PAR study is: How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse? Teachers need authentic and deeper relationships with students to push student to fully engage in

cognitively demanding academic discourse. Without those relationships, the students do not fully engage in the classroom discussions. Within the framework of the PAR, I answered the sub-questions using the data collected and triangulated as outlined in Table 2.

Action Research Cycles

I conducted three action research cycles of inquiry for the PAR study. The Pre-cycle (Fall 2021) provided context for the study. In the Pre-cycle, I formed the EC-NIC team, used CLE protocols in meetings, collected notes from those meetings, and triangulated the data with reflective memos, member checks, and field notes. Additionally, I met biweekly with the EC-NIC team to reflect on how teachers were cultivating relationships with students. In Cycle One, which followed in the Spring 2022 semester, I continued to meet with the EC-NIC team, and we analyzed the first sets of data to make decisions about how we proceed in the second cycle. We hosted a Community Learning Exchange on a teacher workday and reflected on practices that led to effective classroom strategies for building and maintaining meaningful relationships with students. PAR Cycle Two concluded the three cycles of inquiry between August and October 2022. In the final cycle of inquiry, I observed participants using rubrics we co-created and analyzed the connection between culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse.

Figure 5 illustrates the PAR cycle of inquiry model, which is cyclical and iterative in nature. I began the study by meeting with the EC-NIC team to review the focus of practice and begin reflecting on the research questions. The next phase, or action, is when we began implementing practices and analyzing the nexus between forging effective teacher-student relationships and increasing opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse.

Table 2

Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Sub Question	Data Collected	Triangulated with
To what extent do teachers develop deeper relationships with students?	• CLE artifacts • Documents • Observation Protocol • Post-observation conversation Protocol	• Reflective memos • Member checks • Field notes
To what extent do teachers implement and use cognitively demanding academic discourse?	• CLE artifacts • Documents • Observations • Post-observation Conversation Protocol	• Reflective memos • Member checks • Field notes
How am I as a leader able to build internal capacity of teachers and establish spaces for deeper relationships and increased opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse?	• Reflective memos	• Member checks • CLE artifacts

Figure 5. PAR cycle of inquiry model.

Participants, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

In this sub-section, I discuss how I invited teachers to participate in the PAR study. I describe the two types of participants who took part in the study: the EC-NIC members serving as co-practitioner researchers, and the other members of the school staff who worked in the Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures and attended the Community Learning Exchanges that we facilitated.

Participants: Equity Centered Networked Improvement Community (EC-NIC)

Throughout the study, I served as lead researcher with a group of teachers who acted as co-practitioner researchers (CPR) in the EC-NIC. I invited staff members who demonstrated an underlying philosophy of building and maintaining equitable relationships with students, which is a foundational belief for the study. The EC-NIC team comprised four eighth-grade teachers and me, and we worked together to implement the PAR through reflection, action, and analysis of the evidence. To participate in the voluntary study, participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C). During the study, I also invited other teachers in the building not directly related to the CPR group to participate in Community Learning Exchanges. I collected artifacts from the secondary group of participants, and I analyzed that data and shared it with the EC-NIC team for member checks to ensure the data was valid and trustworthy. Participants could exit the study at any time with no repercussions.

For the PAR study, I used purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2018) to select the EC-NIC team. Purposeful sampling relies on a specific unit of analysis that is directly related to the study (Patton, 2018). In this case, that unit of analysis was teachers involved in the study. Consistent with participatory action research, the participants were deeply involved in the work that took place. Purposeful sampling is not random; rather, I, as the lead

researcher, worked closely with a small group of participants, and it is from data collected from these participants that I triangulated the findings from multiple data sources to ensure the findings were consistent and accurate (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Because eighth-grade proficiency as measured by end-of-grade state assessments had lagged behind other cohorts for years and because the eighth-grade team was mostly comprised of early career teachers deeply invested in equity-centered work, I chose to invite that group to work with me as co-practitioner researchers. The eighth-grade team was generally receptive to change in our building, and that held true throughout the study. In fact, the team began embracing EC-NIC and CLE protocols in their own meetings separate from the study. The teachers represented a diverse cross-section of the overall faculty demographics at the school. By focusing on the eighth-grade team, I was able to collect consistent data and utilize the existing PLC structure to drive sustained change.

To summarize, according to Creswell (2013), qualitative research places the researcher directly in the world in which he/she is researching. As teachers and educational leaders, the EC-NIC is fully immersed in a natural setting, and "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). It is a powerful and iterative methodology that allows action-researchers to be highly reflective of the work because we are gathering, analyzing, and subsequently acting on our findings. Creswell (2013) placed an emphasis on the *process* of research and provided a theoretical framework for conducting qualitative studies and delineated several common characteristics: natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participants' meanings, emergent design, reflexivity (in which researchers "position themselves" in the study), and a holistic account (Creswell, 2013, pp. 45-46). Notably, Creswell discussed the

use of qualitative research to empower individuals in the study and to develop new theories of action. We used field notes, reflective memos, and other means of data collection outlined in the next sub-section to ground our work.

Data Collection

In this sub-section, I describe the data collection instruments that I used with the EC-NIC team during the PAR study. I used artifacts from Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), documents that include agendas and meeting notes, classroom observations and evidence-based conversations, and reflective memos. I also utilized observation tools for calling on, question form, and question level (see Appendices D, E, F), the conversation protocol (see Appendix G), and frameworks for academic discourse (see Appendix H) and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (see Appendix I) as a means of analyzing data. Finally, the EC-NIC did member checks to ensure the accuracy and consistency of data that I collected and analyzed.

Community Learning Exchanges

I collected artifacts from Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) and analyzed those artifacts. The CLE axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) continued to support the PAR study throughout the cycles of inquiry. In the Pre-cycle, I analyzed the extent to which teachers create meaningful relationships with students. During the CLEs, we discussed how teachers can position themselves as warm demanders, how they can cultivate a classroom environment in which culture is seen as an asset, and how to create relationships through storytelling. I modeled several CLE protocols that can be taken back to the classroom, including journey lines, mandalas, and other storytelling structures. The CLEs also focused on academic discourse, including how to create cognitively demanding academic tasks, facilitate student-to-student

dialogue, create equitable questioning practices, and utilize higher levels of questioning to elicit creative responses.

Documents

To address each of the research questions, I collected various documents that included lesson plans, meeting agendas, and meeting notes. I used these documents and triangulated the data with reflective memos, field notes, and member checks. Throughout the study, I depended heavily on protocols and documents created and collated by Project I^4, a grant focused on providing school leaders with the tools necessary to pursue equitable classroom practices, especially in rural math and science classrooms.

Classroom Observations and Conversations

While classroom observations are deeply embedded non-negotiables in the school's culture, existing formal observation and informal instructional walkthrough rubrics fail to capture culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) teaching practices or academic discourse in the classroom. Teacher observations are generally evaluative in nature, but the school and district have worked for several years to cultivate a school culture in which instructional walkthroughs and observations are viewed as formative, and feedback is framed as an instructional coaching conversation. During the iterative cycles of inquiry, I utilized observation tools and evidence-based post-observation conversations that were equity-centered and focused on CLR practices and academic discourse. I used observation instruments that gauged teachers' effectiveness in building culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and effective calling-on and questioning practices (see Appendices E and F) as they relate to academic discourse. The post-conversation protocol is in Appendix G. These protocols are representative of Project I^4's foundational beliefs about effective academic discourse.

Reflective Memos

I wrote weekly reflective memos throughout each of the three cycles of inquiry. The memos represented my thinking and allowed me to seek out patterns and extrapolate meaning from the multiple data sources as I reflected on my leadership and the work of the participants within the study. The reflective memo structure comprises four parts that work in conjunction with one another: engaging in, reflecting on, and contextualizing the experience and then planning for the future (Kolb, 1984).

Data Analysis

I coded and analyzed these data sets and shared the analyses with the EC-NIC. I used the coding process of Saldaña (2016) in which he describes a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). I examined the coded data sets of CLE artifacts, documents, classroom observations, post-observation conversations, and reflective memos (Saldaña, 2016) to determine patterns of data from the codes and subcodes that I then sorted into categories, emergent themes, and finally the study findings. The EC-NIC conducted member checks to determine the validity and trustworthiness of that evidence and supported us as we discussed steps for each subsequent cycle of inquiry.

Study Considerations: Limitations, Validity, Confidentiality, and Ethics

In this sub-section, I discuss three considerations that influence the study. First, all studies have limitations, and the limitations in qualitative research have to do with numbers in the study and generalizability (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). Secondly, I examine the internal and external validity of the study, as well as the trustworthiness of the evidence I collect, primarily

referring to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) formulation of how validity is determined in qualitative research. Finally, I discuss how I addressed confidentiality, security of data, and ethics.

Limitations

Qualitative research limitations typically include time, the researcher's biases, and difficulty in generalizing (Quierós et al., 2017). This study was no different. As the principal of a rural middle school in eastern North Carolina, I served as the primary researcher for the PAR study. The EC-NIC team, acting as co-researchers, comprised teacher leaders who were willing to learn, dedicated to equity, and could act as co-practitioner researchers and participants in the study. As principal, I am uniquely positioned as lead researcher and the leader of my building. As such, research and action conducted as part of this PAR study will serve as *praxis* for continued growth in my building well beyond the limited scope of this study. However, because I am the principal, I do have evaluative capacity for the participants, and, while I endeavored to establish the process as collaborative, I also took precautions to ensure that my role as evaluator remained separate from my role in the PAR study.

Any qualitative study will have inherent limitations related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). To maintain credibility, I ensured that findings could be confirmed by multiple sources through detailed coding and triangulation. Though the study was, by its nature and design, limited to my school, findings may be transferrable to other, similar educational settings. Gerdes and Conn (2001) examined ways to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study through several techniques that I used in the PAR study, including prolonged engagement with the participants, persistent observations over time, triangulation using multiple data sources, and frequent member checking with all participants.

Internal Validity

Qualitative research can be inherently subjective, subject to the underlying views of the CPR group as co-practitioner researchers. We used a variety of data points to triangulate findings in such a way as to maximize the validity of the study and the trustworthiness of the evidence collected. The cycles of inquiry were iterative in nature, and the processes we used were collaborative vehicles that pulled from the collective, collaborative expertise of the entire EC-NIC team.

I served as the lead researcher, and I worked with four eighth-grade teachers throughout the study. Therefore, the study was limited to a small group of educators within the school. I used CLE artifacts, PLC agendas, and meeting notes from the EC-NIC to code (Saldaña, 2016) the findings along with weekly reflective memos that informed my progress on the PAR study. To examine the internal validity of the study, I kept detailed field notes and reflective memos to analyze evidence and triangulate the findings through multiple data sources. Additionally, I engaged in observations and conducted member checks with the EC-NIC/CPR group. My dual roles as principal and lead researcher in the PAR study was an ongoing challenge; however, I utilized the CLE axioms and built gracious space (Guajardo et al., 2016) to center the work around those closest to it and worked to further mitigate any inherent bias caused by my dual roles by analyzing and triangulating multiple sources of data.

External Validity

Whereas the study will continue to have intrinsic value within the school in which it was undertaken, caution should be taken in applying study findings to other schools or districts, as underlying conditions at other sites will invariably be quite different from those at this school. The relational trust with the EC-NIC team had a substantial impact on the study. It is by design

impossible to extricate the researcher from the participant. However, the qualitative research methodology, processes used to engage in the work, evidence and artifacts collected, and data analysis and triangulation protocols are transferrable to other settings, and the general knowledge, specifically as it related to the intersection between CLRP relationships and academic discourse, revealed a deeper understanding of the focus of practice.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

All participants in this study were teachers and building-level leaders in the school. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants could elect to withdraw from the PAR study at any time without penalty. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C) to participate in the study. Participants have a significant stake in students' overall success or failure, and they were chosen for their passion and determination in pursuing praxis and equitable outcomes for all students. I conducted multiple classroom observations during the study, and I took every precaution to protect the identities of students, teachers, and any other constituents in the data. I used pseudonyms for all names of teachers throughout the study. I controlled for possible bias by utilizing member checks, peer review of data, and reflective memos to triangulate evidence collected. The security of the data collected and confidentiality of the participants will be treated with the utmost importance, and data will be stored in a secure setting in such a way as to maintain the anonymity of all participants in the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the methodology and research design that I used for the PAR study in order to research the nexus between effective CLRP relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. The participatory action research model of qualitative research allowed the co-practitioner research group to create *praxis*, reflection and action within the three

cycles of inquiry. We worked in an Equity-Centered, Networked Improvement Community that had attributes of co-practitioner researchers and provide a gracious space for conducting this important work (Guajardo et al., 2016). Finally, I outlined the timeline for each cycle of inquiry in the PAR study. In Chapter 4, I discuss how the PAR study was organized through the Pre-cycle and context, with a focus on the Fall 2021 Community Learning Exchange and PLCs. In Chapter 5, I discuss how I continued the process in an iterative nature with PAR Cycle One to seek out emergent themes. In Chapters 6 and 7, I analyze the findings from the final PAR cycle and reflect on the overall efficacy of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PAR PRE-CYCLE

The focus of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study is to explore culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices and how those CLRP practices shape cognitively demanding academic discourse in middle grades classrooms. In this chapter, I describe how I established a co-practitioner research (CPR) group using the Equity-Centered Networked Improvement Community (EC-NIC) model to facilitate effective meetings that center equity and relational trust while amplifying the voices of those closest to this important work. I also modeled the five Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms throughout the Pre-cycle. After describing the PAR context, including the place and people with whom I worked, I describe the PAR Pre-cycle process, including the data gathering and coding process, and I analyze emergent categories from monthly EC-NIC meetings with the co-practitioner researchers. Finally, I explain how the emergent categories and framework informed the next cycle of inquiry in the Spring 2022 semester.

PAR Context

The PAR study took place in a rural Title I middle school in eastern North Carolina. The school serves approximately 550 students in grades 6-8. It was originally built in the 1920s as a segregated high school to serve the town's Black community. After integration, the school became a middle school. It has an active alumni association that celebrates the school's long history. The school has a diverse student population that closely mirrors the community's demographics, with about 39% White, 38% Black, and 18% Latinx. However, the school's staff is significantly less diverse and does not represent the student population it serves. Of 35 certified staff members, 20 (57%) are White, 13 (37%) are Black, and two (5.7%) are Latina.

The school employs only two Black male teachers, yet 19% of our students are Black males. This disparity between staff and student diversity will be explored later in the chapter.

Creating the EC-NIC Group

The eighth-grade team, comprising two English and Language Arts teachers and two math teachers, is a close-knit group of early career educators who have embraced a teaching philosophy that closely aligns with the stated goals of Project I^4 and PAR study. They are committed to building meaningful relationships with their students and seeking out "best practices" in their classrooms. They are reflective and introspective, and they work extremely well together. For these reasons, I selected this team as the EC-NIC group and co-practitioner researchers in the PAR study. The EC-NIC group is described briefly in Table 3, and a more detailed description of the team follows.

Heather is a fourth-year teacher who attended another high school in the district's southern region. Her father recently retired as superintendent in a nearby county, and her younger sister also teaches, so she represents a family of educators. A White woman in her mid-20s, Heather graduated from a teacher preparation program and completed her internship at this school three years ago. In her short career, she has established herself as a skilled math teacher and values building meaningful relationships with her students. Despite her youth and due to several retirements on the eighth-grade team in the last 2-3 years, Heather has become the grade level chair and is a respected leader on the eighth-grade team. In addition to her focus on relationships, Heather also prioritizes effective student discourse strategies in her classroom. With a focus on equitable pedagogical and relationship building strategies, Heather is a natural fit for the PAR study's EC-NIC team.

Table 3

Co-Practitioner Researchers

Name	Description
Michael	Principal and lead researcher, White man, 41 years old, 15 years of experience (7 as a teacher, 5 as assistant principal, 3 as principal)
Heather	Math teacher, White woman, mid 20s, 4 years of experience
Rebecca	ELA teacher, White woman, early 20s, 2.5 years of experience
Briana	ELA teacher, Black woman, late 20s, 4 years of experience
Denise	Math teacher, Black woman, early 20s, 2 years of experience

I hired Rebecca as an English and Language Arts teacher two years ago when an ELA teacher resigned in November to enlist in the military. Rebecca is a White woman in her early 20s and is a recent graduate from a four-year university with no prior experience in education. At the time she was hired, her fiancé was a first-year business teacher at the feeder high school. The two have since married and have "put down roots" in the community, buying a house in the area. Rebecca is committed to the school and serves on numerous committees. In addition to her teaching duties, she also coaches the school's fledgling Quill writing team, which qualified for the state finals in its first year of competition in 2021. Like Heather, Rebecca places a high priority on culturally responsive relationships in her classroom, and since embracing CLRP practices, her classroom management has improved, and student achievement has increased.

Briana is a fourth-year teacher and the other half of the eighth-grade ELA team. Like Rebecca, Briana entered the teaching profession on an alternative licensure pathway. Prior to becoming a teacher, she attended a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and obtained a degree in social work. Briana is a Black woman in her late 20s and served as a social worker for several years prior to entering the teaching profession. Her greatest strength is the rapport that she builds with all students, and she takes great pride in these culturally responsive relationships. Briana often assigns students relevant work, such as college and career research, and is a tireless advocate for her students. Briana is a native of this community, growing up just a few miles from the school. Her father is a retired high school masonry teacher, and her mother still teaches at a high school in the district, which at least partially explains her draw to education. In addition to her classroom duties, Briana also serves as a cheerleading coach and assistant athletic director.

The newest member of the eighth-grade team is Denise, a Black woman in her early 20s. Denise is also a native of this community and attended the middle school where she is now

employed. Her mother is a teacher at an elementary school that is a feeder school for our school. Denise is also a graduate of an HBCU and completed her teaching internship at this school in 2021 before accepting a full-time teaching job in May 2021. Denise works closely with Heather, and the two have similar teaching styles and philosophies, which may have been influenced by the two having the same pre-service internship supervising teacher. Like her colleagues on the eighth-grade team, Denise leans heavily on the relationships she builds with her students.

I am the lead researcher for the PAR study and the principal at the school, where I have served since July 2020. This is my first principalship, and I previously served three years as an assistant principal at a K-8 school, two years as an assistant principal at a high school, and seven years as a teacher, coach, and journalism adviser at the same high school where I later served as an assistant principal. I have spent my entire educational career in the same district. I entered education as a lateral entry teacher in 2006 with no formal teacher training. Prior to becoming a teacher, I worked as a full-time sports editor and reporter for a community newspaper in eastern North Carolina. Teaching had always appealed to me, and I wanted to be the teacher who built lasting and meaningful relationships with my students. Many of my students have remained in contact with me, and I continue to prioritize culturally responsive relationships as an administrator. This foundational philosophy had a significant impact on the EC-NIC group I chose to serve as co-practitioner researchers on this PAR study.

Among the four teachers, it is noteworthy that they share several common traits. All four are eastern North Carolina natives. Three of the four grew up in the district where they now work, and the fourth grew up in a neighboring county and married a native of this district. All four have strong familial ties to education: three have parents who are teachers and the fourth married a teacher whose mother is also an educator. Two of the four attended this school when

they were in middle school and now work with numerous teachers who once taught them. It is extremely likely that some of these commonalities have shaped their teaching philosophies, even as they had disparate pathways to their classrooms.

PAR Pre-Cycle Process

The PAR Pre-cycle took place during the Fall 2021 academic semester. Prior to beginning the Pre-cycle, I approached the eighth-grade team and discussed with them the overarching research questions I hoped to answer through the PAR study. All four teachers were eager to join the study as participants, and we met monthly during the semester as an EC-NIC group. The initial meetings focused almost entirely on creating gracious space (Hughes & Grace, 2010) and relational trust with the group. I began each EC-NIC meeting with a personal narrative that sought to address the overarching research questions for the PAR: How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse? For the Pre-cycle, I chose to focus primarily on the first sub-question: To what extent do teachers develop deeper relationships with students? The team and I also analyzed the Project I^4 framework on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (see Appendix I) and began making preliminary plans for the first Community Learning Exchange (CLE), which we hosted in February 2022.

Next, I discuss the monthly EC-NIC meetings as well as the data collection and analysis from the Pre-cycle. I coded and analyzed the data I collected from weekly memos and protocols, and the resulting emergent categories are analyzed in the subsequent sections.

EC-NIC Meetings

The EC-NIC team met monthly beginning in September 2021. During the initial meeting, we worked to establish gracious space and relational trust. I shared with the team the overarching

research question, the purpose of the PAR study, the philosophy of Community Learning Exchanges, and the CLE axioms. At the second EC-NIC meeting in October, the team shared personal narratives on the following prompt: Who was the most impactful teacher in your educational career and why? The purpose of this prompt was twofold. First, the prompt continued our focus on building gracious space and relational trust. Second, the personal narrative shifted the conversation to the research sub-question on the importance of building effective teacher-student relationships. During the last EC-NIC meeting of the semester, we analyzed the Project I^4 framework on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (see Figures 6 and 7).

Each member of the EC-NIC group first highlighted their own progress on the Project I^4 CLRP framework in green (see Figure 6) and then highlighted their perception of how other teachers at the school address culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in yellow (see Figure 7). The figures are typical of what all members submitted in two ways. First, most team members rated themselves at least somewhat higher than they did their peers. Second, most team members rated themselves and their peers higher on culturally responsive practices than they did on linguistically responsive practices. I analyze this data in more detail later in the chapter.

Finally, we began to discuss the nexus between effective culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and effective academic discourse strategies and began planning for the first CLE in the Spring 2022 semester. Next, I discuss the data collection and analysis from these EC-NIC meetings, and I share an excerpt from the initial codebook that I developed during the Pre-cycle.

CULTURALLY AND LIGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY			
	Minimally Inclusive----------	----------Moderately Inclusive----------	----------Fully Inclusive
Culturally Responsive Practices	• **Relationships:** Superficial and focused on work completion and behavior modification • **Personal identity of students:** Superficially recognized although generally not connected to culture • **Teacher disposition:** Focus on treating all students the same • **Content:** "Neutral"; limited attention to culture and language • **Background and prior knowledge:** Limited and surface level use of student experiences & background. • **Cultural view/use:** Attention to food, flags & festivals • **Culture and classroom:** Culture of the classroom norms - white middle-class behaviors and learning processes • **Culture and community** : Often seen as deficits for students of color; instruction designed to overcome deficits	• **Relationships:** Intentional relationships built & sustained with some students but not all • **Personal identity of students:** Cultural & linguistic identity celebrated but infrequently integrated into learning context • **Teacher disposition:** Relationship often determined by teacher's level of empathy for particular student situations. • **Content:** Conscious of CRP content and processes • **Background and prior knowledge:** Tapping prior & background knowledge support for learning; cultural & linguistic prior knowledge activated • **Cultural view/use:** Diversity celebrated in general but sometimes viewed as a challenge. • **Culture and classroom:** Cultivated to use as starting points for students to engage • **Culture and community:** Culture & community often celebrated but seen as a challenge; connections with community focused on overcoming challenges	• **Relationships** Deep relationships with students and families • **Personal identity of students:** Identities validated as unique perspectives on content; integrated into the learning experience • **Teacher disposition:** Warm demander; fully accommodating individual learning profiles • **Content:** Community-focused with intentional connections to student experiences • **Background and prior knowledge:** Content & practice internalized/embedded in relationships; student knowledge socially constructed; • **Cultural view/use:** Fully integrated into classroom; students viewed as social activists with important roles in their communities • **Culture and classroom:** Multiple perspectives integrated in learning experiences as students engage with deeper and more complex content • **Culture and community:** Culture and community identity of students seen as assets
Linguistically Responsive Practices	• **View of language:** English seen as primary key to learning; language diversity viewed as a challenge • **Teachers knowledge of students:** Through test scores and other baseline academic data; little attention to personal identity as it relates to culture and linguistics • **Expertise for learning language:** External expertise to support ELL students; students often pulled from class; work with "different" instructional materials than their grade level colleagues; support and curriculum for ELL students primarily driven by ESL teacher • **Curricular and instructional supports:** Focused on simplification to make it easier for ELL students; little to no connection to the cultures represented in class or school.	• **View of language:** Home language seen as asset and used to access concepts but prefer students convert/use English • **Teacher knowledge of students:** Some knowledge and use of cultural and linguistic context of students; some knowledge of home situations and histories • **Expertise for learning language** External experts (ESL teachers) "translate" class experience • **Curriculum and instruction:** Some materials used in the mainstream class and supplement with others materials designed to make the tasks easier; some attention to cultural representation of class or school	• **View of language:** Trans-languaging key to instructional process; ability to speak multiple languages is seen as an asset • **Teacher knowledge of students:** Deep knowledge and use of cultural, historical & linguistic contexts of ELL students; • **Expertise for learning language:** Co-teaching of ESL and general ed. teachers; collaboration to determine support needed; student determination of language use • **Curriculum and instruction:** Authentic opportunities to develop language by providing challenging grade level content for students; amplification (not simplification) to ensure rigor and engagement;

Figure 6. EC-NIC member's analysis of her own progress on Project I^4 CLRP framework.

CULTURALLY AND LIGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY			
	Minimally Inclusive----------	----------Moderately Inclusive----------	----------Fully Inclusive
Culturally Responsive Practices	• **Relationships:** Superficial and focused on work completion and behavior modification • **Personal identity of students:** Superficially recognized although generally not connected to culture • **Teacher disposition:** Focus on treating all students the same • **Content:** "Neutral"; limited attention to culture and language • **Background and prior knowledge:** Limited and surface level use of student experiences & background. • **Cultural view/use:** Attention to food, flags & festivals • **Culture and classroom:** Culture of the classroom norms - white middle-class behaviors and learning processes • **Culture and community** : Often seen as deficits for students of color; instruction designed to overcome deficits	• **Relationships:** Intentional relationships built & sustained with some students but not all • **Personal identity of students:** Cultural & linguistic identity celebrated but infrequently integrated into learning context • **Teacher disposition:** Relationship often determined by teacher's level of empathy for particular student situations. • **Content:** Conscious of CRP content and processes • **Background and prior knowledge:** Tapping prior & background knowledge support for learning; cultural & linguistic prior knowledge activated • **Cultural view/use:** Diversity celebrated in general but sometimes viewed as a challenge. • **Culture and classroom:** Cultivated to use as starting points for students to engage • **Culture and community:** Culture & community often celebrated but seen as a challenge; connections with community focused on overcoming challenges	• **Relationships** Deep relationships with students and families • **Personal identity of students:** Identities validated as unique perspectives on content; integrated into the learning experience • **Teacher disposition:** Warm demander; fully accommodating individual learning profiles • **Content:** Community-focused with intentional connections to student experiences • **Background and prior knowledge:** Content & practice internalized/embedded in relationships; student knowledge socially constructed; • **Cultural view/use:** Fully integrated into classroom; students viewed as social activists with important roles in their communities • **Culture and classroom:** Multiple perspectives integrated in learning experiences as students engage with deeper and more complex content • **Culture and community:** Culture and community identity of students seen as assets
Linguistically Responsive Practices	• **View of language:** English seen as primary key to learning; language diversity viewed as a challenge • **Teachers knowledge of students:** Through test scores and other baseline academic data; little attention to personal identity as it relates to culture and linguistics • **Expertise for learning language:** External expertise to support ELL students; students often pulled from class; work with "different" instructional materials than their grade level colleagues; support and curriculum for ELL students primarily driven by ESL teacher • **Curricular and instructional supports:** Focused on simplification to make it easier for ELL students; little to no connection to the cultures represented in class or school.	• **View of language:** Home language seen as asset and used to access concepts but prefer students convert/use English • **Teacher knowledge of students:** Some knowledge and use of cultural and linguistic context of students; some knowledge of home situations and histories • **Expertise for learning language** External experts (ESL teachers) "translate" class experience • **Curriculum and instruction:** Some materials used in the mainstream class and supplement with others materials designed to make the tasks easier; some attention to cultural representation of class or school	• **View of language:** Trans-languaging key to instructional process; ability to speak multiple languages is seen as an asset • **Teacher knowledge of students**: Deep knowledge and use of cultural, historical & linguistic contexts of ELL students; • **Expertise for learning language:** Co-teaching of ESL and general ed. teachers; collaboration to determine support needed; student determination of language use • **Curriculum and instruction:** Authentic opportunities to develop language by providing challenging grade level content for students; amplification (not simplification) to ensure rigor and engagement;

Some of the language concerns, we do not cover as a school.

Figure 7. EC-NIC member's perception of the entire staff's progress on Project I[4] CLRP framework.

Data Collecting and Analysis: Codes and Codebook

During the Pre-cycle, I collected several forms of data. Following the first meeting, I wrote a memo reflecting on gracious space and relational trust. I began collecting data during the second and third EC-NIC meetings. The major artifact from the second EC-NIC meeting was the personal narrative on impactful teachers, and the major artifact from the third EC-NIC meeting was the analysis of the Project I^4 CLRP framework. I also wrote weekly memos throughout the semester. Some of the memos were responses to course assignments, others were in response to an ongoing equity log that I have kept over the course of the semester, and others were written in response to EC-NIC meetings. Reflective memos served to triangulate data collected from the personal narrative and CLRP framework analysis we used during the EC-NIC meetings. I began by using inductive coding, developing a code and emergent categories as I analyzed the data collected during the Pre-cycle (Saldaña, 2016). I also used deductive coding on subsequent passes and found additional data representing the codes developed during the initial analysis of the data. Eventually, I combined the codes, sorted into categories, and noted the frequency of each code and category in the codebook. The inductive and deductive coding was used to create a codebook with 10 preliminary categories and codes with descriptions for each code as shown in Table 4. The entire codebook is shown in Appendix J.

I created the codes from the reflective memos and artifacts collected at the EC-NIC meetings. I then tallied the codes as shown in Table 5. This process allowed me to create meaning from the myriad data collected over the course of the Pre-cycle. Gradually, the codes began to reveal emergent categories that I will analyze in greater detail in the next sub-section.

Table 4

Excerpt from Codebook

Category	Code	Description
Focus on relationships	Familial relationships	Teachers discuss “quasi-parental” roles of teachers
Focus on relationships	Emphasis on teacher-student relationships	General statements concerning the importance of building relationships with students
Focus on relationships	Lack of teacher-student relationships ("minimally inclusive")	Potentially harmful classroom practices caused by the omission, absence, or lack of emphasis placed on building effective teacher-student relationships
Focus on relationships	Creating lasting connections	Relationships that extend beyond the scope of a single school year or semester
Focus on relationships	Cultivating relational trust with students	Creating relationships as a building block toward student success
Equity-based leadership	CLRP professional development	Professional development based on culturally and linguistically responsive practices
Equity-based leadership	Emphasis on CLRP	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that place a priority on culturally and linguistically responsive practices
Equity-based leadership	Hiring practices (diversity)	Hiring practices that consider the importance of staff diversity
Equity-based leadership	Expectation for teachers to be warm demanders	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that create space for teachers to act as warm demanders (personal warmth and high expectations)

Table 4 (continued)

Category	Code	Description
Equity-based leadership	Connection between CLRP and academic discourse	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that explore the nexus between CLRP practices and academic discourse
Equity-based leadership	Approaching leadership through equity lens	Leadership practices with a focus on equity
Warm demanders	Personal warmth & high standards	The two complementary aspects of warm demanders: personal growth and high standards to create relationships that support optimal learning outcomes for students

Table 5

Excerpt from Pre-cycle Codes

Category	Code	Reflective memos	EC-NIC meetings	Total
Systemic inequity	Resistance to change	5	2	7
Systemic inequity	Backlash against equity	5	0	5
Systemic inequity	Dominant POV	4	1	5
Systemic inequity	Challenging dominant POV	1	2	3
Systemic inequity	Principal/teachers fighting for equitable practices	3	0	3
Focus on relationships	Familial relationships	1	1	2
Focus on relationships	Emphasis on teacher-student relationships	5	2	7
Focus on relationships	Lack of teacher-student relationships ("minimally inclusive")	0	1	1
Focus on relationships	Creating lasting connections	0	5	5
Focus on relationships	Cultivating relational trust with students	5	2	7
Warm demanders	Personal warmth & high standards	8	8	16
Representation	Importance of racial representation	7	3	10
Representation	Importance of gender representation	2	3	5
Representation	Importance of linguistic representation	2	5	7

Table 5 (continued)

Category	Code	Reflective memos	EC-NIC meetings	Total
Representation	Lack of culturally responsive practices	3	2	5
Representation	Staff diversity	2	2	4

Emergent Categories

Following the Pre-cycle, three categories emerged from coding the data. The EC-NIC team consistently discussed three topics that are closely related:

1. There must be a focus on relationships for students to be successful, and the focus of that foundation is being a warm demander, an idea that emerged again and again even if the team did not yet have the language to articulate it in those words.
2. Cultural, racial, and linguistic representation is important in a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom.
3. Focusing on relationships is necessary to combat longstanding systemic inequities that persist in an educational setting.

In this sub-section section, I discuss each emergent category in greater detail.

Warm Demanders

Being a warm demander is one of the most important conceptual frameworks for teachers seeking to build effective relationships with students. Warm demanders are those teachers who combine personal warmth with high standards. High standards co-exist alongside effective relationships and classroom protocols that provide supports for students to meet those high expectations (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006). Students won't care how much you know until they know how much you care. During the Pre-cycle, the EC-NIC team reflected on the importance of being warm demanders numerous times.

In the Pre-cycle, codes under the warm demander category showed up 16 times – more than any other category. An analysis of the EC-NIC meetings and protocols gathered during our three meetings in the Fall 2021 semester showed eight instances in which the team referenced

personal warmth and high standards, which were coded under the "warm demanders" category. During my weekly reflective memos, I noted references to these codes another eight times. Warm demanders are the cornerstone upon which effective teacher-student relationships are built. During an EC-NIC meeting, the team reflected on the most impactful teachers we had in our education. Briana, an ELA teacher, recalled one of her college professors. Though she did not use the phrase "warm demander," that is precisely what she described when she talked about a professor who "was like an uncle," who "stayed on top of you" but "gave you chance after chance" and who would not hesitate to tell you that "you need to get your hind parts together asap." Delpit (2012) noted these quasi-parental roles that warm demanders fill for students. Their advocacy and relational trust create confidence for students and instills in them a desire to succeed for the sake of that teacher. Heather, a math teacher, recalled a STEM teacher from high school who "made you feel like you would run through a wall for him."

The EC-NIC team repeatedly found that the teachers who were most impactful for them were warm demanders who combined personal warmth with high standards in their classrooms. Notably, each member of the EC-NIC team discussed how their experiences with their teachers impacted how they saw themselves in their own classrooms. Briana said:

> I take pride in building relationships with students because you never know what they are going through outside of school, and sometimes being a light in a kid's life is more helpful to them long-term than just preparing them for taking tests.

This is consistent with the research of Delpit (2012), who found that warm demanders cultivate relational trust that extends beyond academics.

During the Pre-cycle, the EC-NIC team highlighted the Project I^4 CLRP framework (see Appendix I) two times. In the first iteration, the teachers rated themselves as either minimally,

moderately, or fully inclusive on each aspect of culturally responsive classroom practices (relationships, personal identity of students, teacher disposition, content, background and prior knowledge, cultural view/use, and culture and community). They did the same for each linguistically responsive practice: view of language, teachers' knowledge of students, expertise for learning language, and curricular and instructional supports. In the second iteration, they rated their perceptions of their colleagues on the same categories in the framework. A clear pattern emerged in which the teachers rated themselves consistently higher than they did their peers; yet, only a single element of the framework was marked "fully inclusive" by any participant. Briana marked herself "fully inclusive" for "teacher disposition," which describes a teacher as a "warm demander; fully accommodating individual learning profiles." She rated her colleagues as "moderately inclusive" in the category ("relationship often determined by teacher's level of empathy for particular student situations"). The other members of the EC-NIC (Heather, Rebecca, and Denise) rated themselves as "moderately inclusive" and their colleagues as "minimally inclusive" ("focus on treating all students the same"). Rebecca said she is introspective when it comes to building effective culturally and linguistically responsive practices in her classroom. "I ask myself all the time, what can I do? You think you're doing what you can, but then you question yourself. Am I being inclusive?" Denise agreed with her: "The building relationships piece, I think, is important. Including diversity in the classroom is important. It makes you think: Do I include this in my classroom?" During the activity in which the EC-NIC team analyzed the framework, Briana shifted the conversation to the bigger picture: "As a staff, we should all focus on being more culturally competent and having effective relationships with students. Once we have that down, it might make our jobs easier when it comes to providing instruction to students."

Fostering a school culture that encourages teachers to be warm demanders was critical to the PAR study, yet only one teacher on the EC-NIC team, which was chosen for the members' openness to embracing culturally and linguistically responsive practices, considered herself a warm demander during the Pre-cycle. Each of the teachers in the study spoke fondly of warm demanders they had while growing up, but this was not yet common among a significant number of staff members at the school. In the next two cycles, I looked for additional evidence of the impact of warm demanders and ways in which the study could impact the teacher disposition element on the Project I^4 CLRP framework.

Importance of Representation

Cultural, racial, gender, and linguistic representation is important in a school that embraces culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms. Steele (2010) stated that institutional colorblindness simply does not work. Yet, "colorblindness" remains the default response to questions of classroom diversity and equity. Another emerging category during the Pre-cycle for this PAR study was that of representation, a category represented numerous times by the following codes: importance of racial representation (*n*=10), importance of gender representation (*n*=5), importance of linguistic representation (*n*=7), lack of culturally responsive practices (*n*=5), and staff diversity (*n*=4).

Briana, a Black woman, recalled waiting until college to have a Black male teacher. "By then," she said, "I was grown." Her father was a high school masonry teacher who retired about 14 years ago:

> When I think about the Black male teachers who were available in my K-12 education, they were like my dad. They taught a trade or ROTC. It wasn't often that we saw them in

> science, history, ELA, or anything like that. It was really cool to have that perspective from a Black man at an HBCU.

Heather, a White woman, talked about her own experience with feeling like "the other." Her otherness was not expressed in terms of race but rather gender. In high school, she was the only girl in an engineering course:

> I was the only girl in his class all four years, but he didn't make it weird. He still included me and really listened to my ideas instead of being like, 'Well, just sit there and make it look pretty.'

Just as the teachers discussed how their experiences with warm demanders shaped their own classroom philosophies, so, too, did their experiences with "otherness" (Paris, 2012). Paris warned how the erasure of students' culturally and linguistically defining traits led to the "obliteration" of their rich cultural backgrounds. Instead, Paris noted that teachers should seek to celebrate and sustain students' cultural and linguistic identities. That is exactly what Rebecca, a White woman, does in her classroom. An Arabic student in her eighth-grade ELA class asked if she could write her warm-up journal in Arabic. Rebecca told her she wouldn't be able to read it, but she would be happy for the student to write it in Arabic and then translate her thoughts to English afterward. "That would be cool to see," she told her student. She noted that the student became more engaged in the lesson and was excited to showcase her rich linguistic heritage, not only for the teacher but for other students in the classroom. That anecdote triggered a similar memory for Denise, a Black woman. Two Arabic students were teaching some of their classmates Arabic in class one day. "That's important for them to have their culture recognized," Denise said. Rebecca agreed and noted that it seemed like her student expected her to say no to the request to complete her assignment in her first language. "But I said, 'Sure, go for it.'

That “sure, go for it” moment is a key aspect of culturally responsive learning. In both scenarios, the teachers treated students’ cultures and languages as assets. Seeing culture and language as assets were coded multiple times (*n*=6 and *n*=5, respectively) during the Pre-cycle. For Denise, it is a matter of empathizing with her students. “I think their language is important,” she said. “Imagine sitting in a classroom and not knowing the language.” Yet, this is a reality for many students. Approximately 18% of the students at this school are English Language Learners, and the majority speak a language other than English at home. When the EC-NIC team analyzed the Project I^4 CLRP framework, they consistently noted that most teachers’ linguistically responsive practices, including their own, fell in the “minimally inclusive” range. All four teachers on the team suggested collaborating more frequently with the school’s EL teacher to provide professional development or at least tips and support on how to be more inclusive with students. Rebecca stated that she is doing the best she can. “But if we don’t know another language, I think it’s hard,” she said. “I don’t know how I would integrate another language.” Denise shared similar frustration, adding that she did not recall being taught any linguistically responsive practices in her teacher preparation program. Interestingly, despite their own feelings of inadequacy, both teachers utilize numerous instructional methods to include English Language Learners in their lessons. Rebecca, for example, used Google Translate to assist a student who only spoke Spanish. “I felt really bad for her because she had to sit there and listen to me speak English,” Rebecca said. “I tried to use Google Translate, but for the majority of the class, she was just ‘there.’”

Steele (2010) discussed the dangers of institutional colorblindness, and McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) discussed the harm caused by erasure and other equity traps. At our school, the same pitfalls exist for teachers, but the EC-NIC team largely reported on a different emergent

category – namely, the lack of representation and effective training in several key areas. While every teacher cannot be representative of every language or culture, they can create safe learning spaces where students can share their languages and cultures as assets and thereby flourish. We continued in PAR Cycle One to explore how to support teachers as they moved to more inclusive models for culturally and linguistically responsive classroom practices.

Focus on Relationships

The final emergent category is both the simplest to talk about and perhaps most difficult to address. It is teachers' focus on relationships and how those relationships can serve to reinforce the status quo and dominant points-of-view or challenge the status quo in favor of more equitable learning environments. During the Pre-cycle, this category emerged in five codes: familial relationships (*n*=2), emphasis on teacher-student relationships (*n*=7), minimally inclusive teacher-student relationships (*n*=1), creating lasting connections (*n*=5), and cultivating relational trust with students (*n*=7).

The EC-NIC team responded to a personal narrative asking them to describe their most impactful teacher during their own educational journeys. The participants talked about the importance of familial relationships in Briana's story about her avuncular professor and several other key areas that when taken at face value appear to be solely a focus on relationships. However, when examined more closely, each anecdote revealed how the participants' interactions either reinforced or challenged systems of inequity.

Briana talked about two teachers. In addition to her professor, she discussed a high school teacher who "would bend over backwards" to make her feel important and give her whatever she needed to succeed. For her, it was all about relationships. Heather recalled a similar relationship with a high school English teacher. "She was very understanding. ELA was not my strong suit by

any means. I could not understand a book, but she would help you understand in any way necessary," That phrase, "in any way necessary," came up several times during the EC-NIC's personal narratives on impactful teachers.

For Denise, that "any way necessary" was much more personal. When she was in eighth grade, Denise shared with her teacher that she was assaulted. "My teacher didn't know what happened, but he saw that I was broken and helped me overcome that. That was so impactful." For Rebecca, the relationships formed in high school continued after she graduated:

> I am still friends with so many of them still on Facebook, especially the ones that made an extra effort to make a connection with you. For them it wasn't about 'Okay, here's what we're going to do today' but instead trying to make a connection. Those are the ones that I remember the most.

As stated earlier, three of the four members of the EC-NIC team are teaching in the same district where they attended school, and two are teaching at the same middle school. "It's so weird working with teachers you had as a student," Denise said. "They're like, 'You can call me Bill,' and I'm like, 'No, I really can't.'" Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed this phenomenon, citing an example of a classroom teacher who created "extended family groups" in her classroom. Just as the teachers in the EC-NIC team reported for this PAR, culturally responsive classroom practices start with a culture of caring, according to Ladson-Billings (2009). This is an area that requires continued growth, according to Briana. "I know I have areas where I can grow as an educator," she said, "and I believe that our school has areas that we need to focus on in relationship building outside of the classroom." She stated that teachers sometimes become so focused on year-end testing that they forget the power of building lasting relationships. "Our students are people, and they deserve genuine relationships with their teachers," Briana said.

Teachers who embrace cultural and linguistic diversity engage in what Gutiérrez (2013) calls “conocimiento,” an inherently political action of building classroom spaces dedicated to protecting students’ cultural and linguistic identities. Teachers who embrace the status quo do so by insisting upon institutional colorblindness and teaching only the dominant point of view. By continuing to focus on relationships in the next two cycles of inquiry, we will continue to analyze existing power structures through a critical lens. Next, I reflect on the Pre-cycle and discuss my plans for the next two cycles of inquiry.

Reflection and Planning

Over the next two cycles of inquiry, we continued to analyze the emergent categories discussed in the previous sections: warm demanders, the importance of representation, and how a focus on relationships can provide the necessary praxis (Freire, 1970) to turn reflection into action. I also reflected extensively on what equity-based leadership looks like and how I want to impact my school. In the Pre-cycle, I coded “creating ‘buy-in’ for change” three times in reflective memos as well as several other codes that fell under the category of equity-based leadership. I explored the importance of creating relational trust with staff using the four tenets of gracious space: spirit, setting, inviting the stranger, and learning in public (Hughes & Grace, 2010). The EC-NIC team and I discovered the power of Community Learning Exchange axioms through monthly EC-NIC meetings, especially the third axiom that states, “The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.” We continued to utilize gracious space and the CLE axioms in the two remaining cycles of inquiry in Spring 2022 and Fall 2022. More importantly, we also continued to explore how to utilize culture as an asset (coded six times in the Pre-cycle), how to utilize language as an asset (n=5), and how to foster a culture that encourages warm demanders (n=16).

We hosted the first Community Learning Exchange in Spring 2022 during PAR Cycle One. The CLE invited other teachers at the school to participate by asking them the same question about their most impactful teacher and introducing them to the Project I^4 CLRP framework. They had the same opportunity to reflect on the framework and personal narrative. The parallel nature of the initial EC-NIC meetings in the Pre-cycle and the subsequent CLE in Cycle One provided useful, insightful data that I collected, coded, and analyzed. In addition to using personal narratives, I continued to utilize journey lines, emulation poems, and other protocols to collect data. The CLE built upon the three categories that emerged during the Pre-cycle, and the iterative nature of the PAR process informed the final cycle of inquiry in the Fall 2022 semester.

The CLE focused on teacher disposition and how to move toward being warm demanders. In the meantime, I continued working on building relational trust and creating gracious space for EC-NIC and CLE participants to continue to grow. The third cycle of inquiry introduced cognitively demanding tasks and shifted the focus to academic discourse and its connection to effective teacher-student relationships.

Finally, I reflected on the actual process of coding and analyzing data during a PAR study. While I collected useful data in the Pre-cycle, many of my initial "codes" were far too broad and more akin to categories. My initial "categories" were more closely aligned with themes. Interestingly, only one of the emergent categories – warm demanders – became a theme and later a finding during the final two cycles of inquiry. As I reflected on the process, I realized that the initial categories and codes did not have enough specificity in the coding. Yet, I found value in the Pre-cycle process, as some of the emergent "categories" are present in the literature, which allowed me to focus on more nuanced ways in which I could add to the existing research

in these areas. If I could go back, I would go about the coding process differently. For example, when teachers were talking about culturally responsive language and using their own vernacular in conversations about warm demanders, I would have used more precise keywords from those conversations to create in vivo codes and organize those codes into the emergent categories.

CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE ONE

In this chapter, I describe the ongoing work of the co-practitioner research (CPR), data collection and analysis, and emergent themes. In the pre cycle, I established the Equity-Centered Networked Improvement Community (EC-NIC) with four teachers on the eighth-grade team at the school where I serve as principal. In Cycle One, we expanded our discussions on the first research question and shared the Project I^4 framework on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy (see Appendix I) with teachers who participated in the Community Learning Exchange (CLE). During PAR Cycle One, I focused on culturally and linguistically responsive teacher-student relationships and analyzed artifacts related to the first research sub-question and co-constructed with teachers the importance of defining a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom. This chapter describes the PAR Cycle One process, introduces emergent themes, and provides a reflection on my leadership. The chapter concludes with an outline for PAR Cycle Two.

PAR Cycle One Process

I began the PAR study in the Fall 2021 semester with the Pre-cycle and continued data collection through the Spring 2022 semester with PAR Cycle One. I spent much of the Pre-cycle recruiting the co-practitioner research group to participate in the study, creating gracious space (Hughes & Grace, 2010) and developing relational trust with the EC-NIC team. In Cycle One, I narrowed the focus to the first research sub-question. The CPR group met bi-weekly from January through March 2022. Additionally, the EC-NIC hosted a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in February. The EC-NIC team met twice per month during the Spring 2022 semester. I collected data from the biweekly EC-NIC meetings and Community Learning Exchange and field notes; then, I used member checks and reflective memos to triangulate the

data. Table 6 outlines a schedule of activities for PAR Cycle One. As a result of the iterative nature of participatory action research, three themes emerged that supported the categories from the Pre-cycle. Next, I describe each set of data that I collected during PAR Cycle One.

EC- NIC Meetings

The EC-NIC team agreed to meet biweekly during the Spring 2022 semester for a total of five meetings. Each meeting began with a personal narrative related to the first research sub-question: To what extent do teachers develop deeper relationships with students? We used protocols such as journey lines and photo stories to share our experiences and insights related to the questions. We also read and discussed relevant articles on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices.

During the first EC-NIC meeting for PAR Cycle One, I shared the data I collected and analyzed from the Pre-cycle, and we began planning for the Community Learning Exchange, scheduled during an optional teacher workday. During the second EC-NIC meeting, we read and discussed an article titled *Trading baby steps for big equity leaps* (Gorski et al., 2022) and finalized our plans for the CLE. The article resonated with the EC-NIC group, and we discussed ways in which we could find other staff members who embraced equitable relationships with students. The team discussed this conversation in terms of building effective relationships in the classroom, centering students' diverse cultural identities, and creating relevant learning opportunities in the classroom space. The activity is a relevant example of the work we are seeking to do in service to building culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with students. The third EC-NIC meeting was scheduled for the week of February 14; however, I was absent the entire week due to a family emergency. Despite my unexpected absence, the team decided to meet without me and built a template for the next week's CLE. This was notable, as

Table 6

Activities: PAR Cycle One

Activity	WEEK 3 (Jan. 17-21)	WEEK 4 (Jan. 24-28)	WEEK 5 (1/31-2/4)	WEEK 6 (Feb. 7-11)	WEEK 8 (Feb. 21-25)	WEEK 9 (2/28-3/4)	WEEK 10 (March 7-11)	WEEK 11 (March 14-18)	WEEK 12 (March 21-25)	WEEK 13 (3/28-4/1)
Meetings with CPR/EC-NIC (n=5)	●			●		●		●	●	
Community Learning Exchange (n=12)					●					
Reflective Memos	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

it illustrated the team's commitment to our work even in my absence and a positive sign for future sustainability of the study's ongoing work. The last three EC-NIC meetings were devoted to unpacking the CLE artifacts and planning for Cycle Two. In the next sub-section, I describe the Community Learning Exchange and examine the artifacts collected during the CLE.

Community Learning Exchange

The EC-NIC team emulated one of our meetings from the Pre-cycle for the Community Learning Exchange. I sent an email to the whole staff inviting any teacher who wished to participate in the CLE and stressed that participation was completely optional. Twelve teachers (including the EC-NIC team) representing a diverse cross-section of the teaching faculty at my school elected to participate. We began the CLE by introducing the teachers to the five CLE axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016). The purpose of the CLE was to address the first research sub-question as it related to the importance of forming culturally and linguistically responsive teacher-student relationships. We used a modified digital Chalk Talk protocol (see Figure 8) to generate ideas and reflect on the following prompts:

1. Who was the most impactful teacher in your own education and why?
2. Analyze your strengths and opportunities for growth using the Project I^4 framework for culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.
3. What do your relationships with your students look like? What do you take pride in?
4. Closing question: What is the purpose of having relationships? What is it in service of?
5. Feedback: How useful was this session? How would the staff react if this were offered as a professional development?

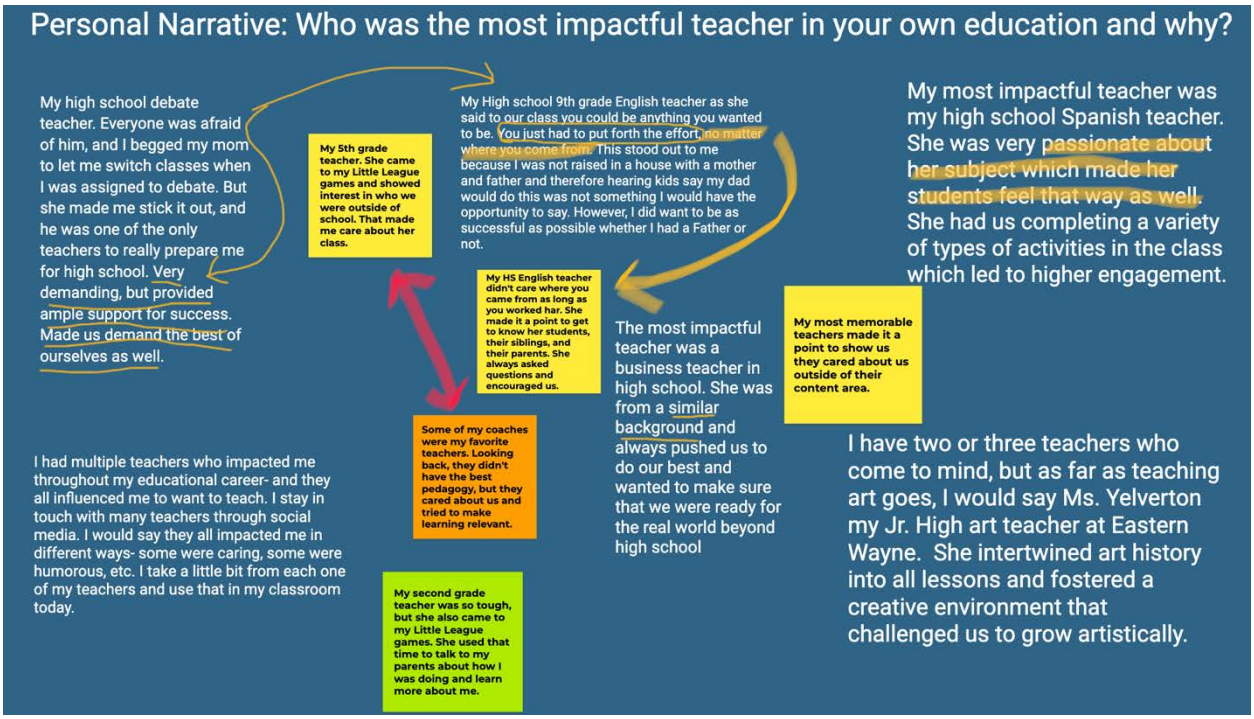


Figure 8. CLE personal narrative: Who was the most impactful teacher in your own education and why?

Data Collection: Codes and Codebook

Over the course of PAR Cycle One, the major artifacts I collected during the CLE and biweekly EC-NIC meetings were evidence of personal narratives (journey lines, "Chalk Talk," and photo stories) and reflections. I wrote weekly memos about the process, using the memos and field notes to triangulate the data I collected. I created codes from data gathered during the EC-NIC meetings, Community Learning Exchange, and weekly reflective memos and used inductive coding and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016) to extrapolate meaning from the data collected. The codebook I compiled throughout the PAR study is shown in Appendix J. In the next sub-section, I discuss the themes that emerged from an analysis of artifacts that I collected during PAR Cycle One activities.

Emergent Themes

As I coded and analyzed artifacts from the data collected in the PAR cycle of inquiry, three themes emerged from the evidence:

1. Relationships create trust and trust is necessary to create engagement,
2. Warm demanders must show empathy and high expectations, and
3. Islands of Innovation – pockets of success where teachers developed CLRP strategies organically and in isolation in response to a lack of formalized systems to address culturally and linguistically diverse students' needs.

Relational trust emerged as a theme and a precursor to the second theme, teacher disposition as warm demander. The evidence suggested that effective culturally and linguistically responsive relationships precede and directly influence teacher disposition as a warm demander. By focusing on effective relationship strategies and naming the traits associated with supporting

relational trust, participants created space in which to be warm demanders. These emergent themes are represented in Figure 9 and will be analyzed in detail in the next sub-section.

Relationships Create Trust

The first theme to emerge from the PAR cycle of inquiry was the importance of creating relational trust, which is essential in building effective culturally and linguistically responsive classroom practices. The importance of relational trust was evident throughout the PAR activities as evidenced in the categories: engagement relies on trust and an analysis of traits of teachers who build relational trust. The participants felt that engagement relies on trust, which is supported by the codes I collected and analyzed in PAR Cycle One. Students want to know the teacher knows them and cares about them beyond the classroom. The first category, engagement relies on trust, is an analysis of what participants considered a central truth of trust built inside and outside the classroom, because, as one participant stated, “They have to know you care before they care what you know.” Participants consistently stated that building culturally and linguistically responsive relationships based on trust is a key component of creating classroom and school cultures where students can engage effectively in the learning process. The second category is an analysis of traits the participants described about someone who builds and sustains relational trust. In the next section, I analyzed the codes related to the two categories within this theme.

Engagement Relies on Trust

During the PAR Cycle One activities, participants reflected on the importance of creating relational trust in their classrooms and recognized the importance with their students. What is important is that until students connect with their teachers, they won’t engage with the content. Key codes that consistently emerged for this category were: build trust so students want to learn

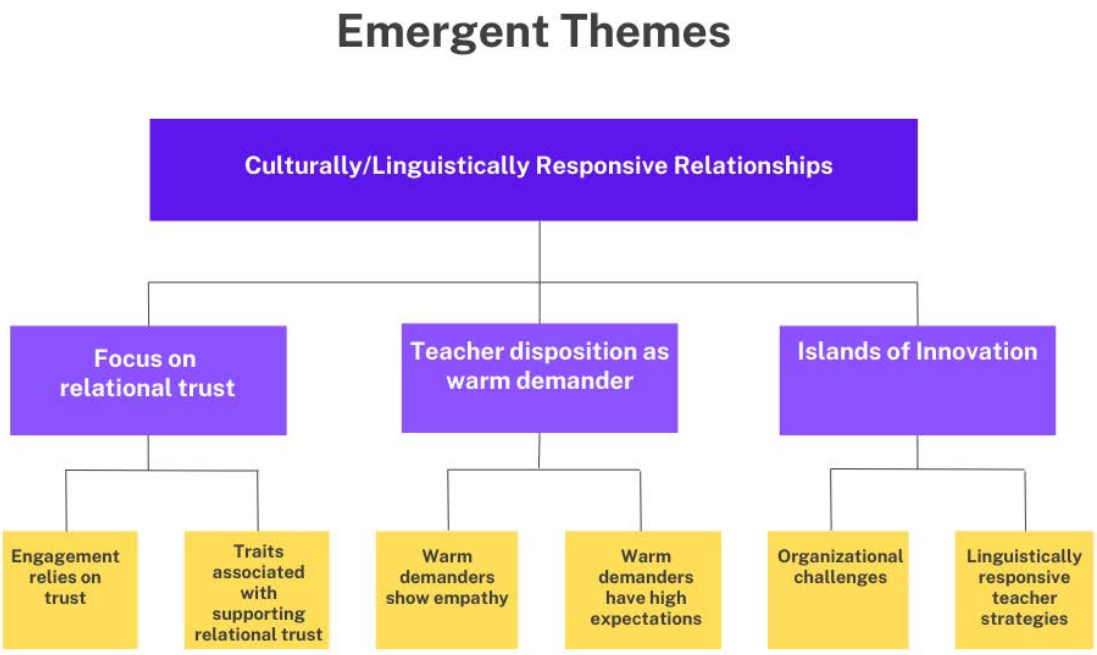


Figure 9. Three emerging themes with categories.

from you (38 codes), know your students' interests (38 codes), and see students as individuals (17 codes). The codes (see Table 7) represent a central truth the participants expressed during PAR activities: Relationships create trust, and this trust is paramount to building engagement.

Build Trust So Students Want to Learn from You. During PAR Cycle One activities, participants stated that the most important consideration was building trust so that students will want to learn from them. This tenet became an in vivo code (Saldaña, 2016), and the most consistent code to emerge from PAR Cycle One with 38 instances supporting the category that engagement relies on trust. Each participant recognized the importance of fully engaging with all students and creating deep relationships with them and their families. Building relational trust was essential to being a culturally and linguistically responsive educator. A participant stated, "I know I'm not everyone's favorite, but I pride myself in getting to know my students and building relationships with each of them." The teacher explained that once he tries to get to know his students, they are more likely to engage in his content. "You can't put the cart before the horse by demanding they trust you without giving them a reason to, but once they know you care, they will surprise you." Like the veteran fine arts teacher, other participants recognized the value inherent in simply getting to know their students and saw the connection between relationships and engagement. For several participants, the nexus between relationship building and engagement was clear, and they stated that students responded positively for them because of the intentionality with which they build relationships.

Know Your Students' Interests. Building trust happens both in the classroom with intentional activities as well as a conscious decision that occurs outside of the classroom. "When the kids see me out in the community supporting their interests, that's a sign to them that I care," a participant noted. The other most common code is directly related to the first. Participants

Table 7

Codebook Excerpt: Engagement Relies on Trust

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
• Relationships create trust	• Engagement relies on trust	• Build trust so students want to learn from you	38
		• Relatable	8
		• Willing to listen	5
		• Knowing students' interests	38
		• Seeing students as individuals	17

asserted that by knowing students' interests (38 instances), they can build effective relationships with them. Participants discussed going to extracurricular activities such as Little League games, band concerts, dance recitals, academic endeavors such as Quiz Bowl, and other events that are important to their students. Jackson, an art teacher, described the importance of knowing his students' interests and hobbies and providing them with the space to talk about those interests – "even if it's something I'm not interested in."

Participants talked about greeting their students at the door, making a conscious effort to attend extracurricular activities, and seeing culture and language as assets. One teacher talked about "trying to learn a little something special about each student." By taking an interest in their students' lives, participants concluded that they would have more success with instruction because the students have a vested relationship with the teacher, or as one participant concisely put it: "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Seeing Students as Individuals. Finally, participants discussed the importance of seeing students as individuals (17 instances) to build relationships through trust. Participants discussed several significant ideas. First, participants discussed the idea of seeing culture and language as an asset. Second, they talked about the importance of seeking equity in their classrooms. "All of our kids bring something different to the table," one participant stated. "We can't operate on a one-size-fits all approach. What works for one student isn't always going to be right for another student. It's up to us to figure out what works based on each child's unique needs." Conversations during the PAR activities reflected the importance of seeking equity in the classroom, ranging from disciplinary outcomes to dress code and cell phone violations to the myriad instructional decisions that teachers must make each day in their classrooms. Rebecca, a language arts teacher, noted some students' penchant for reading aloud in class, whereas others

are reluctant readers for any number of reasons. “I used to do popcorn reading where the kids would call on each other to read, but I moved away from that,” she said. She explained that after participating in the PAR activities, she felt popcorn reading was inequitable because some students were more comfortable with reading passages aloud than others. Instead, she started using “equity sticks” and calling on students when they approached paragraphs where she knew they could be successful. Other times, she said, she would simply skip over a student in a group setting and work with him more closely in a one-on-one setting later in the day. Individualizing instruction took time, and Rebecca stated that it was only after creating a relationship with each child in her classroom that she could manage their widely varied learning needs. Ultimately, participants stated that when students feel like they’re seen as individuals, they feel more comfortable engaging in learning activities. Their basic needs must be met before teachers can focus on engaging instruction. In the next sub-section, I analyze some of the traits and strategies embodied by teachers in their pursuit of supporting relational trust.

Traits and Strategies Associated with Building Relational Trust

While participants recognized the importance of creating effective relationships in service of increased engagement, they also reflected on specific traits and strategies that effective teachers embody in support of creating relational trust. The codes (see Table 8) that most frequently appeared were: viewing language and culture as an asset (*n*=11), fostering a welcoming environment (*n*=17), and making learning relevant (*n*=8). Culturally and linguistically responsive teachers create a welcoming environment and view language as an asset, which in turn makes learning relevant for their students. In this sub-section, I analyze the traits or characteristics of effective relationship-building and how they are essential to developing relational trust.

Table 8

Codebook Excerpt: Traits and Strategies of Supporting Relational Trust

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Focus on relational trust	• Traits and strategies associated with supporting relational trust	• Stay in touch with teachers/students	4
		• Made learning relevant	8
		• Caring	3
		• Humorous	4
		• Passionate about subject	6
		• High engagement	5
		• Language/culture as asset	11
		• Pride in building relationships	5
		• Foster welcoming environment	17

Viewing Language and Culture as an Asset. Throughout PAR Cycle One activities, participants discussed the importance of seeing language and culture as an asset in service of building relational trust in their classrooms. In doing so, teachers created space in which culturally and linguistically responsive connections could thrive, and these connections are paramount to building effective relational trust with students. Brittany described using open-ended writing prompts that asked students to talk about personal experiences and test items that ask about students' interests:

> It takes more time, but I like to write personalized test questions that use things I know about my kids. I get to know them, and they get a kick out of seeing me write about their grandma's empanadas on a vocabulary quiz.

She said she pulls from students' experiences that they share with her in class and looks for ways to center their culturally and linguistically diverse experiences in her lessons. Other participants shared similar examples. An exceptional children's teacher talked about using language as an asset by asking a Spanish-speaking student to help her translate for his classmates while a language arts teacher talked about allowing linguistically diverse students to write journal entries in the languages they speak at home. Participants stated that when language and culture is centered and perceived as an asset, it creates relational trust with their students.

Fostering a Welcoming Environment. A welcoming environment took on many forms during PAR activities, but they shared several similarities – namely, teachers were seeking strategies that made students feel comfortable enough to fully engage in the instructional activities (n=17). Jonathan, an ELA teacher who participated in the CLE, talked about how he cares for each of his students and how they relate to his use of humor. "I take pride in how my students want to come back to see me years later when they're getting ready to graduate," he

said. In the three years that I have served as principal at the school, Jonathan is one of the most-requested teachers, and he has more visits from former students than anyone else. That is no coincidence; indeed, it is a testament to the relationships that he has built with his students in a welcoming environment. Another teacher, an eighth-grade social studies teacher, regularly wears period-specific costumes from the American Revolution or medieval Europe to engage his students. For him, relationships are borne out of his passion for history. "It's a way for me to make learning relevant for my students and to pique their interest." From creating a welcoming environment to fostering creativity in the classroom, participants agreed that relationship-building must be an intentional aspect of their strategies as teachers. It is a way to make learning relevant, and by allowing students the space to share their interests, they are creating a culture of collaboration where engaging, relevant instruction can consistently take place.

Make Learning Relevant. Teachers creating a classroom culture that makes learning relevant for students was another important trait that the participants identified. Participants discussed how each of the traits are deeply intertwined and serve a clear purpose. When students' language and culture are seen as assets and they sense they are welcomed in the classroom space, learning becomes relevant. Like the teacher who uses snippets from students' lives in her quizzes or the teacher who connects American history to local places and events, other participants talked about ways they connect learning to students' lives as a strategy to build relevance. An ELA teacher shared about a lesson on the evolution of language:

> One of my students wanted to copy and paste a Wikipedia article about Spanish dialects, but we talked about using examples from his own family. He got really excited because it was something where he could see a connection to his life.

Where learning is relevant, teachers create relational trust and additional opportunities for engagement.

Participants saw themselves as the arbiters of school culture and relationship building in their classrooms, and they shared relationship-building strategies as a source of pride. Participants began making an intentional connection between the more generally nebulous idea of "relationship" and the more specific notion of culturally and linguistically responsive relationships. In the next section, I connect how these relationships build the foundation for the teacher disposition as a warm demander and analyze the categories for the warm demanders theme.

Warm Demanders

Teacher disposition as a warm demander emerged as a theme in PAR Cycle One with two categories in support of the theme: warm demanders show empathy and warm demanders have high expectations. Being a warm demander is an important teacher disposition needed to build culturally and linguistically responsive relationships in their classrooms. Similar to the existing research on warm demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006), participants in this PAR study defined a warm demander as a teacher who simultaneously shows empathy and demands high expectations. Participants felt this was the crossroads at which a classroom culture of high achievement is created. Participants consistently stated that one cannot exist without the other – warm demanders need both a classroom culture of empathy and of high expectations.

In the next sub-section, I analyze the first category, warm demanders show empathy (see Table 9), focusing on three specific codes: "cared about students" (*n*=15), "nurturing in all situations" (*n*=16), and "tough but nurturing" (*n*=5).

Table 9

Codebook Excerpt: Teachers Show Empathy

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Teacher disposition as warm demander	• Teachers show empathy	• Tough but nurturing	5
		• Nurturing in all situations	16
		• Cared about students	15
		• Teacher learned more about students	2
		• Personal warmth	4
		• Authentic connections	4
		• Intentional questions	3
		• Personal narratives	3
		• Sharing student perspectives	4

Warm Demanders Show Empathy

During PAR Cycle One, participants consistently stated that showing empathy is a key component of being a warm demander. The key attributes of showing empathy were caring about students, being nurturing in all situations, and being "tough but nurturing." In this sub-section, I analyze how each of the codes identified during PAR activities comprise the category of warm demanders showing empathy.

Caring About Students. Showing empathy was a key component of being a warm demander, and it all starts with simply caring about students. Ten of 12 participants used variations of the phrase that their most impactful teachers "cared about us," and nearly all (*n*=16) discussed their own practices of showing empathy using the same terms. One participant said, "Sometimes, I need a little extra grace and flexibility when I am having a bad day, so why wouldn't I extend that same courtesy to my students?" Another participant recalled her favorite teacher from high school and said her most memorable teachers made it a point to show their students how much they cared about their students outside of their content area. "I would have run through a brick wall for that teacher because I knew how much he cared about me on a level that went beyond the subject he taught," the participant said. The participant said he now models his own teaching philosophy on that impactful teacher.

Being Nurturing in All Situations. Participants regularly cited examples supporting the importance of showing empathy by being nurturing in all situations (*n*=16). A participant noted a time when they were working at a high school. A student missed an important deadline for an essay and confided to the teacher that he was working a part-time job at a retail store the night before when the store was robbed. "He didn't need a lecture about a missed deadline; he needed to know that I was worried about him on a personal level," the teacher said.

> I told him to forget about the essay, and we went down to the counselor's office to process how he was feeling. That was infinitely more important than whatever the essay was about, and I guarantee you he remembers that lesson in empathy more than whatever it was we were studying.

During the same EC-NIC meeting, another teacher recalled a time a student texted her on a Sunday afternoon because a classmate had made some concerning statements on social media about taking his own life. The teacher was able to contact the student's parent, verify his safety, and set up a meeting the next morning with a counselor and administrator. "It meant the world to me that my kids knew they could reach out to me outside of normal school hours, and I am so thankful that that student is okay," the teacher said, adding that she attended his wedding several years later. For participants in this PAR study, creating a warm, nurturing environment is paramount to learning, and it is also vital to establishing lifelong relationships that transcend the classroom.

Tough, But Nurturing. Participants differentiated between simply being nurturing and being "tough, but nurturing," a distinction several participants discussed during the PAR activities. Laura, an exceptional children's teacher who participated in the CLE, described herself as "tough, but nurturing" and stated that she prides herself on being empathetic toward her students' needs. Using in vivo coding, I adopted this phrase as a code, and it showed up five times during the PAR cycle. Teachers used phrases like "tough but nurturing;" being "empathetic in all situations;" and the value of their own teachers "caring about us," "learning more about us," and "showing us they cared outside of the classroom." The quotes are examples of how teachers showed they were nurturing, but participants elaborated that being nurturing wasn't enough; they also talked about the duality of being tough as well as nurturing. Laura talked about

pushing her students beyond their comfort zones while in a safe, nurturing environment. “My students know there is no such thing as ‘can’t’ in my room,” she said. For Laura, it is more than a perception; it is reality. In each of the last three academic years for which testing data is available, 100% of her students were proficient on state end-of-grade exams in her classroom. “I love them,” she said, “but I’m not letting them get by with less than their best.” In the next sub-section, I explore the second foundational tenet of warm demanders – having high expectations.

Warm Demanders Have High Expectations

Warm demanders have high expectations, and participants discussed high expectations in terms of three codes: “creating ample support for success” (*n*=12), being “tough but fair” (*n*=5), and “expecting the best of students” (*n*=29). Participants felt that when these three traits (see Table 10) exist in a classroom, a culture of high expectations will be evident.

Ample Support for Success. Teachers defined high expectations as a disposition for warm demanders as providing ample support for success. Participants discussed their late work policies and mastery-based grading as protocols that create a culture of high expectations. Paula, a seventh-grade math teacher, discussed her late work policy. “Everyone has an opportunity to turn in late assignments at full credit up until the last day of the marking period,” she said. Participants also discussed mastery-based grading in terms of focusing solely on the content standards rather than behaviors in evaluating student progress. She stated that she gives students the opportunity to submit assignments as many times as necessary until they show mastery. “Allowing them to get by with a zero is the opposite of high expectations,” she said. “Failure is not an option in my classroom, and my students know I require them to do the work, no matter what.” She often stays with students during lunch or allows them to come to her class during her

Table 10

Codebook Excerpt: High Expectations

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Teacher disposition as warm demander	• Have high expectations	• Had to put forth the effort	7
		• Expect best of students	29
		• Tough but fair	5
		• Ample support for success	12

planning block to work with them one-on-one. “I expect a lot,” she said, “but they also know I am always there for them when they get stuck.”

During the CLE, the participants were consistent in naming the importance of having high expectations while reflecting on both their most impactful teachers and their own practices. Participants felt strongly that their own dispositions as teachers aligned with the Project I^4 description of warm demanders on the CLRP framework. Heather, another math teacher, leans heavily on data analysis and one-on-one “data talks” with her students to create a climate that supports success. Her data talks became the crux of a school-wide focus on students creating digital “portfolios” that accompany weekly one-on-one discussions with their teachers. “When they can see the progress they’re making on their benchmarks and we can talk about their long-term and short-term goals, it creates a sense of buy-in for them,” Heather said. Heather called it a “mindset shift” and said she is constantly looking for ways to provide support while also insisting on high expectations.

Expect the Best of Students. Participants indicated a strong perception that they have high expectations for their students and rated this characteristic as an important trait for the teacher disposition as it relates to warm demanders. I coded a specific type of high expectation as participants consistently rated “expect(ing) the best of their students” (n=17). Participants also used the code “very demanding” another 12 times. Upon reflection, I combined the two codes into a single code under “expect the best of their students.” Participants defined this in several ways, but all spoke consistently about having high expectations and a foundational belief in the need for demanding the most of their students. They also shared their confidence in their own acumen for providing the requisite level of high expectations in their classroom.

Tough, But Fair. It is noteworthy that "tough, but nurturing" and "tough, but fair" showed up for each category in the warm demanders section, respectively. By having high expectations and making clear to students a classroom culture that placed a premium on "very demanding" instructional practices, participants' adherence to the dual nature of warm demanders ("empathy" plus "high expectations") began to take shape. In this section, I analyze the participants' belief that being "very demanding" and "expecting the best of students" is at the heart of having high expectations and bridges the gap between "tough" and "fair." Denise attended the school where she now works and recalled a colleague who was her teacher some years ago and whom she now models her own practices after:

> She was one of the only teachers to prepare me for high school. She was very demanding, made us put forth our best effort every day, and expected the best of us, but she was always very fair and gave us room to make mistakes and grow.

In a single quote, Denise captured the essence of artifacts, conversations, and reflections that I analyzed and coded during PAR Cycle One. Jackson, an art teacher, recalled having a teacher who was "tough, but fair." Another participant wrote: "I never had a word to describe it before, but being a warm demander is my biggest strength. I pride myself on being tough but also nurturing. Students seem to respond well to that." Paula, meanwhile, exemplifies the warm demander duality of high expectations and empathy. She affectionately refers to her students as "Honey Bun," and they return the favor; however, her "Honey Buns" are expected to perform at a consistently high level. She created a "no zero" policy in her classroom and requires multiple resubmissions on all assignments until students can show mastery. "My students know what to expect when they come in my room. I don't tolerate slacking off, but I always provide them with the support they need to do well in math," she said. Another participant stated that she doesn't

believe she is doing students any favors in the long run by not always expecting their best. This notion encapsulated the tone of the PAR Cycle One activities: Participants took pride in having high expectations as well as showing empathy. When the two foundational philosophies converge, teacher disposition as a warm demander emerges.

A perceived culture of empathy and high expectations are evident at the school. As I moved into PAR Cycle Two, I examined the participants' perception of being warm demanders by observing classroom practices using evidence-based observation tools and evidence-based conversations. In the next section, I discuss how these traits and strategies developed in the school as islands of innovation.

Islands of Innovation

An unexpected theme emerged during PAR Cycle One that I refer to as "islands of innovation." Fullan (2001) described "islands of innovation" as pockets of change and improvement in educational settings that remain isolated and do not spread or become part of a larger systemic reform. Throughout the PAR activities, participants reflected on their solutions to create equitable opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students. In the absence of school- and district-wide systems to support these learners, teachers adopted their own solutions, often in innovative ways. These pockets of success – or islands of innovation – were in direct response to organizational challenges in addressing CLRP and evolved into strategies to support the students, and two categories emerged: a direct response to organizational challenges and strategies used to support students. Data revealed specific barriers participants continue to face in their classrooms, but it also revealed strategies they used to overcome those barriers.

All five participants in the EC-NIC and all 12 teachers in the CLE reported strategies they had developed to support English language learners; however, they also reported

unanimously that these strategies had been developed out of a sense of frustration over the lack of organizational systems to these students. While these islands of innovation were overall stories of success, they also represented organizational shortcomings. Like Lortie's (1975) "egg-carton" metaphor, teachers often work with limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration. During Cycle One, the codes coalesced into two categories: organizational challenges (Table 11) and the linguistically responsive strategies that teachers developed because of systemic gaps.

Organizational Challenges

Data collected and analyzed during the PAR cycle shows two things: Systemic shortcomings exist, and teachers are addressing those shortcomings in effective but isolated ways, hence, "islands of innovation." There was a prevailing notion among participants that there is a lack of adequate support for English language (EL) learners at an organizational level, which was evident in three codes: lack of EL support (*n*=12), lack of curricular and instructional support (*n*=6), and a need for additional EL resources (*n*=5).

The most notable systemic deficit that participants noted was an absence of district-level support for English language learners. The district has allotted one EL teacher whose time is split between five schools; essentially, each school has 0.2 positions allotted for English-language learners, who comprise roughly 15% of students at this school. Participants directly referenced this support as inadequate, and multiple participants commented that the school needed, at minimum, a full-time EL teacher. "We need more support to assist in the language barriers of students that do not primarily speak English," one participant stated. Additionally, participants noted during the PAR activities that no formal training exists for working with culturally diverse students. Given the lack of systems of support, teachers have by necessity been forced to develop their own implementation strategies to support linguistically diverse students.

Table 11

Codebook Excerpt: Organizational Challenges

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Island of Innovation	• Organizational challenges	• Lack of EL support	12
		• Lack of EL knowledge	4
		• Lack of curricular/instructional support	6
		• Language barriers	4
		• Need for EL resources	5

Participants unanimously rated themselves and their peers on the Project I^4 CLRP framework as "minimally inclusive" for linguistically responsive practices (see Appendix I) and called attention specifically to a lack of support for linguistically diverse curriculum and instruction. Participants indicated a strong correlation for the "islands of innovation" theme, as many of the "areas for growth" they discussed during PAR activities are systemic deficits related to linguistically responsive teaching practices.

> We don't receive enough training, support, or resources to support our EL students effectively or meaningfully. We need instructional support in learning how to better help those students who do have a language barrier and may not understand some things covered in class.

In the absence of systems to support English learners, teachers have developed their own protocols, procedures, and classroom practices to support these students (Table 12).

Several participants noted a need for additional resources to assist students who have "language barriers" or do not speak English as their primary language, and 7 of 12 participants talked about the importance of intentionally building linguistically responsive relationships with their students. Another teacher noted that "language is not leveraged as an asset as often as possible." Lacey, a former ELA teacher and the school's media coordinator, discussed one of her students who speaks no English:

> I was trying to get him to turn in a homework form, and we had difficulty communicating. Still, he has to take the end-of-grade test at the end of the year. Without proper EL support, that's not right, and it is not fair to him.

In the absence of consistent organizational systems of support at the district or even school level, teachers looked inward to their own innovations for addressing students' myriad linguistic needs.

Table 12

Codebook Excerpt: Linguistically Responsive Teacher Strategies

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Island of Innovation	• Linguistically responsive teacher strategies	• Home language as asset in classroom	12
		• Authentic connections	5
		• Cultural/linguistic context	6
		• Classroom practices	6
		• Sharing language/culture	9

Linguistically Responsive Teacher Strategies

Teachers stated that they developed linguistically responsive strategies to support their students out of necessity because they feel systemic support is unlikely or impossible. Teachers looked to their own classroom practices to solve the problem. Rather than bemoan what cannot be changed, the teachers committed to providing additional classroom supports, viewing students' linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a challenge, and using strategies to support culturally and linguistically diverse students on a more regular basis. These strategies provided the basis for three codes that I analyze in this section: using home language as an asset in the classroom (*n*=12), making authentic connections (*n*=5), and allowing space for students to share their language and culture (*n*=9).

Participants consistently stated that providing opportunities for students to use their home language as an asset in the classroom was their most effective linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Rebecca, an ELA teacher, shared an anecdote about allowing Arabic students to write a journal entry in their native language. This accomplished several goals, she said. First, she removed any language barriers to her content, allowing the student to learn on her own terms and in her home language. Second, the strategy celebrated the student's linguistic diversity as an asset.

Participants also sought opportunities to make authentic connections with students based on their cultural and linguistic diversity. One participant, for example, recalled a day in which her lesson ended early. She allowed the same students to paint Arabic Henna tattoos on her hand. "They got a kick out of sharing something from their culture," she said. Rhonda, an ELA teacher, shared an anecdote about using storytelling in her classroom to center culturally diverse voices. She prides herself on selecting short stories, poems, and novels from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous,

and people of color) authors, and she asks her own students to make connections to these culturally diverse writers. “The literary canon is so much bigger than dead white guys, and my students appreciate hearing the voices of writers and artists who look and sound like them,” she said. Landon, a social studies teacher, said he does the same with primary source document analysis in his classroom. His classroom is set up in a way that values linguistically diverse learners, and when students encounter documents in another language, he asks native speakers to help interpret and analyze the documents. He uses a variety of strategies to elicit responses from culturally and linguistically diverse students, refers to his students as “future historians,” and prides himself on building relationships that foster relational trust in his classroom.

By allowing students space to share their language and culture, teachers center students’ cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset. Laura, an exceptional children’s teacher who teaches in a separate setting, said she likes to find a student who speaks Spanish to support EL students who have a tenuous grasp on the language:

> It makes them feel important, and it gives them some responsibility. Think about how often we center their language and culture. He may not always know the content, but when he is helping a student with their language acquisition and simply translating for them in class, he is the expert.

By allowing her student to leverage his own linguistic assets, she has given him the agency to connect with his peers in a meaningful way.

From the artifacts I collected during PAR Cycle One, it is evident that these islands of innovation exist and that there exists the potential to extend these pockets of success to a wider audience with a more systematic approach to culturally and linguistically responsive teaching

practices. In the next sub-section, I reflect on my leadership and the steps I needed to take for PAR Cycle Two.

Leadership Reflection and Action Steps for PAR Cycle Two

In this sub-section, I discuss my reflection as a school leader and next steps for PAR Cycle Two, including how PAR Cycle Two will address the final two research sub-questions: To what extent do teachers implement and use cognitively demanding academic discourse? and How am I as a leader able to build internal capacity of teachers and establish spaces for deeper relationships and increased opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse?

I critically reflected upon my agency as a middle grades principal because of the work I completed with the EC-NIC and through the Community Learning Exchange process. Throughout the PAR activities, I have analyzed and reflected upon my own leadership through my field notes, reflective memos, and member checks with the EC-NIC team. Developing my leadership skills as a research-practitioner has been deeply challenging but rewarding, and the work completed has already yielded me opportunity to engage in reflective conversations with the EC-NIC team.

During the PAR cycle of inquiry, I noted several areas of strength. Teachers are beginning to center relational trust and leverage those relationships in service of effective pedagogy. They are embracing the dual tenets of warm demanders – empathy and high expectations – to create effective learning spaces for culturally and linguistically diverse students. I have prioritized these areas, both as part of the PAR study as well as in service of the whole school. It is encouraging that participants noted an increased awareness and desire to become more fully inclusive in these areas. Yet, areas of growth were also illuminated because of this PAR cycle. The “islands of innovation” theme showed some organizational challenges

that are systemic and will require additional support. I approached every challenge through an equity lens, and I am beginning to connect culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with equitable academic discourse for all students by being intentional about my questioning practices and thinking about students' culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as assets that can be leveraged in effective classroom discussions. My leadership is focused on providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practices. This idea will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter as I further explore my leadership practices.

Throughout PAR Cycle One, I used my field notes and reflective memos to triangulate the data. Coding these artifacts showed that my leadership capacity has shifted. I have always prided myself on the relationships I forge with students, both in my prior roles as a teacher, coach, and assistant principal and now as a principal. Now, more than ever before, I am focusing on my relationship with teachers, and I approach every problem through an equity lens. By recentering and focusing my leadership through an equity lens, I hope to eliminate cultural and linguistic "blind spots" in my own leadership and guide teachers in their own development in this area. My reflective memos revealed several scenarios this semester in which this approach led to equitable outcomes for students.

By modeling this behavior for the EC-NIC team and the rest of my staff, I have created relational trust with my team which has given us space to have difficult conversations. The team has reciprocated that relational trust by opening up and being vulnerable during the PAR activities. This has been an intentional process and has contributed to the success of the iterative nature of a participatory action research study and my growth as a leader.

In the final Cycle of Inquiry, I continued to explore the emergent themes of relational trust, warm demanders, and "the islands of innovation" that participants have developed in

isolation. The EC-NIC team and I also decided to focus on observing for strong academic discourse to analyze the connection between effective relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. The research sub-questions allowed me to reflect on my own leadership practices at a deeper level. In the final PAR cycle, I observed participants using a rubric to measure teacher disposition as warm demanders that is rooted in culturally and linguistically responsive relationships. We used the Project I^4 CLRP framework (see Appendix I) as the baseline for the rubric. The last research sub-question for the PAR reads: "How am I as a leader able to build internal capacity of teachers and establish spaces for deeper relationships?" I continued to use reflective memos to respond to the leadership question. For PAR Cycle Two, I continued to meet monthly with the EC-NIC team, and we incorporated regular walkthrough observations in each participant's classrooms using the rubric to guide evidence-based conversations.

During PAR Cycle Two, we saw significant changes to the composition of the EC-NIC team, as two members unexpectedly resigned at the end of the Spring 2022 semester. Brianna decided to leave the teaching profession to pursue Master of Social Work degree. Heather relocated and transferred to a high school closer to her home. Rather than replace these EC-NIC members for the final Cycle of Inquiry, I worked with the remaining EC-NIC participants as well as a small number of teachers who participated in the February 2022 CLE, as these teachers are already familiar with the PAR study and interested in continuing the equity-centered work toward building sustainable systems for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

During PAR Cycle Two, I continued to analyze data related to the themes that emerged from the inquiry cycles. The data continued to be iterative, and we connected the final research sub-questions to the overarching research question outlined in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings from the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. These findings are a result of three inquiry cycles over an 18-month period. In the first cycle (PAR Pre-cycle, Fall 2021), I established an Equity Centered-Networked Improvement Community (EC-NIC) with four teachers on the eighth-grade team at the school where I serve as the principal. I analyzed data from Pre-cycle artifacts, including weekly EC-NIC meetings, reflective memos, and a Community Learning Exchange (CLE). Categories emerged from these data:

- There must be a focus on relationships for students to be successful, and the focus of that foundation is being a warm demander, a practice that emerged repeatedly even if the team did not yet have the language to articulate it in those words;
- Cultural, racial, and linguistic representation is important in a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom; and
- Focusing on relationships is necessary to combat longstanding systemic inequities that persist in an educational setting.

I continued to collect and analyze evidence during PAR Cycle One (Spring 2022) and determined three themes: (1) Warm demanders create empathy and demand high expectation; (2) when teachers have strong dispositions as warm demanders, cognitively demanding academic discourse was much more likely to occur; and (2) participants created “islands of innovation” – pockets of success in isolation – in the absence of school-wide systems.

During PAR Cycle Two, the EC-NIC team shifted our focus to the remaining research sub-questions to analyze the nexus between effective relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. This led to three findings for the PAR study:

1. High Empathy, Inconsistent Expectations;
2. Warm Demanders Utilize Cognitively Demanding Discourse; and
3. Islands of Innovation.

The findings were related to each other, and like the PAR process itself, they were generative and iterative in nature. Participants recognized the need for effective culturally and linguistically responsive relationships, and they identified teachers' disposition as warm demanders as the most important aspect of those relationships. The EC-NIC members defined warm demanders as those teachers possessing both empathy and high expectations. Where I found evidence for the warm demander disposition, evidence for cognitively demanding academic discourse was more likely to occur in the participants' classrooms. Finally, I saw the emergence of pockets of success, which I call "islands of innovation," in which participants, in the absence of formal systems of support, created and implemented CLRP strategies to promote effective classroom discourse.

During PAR Cycle Two (Fall 2022), I built upon the data I collected during the Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One and focused on answering the second research sub-question: To what extent do teachers implement and use cognitively demanding academic discourse? The purpose of the final cycle of inquiry was to identify a connection between culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and effective academic discourse. I wanted to answer the overarching research question guiding the PAR study: *How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse?* When I began the study, I imagined that teachers must create and sustain authentic and culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with students if they hope to push them to fully engage in cognitively demanding academic discourse. In each cycle of inquiry, I found a clear nexus between these

two ideas, and in the final cycle, I analyzed participants' self-perception of their practices and compared that perception with data I collected and analyzed from classroom observations.

In this chapter, I begin with a review of the data collection process for the PAR study in general and specifically PAR Cycle Two. Next, I present the findings for this study substantiated with evidence from all three cycles of inquiry.

PAR Cycles

I collected and analyzed data and artifacts for each cycle of inquiry during the PAR study. For the PAR Pre-cycle (Fall 2021), I formed the EC-NIC team and met with them biweekly, creating agendas for each meeting. We utilized multiple protocols, including personal narratives, journey lines, and chalk talks. I collected these documents and triangulated the artifacts with reflective memos, member checks, and field notes. For PAR Cycle One (Spring 2022), I collected the same artifacts and added Community Learning Exchange artifacts from our first CLE, which I hosted in February 2022. For PAR Cycle Two (Fall 2022), I added observational data and notes from evidence-based conversations that followed each observation (n=12). Each cycle of inquiry was iterative and generative, and we built upon the artifacts collected from each previous cycle. Table 13 shows these data. In the next sub-section, I describe with more specificity the data collection process for PAR Cycle Two.

PAR Cycle Two Data Collection

PAR Cycle Two was the culmination of the three cycles of inquiry into the PAR study. I continued with the weekly EC-NIC meetings and reflective memos and added two additional pieces of evidence during this cycle: observations looking for evidence of CLR practices and cognitively demanding academic discourse and evidence-based conversations that followed each observation. The cycle had two purposes: the first was to compare the participants' self-

Table 13

PAR Study Data Collection

PAR Cycle	Data Collected	Triangulated with
PAR Pre-cycle (Fall 2021)	• EC-NIC agendas (biweekly) • Personal narratives • Journey lines • Documents • Chalk Talk	• Reflective memos • Member checks • Field notes
PAR Cycle One (Spring 2021)	• EC-NIC agendas (biweekly) • Personal narratives • Chalk Talk • CLE artifacts • Documents	• Reflective memos • Member checks • Field notes
PAR Cycle Two (Fall 2022)	• EC-NIC agendas (biweekly) • Personal narratives • Chalk Talk • CLE artifacts • Documents • Observations • Post-observation Conversation Protocol	• Reflective memos • Member checks • CLE artifacts

described perceptions of their classroom practices with evidence from the classroom observations and reveal what practices are consistently occurring in their classrooms, and the second was to look for the nexus between effective CLR relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. During the Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One activities, I asked participants to rate themselves using the Project I^4 frameworks on CLRP (see Appendix I). In PAR Cycle Two, I compared those ratings with the data I collected from classroom observations (n=12). I analyzed data from both the selective verbatim observational notes and the calling-on and questioning levels tools to identify the connection between CLR relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. In this section, I describe the PAR Cycle Two activities. See Table 14 for a timeline and activities during Cycle Two.

Equity Centered-Network Improvement Community Meetings

The EC-NIC team started with five participants and the composition changed over the summer, as two participants resigned from their positions at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year. The remaining team members elected to continue meeting every other week, starting in August 2022 when teachers returned to school. We met five times between August 15-October 3. Each meeting began with a personal narrative related to the first two research sub-questions on effective relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. The artifacts focused on the identifying characteristics of a warm demander as shown in Figure 10, and once again teachers identified high expectations and empathy as the key traits associated with warm demanders. One participant was particularly succinct in her belief on the importance of building relationships: “If you don’t genuinely care about your students, then you need to change professions… period,” she stated. Hammond (2015) connected culturally responsive teaching to building students’ internal capacity for completing rigorous work and concluded that the focus

Table 14

Activities: PAR Cycle Two

Activity	WEEK 1 (Aug. 15-19)	WEEK 2 (Aug. 22-26)	WEEK 3 (Aug. 29-Sept. 2)	WEEK 4 (Sept. 5-9)	WEEK 5 (Sept. 12-16)	WEEK 6 (Sept. 19-23)	WEEK 7 (Sept. 26-30)	WEEK 8 (Oct. 3-7)
EC-NIC meetings (n=5)	●		●		●		●	●
Participant observations and evidence-based conversations (n=12)			● (2)	● (2)	● (2)	● (1)	● (3)	● (2)
Reflective Memos	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

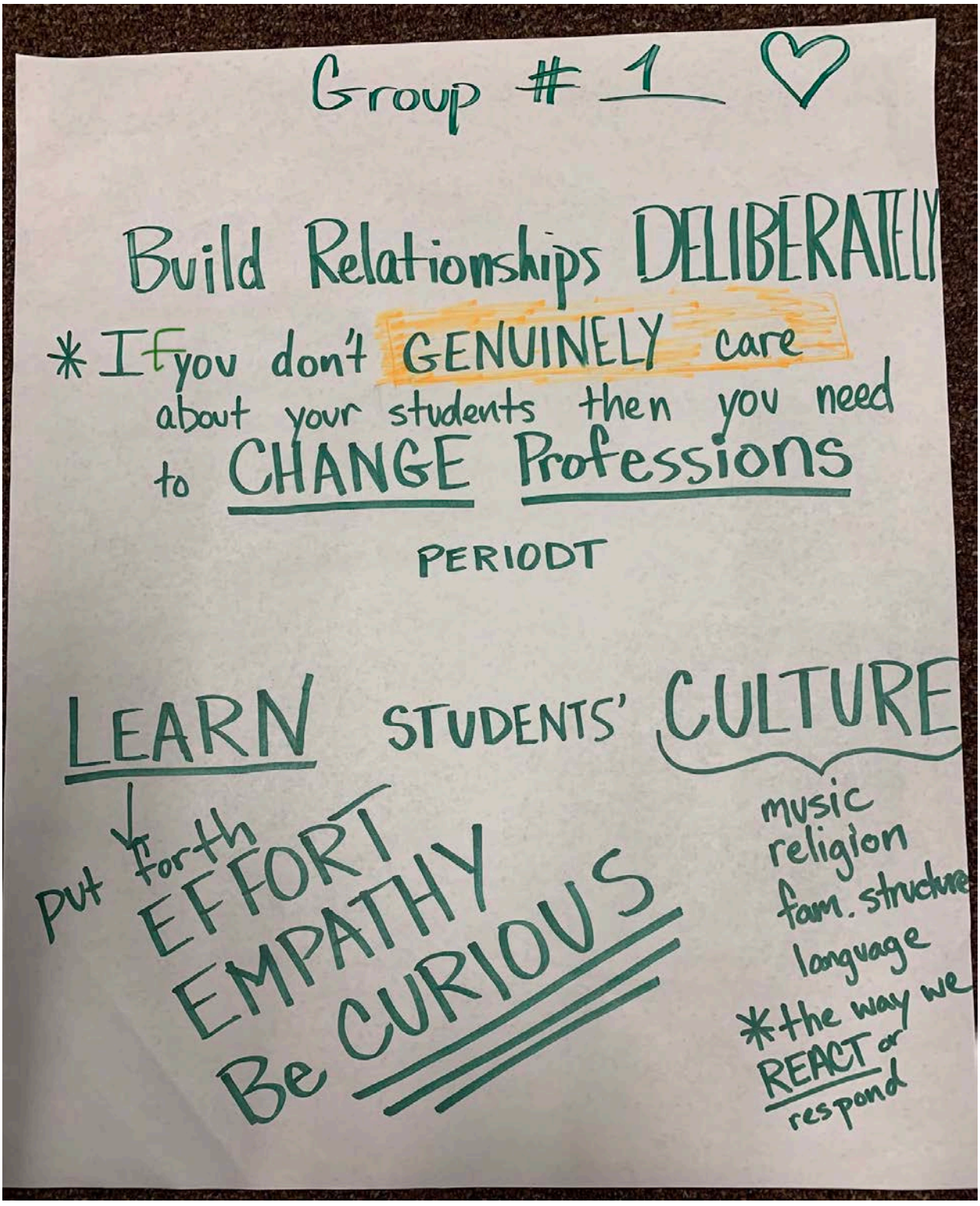


Figure 10. Personal narrative: Elements of teacher disposition as warm demander.

of CLRP relationships isn't on motivation but rather increasing students' ability to process information. Similarly, the EC-NIC team connected CLRP relationships to effective classroom discourse, and all participants articulated a belief that one cannot exist without the other. "It's just like how warm demanders need empathy and accountability," a participant said. "Good classrooms need effective relationships before we can even think about effective instruction." I will analyze this idea further in the findings section where I discuss the relationship between the first and second research sub-questions.

I completed two sets of observations during the cycle, one set looking for CLR practices and another looking for evidence of practices supporting cognitively demanding academic discourse. In the next sub-section, I review the processes I used for collecting data from both sets of observations.

Observations of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices

During a period of six weeks during the Fall 2022 semester, I observed each participant multiple times (n=12) using selective verbatim notes. For the classroom observations, the team agreed to focus on collecting evidence in the following areas: relationships, teacher disposition as warm demander, and the teachers' use of language. I wanted to compare the way participants described their own classroom practices with observational data showing what culturally responsive practices were occurring in their classrooms. Figure 11 shows the selective verbatim notes on one lesson that I observed during PAR Cycle Two and provides statements made by the teacher or student. I chose to highlight the selective verbatim notes from this observation because that teacher had several examples of building relationships, positioning herself as a warm demander who demonstrated both empathy and high expectations, and using language as an asset. I placed each statement in the corresponding focus area, and then the teachers and I met to

Date: 9/27/22 • Time: 12:45-1:30 p.m. • Subject: English Language Arts • Lesson: Weaving God's Eye ("Ojo de Dios").	
CLRP Elements	**Selective Verbatim Script**
Relationships	• "Alright, everyone, we're going to do something a little different today and learn about someone else's culture." • "It's important that you are able to see someone else's perspective. Walk a mile in someone else's shoes!" • "[Student Name], I'm so glad you're back with us today! We missed you last week!" • "[Student Name], connect the journal to that thing you were telling me yesterday."
Teacher disposition as warm demander	• "I did this in Core 2, and I asked everyone if they wanted me to finish the video in Spanish. All of my Latino students were so excited and said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' It was so empowering for them to hear this in their home language. I told the class we would be doing this all year, learning about different cultures and learning to like people who don't look and sound like us." • "No, [Student Name], you can't give up like that! Your writing is way too good. Let me see what you've got?" • "Okay, watch. I'm going to show you what I want with the journal entry."
Elements of Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy	**Selective Verbatim Script**
View of language	• Instructions for activity given in Spanish via YouTube video. Centered Latino students' experience in the classroom. • "How many of you understood what he was saying?" • "A little bit, a little bit" *points at Latinx students* "Definitely, definitely, definitely" • To whole class: "How does it feel to have someone give you directions to do something in a language you don't know?" • Student response from Black/White students (non-Latinx): "Weird, hard, frustrating, confusing" • "How does someone who comes to this country feel when they come to this country and don't understand the language?" • Student response: "The same way."

Figure 11. CLRP classroom observation tool.

discuss the statements during an EC-NIC meeting and during evidence-based conversations. The discussions also served as a member check. The observation tool helped me compare the frequency of codes indicating participants' relationship-building strategies with students as well as their disposition as a warm demander and their view of language as an asset. I analyze each of these characteristics in the findings section later in the chapter.

Observations of Academic Discourse

Over the same six-week period, I also observed participants for evidence of cognitively demanding academic discourse (n=12), using the Project I^4 Calling-On (see Appendix D) and Question Level (see Appendix F) tools. For each observation, I collected and coded data related to both the levels of questions that the participant asked over the course of each lesson as well as specific calling-on strategies that the teacher utilized, such as raised hands, cold calling, think/wait time, equitable calling-on methods such as equity cards/sticks, call and response, and the participants' revoicing of the students' responses. Figure 12 is an example of an observation using the Question Level Tool where I recorded each teacher or student response and timestamped each occurrence. I then identified the level of each question. The tools helped me understand how cognitively demanding academic discourse was occurring in teachers' classrooms and with what frequency. I discuss the frequency charts for the observations in the findings section later in this chapter. The tools were also effective artifacts when I met with teachers for evidence-based conversations.

Evidence Based Conversations

Traditionally, post-conference observations in my school have been highly subjective; however, participants stated that engaging in an evidence-based conversation and reviewing evidence from the observations assisted them in reflecting on their practice and adjusting lessons

Project I⁴ Observation Toolkit

Project I⁴ Observation Tool Question Level 1.A

The tool is designed to collect basic information for the teacher to see what types (levels) of questioning the teacher is using. **First, use selective verbatim by selecting and recording teacher questions and student responses (use T; or S: to indicate which). If possible, name student to whom teacher addresses question. Second, analyze the evidence using names from the next page.**

Teacher	Observer	Date
Duration of Observation 10:30 to 10:50		9/14/22

TIME	Teacher Questions and Student Responses (Use T: or S: to indicate speaker)	Level or Type of question
10:32	(S), one thousand what?	LCD (Recall) NTT
10:34	(S), Can we take 8 from 4? No, so we come next door.	LCD (Understand) NTT
10:37	How can we check our work to make sure the answer is right?	HCD (Apply) TT
10:40	(S), sweet (S), will you share your equation?	HCD (Create) TT
10:43	Is this the only way I could write this equation? What's a different way I could write it? (S)?	HCD (Create) Analyze TT
10:47	What's a different way, (S)? Could I have written it if I started like this? (Stem on board)	HCD (Eval.) TT
10:50	There's one more way I could write it. (S)?	HCD (Eval.) TT

Figure 12. Question level observation notes.

to be more equitable, more focused on the teacher disposition as a warm demander, and more in tune with calling-on and questioning strategies to maximize cognitively demanding academic discourse in their classrooms. To accomplish this, I used the Project I^4 guide for evidence-based conversations (Appendix G). The tool presented evidence from the observation to the teacher, and I asked questions of the teacher based on data from the observation. This assisted the teacher in reflecting on their classroom practice and removed from the process the evaluative component that often dominates post-observation conversations. We also used the tools and observational evidence to guide our conversations during our biweekly EC-NIC meetings. Similarly, those conversations guided the teachers' reflection and planning. Using the observational data, I compiled an aggregate of the evidence, and we discussed patterns in the evidence and identified strategies that we wanted to work on such as wait time, equity sticks and other calling-on strategies, and teacher and student revoicing.

PAR Cycle Two Data Analysis

During each PAR Cycle of Inquiry, I collected and coded artifacts and created a codebook to support my analysis of the evidence. I collected artifacts from biweekly EC-NIC meetings, weekly reflective memos, and from the Community Learning Exchange. Participants completed personal narratives and created several artifacts using journey lines, reflective prompts, "Chalk Talk" protocols, and photo stories during the EC-NIC meetings. I also collected and analyzed classroom observation data focused on CLRP and cognitively demanding academic discourse, and evidence-based conversations. The codes I collected and analyzed from the observations helped me triangulate the data I collected in the PAR Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One. The observational data on CLRP showed the ways in which participants demonstrated empathy and having high expectations in their lessons. When observing for academic discourse,

the two academic discourse tools (calling-on and questioning level) provided data that demonstrated the classroom practices that encouraged cognitively demanding academic discourse. Weekly memos supplemented the data collection. I used inductive coding and in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016) to extrapolate meaning from the data collected, and those codes became the basis for the categories and emergent themes that led to the findings in this section. I began developing the codebook (see Appendix J) during the PAR Pre-cycle using in vivo codes from the initial EC-NIC meetings. These early codes coalesced into emergent categories and themes. I continued to build and expand upon the codebook with each iterative step in the PAR study, and the information I collected and analyzed became the basis for my findings. In the next section, I discuss my findings for the PAR study.

Findings

In this section, I present three findings:

1. High Empathy, Inconsistent Expectations;
2. Warm Demanders Utilize Cognitively Demanding Discourse; and
3. CLRP Islands of Innovation.

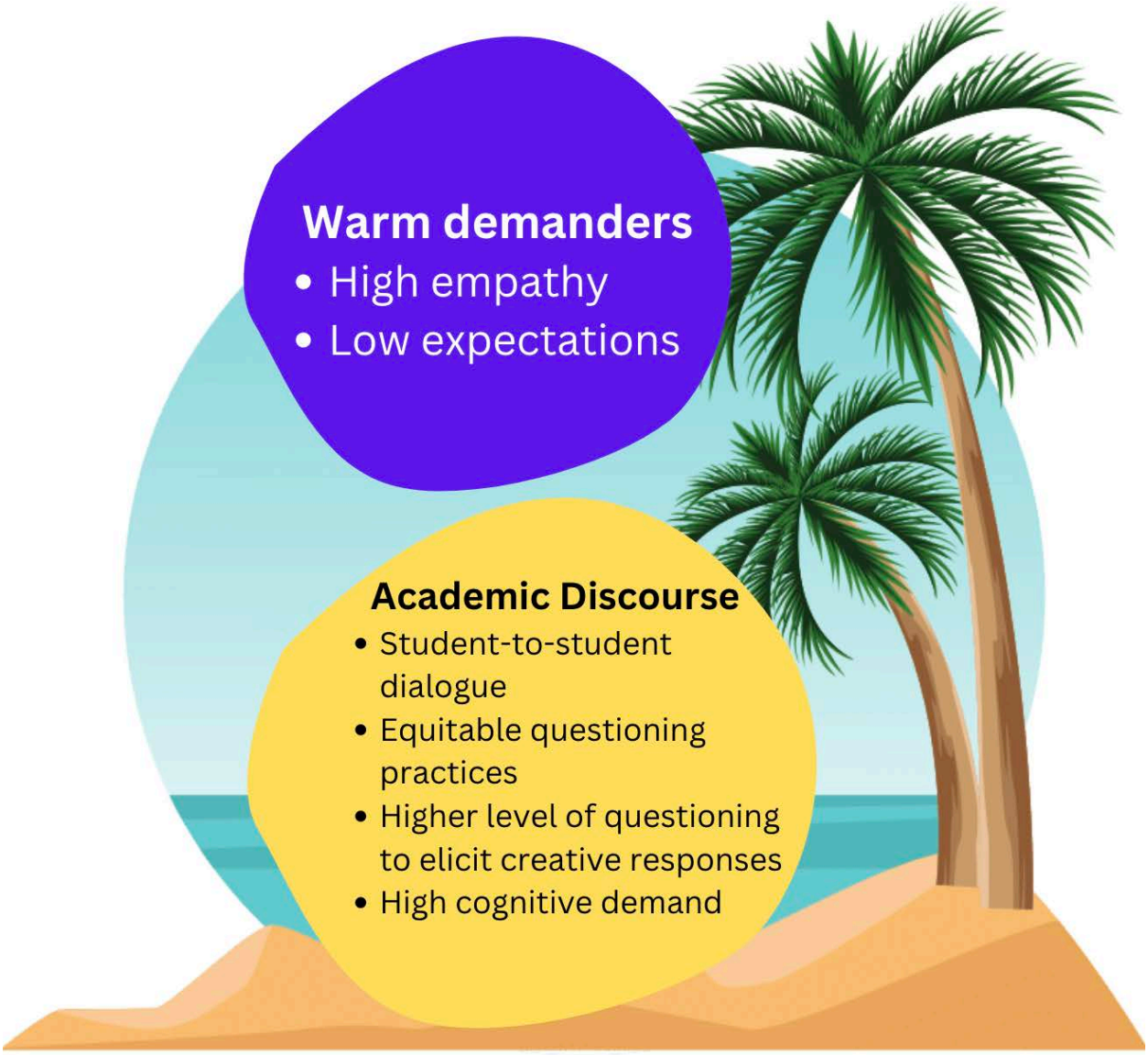
As I worked through the three cycles of inquiry with the EC-NIC team, we co-created a definition for warm demanders that mirrored that of existing literature (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006). Our definition became the basis for the first finding, that warm demanders in my school show empathy but have inconsistent expectations. Further, we found that participants who are warm demanders are more likely to have cognitively demanding academic discourse (Resnick et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978; Zwiers, 2007) in their classrooms. Finally, we looked at islands of innovation that developed at our school in the absence of formal systems of support and found

pockets of success with the warm demander disposition, pockets of cognitively demanding academic discourse occurring in some classrooms. The graphic in Figure 13 is a representation of the findings.

Over the course of the study, I found that teachers who developed culturally and linguistically responsive relationships promoted academic discourse, and I found that some participants developed the strategies in isolation of others, without formal systems or structures of support. The participants are developing culturally and linguistically responsive relationships, and this has manifested itself in a high degree of empathy – one-half of the equation for teacher disposition as a warm demander. However, the second part of the equation is not fully evident – all participants did not consistently demonstrate high expectations. Most participants demonstrated high degrees of empathy and called themselves warm demanders; however, some participants were not consistently demonstrating high expectations. The observational data showed several exemplar lessons that demonstrated participants' disposition as warm demanders as well as utilizing effective strategies for cognitively demanding academic discourse. During the second PAR cycle member checks, the participants were surprised by the findings but receptive to reflection. "I still think I am a warm demander more often than not, but it's hard to argue with the data when you see it laid out in front of you," one participant stated.

Finding #1: High Empathy; Inconsistent Expectations

The observational data (*n*=12) for PAR Cycle Two showed that participants regularly demonstrated empathy but were not as consistent in showing a culture of high expectations. The observational data is somewhat at odds with teachers' self-perception, as three of five EC-NIC members and eight of 12 CLE participants rated themselves as warm demanders who



Islands of Innovation

- Pockets of success
- Pockets of warm demander disposition
- Pockets of cognitively demanding academic discourse
- Happening in isolation
- Lack of systemwide support

Figure 13. Key findings.

consistently show both empathy and high expectations. Table 15 shows the most frequent codes I collected during PAR Cycle Two observations. The three most common codes for the first category, "warm demanders show empathy," are: Cared about students (*n*=21), nurturing in all situations (*n*=18), and tough but nurturing (*n*=17). The three most common codes for the second category, "warm demanders have high expectations," are: ample support for success (*n*=12), authentic connections through storytelling (*n*=10), and expect the best of students (*n*=9).

The observations confirmed the extent that teachers are demonstrating the two attributes of warm demanders: Showing empathy and having high expectations. However, observational data showed that codes associated with high expectations were implemented more inconsistently than those for showing empathy.

Warm Demanders Show Empathy

Participants showed empathy for their students. Participants self-reported a high degree of personal warmth, which they defined as "showing empathy," and observational data supports their perceptions. Zwiers and Crawford (2011) found that facilitating opportunities for students to share different perspectives led to increased empathy for students and teachers. During PAR Cycle Two observations, I observed examples of teachers showing empathy in three ways: nurturing in all situations (*n*=18), cared about students (*n*=21), and tough but nurturing (*n*=15). The observational data support the participants' perceptions of how they see themselves showing empathy in their classrooms, with five of five EC-NIC members and 10 of 12 CLE participants indicating they felt they displayed empathy. See Table 16 for a comparison of participants' self-perception compared with observational data I collected.

Table 15

Observational Data Supporting Teacher Disposition as Warm Demander

Finding	Category	Codes	Frequency
High Empathy; Low Expectations	• Warm demanders show empathy	• Nurturing in all situations	18
		• Cared about students	21
		• Tough but nurturing	17
	• Warm demanders have high expectations	• Authentic connections through storytelling	10
		• Expect the best of students	9
		• Ample support for success	12

Table 16

Comparing Participants' Self-Perception of CLR Practices with Observational Data

Category	Codes	Self-Reported Frequency (n=12)	Observational Frequency (n=12)
Relationships	• Superficial/focused on work completion	1	3
	• Intentional/sustainable for some, not all	4	6
	• Deep relationships with all students/families	7	3
Teacher disposition	• Treat all students the same	0	3
	• Situational empathy	2	6
	• Warm demander	10	3
View of language	• Language viewed as challenge	8	6
	• Language viewed as asset but English preferred	2	4
	• Language fully leveraged as asset	2	2

An example of a teacher showing empathy by being "nurturing in all situations" occurred during an observation when the teacher demonstrated to her ELA students how to create Ojo de Dios ("God's Eye") weavings, which are culturally significant in parts of Mexico, Peru, and Latin America among Indigenous and Catholic populations. About a quarter of the participant's class are Latinx students, and several primarily speak Spanish at home. She started the lesson by showing instructions in Spanish. "I did this in Core 2, and I asked everyone if they wanted me to finish the video in Spanish," she said. "All of my Latino students were so excited and said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' It was so empowering for them to hear this in their home language." The lesson was culturally and linguistically responsive, and she showed a high degree of empathy in supporting her students' cultural and linguistic diversity as an asset. Showing empathy showed up in the codes 18 times and is hardly surprising. Most participants self-rated high on showing empathy, and the observational data indicated numerous examples of teachers being nurturing by scaffolding questions, providing additional support for students to find success, and building relational trust to know how different types of learners learn best in various settings. During PAR Cycle Two, a cultural shift was evident in the school, and most participants were keenly aware of their students' cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The way in which they leveraged the students' backgrounds as an asset was another example of being nurturing to all students.

The observational data showed that teachers genuinely "care about their students" (n=21). During PAR Cycle Two, I observed participants meeting students at the door, talking with them about extracurricular activities such as sporting events and band concerts, utilizing personal narratives and journey lines to get to know students, and using examples of students' lived experiences in classroom activities to create relevant, engaging learning opportunities. One participant talked about using intentional relationship building strategies:

> I found this activity on Pinterest where I committed to spending two minutes per day for 10 days in a row getting to know students through one-on-one conversations. At the end of 10 days, I was surprised by how much more I knew about my kids and how much more they knew about me. Those connections meant a lot in the classroom.

Another participant said she tries to have five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. “When I have to call home because one of my students messed up, it helps that I have spent some time showing them how much I care,” she said. Throughout the PAR cycle, participants spent a great deal of time thinking about how to build caring relationships, and the genuine care for their students was on full display in all classrooms I visited.

Similarly, I observed several instances of participants being “tough but nurturing.” Bondy and Ross (2008) articulated the importance of establishing caring relationships while maintaining high expectations. “When students know that you believe in them, they will interpret even harsh-sounding comments as statements of care from someone with their best interests at heart” (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 55). In the case of our study, participants consistently described themselves as “tough but nurturing.” For example, the teacher who facilitated the “Ojo de Dios” lesson insisted that students complete the weaving and subsequent written reflection. Several students wanted to give up on either the weaving or the written reflection, but the teacher provided appropriate support when they struggled. Another participant who affectionately refers to her students as her “honeybuns” had multiple student interactions that I coded for “tough but nurturing.” Her students completed multi-step word problems that asked them to manipulate fractions in several ways. This is a skill that students have traditionally struggled with, as evident by both classroom observation and test scores. The lesson during PAR Cycle Two was no different – a significant number of students struggled during the lesson. The teacher, however,

refused to let them give up and worked with each while displaying a high degree of empathy for their struggles and insisting they complete the work satisfactorily. That insistence on students completing work despite hardship was the most common way in which the "tough but nurturing" code showed up. Overall, EC-NIC members consistently employed strategies in which a high degree of empathy was evident. Empathy is a key characteristic of warm demanders. In the next section, I present the other side of the warm demander disposition: high expectations.

Warm Demanders Have High Expectations

The EC-NIC team knew warm demanders demonstrate high expectations from reviewing and discussing the literature (Bondy & Ross, 2008) and reflecting on their practices, yet teachers did not consistently demonstrate high expectations during the PAR study. From the classroom observations, I noted the following codes most frequently in the participants' practices: "authentic connections through storytelling" (*n*=10), "expect the best of students" (*n*=9), and "ample support for success" (*n*=12).

Warm Demanders Make Authentic Connections Through Storytelling. Several participants successfully used storytelling in their classrooms to create empathy in a way that centered students' experiences as assets while also demanding high expectations. When teachers gave students the space to share stories about their culturally and linguistically diverse experiences, students felt empowered and were more apt to engage deeply and meaningfully in their learning. During PAR Cycle Two observations (*n*=12), I observed 10 instances of participants using storytelling to maintain high expectations in their classrooms. The protocols assisted participants in creating opportunities in their classrooms to build meaningful connections with their students while having high expectations.

Warm demanders straddle the line between empathy and high expectations (Delpit, 2012;

Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009), and I reflected for some time on which section to include the analysis on storytelling. Ultimately, I chose to include the code in the section on high expectations because anecdotal evidence from observations and evidence-based conversations indicated that participants who took the time to make these connections often had higher expectations than those participants who did not (Hammond, 2015). An interaction between an ELA teacher and a bilingual student indicates the way in which she created space for her student to extrapolate meaning through his own story and have high expectations (Gutiérrez, 2013; Zwiers, 2007). The participant shared an anecdote in which a student was tasked with writing a short essay comparing academic Spanish with colloquial Spanish. The participant stated that the student wanted to copy and paste a Wikipedia article, but she reminded the student that he could use a personal anecdote about family members who speak Spanish. In doing so, the participant viewed the student's linguistically diverse background as an asset and this one comment empowered the student to write a thought-provoking essay that centered his own cultural experience through effective storytelling. While she displayed empathy in valuing his linguistic diversity, this example was also an example of having high expectations, as the teacher insisted on the student critically analyzing his own story rather than relying on a copy-and-pasted snippet. Following the observation, I asked the teacher about this interaction. She stated: "It would have been too easy to let him copy something from the Internet, but how is that making any kind of connection to the assignment?" She showed empathy by allowing him to use own experience, and she maintained high expectations by insisting he not default to a low-level academic task. One participant, an eighth-grade math teacher, asked students to use real-world examples to make connections while learning about slope. Several students attempted to make connections, and one girl talked about how she helped her grandmother sell empanadas on the

weekends. The teacher worked with her to graph a linear expression based on the price of the empanadas and how many she sold. “Seeing how the content related to her in real life helped her make a connection, and I expect she will do well on the unit test,” the participant stated. Making authentic connections through storytelling was the most telling example of teachers having high expectations. In the next section, I analyze other ways in which participants expected the best of their students.

Warm Demanders Expect the Best of Students. Most participants (three of five EC-NIC members; eight of 12 CLE participants) perceived their dispositions as regularly demanding high expectations. Yet, examples emerged from the observations in which occasional lapses in high expectations occurred. Khalifa (2018) warned that having low expectations, especially for students of color, remains prevalent in classrooms and causes significant harm to minoritized students. Yet, low expectations were occasionally on display in participants’ classrooms. Two participants allowed students to report to class after the tardy bell rang without acknowledging the tardy. Another participant allowed students to get by without submitting homework – those grades are simply omitted from the gradebook. Three participants allowed students to actively avoid collaboration with peers or relied on what Freire (1970) referred to as the “banking model of education,” treating their students as empty vessels into which their pour their expertise. However, there was also evidence of teachers expecting the best of their students. During the observations, four of the 12 teachers facilitated high level academic tasks that were cognitively demanding – either abstract ideas or tasks that required deeper analysis and more critical thinking. In two additional observations, the participants fully committed to student-led discourse, and those students experienced the greatest understanding of the academic task they were asked to complete.

Warm Demanders Provide Ample Support for Success. Warm demanders who possess high expectations also must provide ample support for success; it is not sufficient for warm demanders to simply possess high expectations without support. Muhammed (2018) wrote that teachers often have high expectations for their students but do not always center those expectations in a strong sense of self for students or deep knowledge of their identities. The most successful teachers, he found, were those who thought intentionally about students' myriad and diverse identities and then leveraged those identities as assets in their classrooms. Over the course of the PAR study, participants showed support for success as warm demanders in several important ways. During an introduction to slope, a math teacher provided students with a word problem and asked them to work in small groups to answer the question. The students were not given the formula for slope (y=mx+b). Instead, the teacher expected them to come up with their own algorithm for solving the problem. The students struggled; however, the teacher was ready for this productive struggle and supported them in the process. "I flipped the lesson and had them develop the formula instead of just giving it to them," the participant said. She positioned herself to ask probing questions and help the students approach the word problem in a way that would lead them to the correct formula for slope. "I could have just given them a worksheet, but all that teaches is a procedure. I need them to have a conceptual understanding," the teacher said. She anticipated where the students would struggle and created supports to help them overcome those struggles. Overall, teachers who employed both empathy and high expectations modeled the warm demander teacher disposition. In the next sub-section, I analyze the claim that the warm demander disposition is closely related to cognitively demanding academic discourse, which is the second key finding in the study.

Finding #2: Warm Demanders Utilize Cognitively Demanding Discourse

When teachers exhibited strong dispositions as warm demanders, cognitively demanding academic discourse was much more likely to occur. Every time I observed a teacher using cognitively demanding academic discourse, there was evidence of being a warm demander by showing empathy and having high expectations. Throughout the PAR study, participants in EC-NIC meetings stated a strong belief in the nexus between culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. We read articles representing the seminal work on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, including Gay (2018), who discussed the pedagogical impact of culturally responsive practices. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2009) talked about the ways in which effective relationships led to effective pedagogy. However, this belief did not always translate to classroom practice for participants in this study. While observing for cognitively demanding academic discourse, I observed for three areas related to cognitively demanding academic discourse: academic task, protocols and questioning, and dialogue. The areas are borrowed from the Project I^4 framework on academic discourse (see Appendix H). The frequency chart in Table 17 shows how participants demonstrated cognitively demanding academic discourse. I coded the observations for academic task and identified eight examples of high cognitive demand, compared with 11 examples of low cognitive demand. I also observed for questioning protocols, and data revealed the following codes: Wait time (*n*=11), high levels of questioning (*n*=9), and low levels of questioning (*n*=14). For observations of dialogue, I observed the following codes: student-to-student talk (*n*=8), teacher-student, one way (*n*=15), and teacher-student, two-way (*n*=11). In the next sub-section, I analyze how the three areas of academic discourse are occurring in participants' classrooms.

Table 17

Observational Data Supporting Nexus Between Warm Demanders and Academic Discourse

Finding	Category	Codes	Frequency
Nexus Between Warm Demanders and Academic Discourse	• Academic Task	• High cognitive demand	8
		• Low cognitive demand	11
	• Questioning Protocols	• Wait time	10
		• High levels of questioning	9
		• Low levels of questioning	14
	• Dialogue	• Student-student talk	8
		• Teacher-student (one-way)	15
		• Teacher-student (two-way)	11

Academic Task

To maximize learning, academic tasks must challenge students, either by asking them to think critically about abstract ideas, asking them to probe a topic more deeply, or both. During PAR Cycle Two observations, tasks requiring low cognitive demand outnumbered tasks requiring high cognitive demand 11-to-8. Teachers who had high expectations said they employed strategies that supported cognitively demanding academic tasks; however, I did not always observe the relationships during PAR Cycle Two observations. Zwiers (2007) connected academic success to teachers showing empathy and promoting perspectives from linguistically diverse students. “English learners were asked more of the early fact-based questions while mainstream students were asked (and responded to) more of the cognitively demanding questions” (Zwiers, 2007, p. 101). During the observations, I noted eight examples of high cognitively demanding academic tasks and 11 examples of low cognitively demanding. In the lessons coded as low cognitive demand, the teachers depended mostly on direct instruction or lecture, and students were asked to recall and reproduce facts, depend on formulas and procedures without a deeper conceptual understanding, or utilize rote memory. Where the tasks were teacher initiated and facilitated, academic tasks were generally at a medium or even high level of cognitive demand, with students thinking more critically about the task at hand and using procedures with a deeper conceptual understanding. There were two lessons that allowed students to collaborate to develop procedures and protocols for solving complex problems and was ample evidence of student talk and reflection. However, many participants continued to default to lower levels of cognitive demand (coded 11 times during the lessons). Several observations included examples of both high and low cognitive demand within the lesson.

During member checks, participants stated that they tended to default to what they were comfortable with:

> Whenever someone is in our room observing, we go back to what we feel is safe. Now that I think about it, we probably do what feels safe more than we should, even though I know what it looks like to have high expectations.

While everyone in a classroom likes to feel comfortable, productive struggle is often necessary and is a component that was noticeably missing as participants often fell short of having truly high expectations in the academic tasks.

Protocols and Questioning

Effective protocols and questioning practices were most evident in classrooms where the teacher demonstrated a warm demander disposition. A high degree of both empathy and high expectations led to teachers using protocols and asking high level questions. The protocols and questioning helped students to feel comfortable exploring challenging concepts and taking greater risks. Depka (2017) found that student achievement is greatly impacted by teachers who ask cognitively demanding questions and challenge students with strategies that push them beyond their comfort zones. During PAR Cycle Two observations, teachers used effective calling-on strategies, such as providing ample wait time (n=10) and asking high level questions (nine codes). However, participants also defaulted to low levels of questioning 14 times. These questions were often procedural or "recall/reproduce" according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). One ELA teacher asked her students to recall plot elements from a short story but never asked students to consider the elements' implications to the story – that is, students could reproduce facts but were not asked to critically analyze. Conversely, the two "warm demander" lessons successfully incorporated student-to-student talk and sought relevant connections to

students' shared experiences. The most successful teachers utilized equitable questioning practices such as equity sticks (four of 12 lessons) sufficient wait time (*n*=28) and call-and-response practices that encouraged students to build upon their classmates' responses. These practices were typically more likely to occur in classrooms where teachers prioritized the warm demander disposition (Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Resnick et al., 2015).

Dialogue

Finally, I explored the role of dialogue in effective academic discourse and observed a notable lack of effective dialogue in participants' classrooms. In particular, student-to-student talk (*n*=8) was low. Yet, research shows that students who are given the opportunity to converse with their peers make deeper connections to the content (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). However, PAR participants were clearly most comfortable with teacher-generated talk. I utilized two codes to delineate between the two types of teacher-led discourse: Teacher-student (one-way) was coded 15 times, and teacher-student (two-way) was coded 11 times. Some of the dialogue focused on extension (11 times), and some of the dialogue was limited – either in scope or content (15 times). When the participants allowed students to engage in student-to-student talk, the conversations were often richer, and the participant could serve in more of a coaching/facilitator role with more probing questions and deeper learning.

> I know that's the gold standard, but it can be intimidating to give up control and turn the students loose. You have to be able to really trust them, and I think that is where the relationship piece comes in.

Throughout the PAR study, forming deeper relationships with students and cultivating a warm demander disposition led to much deeper and more cognitively demanding academic discourse

for students. Next, I discuss how these effective practices emerged in pockets of success that I call “Islands of Innovation,” which is the third key finding in the PAR study.

Finding #3: Islands of Innovation

In the absence of school-wide systems, participants created “islands of innovation” or pockets of success in several important ways, in their dispositions as warm demanders and in their ability to facilitate cognitively demanding academic discourse. Some classrooms have teachers as warm demanders who routinely create lessons centered around cognitively demanding academic discourse. Those teachers are innovative. They consistently show empathy and have expectations of their students and have developed cognitively demanding tasks that facilitate student-led talk. However, this is not systemic in the school. The key is finding ways to build upon that innovation to create a school of warm demanders who embrace empathy and high expectations through cognitively demanding academic discourse. To address the systemic inequity at the school, I worked with the EC-NIC team (Bryk et al., 2015) to utilize more of the Project I^4 protocols in their classrooms, namely journey lines, emulation poems, personal narratives, chalk talks, and other protocols that proved successful during PAR activities. While the PAR study lasted 18 months, a limitation I discuss in the final chapter, I believe that protocols utilized during the study’s activities will yield more systemic change over a greater timeline (Bryk et al., 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

During PAR Cycle Two, I focused more on the second research sub-question: *To what extent do teachers implement and utilize cognitively demanding academic discourse?* Therefore, I spent significant time analyzing observational data. The data I collected shows that pockets of success exist in individual participants’ classrooms despite little systemic support. I saw pockets of success in three distinct areas: home language as an asset (n=9), authentic connections (n=16),

and sharing language/culture (*n*=15). They were implementing successful practices independently, and I want to consider ways to collaborate with the teachers to build a systemic model.

Home Language as an Asset

Teachers who use students' home language as an asset is a pocket of success. Paris (2012) discussed how multi-lingual students are often approached from a deficit mindset. Their home language is seen by many teachers as something to overcome. Muñiz (2020) talked about the instructional benefits of speaking to students in a linguistically responsive manner and recognizing cultural diversity in the classroom. Earlier in the chapter, I shared an example of a student whose teacher asked him to utilize his home language to compare academic and colloquial Spanish. In another example, a participant used a Spanish-language video to introduce a culturally and linguistically responsive lesson. Both are exemplars showing teachers effectively leveraging culturally and linguistically responsive practices to create a classroom culture of high expectations. However, all nine times the teachers used home language as an asset came from these two lessons. In 10 other observations, teachers either made passing references to students' home language or did not acknowledge linguistic diversity at all. This led to a classroom environment in which 15-25% of students lived experiences were neutralized "It's not that we don't want to include everyone," a participant stated. "We know it's important, but we don't have the tools or the training to know how to implement these practices." Lacking the tools to implement linguistically responsive practices was a significant hindrance, according to participants throughout the PAR study, and co-creating tools in a supportive environment such as an EC-NIC will support teachers in using students' linguistic diversity as an asset will lead to school-wide change on this island.

Authentic Connections

Participants consistently seeking ways to make authentic connections with their students is another pocket of success. Prior research (Gay, 2018; Paris, 2012) indicates this is an effective method of building culturally and linguistically sustaining relationships. I coded authentic connections 16 times during the 12 observations. During PAR Cycle Two observations, I observed teachers who asked students about their weekends, engaged them in conversations about their non-academic interests, and utilized personal narratives to get to know the students. Another participant, an ELA teacher, intentionally centers Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) authors in her lessons and works to introduce her culturally and linguistically diverse students to other cultures. "I get so much more out of them academically when they see themselves in a mirror," the teacher said. "I use our texts as a way to make real connections with them, and those 'ah-ha moments' serve us well." Resnick et al. (2015) asserted that classrooms whose social design supports rigorous academic discourse had a positive impact on student achievement. As with other classroom practices, teachers have been mostly left to fend for themselves with no formal training on how to forge connections with students. Some teachers were able to develop the practice, while others did not. Yet, this is an area in which teachers can engage in professional development to seek out more authentic connections and create school-wide capacity that will expand the limited pockets of success in this area.

Sharing Language and Culture

Finally, warm demanders are teachers who find ways for students to share their home language and culture to create classroom environments in which students feel safe to take academic risks and thus experience higher levels of cognitively demanding academic discourse. This was pocket of success. I coded "sharing language/culture" 15 times during PAR Cycle Two

observations. The most common way in which teachers developed strategies for students to sharing their language and culture was through storytelling. A few teachers in the school were already using this strategy; however, others were not. This is another data point showing evidence of a lack of systems in place to support "islands of innovation." As a result, I worked with the EC-NIC team to develop their internal capacity in this area. We spent three cycles of inquiry utilizing personal narratives and storytelling in our biweekly EC-NIC meetings, and participants began utilizing personal narratives in their own classrooms to great success. "I love, love, love the emulation poem we did in one of our meetings," a veteran ELA teacher said. "When I did an 'I am' poem with my students and asked them to write their own, I got some really great stuff, and I really got to know the kids a lot better." Another teacher used journey lines with her math students, while yet another teacher used an endowed object assignment to allow students to bring something from home and share their own cultural diversity with their classmates. In all cases, participants reported more personal warmth and empathy in their classrooms. This is the area in which participants most clearly utilized specific strategies from the EC-NIC meetings with the greatest evidence of successful implementation. All four members of the EC-NIC team reported success in this area. As participants begin to share these strategies and protocols in their grade-span and content area PLCs, this "island of innovation" has the potential to grow into a school-wide system supported by our emerging communities of practice and EC-NIC model.

Conclusion

The PAR study revealed three key findings. First, warm demanders must show both empathy and high expectations. In our school, showing empathy is largely evident while demanding high expectations was more inconsistent. Second, high expectations are often

manifested through cognitively demanding academic tasks and discourse. Finally, I presented how the use of culturally responsive teaching practices and academic discourse are pockets of success in what I call "Islands of Innovation" (Fullan, 2001). PAR Cycle Two analysis confirmed some themes that emerged in earlier cycles; the observational data showed some inconsistencies in participants' perceptions of their classroom practices compared with the reality of what is occurring. Lacking school- and system-wide structures for warm demanders and academic discourse, the innovators, accustomed to being left to their own devices, developed resources in isolation of each other. The challenge now is to take those isolated innovations and, building on the innovators' expertise, turn them into school-wide assets. Already, I have seen incremental progress in utilizing some of the protocols we used during the PAR study's EC-NIC meetings and CLEs. As participants take these protocols to their PLCs, grade-span, and content area meetings, I expect them to become the basis of more systemic processes that all teachers can use to address some of the systemwide inequities present in current pedagogy (Barth & Guest, 2005). In the final chapter, I re-investigate these finding using the extant literature in Chapter 2 as a foil. I then explore the implications of this PAR study, reflect on my internal capacity as a school leader, and examine one final question as I reflect on the three cycles of inquiry: *What next?*

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the participatory action research (PAR) study was to examine the extent to which a team of four eighth-grade teachers in a rural middle school built meaningful culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) relationships with students and to what extent those same participants engaged in cognitively demanding academic discourse with their students. To achieve these ends, a PAR design was employed, and I facilitated a co-practitioner research (CPR) group that also served as the study's participants. Together, we aimed to understand the theory of action for this study: *Teachers who successfully built CLR relationships with their students would have a greater degree of success in implementing cognitively demanding academic discourse.*

Over the course of three cycles of inquiry from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022, I worked with the team of four eighth-grade teachers as the CPR group. We met biweekly as an Equity-Centered, Networked-Improvement Community (EC-NIC) and hosted two community learning exchanges with other teachers in the building. Over the span of 18 months, we narrowed the PAR study to focus primarily on how *warm demanders* (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006) are best positioned to provide cognitively demanding and equitable academic discourse (Resnick et al., 2015; Zwiers, 2007). The CPR group collaboratively defined warm demanders as those teachers who possess empathy and hold high expectations. They also determined that cognitively demanding academic discourse requires a high level of student-to-student dialogue, equitable questioning practices, and high levels of questioning.

During the PAR study, we coined the phrase "islands of innovation" to describe some teachers who were having success as warm demanders and/or engaging students in cognitively

demanding academic discourse despite the lack of school-wide systems of support. I learned that some teachers were innovating ideas in isolation of their colleagues and through observations, I observed those classrooms to be pockets of success. I also learned how participants in the study possessed a high degree of empathy but were at times inconsistent in displaying high expectations in their classrooms. The focus shifted as we learned from the teachers who were innovating and agreed to utilize practices we learned during the study. As the PAR study progressed, most began to utilize protocols that we modeled during EC-NIC meetings and community learning exchanges (CLEs) to varying degrees of success, an example of teachers building upon that success. I intentionally organized members' learning in ways that model what I expected them to teach students (Mehta & Fine, 2020). As we continue to expand the "islands," we will form the basis for future innovation in the school.

Figure 14 shows the PAR activities from each cycle of inquiry and includes biweekly EC-NIC meetings, two CLEs, 12 classroom observations, and weekly reflective memos that I used to triangulate data. In this final chapter, I discuss how the findings are supported by the existing literature. Specifically, I relied on the literature I detailed in Chapter 2 to support my findings. I then re-visit the study's original research questions that I set out to answer in this dissertation. I next turn to the emerging framework and expanded theory in action. Then, I discuss the implications for this study in three domains: policy, practice, and research. I conclude with a reflection on my own leadership development throughout the PAR process.

Discussion

The PAR study focused on engaging with a group of teachers in professional learning that utilized a CLRP framework to develop deeper relationships with students as a critical premise for increasing cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classroom. The study

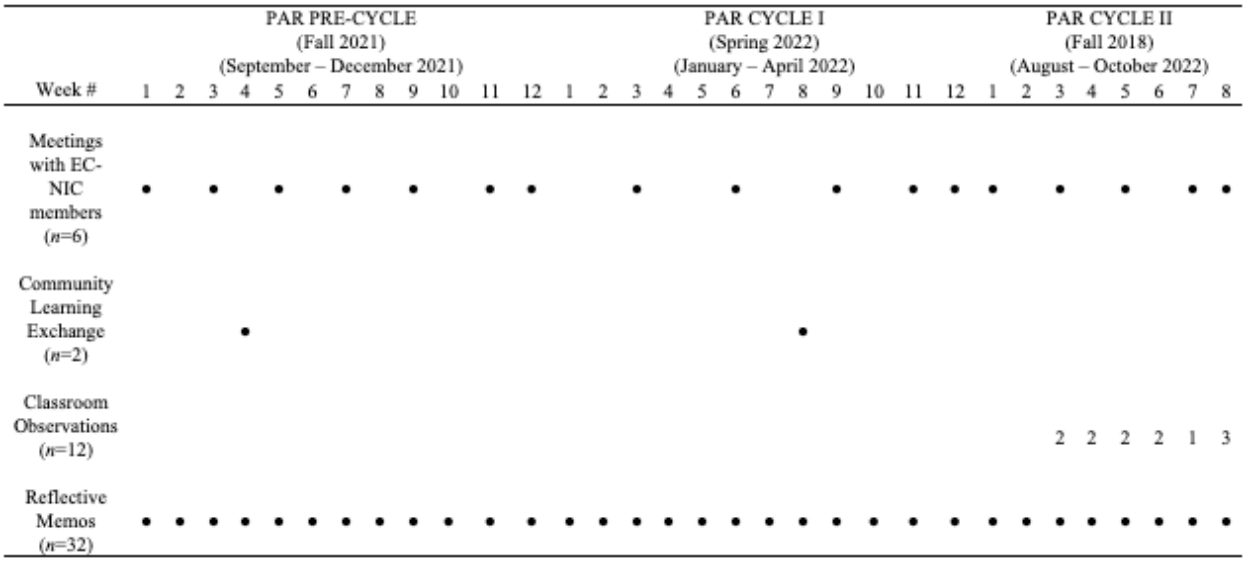


Figure 14. PAR cycle activities.

focused on two areas, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy and cognitively demanding academic discourse. I focused on my role as a leader in facilitating professional learning for teachers in support of culturally and linguistically responsive classroom practices and effective discourse strategies. As the study progressed, the CPR team narrowed its focus to warm demanders as the teacher disposition most indicative of meaningful student-teacher relationships, and we examined the role of academic discourse in participants having high expectations in their classroom. The three inquiry cycles provided data that was coded and analyzed resulting in evidence that revealed three key findings:

1. Participants demonstrated high empathy but inconsistently high expectations,
2. When a strong teacher is a warm demander, cognitively demanding academic discourse was much more likely to occur, and
3. Islands of innovation exist; participants found pockets of success with CLRP relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse.

Each of these findings is supported vis-à-vis the literature.

In preparing for the PAR study, I examined the existing literature in three areas that I asserted were deeply connected: Significance of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) in classrooms and schools, the need for cognitively demanding academic discourse, and effective school leadership as a mechanism for change. At the time, I worked from a conceptual framework positing that cognitively demanding academic discourse depended upon culturally and linguistically responsive relationships between teachers and students and how teachers' professional learning in those areas was important to my leadership development.

As I worked with the co-practitioner researchers on the PAR study, the conceptual

framework guided our work. Throughout the three cycles of inquiry, we began to think about CLR relationships in terms of the participants' disposition as a warm demander. Kleinfeld (1975) first used the term "warm demander," and other researchers (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006) further defined how the dual roles of personal warmth and high expectations co-existed in successful classrooms, especially for students of color. During the PAR study, we defined personal warmth in terms of having empathy and seeking authentic connections with all students. When defining high expectations, we began to think about cognitively demanding academic discourse (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011) as a key indicator. We used self-perception rubrics and classroom observations to study the role of warm demanders – those teachers possessing both empathy (CLR relationships) and high expectations (cognitively demanding academic discourse). As I developed the PAR findings, I reviewed the literature review and recent studies to analyze how the literature supports the findings of the PAR study: Warm demanders show empathy, warm demanders used cognitively demanding academic discourse, and the existing "Islands of Innovation" can expand by cultivating communities of practice.

Warm Demanders Show Empathy

During the PAR study, I found that participants possessed high degrees of empathy, but some lacked high expectations. Participants self-reported their perceptions of a culturally responsive classroom, and I collected observational data to compare with their perceptions. It became evident that participants had varying degrees of success demonstrating the disposition of warm demander with the dual characteristics of creating empathy *and* having high expectations in the classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2009) saw culturally responsive teachers as those teachers who position themselves as part of the community and firmly adhere to the belief that all

students can succeed. The participants consistently talked about ways they positioned themselves to be members of the community – attending sporting events and concerts, asking students about their day-to-day lives, and inviting parents and community members into their classroom spaces. These activities are examples of culturally sustaining practices (Paris, 2012) and teachers built relationships centered on empathy and authentic connections. Gay (2018) talked about how culturally responsive teaching practices are empowering and have a positive impact on student achievement. During the study, one of the most frequently used codes was the participants' core belief that students "know we care," with one teacher stating, "Students don't care how much we know until they know how much we care." Ware (2006) found in his empirical study that warm demanders establish relationships that show students they care about them while also having nonnegotiable demands for high expectations. Hammond (2015) tied the idea of "warm demander" to the notion of "zones of proximal development" that led to a state of "relaxed alertness" (p. 97), while Delpit (2012) stated that warm demanders have high expectations for students that "convince them of their own brilliance" (p. 77). When participants viewed their students' myriad cultural and linguistic identities as assets, they were building empathy and creating a space for students to succeed. Participants routinely incorporated storytelling into their daily routines, allowing students to share their personal experiences. Those shared experiences opened doors through which teachers could hold high expectations and foster more cognitively demanding academic discourse. In the next sub-section, I review the existing literature to support the finding that warm demanders have cognitively demanding academic discourse.

Warm Demanders Support Cognitively Demanding Academic Discourse

Throughout the PAR study, participants' self-reflections and the observational data revealed that when the teacher disposition has a disposition as a warm demander, they are more

like to support cognitively demanding academic discourse for students. Teachers who had high expectations were most likely to be strong facilitators of academic discourse (Muhammed, 2018). Teachers who held high expectations often manifested the high expectations through cognitively demanding academic discourse in three areas: Frequent student-to-student dialogue (Resnick et al., 2015), equitable questioning practices (Smith & Stein, 2018; Zwiers, 2007), and high levels of questioning (Depka, 2017; Tinkel, 2022; Zwiers, 2007).

Frequent Student-to-Student Dialogue

Participants showed evidence of frequent student-to-student talk in some classrooms. Resnick et al. (2015) talked about a continuous feedback loop of teacher input to facilitate student talk followed by feedback and additional responses from the students. They looked at the importance of student-to-student dialogue in parsing, understanding, and communicating. In doing so, teachers could facilitate multiple types of student discourse: "claims, interpretations, explanations, and justifications" (Resnick et al., 2015, p. 26). Though cognitively demanding academic discourse was not as prevalent in the classroom observations as empathy, I did see evidence of robust student-to-student discourse in four of 12 observations. For example, one participant, a math teacher, spent considerable time teaching academic language and providing space for students to collaborate with one another while using content language. The students were confident and successfully tackled rigorous course material while the teacher served as a facilitator. During an evidence-based post-observation conference, the participant remarked that she spent a great deal of time teaching her students how to "do" academic discourse. This is supported in the literature, as Resnick et al. (2015) noted that "no one is a native speaker" of academic discourse; they must be taught (p. 20).

Equitable Questioning Practices

Participants recognized the importance of facilitating equitable questioning practices in their classrooms. They understood that an important aspect of academic discourse is that all students have access to equitable and cognitively demanding questioning practices. Zwiers (2007) noted that teachers who prioritize academic discourse show students how to progress "from facts and concrete ideas to more abstract and complex ideas" (p. 101). Participants embraced our district's initiative to plumb deeper depths of knowledge with academic tasks. Yet, equity gaps persisted in this study just as Zwiers predicted when he wrote that "English learners were asked more of the early fact-based questions while mainstream students were asked (and responded to) more of the cognitively demanding questions" (Zwiers, 2007, p. 101). The co-practitioner researchers discussed this equity trap (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) and committed to thinking about not only how students were communicating but which students were recipients of cognitively demanding academic tasks. "You have to approach it from a mindset that all of your students are capable of really rigorous work," one participant remarked during an EC-NIC meeting. "Otherwise, some will get it, and some will just sit there and not benefit from the same depth of instruction as their peers." Participants clearly recognized the need for equitable questioning practices, even though some were not implementing it as consistently or as effectively as desired.

High Levels of Questions

Finally, participants found that cognitively demanding academic discourse requires high levels of questions. Depka (2017) asserted that teachers must scaffold from lower levels of thought to higher levels of understanding in the questions they pose in their classrooms. Tinkel (2022) found that rigor leads directly to growth and argued that students should not have to

manufacture their own rigor in absence of instructional practices that lack high expectations. In his foundational study on academic discourse, Vygotsky (1978) argues that thinking originates in social interaction and can be harnessed with effective classroom discourse. PAR participants discussed this idea as they reflected on their own practices. “I want to push my kids by asking them to analyze, construct and deconstruct, and synthesize the learning targets,” a participant stated. “They are more comfortable with recalling and regurgitating low-level information, but that’s not how you build critical thinkers.” The participant’s classroom is typically collaborative, and she often interjects high-level question stems to challenge her students and guide discussions. In the next sub-section, I discuss how to expand the islands of innovation using communities of practice in my role as a school leader.

Expanding the Islands of Innovation with Communities of Practice

Throughout the PAR study, the EC-NIC model allowed us to explore solutions to systemic issues in our school, reflect on best practices, and learn from each other. Bryk et al. (2015) wrote that using an NIC engages many different stakeholders in solving a problem together, shifting the experience towards “learning fast to implement well” (p. 7). In describing the model for communities of practice, Bryk et al. (2015) asked: “What specifically are we trying to accomplish? What change might we introduce and why? How will we know that a change is actually an improvement?” (p. 114). By using an EC-NIC as the basis for biweekly co-practitioner researcher meetings with the study’s participants, the participants and I addressed each of those questions throughout the three cycles of inquiry each time we met. Guajardo et al. (2016) looked at how community learning exchanges empower stakeholders to solve problems of practice, especially the axiom that the people closest to the issues are those who are best situated to find the solutions to local concerns.

I used the research on communities of practice (Bryk et al., 2015; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) and community learning exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016) to guide me in my dual roles as a researcher and leader during the PAR study. I relied on the CLE axioms as a philosophical stance and worked to empower the teachers closest to the issues of local concern in both the EC-NIC meetings and the CLE while using the appropriate pedagogies and protocols. For example, during the EC-NIC meetings, I used personal narratives, journey lines, emulation poems, Chalk Talks, and other storytelling protocols to help facilitate equity of voice and empower teachers who were closest to the students' needs. Participants began using some of these protocols in their own classrooms and PLCs, which allowed for more student and teacher voice. By the end of the study, I noticed more teachers using our protocols and embracing some of the strategies in the classroom. As we redefine and expand the use of PLCs, we hope to use a community of practice to cultivate a teacher disposition as warm demanders and access to cognitively demanding academic discourse at a more school-wide level rather than the more isolated islands of innovation (Fullan, 2001). My role as leader is critical to the expansion of this work. Next, I review the PAR's research questions that I introduced in the first chapter.

Review of Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: *How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse?* In this sub-section, I respond to the overarching research question after reviewing the first two research sub-questions. I will discuss the third research sub-question on my own leadership development later in the chapter.

The first research sub-question was: *To what extent do teachers develop deeper relationships with students?* I found that teachers developed deeper relationships using CLE

protocols and practices. Artifacts I analyzed from the three cycles of inquiry indicated that teachers were showing empathy and creating culturally and linguistically responsive relationships using storytelling, personal narratives, journey lines and emulation poems. They were implementing the protocols we used during EC-NIC meetings and CLEs. "I'm a lateral entry teacher so I never had formal training on some of this stuff," Rebecca said, "I was doing some of it instinctively, but seeing it modeled was really helpful." Rebecca and the other participants continued to place a high priority on building meaningful CLR relationships with students throughout the study, and they successfully implemented many of the protocols we used.

The second research sub-question was: *To what extent do teachers implement and use cognitively demanding academic discourse?* I found that teachers were at times inconsistent in demanding high expectations of their students and promoting cognitively demanding academic discourse. I observed each participant three times for a total of 12 observations and engaged in evidence-based conversations using a CLRP rubric we co-created as well as the Project I^4 Calling-on and Questioning Levels tools. I found that while participants developed some cognitively demanding lessons, data I collected and analyzed from the selective verbatim observations revealed the lessons did not consistently utilize cognitively demanding academic discourse or high-level tasks. Participants possessed the *warmth* (empathy) of warm demanders but did not yet fully possess the *demand* (high expectations). Ultimately, participants are still in the early stages of learning how to leverage CLR relationships into equitable discourse for all students. The teachers are relatively inexperienced with leveraging specific academic discourse strategies – effective student-to-student dialogue, equitable questioning practices, and appropriately rigorous questioning levels.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the overarching research question for the PAR study: *How do teachers form deeper relationships with students that influence cognitively demanding academic discourse?* After three iterative cycles from Fall 2021 to Fall 2022, I found an answer: They don't – at least not yet consistently. This was not the answer I had hoped for, but the data provided valuable insight into the disconnect between culturally and linguistically responsive relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse. Participants placed a significant priority on developing meaningful relationships with their students, but those relationships do not yet provide the impetus for them to facilitate effective academic discourse. Yet, research is clear on the harm done to students by accepting low expectations. Khalifa (2018) stated that all teachers must maintain high expectations for all students. Ladson-Billings (2009) connected meaningful relationships to high achievement in the classroom and argued that it was the responsibility of all teachers to make that connection. Participants understood the importance of making connections and having high expectations, but their perceived success in this area did not always translate to practice when I observed them. A significant part of the disconnect was the disparity between participants' self-rated perception of high expectations compared with what I observed during PAR Cycle Two. Participants thought they had high expectations for their students, but data suggested otherwise. Participants enthusiastically embraced each of the concepts related to cognitively demanding academic discourse during PAR Cycle Two; however, the abbreviated timeframe did not provide them with the amount of time necessary to master some of the practices. Over time, I expect participants to become more comfortable with the discourse strategies we modeled during PAR Cycle Two, and their core belief in equitable relationships will serve as the foundation upon which to build that internal capacity. The

principal occupies the central role of the head learner and as the school leader needs to engage in, display, and model the behaviors expected by teachers and students (Barth & Guest, 2005).

Equity issues emerged throughout the study. Because the focus of practice and research questions were developed through an equity lens, it allowed me to steer the work toward more equitable outcomes for all students. When I began the PAR study, I wrote that teacher practices were inconsistent. Some teachers were creating equitable relationships with students more effectively than others. A predominantly White staff and a diverse student population led to a lack of equitable relationships that disproportionately impacted students of color. This served as the background upon which I began the PAR study more than 18 months ago. Mills (2011) talked about how existing educational systems whitewashed schools, and Gutiérrez (2013) talked about how breaking with broken traditions was a subversive, political act. My work with the EC-NIC. team, however, never felt subversive. We talked about leveraging students' cultural and linguistic diversity as assets. We talked about using storytelling to build authentic connections and using students' lived experiences as an instructional lodestone that guided our conversations on equity. Eubanks et al. (1997) warned against equity traps posing as well-meaning "colorblindness," an idea we addressed early in the Pre-cycle and worked to overcome throughout our work. An intentional focus on equity led to more culturally and linguistically responsive relationships for all students – hardly a surprising outcome. It also led to more equitable outcomes in participants' use of calling-on strategies and questioning practices, and participants began thinking more intentionally about planning student-to-student dialogue that elevated students' lived experiences in their classrooms. Keeping an equity lens on the study was an inseparable component of the study and something that will continue to be a focal point of my

leadership as I move forward in my career. In the next section, I examine the emerging framework for the PAR study.

Emerging Framework

The PAR study started with a focus of practice, and I developed a theory of action to guide the process. Through the analysis of the evidence and from reflections in my own learning, I created a theory *in* action. My initial theory of action predicted that if culturally and linguistically responsive relationships were cultivated in participants' classrooms, the participants would be more likely to embrace cognitively demanding academic discourse. At the conclusion of the PAR study, I created an expanded theory in action. In this section, I describe the PAR conceptual framework and how the theory of action became an expanded theory in action (see Figure 15). The framework includes the new expanded theory *in* action.

The PAR's focus of practice was to engage with a group of teachers in professional learning that utilizes a CLRP framework to develop deeper relationships with students as a critical premise for increasing cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classroom. The theory of action was that if the CPR group engaged in professional learning to develop deeper relationships with students that are culturally and linguistically responsive, then participants would implement culturally and linguistically responsive practices and develop classroom practices in support of equitable, cognitively demanding academic discourse for all students. The inputs I shared with the CPR group were the biweekly EC-NIC meetings and two CLEs, both of which used protocols such as storytelling and personal narratives. I used these protocols to build the participants' internal capacity to create effective classroom practices and protocols related to culturally responsive relationship building and academic discourse. Additionally, I observed participants in their classrooms and compared their self-reported perceptions to the observation

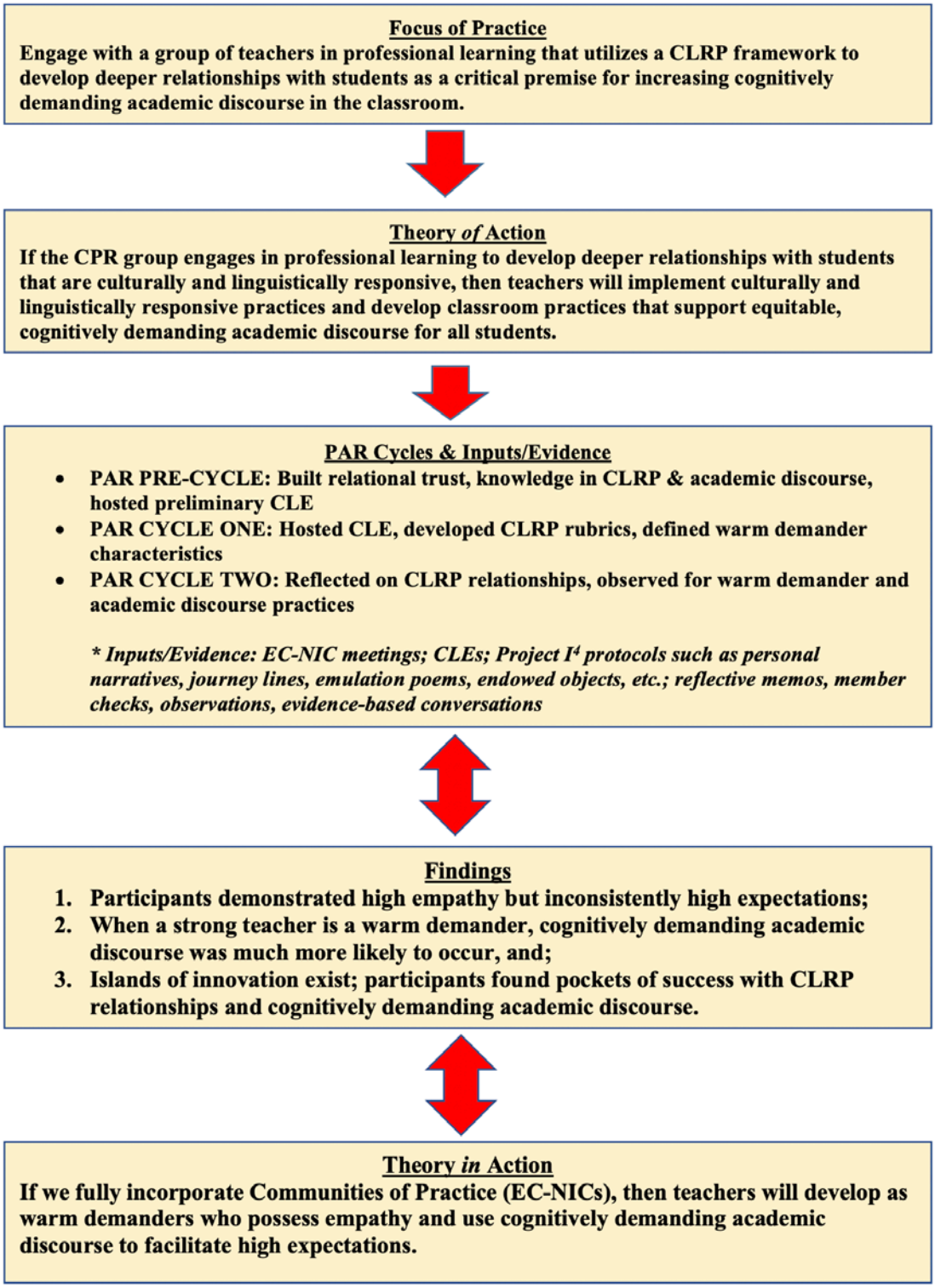


Figure 15. PAR conceptual framework: From theory of action to theory in action.

notes. The evidence included notes from 12 observations and evidence-based post-observation conferences. I triangulated my findings with reflective memos and member checks. Each PAR cycle served a specific purpose. The PAR Pre-cycle focused on building relational trust and introducing the team to the Project I^4 frameworks and hosting a CLE. During PAR Cycle One, I hosted another CLE, and we learned about culturally responsive teacher-student relationship practices, which we defined in terms of the warm demander teacher disposition. In PAR Cycle Two, I used observations to compare participants' self-rated perceptions to their classroom practices. Through observations, I analyzed the frequency with which participants built upon their capacity as warm demanders and facilitated cognitively demanding academic discourse.

What emerged was an expanded theory *in* action: If communities of practice (EC-NICs) are incorporated as a school wide practice, then teachers will develop as warm demanders who possess empathy and use cognitively demanding academic discourse to facilitate high expectations. Throughout the study, I utilized communities of practice (the EC-NIC team) and CLEs to build teachers' internal capacity for empathy and high expectations while increasing opportunities for cognitively demanding academic discourse. The work began with the biweekly EC-NIC meetings, classroom observations, and evidence-based conversations. As we continued to work as a team, I observed the participants embrace the protocols and practices. Perhaps just as importantly, I observed the EC-NIC team embrace and adopt the underlying principles of Communities of Practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) and CLE axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016), as they ventured beyond the PAR study and into their own PLCs, grade spans, and content area meetings. While all five CLE axioms are important, we focused on the first three: Learning and leadership are a dynamic social process, conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes, and the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers

to local concerns. As the leader, I facilitated the group discussion using the CLE axioms as a foundational philosophy for our work while providing the participants with the freedom to adopt those protocols and practices in their own classrooms. Using these protocols made the work collaborative and increased the team's effectiveness because tools and protocols act as material and social mediators of learning (Ahn et al., 2021; Gomoll et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2009; Wise & Jacobo, 2010).

The first axiom centered the team as a dynamic social process and allowed participants to have a say in important decisions. The second axiom saw us use conversations and storytelling to build authentic connections – a strategy that participants emulated with success in their own classrooms. Meanwhile, the EC-NIC team as a community of practice allowed us opportunities to focus on supporting the teacher disposition as warm demander while using cognitively demanding academic discourse, all while putting those closest to the issues in a position to solve complex problems.

Implications

The results of this study support current research that recognizes the importance of the principal collaborating with teachers to change instruction (Grissom et al., 2021). As a result, the study, although small, has implications for practice, policy, and future research. As teachers experienced new routines and teaching practices, they experience greater success and efficacy than they did in the past (Yurkofsky et al., 2020) and were willing to engage in cycles of inquiry and continuous and incremental improvement. My decision to use participatory action research (PAR) to collaborate with the CPR team as a mechanism for change was effective. In the PAR process of collaborating with a co-practitioner research group, team members approached educational changes creatively (Wong et al., 2021). As the team members experienced inquiry,

they shifted their thinking about teaching and learning for their students. The teachers in this study changed how they approached teaching because they experienced the EC-NIC process as learners in our CPR group work. They collaborated and co-constructed knowledge and engaged in authentic learning. As a result, they developed stronger teacher agency. The experiences changed how the teachers approached their planning, facilitation, and implementation of learning. The coaching conversations provided opportunities for change to take place (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). As teachers engaged in the coaching conversations, they began to ask questions about their teaching, and they asked each other questions. They saw their teaching from new perspectives and reflected and decided on changes they needed to implement (Militello et al., 2021). In this section, I look at the implications of the PAR study, including how the study informed my leadership practice, how it impacts policy at the micro, meso, and macro levels, the research implications, and the study's limitations.

Practice

In this section, I examine how the study informed my practice as a school leader while also examining the practices in which I engaged during the PAR study. The study continues to inform my practice, both in my current context as a school leader in an eastern North Carolina middle school as well as within the scope of the people with whom I worked most closely – the co-practitioner research group. If school leaders want to change how teachers teach, they must provide teachers with opportunities to become learners. As school leaders implement professional development, they should create opportunities for teacher learning that allows teachers to take responsibility for carrying out their learning (Terehoff, 2002). This can be done through developing professional development that includes protocols, the axioms from community learning exchanges, and opportunities for teachers to be engaged learners of the new

content contained within the professional development. An implication is that the use of protocols have started expanding beyond the limited scope of the initial study to include a school- and even district-wide focus areas. When I first began the PAR study, I hosted a one-hour professional development session on academic discourse using CLE protocols and practices for a group of teachers and administrators in my district. Since then, I have shared articles and research on warm demanders with a group of other leaders in the district. It has been rewarding to see some of the protocols and practices we used in our EC-NIC expanding into grade-level meetings, content area PLCs, and district initiatives. Other administrators in the district are using the term "warm demander" for the first time in their own faculty meetings. District administrators are focusing on academic discourse, including student-to-student talk, equitable questioning practices, and levels of questions. Russell et al. (2017) defined NICs as "communities of practice where participants with a common aim and a deep understanding of the problem work together to develop new theories to address the issue" (p. 3). It centers the work on those closest to the issue and addresses systemic shortcomings – shortcomings that in our study resulted in "islands of innovation." Throughout the study, we used EC-NICs to facilitate our biweekly meetings, and participants began using protocols from the EC-NIC meetings in their own classrooms. We will continue to focus on using improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015) to drive major decisions, and the NIC model (Russell et al., 2017) will allow us to move forward with an emerging system that will expand over time and provide the necessary tools for teachers to address other problems of practice. Through the study, team members became motivated to implement protocols and practices, and as they reflected on their work, they became more familiar with a different way of thinking (Yurkofsky et al., 2020). As I move forward with my career, I will continue the important work of centering teachers' dispositions as warm

demanders and prioritizing empathy and high expectations as the dual tools offering teachers the greatest opportunity to impact effective relationships and discourse strategies.

Policy

The PAR study has the potential to impact policy at the micro and meso level. I analyzed the study's implications for school- and district-level policy. School and district policies inform teacher practices on student-teacher interactions and instructional design but typically lack systems for supporting relationship-building or discourse strategies. The EC-NIC model has proven useful in building relational trust among the EC-NIC team, and the community learning exchanges have similarly provided a structure by which to empower a larger group of teachers to center themselves on this important work and parlay reflection into action. At the micro level, providing professional learning on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practice and cognitively demanding academic discourse will standardize teaching and leadership practices and provide students with more equitable opportunities, regardless of which teacher's name appears on their schedule. As principals set the vision for good instruction, they "establish learning as the core of their practice, and they set the tone, direction, and expectations for learning in the school" (Bredeson, 2000, p. 392). On the other end of the spectrum, I noted the disconnect between local, state, and national policymakers and educators who are "in the trenches" as a macro challenge. Policymakers far removed from the classroom dictate local policy rather than those closest to local issues. Continuing to build relational trust among teachers and community members will allow us to create praxis (Freire, 1970) – reflection followed by action. This is vital, as there exists the possibility that critics of "critical race theory" and other equity-minded initiatives often seek to thrust anything related to equity – including CLRP – under the "CRT" umbrella. Already, the district has hired a full-time equity officer to

work with schools on some of the issues I discussed in this study – coincidentally, she was hired at roughly the same time I began this study. Since that time, I have worked with her and other district leaders to use NICs, CLEs, and other protocols from this study to center professional learning around ongoing equity work. Working with a CLE or EC-NIC group places the people closest to the issues in a position where they are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. Careful framing of issues and solutions allows us to reframe policy debates in terms that avoid "hot button" terminology while seeking equitable solutions for all students. For example, we will continue to utilize an observation rubric based on the Project I^4 framework that delineates specific ways teachers can seek to be culturally and linguistically responsive in their classrooms, and we will continue to utilize observation tools that prioritize effective academic discourse, questioning protocols, calling-on strategies, and student-to-student dialogue in service of high academic tasks. These are real, measurable solutions that ground the more theoretical aspects of the PAR study and can have a lasting impact at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Research

The PAR process, EC-NIC, and CLE protocols will have a lasting impact in my school beyond the scope of this study. I began the study by looking at culturally and linguistically responsive relationships in service of cognitively demanding academic research. What ultimately contributes to the existing research is that participatory action research using an EC-NIC model was useful to examine the connection between warm demanders and academic discourse. The study adds value to the existing research by looking at tools and protocols a small group of co-practitioner researchers can utilize to build their internal capacity to *be* warm demanders who demand both empathy *and* high expectations. Existing research (Bondy & Ross, 2008) makes connections between teachers' disposition as warm demanders and academic success, using

strong academic discourse as evidence of that success. The study showed specific practices such as personal narratives, emulation poems, and other storytelling protocols that can lead to culturally and linguistically responsive relationships. The study also forced teachers to consider how they are addressing cognitively demanding academic discourse through equitable questioning practices, student-to-student talk, and effective calling-on strategies. By embracing the CLE axiom that the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns (Guajardo et al., 2016), participants began to build a school-wide system of support using EC-NIC protocols and the CLE axioms to build and sustain empathy, equitable relationships, and effective discourse practices. Plenty of work is still to be done around my focus of practice. As long as students are taught in a system in which inequitable practices exist, meaningful relationships and cognitively demanding discourse opportunities are largely left to chance. Future research can continue to bridge the complementary areas of CLRP relationships and cognitively demanding academic discourse (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). In the conceptual framework, I stated that if we fully incorporate communities of practice as EC-NICs, then teachers will develop as warm demanders who possess empathy and use cognitively demanding academic discourse to facilitate high expectations. There exists potential for future research on this topic, specifically on the efficacy of communities of practice in facilitating effective relationships in service of high expectations. I hope to continue this work with larger-scale surveys on the research questions involving more teachers at more schools, and I hope to continue following the growth and development of the study's participants over time as they continue their careers at my school. Big questions remain. How can we create sustainable systems for teachers to engage in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices? What will cognitively demanding academic discourse look like when all teachers have embraced

the duality of warm demanders – empathy and high expectations? What supports do teachers need in developing these skills? These questions carry significant implications for the next step in the ongoing research that I began with this PAR study. In the next sub-section, I discuss the study's limitations.

Limitations

The study is not without its limitations, most notably the scope of the study. I began with four eighth-grade teachers for the Pre-cycle and Cycle One before losing one participant who left the profession and completed Cycle Two with just three participants. The participants represented only two content areas (math and ELA) and one grade level. The size of the study raises the question of how to translate the findings from this study to school- and district-wide policies. While I believe that EC-NIC and CLE protocols will begin to support and develop school-wide and district-wide systems, it is too early to tell if this will be successful when scaled up. Teacher buy-in outside of the EC-NIC team will answer that question in time. Given the limited time frame of the PAR cycles (18 months over two academic years) and the limited number of participants, it is difficult to predict the transfer of practices to school-wide or district-wide policies. Finally, my dual role as lead researcher and school principal was a limitation. Although I took measures to limit the evaluative nature of my role as principal while working with the EC-NIC team, it is necessary to acknowledge that role never truly disappears. Yet, developing relational trust over time did much to mitigate that study limitation.

Leadership Development

In this section, I discuss my reflection as a school leader and how I have developed as a leader over the course of the PAR study. I challenged myself to reflect on my internal capacity as a school leader. Using reflective memos, field notes, and member checks, I reflected on my

development as a school leader. While I have always believed in a distributed approach to leadership and involving teachers in significant decisions (Spillane et al., 2004), work on the PAR has given me additional tools to center those closest to the work and build relational trust with them. Highly effective principals implement structures that move teachers to greater levels of independence and professional autonomy (Bredeson, 2000). In other words, through the EC-NIC work in a professional learning community, we unpacked the black box of teaching that confounds education reform (Cuban, 2016); when we opened it up, we found that we had the knowledge and skills to tackle the EC-NIC work together, repackage the way we teach, and design useful tools for being warm demanders and using cognitively demanding academic discourse in the classrooms.

Working as a research-practitioner challenged me to fill dual roles of practitioner and researcher, and I embraced the Equity-Centered, Networked Improvement Community model and used the protocols to bridge the research to practice. I developed with the co-practitioner researchers during our biweekly EC-NIC meetings. I used the four essential characteristics of NICs (Russell et al., 2017) to compare my leadership actions to the NIC characteristics. According to Russell et al. (2017), NICs have four essential characteristics (see Table 18). NICs are:

- focused on a well-specified common aim;
- guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a shared working theory of how to improve it;
- disciplined by the rigor of improvement science, and;
- highly coordinated in a supportive social architecture to accelerate a field's capacity to learn to improve (p. 3).

Table 18

Comparison of NIC Characteristics to my Leadership Actions

NICS are…	Leadership Actions
focused on a well-specified common aim	• Developed biweekly EC-NIC agendas focusing on PAR research questions
guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a shared working theory of how to improve it	• Utilized theory in action and emerging conceptual framework in each cycle of inquiry
disciplined by the rigor of improvement science	• Modeled iterative *and* generative nature of PAR study during all PAR activities
highly coordinated in a supportive social architecture to accelerate a field's capacity to learn to improve	• Developed highly structured agendas • Each research question informed next steps • Centered those closest to the issue and provided capacity to learn and improve

The way I embraced the characteristics of NICs (see Table 19) during the study helped me refine my own leadership style. Over the course of the study, I embraced the underlying philosophy of NICs, and more specifically Equity-Centered NICs. For example, I embraced the idea that the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns and used NICs to situate problems of practice "in a supportive social architecture to accelerate a field's capacity to learn to improve" (Russell et al., 2017, p. 3). The biweekly meeting agendas provided us with a well-specified common aim – to answer each of the research questions. The meeting structure provided the basis to try out my theory of action and emerging conceptual framework in an iterative and generative manner. Finally, using EC-NICs throughout the study provided the CPR team with the *praxis* (Freire, 1970) to reflect and act as a team and therefore learn and improve. During the final cycle of inquiry, I engaged in evidence-based conversations with the participants using an observation tool that was deeply personal to them because they had a hand in creating it. This illustrates an area of strength in my leadership style: building relational trust and then leveraging that trust to have meaningful conversations with teachers about problems of practice, including effective relationship-building strategies and classroom practices in support of cognitively demanding academic discourse. Because we trusted each other and understood the participatory action research process, I was comfortable with sharing the power of decisions (Suarez, 2018). Participants are beginning to embrace the EC-NIC model in their own PLCs, and teachers are starting to address some innovations in other departments and across grade spans. As a research practitioner, I had to straddle the line between researcher and school leader (Creswell, 2013; Labaree, 2003). While conducting research in pursuit of a doctoral study, I sought not to explore an abstract question, but rather, to improve my school (Labaree, 2003). As a principal, I believe in building teachers' internal capacity to create change. Situating

teachers in a NIC setting and using effective protocols allowed me to create opportunities for teacher leaders to seek solutions to complex problems.

As I reflected on my leadership, I prioritized my work around equity. Boykin and Noguera (2013) discuss the importance of framing students' cultural and linguistic diversity as assets rather than deficits, which is something I continue to prioritize as a school leader. I continue to recognize "blind spots" and equity gaps, but I have built relational trust with my team and trust them to help me see and then overcome some of those gaps. In modeling this mindset for my team, I have created space in which participants are more comfortable and less defensive when having difficult conversations, whether those conversations center around the CLR practices or other school issues. Equity was a focal point for so much of the work we completed. Did participants display empathy for all students? Did students of color receive the same level of cognitively demanding academic discourse as their White peers? The answers are nuanced. Personal narratives and other protocols provided a pathway to equity for building and sustaining relationships with students of color (Mills, 2011). Evidence-based observations and conversations allowed teachers to reflect on their questioning practices through an equity lens.

Overall, the processes informed my development as a leader, and I will continue to prioritize equitable practices for all students, both with my continuing work on CLRP relationships and academic discourse and in all other areas I may encounter as a school leader in the future. I will continue to explore the areas of relational trust, teacher disposition as warm demanders, cognitively demanding academic discourse, and "the islands of innovation." Serving as a practitioner-researcher for the past two academic years has given me insight into how I will address future problems when they come to me. Developing a focus of practice, asking myself what questions will lead to possible solutions, centering those closest to the issue, and providing

them with a framework to reflect and act on the problem are just a few of the ways in which the study has impacted my leadership philosophy. I will continue to examine assets and challenges and then parlaying them into action while using data and collaborating with key stakeholders. In short, the PAR has taught me the importance of engaging in iterative and generative inquiry to solve problems. My challenge as I go forward is how best to expand upon those islands of innovation and eventually replace them with school-wide systems that support equity by using CLR relationships, warm demanders, and a high degree of cognitive demand through intentionally building all teachers' capacity for delivering cognitively demanding academic discourse. Finally, I consider the legacy of the PAR study and endeavor to begin thinking about what comes next.

Conclusion

I reflected on my leadership capacity throughout the PAR study and how I could best impact and expand the pockets of success and innovations in my school. Because each cycle of inquiry was an iterative process, I consistently reflected on my impact as a leader and asked myself: What comes next? As the 18-month PAR study comes to an end, I ask myself that question one more time: What's next? My university professors and dissertation coaches have told me from the beginning that participatory action research is iterative and generative, and I have worked closely with my EC-NIC team to generate new ideas and new solutions to existing problems. I challenged myself to be an equity minded leader, and I asked myself how I could effectively build culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with our students grounded in equity for all. This led me down a path toward cultivating the teacher disposition of warm demander, and I spent significant time on building protocols that supported that disposition: having empathy *and* high expectations.

I asked myself what empathy looks like. The answer was multi-faceted. It begins with storytelling for each of us to share and listen to one another. Storytelling protocols such as personal narratives created space for us to share our stories. In turn, we need to replicate the same with our students for them to share and adults to learn about their culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It also entails participants being intentional on getting to know our students beyond the scope of school and seeing cultural and linguistic diversity as assets. Participants who made themselves visible in the classroom, hallways, and at extracurricular events in support of our students' myriad interests showed empathy – something that occurred frequently during the study.

Leaders like me must also ask about expectations. What do high expectations look like? Based on my FoP and PAR, they manifested in cognitively demanding academic discourse as a practice that requires high expectations. High expectations require academic tasks that "dig deeper" and challenge students to think critically about abstract ideas. Everything we discussed in the PAR study, both in biweekly EC-NIC meetings and in the two CLEs, are simultaneously abstract and concrete. "Relationships" often feel ephemeral, but I discovered specific strategies to build relationships and build students' internal capacity for cognitively demanding academic discourse. I set out to quantify these strategies in rubrics, and I observed each participant's classroom multiple times, looking for evidence and then having evidence-based conversations about the observational evidence.

If the sole purpose of the study was to find consistently strong evidence of both empathy and high expectations through cognitively demanding academic discourse, we were only partially successful. The empathy was there; the expectations were less consistent. However, if the purpose of the study was to identify a focus of practice in my school and then reflect and act

upon it with a theory of action that became an emerging conceptual framework, then the study was successful. As I completed the study, I thought about the impact of Equity Centered, Networked Improvement Communities and Community Learning Exchanges and how they empowered the people closest to the issues in finding equitable and meaningful solutions. These practices are now part of my daily practice—a legacy of this PAR study far greater than any individual focus of practice or research question.

The lessons from the PAR study will forever have an impact on my work. I will continue the important equity-centered work of building and sustaining culturally and linguistically responsive relationships, and I will continue to examine ways to build rigor through cognitively demanding academic discourse. Equally important is the way in which I approach issues as they arise. I will inevitably encounter a new problem of practice in my leadership journey and utilizing the protocols I embraced as a leader during this study will allow me to find consensus among my staff and seek out new iterative and generative solutions for whatever problems come our way. I began this dissertation with a personal anecdote about my fifth-grade teacher building a relationship with me by attending my Little League game and then using that connection to bring about academic success. Relationships mattered more than three decades ago for this teacher and me. They matter now. Three cycles of inquiry, biweekly EC-NIC meetings, a pair of CLEs, and countless reflective memos and personal reflections on my leadership have brought me to this point. My ongoing task is to continue finding ways to create spaces for systemic change that can bring about innovations so that teachers will no longer feel like they are stuck on islands.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Michael Moon
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 9/1/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-001653
Relationships Matter

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/1/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1, 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
CALL Protocol(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Community Learning Exchange - Agenda template(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Informed Consent to Participate in Research - Moon - 8-19-21.docx(0.01)	Consent Forms
Moon - Chapters 1-3 - Focus of practice, literature review, and research design(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Project I4: Effective conversations guide(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Script for recruitment of research team members.docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING

citiprogram.org/verify/?wfd44e1cc-0606-4815-85b7-e9b0fc2d3365-40169758

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Relationships Matter: Examining the nexus between culturally responsive relationships and equitable academic discourse

Principal Investigator: Michael Moon (Person in Charge of this Study)
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University
Address: East 5th Street, Greenville, NC 27858
Telephone #: 252-566-3326

Participant Full Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Please PRINT clearly

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to examine the connection between effective teacher-student relationships and equitable academic discourse in the classroom. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a teacher at E.B. Frink Middle School, where the study is taking place. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how teachers can effectively form deeper relationships with students in order to push students to fully engage in cognitively demanding academic discourse.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 70 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
I understand I should not volunteer for this study if I am under 18 years of age or not currently working as a teacher at E.B. Frink Middle School.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate, and you can stop participating at any time without penalty.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at E.B. Frink Middle School. You will need to come to designated meetings at the school, which will typically occur during regular work hours on the school's campus. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study will correlate directly with regular work hours through the Spring 2022 semester.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) at regular intervals during each semester of the study (not to exceed once per month) and submit artifacts from the CLEs
- Participate in regular Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in line with your normal job duties and allow the lead researcher to collect data from these meetings
- Allow classroom observations and instructional walkthroughs to be recorded, coded, and analyzed by the lead researcher

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This include the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research recor that identify you.
- The lead researcher (Mr. Michael Moon)

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The security of the data collected and confidentiality of the participants will be treated with the utmost importance, and data will be stored in a secure setting in such a way as to maintain the confidentiality of all participants in the study. Data will be stored in a secure location by the lead researcher for the duration of the study.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 252-566-3326 during normal business hours (Monday-Friday from 7 a.m.-4 p.m. during the academic year and Monday-Thursday from 7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. during summer hours).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- ☐ I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- ☐ I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- ☐ By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- ☐ I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	**Signature**	**Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	**Signature**	**Date**

APPENDIX D: CALLING-ON OBSERVATION TOOL

Project I[4] Observation Tool Calling-On Tool 1.A

The tool is designed to collect basic information for the teacher to see how the teacher (or a student leading a discussion of a math problem) is generally calling-on students in classroom setting. **Two types of information are useful: seating chart and selective verbatim of the teacher actions and student responses.** Using one is useful; gaining proficiency at using both at the same time is even better.

Type One of Calling On: Make a seating chart.

Using a seating chart to determine equitable calling on is critical. Too often, some students are totally overlooked – they may not raise their hands, or, if they do, teachers ignore thm. If possible, write student names if you know them. Either use STUDENT NAME or identity (F/M or race/ethnicity): AA= African American; L= Latinx; W=White; AsA= Asian American. This classroom map is of one table of 6 persons.

Make a slash mark (/) for every instance of the items in the tool. Try to indicate with short abbreviation of the type of calling on or teacher response that was used (after the slash mark). It will take a bit of practice to get used to the names of calling on (chart below), but this offers precise data with which to have the conversation with the teacher

St 1 (F/AA) /R/CC	St 2 (M/L) /B-I/TR
St 3 (F/W) /R/R/R/R/R	St 4 (M/AsA) /R/TR
St 5 (M/L)	St 6 (F/L)

R*	Raised hand
CC**	Cold Call
CCD	Cold Call for Discipline
B-A	Blurt out-Accepts
B-I	Blurt out-Ignores
C&R	Call and Response: Teacher asks for group response or indicates students should "popcorn"
ES	Uses equity strategy (equity stick or card to call on student)
TR***	Teacher repeats student response to class verbatim
TRV***	Teacher revoices student response
TPS	Think and Pair and then Share
Other	Any other strategy you note

*Raised hands are not always ineffective. See Chapter 1. However, if primary mode of interacting, this reduces equitable student access.

** Cold calling is not incorrect or ineffective if used in ways that support student thinking and full access (wait/think time) and student name at end of question after think time.

*** Note difference between simple repetition, effective repetition, and revoicing on charts

Please use this blank page to draw the seating arrangement of the class you are observing and identify students in each place. Mark the slash and abbreviation for each calling on instance.

R*	Raised hand
CC**	Cold Call
CCD	Cold Call for Discipline
B-A	Blurt out-Accepts
B-I	Blurt out-Ignores
C&R	Call and Response: Teacher asks for group response or indicates students should "popcorn"
ES	Uses equity strategy (equity stick or card to call on student)
TR***	Teacher repeats student response to class verbatim
TRV***	Teacher revoices student response
TPS	Think and Pair and then Share
Other	Any other strategy you note

Type Two: Selective Verbatim and Use of Coding

In the second type of calling on process, the observer uses selective verbatim to capture the teacher's actions, the time, and the student responses. While think time is a part of the question form and question level tools, the observer can record TT (think time) or NTT (no think time). The lack of think time between asking the question and calling on a student often leads to certain students being quicker thinkers who raise their hands. First, the observer collects time and selective verbatim. After the observation, the observer codes the evidence.

Time Stamp	Evidence	Code

Step Three: Tabulate and Analyze

After the observation, as the observer, tabulate the data from seating chart observation on this chart.

Note: It is possible if you get adept at this to use this as a data tool to collect the data; judge your comfort level with the map and/or this tool. If you use the map, tabulate results on this table to share with teacher.

Teacher **Observer** **Date**
Duration of Observation _____ to _____

Student Name OR number	Raised hand **CO: R**	Cold Call **CO: CC**	Cold Call Discipline **CO:CCD**	Calling out **CO: C&R CO: B-A CO: B-I**	Equitable method **CO: ES**	Simple Repetition **TR**	Teacher Revoicing **TRV**	Other
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
6.								
7.								
8.								
9.								
10.								
11.								
12.								
13.								
14.								
15.								
16.								
17.								
18.								
19.								
20.								

After the observation using selective verbatim, tabulate the number of instances of each type of calling on.

Teacher	**Observer**	**Date**
Duration of Observation _____ **to** _____		

R*	Raised hand	Total Number
CC**	Cold Call	
CCD	Cold Call for Discipline	
B-A	Blurt out-Accepts	
B-I	Blurt out-Ignores	
C&R	Call and Response: Teacher asks for group response or indicates students should "popcorn"	
ES	Uses equity strategy (equity stick or card to call on student)	
TR***	Teacher repeats student response to class verbatim	
TRV***	Teacher revoices student response	
TPS	Think and Pair and then Share	
Other	Any other strategy you note	

What are statements of factual evidence from the observation?
Use the evidence categories from the data to record to make 5-6 factual statements about the data.

Examples of Evidence
Of the 27, students in the class:
____ students who were called on after **raising hand** (CO: R)
____ students called out answers and teacher **accepted call-outs** (CO: B-A)
____ students called out answers after direction from teacher to use C&R (Call & Response)
____ students were asked to repeat/paraphrase another student's response
____ students answered more than once
____ students who responded are ____ male/boys and ____ female/girls

OR

Teacher asked ___ questions and called on ___ students whose hands were raised.
Teacher cold-called on ___ students.
Teacher revoiced ___ times.

Step 4: Having a Conversation with the Teacher

In this section, although you will have ideas about what to do, **engage the teacher in problem solving.** Keep in mind: "Telling people what we think of their performance doesn't help them

thrive and excel and telling people how we think they should improve actually hinders learning" (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019, p. 2).

1. **Introduction:** *I was in your class for ___ minutes while the lesson was focused on _____. As you know, I was particularly concentrating on the ways you called on students and perhaps used opportunities to have student-to-student dialogue*

2. **These are the data from that observation: (present factual analysis to teacher).**

3. **Let's talk about what you are observing about these data?** *Continue to ask probing questions, but engage the teacher in making a decision about what specific action to take and how s/he will know there is improvement.*

4. **As a result of this data, what areas of strength do you observe? What is a practice that you want to change?**

5. **What do you want me to observe and when?**

RESOURCE: TEACHER ACTIONS FOR CALLING ON

TEACHER ACTION	EXPLANATION
REVOICING	Teacher repeats some or all of what a student has said and then asks the student to respond and verify whether or not the teacher's statement is correct. · Involve student in clarifying their own thinking · Help other students follow along with conversation · Make student's ideas available to others
REPEATING/ RESTATING	Teacher extends to another student to repeat or rephrase, in their own words, what first student has said and follow up with the first student. · Another rendition of first student's contribution without interpreting, evaluating, or critiquing · Provide evidence other students hear what was said · Student thinking is important and worth emphasizing
ADDING ON	Teacher increases participation by asking for further commentary, either adding to other comments or agreeing / disagreeing with previous comments. · Extend in open-ended manner near closure · Extend in strategic manner to produce more detailed explanations
WAITING	Teacher gives students time to compose their responses. · Signals value that deliberative thinking takes time · Create respectful, patient environment for digesting important findings and raising any lingering questions · Diversify participation
REASONING	Teacher asks another student to respond to previous student's statement by eliciting respectful discussion of ideas (agree / disagree). · Students provide explanation of their reasoning to someone else's contribution · Compare one's reasoning with someone else

APPENDIX E: QUESTION FORM OBSERVATION TOOL

The tool is designed to collect basic information for the teacher to record question forms**. Use selective verbatim by selecting and recording teacher questions. If teacher addresses question to specific student, name the student and recognize if student name is first or last and if there is think(wait) time or not. Record time if possible. Use as many pages of the same recording as needed.** Then in Step Three, you name the question form in last column by using the abbreviations.

Teacher	**Observer**	**Date**
Duration of Observation _____ to _____		

TIME	Teacher Questions	Question Form

Step Three: What You Need to Tabulate and Analyze

In the third column of the question form evidence, use these abbreviations in column one below to name the question form. You may have more than one code for a single question as there are many parts to the question form.

Then tabulate number of instances of each question form below.

Question Form Abbreviation	**Question form explanation**	**Number of instances**
Y/N ?	Yes/no questions	
QW or NQW	Question word (question starts with question word) No question word (question does not start with question word)	
FIB ?	Fill in the blank question. Usually teacher starts to make a statement and seems to decide halfway through the question to change to asking and says…. Is what? at end of sentence	
SNA **SNB**	Student name after question Student name before question	
TT **NTT**	Adequate Think Time for type of question No think time used	
Other	Anything else you observe about question form	

What are statements of factual evidence from the observation?

Use the evidence categories from the data collection and used marks to record to make 5-6 factual statements about the data.

Examples of Evidence

- The teacher asked ___ questions in ___ minutes.
- The teacher used no think time/wait time in any question
- The teacher used think time of ___ seconds.
- In ___ questions in which the teacher called on students, the teacher used the student name at start of question ___ times and used the student name at end of questions ___ times.

APPENDIX F: QUESTION LEVEL OBSERVATION TOOL

Project I[4] Observation Tool Question Level 1.A

The tool is designed to collect basic information for the teacher to see what types (levels) of questioning the teacher is using. **First, use selective verbatim by selecting and recording teacher questions and student responses (use T; or S: to indicate which). If possible, name student to whom teacher addresses question. Second, analyze the evidence using names from the next page.**

Teacher	**Observer**	**Date**
Duration of Observation _____ to _____		

TIME	Teacher Questions and Student Responses (Use T: or S: to indicate speaker)	Level or Type of question

APPENDIX G: EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS PROTOCOL

GUIDE

EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Project I⁴

East Carolina University
and the Institute for Educational Leadership

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Carrie Morris

October 2020

"We come to praise; we come to learn; we come to have conversations about practice"
Frank Lyman

The guide is a work in progress and based on research and tools from:

- Glickman, C. (2003). *Leadership for learning.* Alexandria VA: ASCD
- Bloom, G.S., Castagna, C. L. , Moir, E., & Warren, B. (2005) *Blended coaching: Skills and strategies to support principals.* Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press.
- Saphier, J. (1993). *How to make supervision and evaluation really work.* Research for Better Teaching

Special thanks to Jim Warnock of Research for Better Teaching for input. Note on pronouns: We have not fully converted to pronoun use for persons who identify they and their as pronouns of choice.

NOTE: See hyperlinks in the text for deeper explanations.

OVERVIEW

A conversation (formal or informal) that follows an observation (also formal or informal) has several components: preparation for observation, using an observation with tool that collects objective and usable evidence, data analysis and preparation for post-observation conversation, the conversation, and then follow-up observations/conversations.

Think about the parts of the conversation as we think about parts of a lesson and "task analyze" the approach. Obviously, the conversation following an observation is premised on **establishing trust between the teacher and the observer**. Trust is enhanced by the observer's ability to have a substantive reflective conversation about practice and provide useful **data and coaching questions** that support the teacher's reflection.

The conversation following a relatively short observation (10-20 minutes) may be different than the actual formal post-conference for evaluation purposes. Because the formal process of evaluation in a state or district process requires written evaluation using a prescribed format, that conversation may require a different process than a conversation following an informal observation. However, an administrator can use the informal observations to build a set of evidence that can serve both the teacher and the administrator for the formal evaluation process.

Through observations and conversations that occur throughout a school year, sustaining trust in the total process can deepen through frequent observations and conversations about practice. A key guideline: There should be a **quick turnaround** on the evidence, the analysis, and the conversation. Follow-up conversations should be held as close as possible to the date of the observation. That means that the observer needs to analyze the evidence from the conversation, send the analysis to the teacher, and schedule a conversation of approximately 15 minutes within 2-3 days.

There is no one right way to have a conversation. However, the formats we introduce are useful for **most** conversations. Some conversations require **coaching moves,** as the teacher may have not made changes in practice after several attempts to observe and provide feedback. Or, in some cases, a teacher has done something that is egregious which requires administrator intervention. As one administrator said: *Every principal has to analyze the staff and decide how you can have a coach role and when you have to be clear about your administrator-evaluator role and have someone else on staff take on the coaching role.*

The suggestions offer guidance, but not "rules". Every teacher is different, and knowing how each teacher learns/thinks is vital to setting up the trusting relationship necessary for any conversation.

GENERAL PREPARATION FOR CONVERSATION AFTER OBSERVATION

The primary objective of the conversation is to **support the teacher to (1) analyze the data from the observation; (2) make decisions about what s/he proposes to change; and (3) make a clear plan to improve instructional practice**. We, as administrators and coaches, have been schooled to give "feedback", and teachers often say they want feedback. However, Project I[4] posits that what teachers want is more consistent and deeper attention to their teaching so that the conversation uses the evidence from the observation to provide a "tailor-made" observation and conversation process (Paryani, 2019).

Thus, the administrator's objective is not to give feedback about what the administrator thinks should change. In having the conversation, the principal should be **transparent about how the analysis of the evidence and the conversation are different.** The main objective is to support the teacher to talk about his/her practice so that s/he can make decisions about what to change. Typically, with veteran teachers, the observer can proceed with a **collaborative coaching stance** and engage in cognitive coaching, supporting the veteran to draw on his/her knowledge and skill base to make decisions. For novice teachers that may be different; they are new to instructional practices. Thus, supporting their analyses and decisions about changing practice(s) is often necessary as they do not yet have a repertoire of knowledge and skills to fully make decisions. That may require what Glickman calls a **direct informational coaching stance.** In any case, the observer needs to make decisions about the coaching stance before entering the conversation.

If the observation and conversation are used for the formal observation required for the evaluation process, there is considerable value in a substantive pre-observation or planning conference. A fruitful planning conference supports the teacher to have a more thoughtful, well-planned lesson and a more productive post observation conversation.

The following are steps **after the observation**:
STEP ONE: **Analyze the data/evidence and use it to guide the conversation;** depending on the situation, **give data to teacher ahead of the conversation**.
STEP TWO: Decide on an **approach/coaching stance** and a location for post-observation conversation
STEP THREE: Prepare an **opening question** that relates to the evidence
STEP FOUR: Ask **coaching questions (**acknowledging, paraphrasing, clarifying, shifting, restating); summarize throughout the conversation as you move through the evidence and conversation
STEP FIVE: **Summarize next steps** that teacher has chosen and set date for another observation

Step One: ANALYZE THE DATA/EVIDENCE from observation

Any analysis is premised on an observer collecting observable, **objective**, non-judgmental data to analyze in preparation for the conversation. Analyzing the data helps the observer decide on an objective/purpose for the conversation. Even if the district evaluation tool does not require evidence, effective administrators should use evidence-based observation tools (and not checklists or other judgmental tools).

To prepare for the conversation with the teacher, the administrator can make choices about analyzing the data: send teacher the data before the conversation, analyze for the first time when you meet together, or share what you, as observer, have analyzed. There is no one right way to present the data, but this question is critical: What factual evidence does the observation yield?. The important part is that you **use objective data** and **share that data/evidence with the teacher**. The data should not include any notes to yourself or questions that may indicate pre-judgment.

Step Two: Think about the **APPROACH** (also termed a **coaching stance)** for the conversation based on Glickman. The approach informs the kinds of questions you ask and how you ensure that the teacher makes decisions about what to do. Two of the four approaches apply to most teachers.

- **Direct-informational**: Teacher who needs more information in order to make decisions about an improvement choice. In other words, the knowledge base of the teacher may not include what s/he needs to know to make improvement. Typically, a novice teacher or a veteran who does not know current thinking can benefit from coaching. If the conversation requires that you provide specific instructional direction, ask permission to be instructional -- *Is it all right if I provide instructional options?*
- **Collaborative**: Teacher who is knowledgeable about practice and for whom the evidence is supportive. The conversation is **two-way with an emphasis on teacher talk.** The **ratio** of teacher talk: observer talk is important. The responsibility of the observer (now coach) is to ask the kinds of coaching questions that elicit teacher talk and teacher decisions. The collaborative approach includes attention to **non-verbal behaviors** like nodding, smiling, and looking at the teacher.

Think about the range of coaching stances from instructional to facilitative coaching, remembering that **transfer to teacher practice** is the objective. As you discuss what might be helpful and the teacher decides next steps, keep a list as you talk and summarize the materials you can provide to the teacher.

Secondly, think about **where and how this post-observation conversation occurs**. If this is in your office, do not sit behind your desk; move to a table a **sit side by side or face to face.** Perhaps meet the teacher in a classroom or a conference room in the school (neutral space). In any case, set the tone as supportive, collegial, and welcoming. You want a **nonthreatening, safe, and positive** environment that continues to nurture relational trust between you and the teacher.

Step Three: □□□□□ PREPARE AN OPENING QUESTION FOR CONVERSATION: BEYOND ASKING "HOW DO YOU THINK THE LESSON WENT?"

Preparing a **thoughtful opening question** for the conversations can alleviate the tension that an administrator sometimes feels at the beginning of the post-observation conversation. The question depends on the type of post-conference approach that you use: (1) direct-control (2) directive-informational (3) collaborative or (4) nondirective (Glickman, 2002). Most conversations fall in category 2 or 3 of Glickman and correspond to the instructional to facilitative range of coaching in the *Blended Coaching* (Bloom et al., 2005).

Depending upon the type of approach you use (See Glickman chart), start with a **warm greeting**, **introduction to the process, and a focus on the use of evidence to guide the conversations**:

"Welcome. Thanks We had decided before the observation that I would look at _____ (or use ___ tool to observe your class). What I would like to do is look at the data together and see what we observe."

Reiterate the importance of the use of the tool to gather factual information.

Note: Feel free to say (especially in early conversations while you are getting used to the format) the following: *This is a new process for me and I will want your response to the process when we finish. We want to use the evidence to guide our conversation, and I want to listen better to your ideas.*

Step Four: Ask **follow-up coaching questions** during conversation. As much as possible, do not put your 2 cents worth in the conversation (aka feedback); rely on coaching through paraphrasing moves/questions.

In this section, you are listening with great care, summarizing as you go. **Focus on assets** the teacher can bring to addressing any changes. As you move through the conversation, **redirect** as necessary to ensure that (a) the **focus is on the evidence to guide discussion**, (b) the **teacher is then making decisions** about what to do next, and (c) insert any instructional ideas only as a part of talking about the evidence. In this kind of conversation, do not switch into "feedback" or telling mode (which is only necessary for direct control approach): **See coaching questions below in Coaching for Equity: Paraphrasing**

Step Five: Summarize and Debrief (optional)
Summarize
End the conversation with a decision about what is next in terms of teacher practice and a possible follow-up observation. Often, the observer can use the summarizing and organizing function to summarize what has been said (see **Coaching for Equity: Paraphrasing).** If the conversation is a part of a formal evaluation process, the administrator must translate the objective observation and conversation to the district or state forms.

Discretion is advised at this step of the process as the collaborative process in which you have engaged has the potential to drift toward hierarchical (because of bureaucratic requirements or because you may revert to feedback and telling). Depending on the teacher need and assessment of Glickman types, you may have to engage in a direct-control conversation with a teacher who needs improvement.

Use summarizing statements/questions:

- Let's review the key points of the discussion.
- What next steps are you taking? OR The steps I heard you talk about are_____
- What evidence will you look at to ascertain if those next steps are working? OR The evidence I need to collect next time I come is _____
- How does this connect to student learning/equity? I heard you say ___ and that clearly connects to student learning/equity in these ways: _____

DEBRIEF

Debriefing may or may not feel like the right thing to do. As an administrator, you are model reflection. Thus, depending on the situation, ask for feedback on the structure, tone, and usefulness of conference, using the + and △ (delta=change) format or use a written feedback form for the teacher to reflect on and complete if s/he wishes. However, In some cases, debriefing would not be an appropriate choice.

CONSIDERATIONS and FINAL "TIPS"

While we might have mentioned these previously, we are reiterating.

- **Set the tone:** Of course, you want the conversation to go as well as possible, so make the teacher feel comfortable. Many administrators recommend having the conference in the teacher's room, or, if it is your office, then probably the administrator sits by the teacher or sits around a table with the teacher. Unless it is a direct control conversation (Glickman) in which you have to set a distinct hierarchical tone with teacher, do not sit behind your desk. Assume best intentions and assume that if the teacher knew to do anything else, s/he would do it. Refrain from making judgments; instead seek reasons behind problems or stated explanations. Probe, but do not prejudge. Use coaching questions. Indeed, if you are practicing having a different type of conversation for the first time, then be transparent and share that with the teacher.

For example, *I am practicing having a different kind of conversation with you about the observation, one that relies on the evidence I collected and analyzed and one in which you decide what your next steps are. I have ideas, of course, but what I am most interested in is your decisions about what you want to do next as a result of analyzing the evidence from the*

observation. As always, I only observed a slice of your teaching practice, so, if there are particular classroom circumstances with students or lesson, please tell me as we proceed.

- **General rule of thumb: Teacher should do most of the talking.** Acknowledge ideas, even if you do not totally agree. Typically, do not start conversations with WHY questions. Think time or silence is OK as it allows time for collecting thoughts and thinking about what happened. Use paraphrasing to encourage teacher talk. Use an opening question based on evidence.

- **Language**. In general, avoid "you" statements. Convert to "we" or "I" statements. Use open-ended questions that produce explanations and ideas, not short answers. See advice on question stems that can help to clarify, paraphrase or probe.

- **Body Language**: The process should be viewed in general as a **conversation between professionals.** Be aware of the ways you position yourself as the administrator. Again, for the "hard" conversations, you have to think carefully about what you want to communicate and that may require a different stance, format (directive-control) or positioning (behind your desk).

- **Procedural Advance Organizer** (AO): Explain the **purpose and the parts of the post conference and ask for concurrence.** You want to be open, but purposeful. Think carefully about the objective of the conversation. You are creating a mini-lesson plan for conducting the conference. Be open, as you are in a classroom, to the student input and changing direction, but don't just drift from one question to another, getting surface responses. Note: *This seems like a lot of planning at first, but as you gain experience, the planning lessens and parts of this become more automatic.*

- Use **teaching and learning language** – naming practices specifically as much as possible. That helps the teacher build structures and you develop a common language for teaching and learning in your school.

- **Acknowledge tensions:** This means that you, as the observer (administrator) recognize that teaching is a complex task and each teacher is thinking of many things at once: management, lesson outcomes, time, next question, lesson flow and pacing.

- **Remember to put equity at the forefront of the conversation and push the teacher to think about equitable access and even if the observation was not specifically about this.** How does the evidence demonstrate equitable or inequitable practice? How can you direct every part of the conversation toward equity?

Glickman Coaching Stances

You need to consider the teacher with whom you are conferring. Most teachers fall into the direct informational or collaborative approach.

Conversation Approach	Conversation Opening Question Stems
Direct Control (Glickman) Very clear data and presentation of what to do. Highly instructional and direct. This type of conversation is to deliver a message. This is not used in most conversations, but is necessary at times.	• *Based on the analysis of the data, there are some clear patterns in the classroom that require immediate attention if we are to support you to teach this year. In terms of classroom management, I want you to try _____* • *Based on the analysis of the evidence, I am concerned about _____, and I need to sit with you and plan a lesson so that we can perhaps assist you more in _____.* • *I observed that 15 of 20 students were off task each time I did the at task data collection in the 45 minute period. Therefore, I want to work with you on engagement strategies and checking or understanding.*
Directive Informational (Glickman) Instructional (Bloom) When choosing an instructional approach, Bloom says it is a good idea to get permission. It is often useful for new teachers, who often do not have a way to think through the options. This is often an effective approach with novice teachers or veteran teachers who need particular attention	To start any conversation of this type, use some version of this start: *"I observed _____. I would like to give you some options for what I think might be helpful. Is that all right?"* • *Three students on the left back and two students on right rear were talking or off task the entire period. These are three options I can think of to try: (1)____ (2)____ (3) _____ Do you have another option you think might work better* • *I observed that you primarily used hand-raising to call on students. You asked __ questions; typically in those questions you did not use think time, and you called on ___ students. One way I think we agreed to in our professional learning was to use equity sticks. In this particular lesson, when could you have used those?* • *What are some other ways you know to call on students so we have more equitable access to the classroom discourse?*

Collaborative (Glickman) Aka Facilitative (Bloom) Cognitive Coaching (Garmstrom et al.) Teacher who is knowledgeable about practice and for whom the evidence will be supportive.	The purpose of this CONVERSATION is to get the teacher to talk about practice. ● *"I observed that _____ occurred. Can we talk about that or does something else in the data stand out as important to talk about?* ● *The data indicate that _____. Do they correspond to your perception of _____?* ● *What was happening when _____?* ● *I'm curious about this part of the observation (state factual evidence). What were you thinking about when you _____?* ● *I noticed these two things about student responses: _____ and _____ What can you tell me about those students and their learning?* ● *I noticed that you spent most of your time with ____ and _____. I am wondering about that choice…was it purposeful or did it just happen?*
Nondirective (Glickman) Collaborative (Bloom) Cognitive coaching Works at all times toward teacher's self-plan for improvement and relies on teacher input to have conference.	The most important part of this type of conversation is not in the opening question, but in the paraphrasing and mediational questioning that occurs in the conversation to help the teacher develop a self-plan for improvement, relying almost totally on the teacher as lead. This is usually done with sophisticated, strong and often veteran teachers who know teaching practice and language. This relies on listening empathetically and effectively and requires an observer/evaluator who has acquired strength in tools of constructivist listening.

FACILITATIONAL OR INSTRUCTIONAL QUESTIONS
See Coaching for Equity Paraphrasing at end of this document.

Blended coaching requires a dance between three positions to take as a coach: **Consultative, Collaborative and Transformational** using two types of coaching questions: **instructional and facilitative.**

You will need to make a decision about whether the conference needs to be instructional (probably Glickman direct control or direct informational) or facilitative (collaborative or nondirective). In all cases, we do hope that the teachers can come to their own ideas and decisions about changing practice – mainly by the use of facilitative coaching moves of **paraphrasing, clarifying, and mediational questions + summarizing statements**. In general, new teachers need more instruction, but even then, get them to talk about practice. Even when they ask (or nearly plead), be very careful about lots of advice and direction. Remember that, even when something in the classroom has made you upset –most of the time, the teacher is

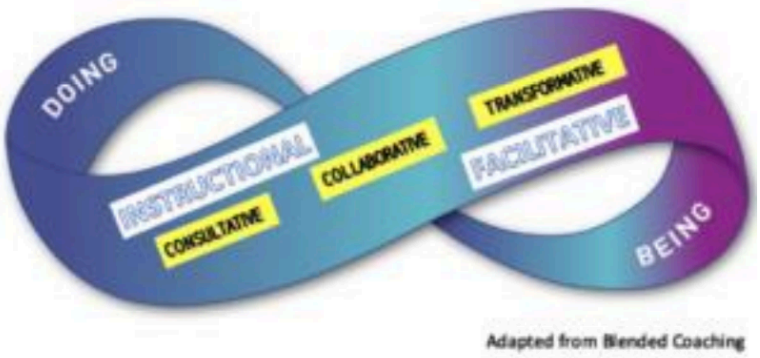
alone in the classroom and has to solve his/her own problems. Thus, it is important, if possible, that the teacher solve his or her own problems by thinking through them with you. If this requires more instruction on your part because the teacher does not really know what to do, get permission to be instructional. As much as possible navigate the conversation back to facilitating the thinking of the teacher.

Instructional to Facilitative Coaching

Bloom, G., Castagna, C.L., Moir, E., & Warren, B. (2005). *Blended coaching: Skills and strategies to support principal development.* Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press

Although the book is useful for those coaching principals, the coaching philosophy applies to coaching any adult.

The image is a mobius strip chosen to exemplify the ways that effective conversations rely on the coach's ability to move easily among the approaches to support the person who is coached. At times, like Glickman, the principal has to be more instructional and less facilitative (or using cognitive coaching). The goal is always to ensure the coachee starts to think for herself or himself about how to transform his or her practice.



Adapted from Blended Coaching

PROECT I[4] COACHING FOR EQUITY

USING PARAPHRASING IN MULTIPLE WAYS Adapted from Lipton, Wellman Humbard, 2003 and Principal Leadership Institute, UC Berkeley

CRITERIA FOR STRONG PARAPHRASING

- Focuses on **current level of assets of the teacher.** While the teacher may need to improve some aspect of practice, the teacher needs to choose a next step based on current level of practice from which she/he/they can improve.
- Captures the essence of the message from coachee – that means that the coach listens carefully and relies on using what you hear from the coachee to form the next question or statement. Reflects the speaker's thinking back to the speaker for further consideration. The coach **responds to ideas from the teacher** to guide coaching choices.
- Reflects the essence of conversation in voice tone and gestures
- Names the speaker's content, context, emotions, and frames a logical level for addressing the topic

TYPES OF PARAPHRASING		
ACKNOWLEDGING & CLARIFYING	**SUMMARIZING & ORGANIZING**	**SHIFTING LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION**
By restating the essence of a statement, the coach paraphrases in order to identify and calibrate content and emotions.	By summarizing and organizing, the coach's paraphrases the coachee's responses to reshape thinking and separate jumbled issues.	By shifting the level of abstraction "up", the coach illuminates other ideas and supports the coachee to think at a deeper level. When shifting "down", the coach supports coachee to be more precise.
COACHING QUESTION STEMS		
• So, you're feeling _____. • You seem to noticing that _____. • In other words, you are saying that ____. • Hmm, you're suggesting that _____.	• There seem to be two issues here: _____ and ____ • On the one hand, it seems you are saying that _____. On the other hand, there might be _____ to think about. • For you then, several themes are emerging: _____, _____ and _____ • It seems you are considering this sequence or hierarchy: _____	So, a(n) _____ for you might be _____. ***Shifting up*** category belief assumption goal intention ***Shifting down*** example non-example strategy choice action option

APPENDIX H: ACADEMIC DISCOURCE FRAMEWORK

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE (AD) Teacher-Generated----------Teacher Initiated and Facilitated----------Student Generated			
Academic Task	• **Designer:** Teacher-designed, directed & controlled • **Cognitive Demand:** Typically low	• **Designer:** Teacher-initiated & facilitated • **Cognitive Demand:** Medium to high, teacher-facilitated	• **Designer:** Teacher and student collaboratively-designed & facilitated • **Cognitive Demand:** High cognitive demand
Protocols and Questioning	• **Teacher Role:** Teacher-designed questions; teacher-controlled protocols • **Underlying focus:** Often compliance & behavior-driven; concerned with pacing & fidelity • **Primary interaction relationship**: Teacher-to-student; often pseudo-discourse • **Calling on strategies:** Typically raised hands; limited use of strategies for equitable access • **Level of questions**: Often recall and the application questioning levels with few questions at higher cognitive levels	• **Teacher Role:** Teacher-initiated, including encouraging student-to-student dialogue • **Underlying focus:** Student understanding and teacher use of student experiences • **Primary interaction relationship**: Teacher-to-student, with teacher encouragement of student-to-student & small groups • **Calling-on strategies**: Designed for equitable access of all students • **Level of questions:** Attention to higher cognitive level questions, including synthesis and creativity	• **Teacher Role:** Coaching students as facilitators; warm demander & strong student relationships • **Underlying focus:** Encouraging more student-facilitated groups • **Primary interaction relationship:** Student-to-student • **Calling on strategies:** Primarily student-generated questions & student-to-student interaction • **Level of questions:** Higher level questions that elicit creative responses & authentic problem-solving
Dialogue	• **Teacher role in questioning:** All questions by teacher; posed for short responses; teacher often looking for right answers • **Teacher-to-student dialogue**: Typically one-way dialogue and with a subset of students • **Student responses:** Inaudible and short; often repeated by teacher or ignored if "wrong answer"; teacher often repeats student responses	• **Teacher role in questioning:** Most questions generated by teacher; questions range: recall to analysis • **Teacher-to-student dialogue:** Focusing on extensions ▪ Teacher asking for elaboration & clarification ▪ Teacher requesting support for ideas ▪ Student paraphrasing encouraged ▪ Student questions encouraged • **Student responses**: Often recorded by students or teachers; equitable access for student responses; complex thinking and interactions in teacher-student interchanges; multiple student ideas or solutions considered; paraphrasing of student responses encouraged	• **Teacher role in questioning**: Collaboratively generated • **Teacher-to-student dialogue:** Primarily coaching; focusing on probing questions for deeper learning • **Student responses**: Student-to-student dialogue, often initiated by students; student-driven conversations; built on and challenging ideas of other students; ideas supported with evidence, often co-generated

APPENDIX I: CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

CULTURALLY AND LIGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY Minimally Inclusive----------Moderately Inclusive----------Fully Inclusive			
Culturally Responsive Practices	• **Relationships:** Superficial and focused on work completion and behavior modification • **Personal identity of students:** Superficially recognized although generally not connected to culture • **Teacher disposition:** Focus on treating all students the same • **Content:** "Neutral"; limited attention to culture and language • **Background and prior knowledge:** Limited and surface level use of student experiences & background. • **Cultural view/use:** Attention to food, flags & festivals • **Culture and classroom:** Culture of the classroom norms - white middle-class behaviors and learning processes • **Culture and community** : Often seen as deficits for students of color; instruction designed to overcome deficits	• **Relationships:** Intentional relationships built & sustained with some students but not all • **Personal identity of students:** Cultural & linguistic identity celebrated but infrequently integrated into learning context • **Teacher disposition:** Relationship often determined by teacher's level of empathy for particular student situations. • **Content:** Conscious of CRP content and processes • **Background and prior knowledge:** Tapping prior & background knowledge support for learning; cultural & linguistic prior knowledge activated • **Cultural view/use:** Diversity celebrated in general but sometimes viewed as a challenge. • **Culture and classroom**: Cultivated to use as starting points for students to engage • **Culture and community:** Culture & community often celebrated but seen as a challenge; connections with community focused on overcoming challenges	• **Relationships** Deep relationships with students and families • **Personal identity of students:** Identities validated as unique perspectives on content; integrated into the learning experience • **Teacher disposition:** Warm demander; fully accommodating individual learning profiles • **Content:** Community-focused with intentional connections to student experiences • **Background and prior knowledge:** Content & practice internalized/embedded in relationships; student knowledge socially constructed; • **Cultural view/use:** Fully integrated into classroom; students viewed as social activists with important roles in their communities • **Culture and classroom:** Multiple perspectives integrated in learning experiences as students engage with deeper and more complex content • **Culture and community:** Culture and community identity of students seen as assets
Linguistically Responsive Practices	• **View of language:** English seen as primary key to learning; language diversity viewed as a challenge • **Teachers knowledge of students:** Through test scores and other baseline academic data; little attention to personal identity as it relates to culture and linguistics • **Expertise for learning language:** External expertise to support ELL students; students often pulled from class; work with "different" instructional materials than their grade level colleagues; support and curriculum for ELL students primarily driven by ESL teacher • **Curricular and instructional supports:** Focused on simplification to make it easier for ELL students; little to no connection to the cultures represented in class or school.	• **View of language:** Home language seen as asset and used to access concepts but prefer students convert/use English • **Teacher knowledge of students:** Some knowledge and use of cultural and linguistic context of students; some knowledge of home situations and histories • **Expertise for learning language** External experts (ESL teachers) "translate" class experience • **Curriculum and instruction:** Some materials used in the mainstream class and supplement with others materials designed to make the tasks easier; some attention to cultural representation of class or school	• **View of language:** Trans-languaging key to instructional process; ability to speak multiple languages is seen as an asset • **Teacher knowledge of students**: Deep knowledge and use of cultural, historical & linguistic contexts of ELL students; • **Expertise for learning language:** Co-teaching of ESL and general ed. teachers; collaboration to determine support needed; student determination of language use • **Curriculum and instruction:** Authentic opportunities to develop language by providing challenging grade level content for students; amplification (not simplification) to ensure rigor and engagement;

APPENDIX J: PAR CODEBOOK

Category	Codes	Description
Systemic inequity	Resistance to change	Statements from teachers in which a preference for the status quo is articulated
	Backlash against equity	Statements or actions from teachers in which the need for equity-based practices is questioned or challenged
	Dominant POV	The dominant point-of-view is the only POV present
	Challenging dominant POV	Other points-of-view are utilized
	Principal/teachers fighting for equitable practices	Principal/teachers push back against systemic inequity
Praxis	Creating action out of reflection	Freire's model for praxis: Action created out of reflection
	Reflection	Teachers are reflective of their practices and their roles in current system
Focus on relationships	Familial relationships	Teachers discuss "quasi-parental" roles of teachers
	Emphasis on teacher-student relationships	General statements concerning the importance of building relationships with students
	Lack of teacher-student relationships ("minimally inclusive")	Potentially harmful classroom practices caused by the omission, absence, or lack of emphasis placed on building effective teacher-student relationships
	Creating lasting connections	Relationships that extend beyond the scope of a single school year or semester
	Cultivating relational trust with students	Creating relationships as a building block toward student success
Equity-based leadership	Creating "buy-in" for change	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that create space for change
	Principal cultivating relational trust with staff	Creating relationships between the principal and staff that creates space for PAR work
	CLRP professional development	Professional development based on culturally and linguistically responsive practices
	Emphasis on CLRP	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that place a priority on culturally and linguistically responsive practices
	Hiring practices (diversity)	Hiring practices that consider the importance of staff diversity

	Expectation for teachers to be warm demanders	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that create space for teachers to act as warm demanders (personal warmth and high expectations)
	Connection between CLRP and academic discourse	Processes, statements, protocols, and actions that explore the nexus between CLRP practices and academic discourse
	Approaching leadership through equity lens	Leadership practices with a focus on equity
Gracious space	Spirit	One's approach to each day; general attitude toward gracious space
	Setting	The physical connection that binds us to a place
	Invite the stranger	Inviting "strangers" or outsiders to hear another perspective
	Learn in public	Being vulnerable and willing to judge less, listen more, and change your mind in a public setting
Culturally responsive practices	culture as asset	Students' myriad cultural backgrounds are fully integrated into classroom practices
Linguistically responsive practices	language as asset	Students' diverse linguistic backgrounds are fully integrated into classroom practices
CLE axioms	CLE - dynamic social process	"Learning and leadership are a dynamic social process."
	CLE - conversations are critical	"Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes."
	CLE - positionality	"The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns."
	CLE - crossing boundaries	"Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process."
	CLE - assets/dreams of locals	"Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities."
Warm demanders	Personal warmth & high standards	The two complementary aspects of warm demanders: personal growth and high standards in order to create relationships that support optimal learning outcomes for students
Representation	Importance of racial representation	Students need to have teachers with diverse racial backgrounds.
	Importance of gender representation	Female students are historically underrepresented in math, science, and STEM fields
	Importance of linguistic representation	Students need to have teachers with diverse linguistic backgrounds.

	Lack of culturally responsive practices	Culturally responsive practices are important but are lacking among a significant number of staff members
	Staff diversity	A diverse staff is important in embracing culturally and linguistically responsive practices for a diverse student population
Engagement relies on trust	Build trust so students want to learn from you	Teachers must create trust for students to engage in learning
	Relatable	Teachers must create relevance between content and students' interests
	Willing to listen	Teachers must be willing to listen to their students
	Knowing students' interests	Teachers must be aware of their students' interests so they can leverage them effectively
	Seeing students as individuals	Teachers must view all students as individuals
Traits/strategies associated with relational trust	Stay in touch with teachers/students	Teachers often remain in touch with students after they leave their classrooms
	Made learning relevant	The most effective teachers make learning relevant to all students
	Caring	Teachers who demonstrate care for students
	Humorous	Teachers who effectively leverage humor to build relationships
	Passionate about subject	Teachers who are passionate about the subject they teach
	High engagement	Examples of teachers having a high level of student engagement
	Language/culture as asset	Teachers who use language and culture as an asset
	Pride in building relationships	Teachers who take pride in building equitable relationships with students
	Foster welcoming environment	Teachers who create a welcoming environment
Warm demanders show empathy	Tough but nurturing	Teachers who balance "toughness" with a nurturing demeanor
	Nurturing in all situations	Teachers who show compassion and a nurturing demeanor in all situations
	Cared about students	

	Teacher learned more about students	Examples of practices that show teachers care about their students
	Personal warmth	Teachers who made intentional decision to learn more about their students
	Authentic connections	Teachers who display personal warmth
	Intentional questions	Teachers who make authentic and relevant connections with students
	Personal narratives	Intentional questioning practices
	Sharing student perspectives	Using personal narratives as a protocol to build relationships
		Leveraging students' unique perspectives as an asset in the classroom
Warm demanders have high expectations	Had to put forth the effort	Teachers who required maximum effort from all students
	Expect best of students	
	Tough but fair	Teachers who demonstrated consistently high expectations from all students
	Ample support for success	Teachers who balanced "toughness" with overarching sense of fairness
		Teachers who provided support for student success in their classrooms
Organizational challenges	Lack of EL support	Teachers who noted lack of system-wide support for English Learners
	Lack of EL knowledge	Teachers who noted lack of personal knowledge for how to address EL students
	Lack of curricular/instructional support	Lack of system-wide or school-wide curricular support (including but not limited to EL students)
	Language barriers	Teachers who expressed frustration with language barriers with students
	Need for EL resources	Teachers who expressed need for additional resources to support English Learners

Linguistically responsive teacher strategies	Home language as asset	Teachers who viewed students' home language as an asset
	Authentic connections	Teachers who sought to create authentic connections with students
	Cultural/linguistic context	Intentional focus on culture and language in classroom context
	Classroom practices	Classroom practices that support linguistically responsive strategies
	Sharing language/culture	Teachers allowing students to share their language and culture in the classroom

APPENDIX K: RESEARCH SITE APPROVAL

Connecting Your Child to a Prosperous Future

July 6, 2021

Dear Michael Moon,

Lenoir County Schools recognizes the benefits of participating in relevant, well-designed research studies proposed by qualified individuals. Approval for conducting such studies is based primarily on the extent to which substantial benefits can be shown for Lenoir County Schools and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to conduct your dissertation study with participants in our schools on the inquiry: "If teachers form deeper relationships that are culturally and linguistically responsive with students, how will it lead to more cognitively demanding academic discourse, and, ultimately, student success?" We also give permission to utilize the following spaces in Lenoir County School to collect data and conduct interviews for your dissertation project: E.B. Frink Middle School, principal professional learning, communities of practice in the E.B. Frink community, and site and classroom visits.

The project meets all of our school/district guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for you to conduct your study, and your project will not interfere with any functions of your role as principal at E.B. Frink Middle School. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and Lenoir County Schools:

- Participant data only includes information captured from the state data collection strategies.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants can choose to leave the study without penalty at any time.
- Any issues with participation in the study are reported to the school administration in a timely manner.
- An executive summary of your findings is shared with the school administration once the study is complete.

In addition to these conditions, the study must follow all of the East Carolina University IRB guidelines.

We are excited to support this important work.

Respectfully,

M. Brent Williams
Superintendent

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