ABSTRACT

Leon R. Dupree, REPOSITIONING OUR THINKING: USING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES TO INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

A teacher's work is to enhance their knowledge and skills of effective teaching while making sure that every student's needs are met through their teaching practices. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) study examined the extent to which teachers changed their practices by engaging in culturally responsive practices with a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team and transferred those practices to the classroom. I formed a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team of four teachers and an instructional coach and facilitated the co-creation of a learning environment in which we could engage in dialogue and co-generate culturally responsive pedagogical practices that address rigor in the classroom. Using the methodology of participatory action research and focusing on the community learning exchange axioms, the CPR team engaged in the three inquiry cycles. By purposefully working in collaborative structures to identify effective strategies and components of rigor, using community learning exchange pedagogies, and cultivating an appropriate learning environment, the CPR team co-created an observational tool that identified rigor in their teaching practices. These findings are based on evidence from a three-cycle inquiry process in which we constructed meaning from the data.: (1) Teachers require appropriate learning conditions that foster their development as adult learners.; (2) creating rigorous instruction for students is a developmental process for teachers, and (3) teachers transfer their learning to practice when they have opportunities for peer dialogue and input on observation processes. As a team, we engaged as a community of practice committed to engaging in collaborative activities, discussions about the the classroom and being active practitioners to transfer practice to the classroom. The important application is the methods we

used for meeting and learning together about the critical work of focusing on rigor in middle

school classrooms.

REPOSITIONING OUR THINKING: USING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES
TO INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RIGOROUS INSTRUCTION

A Dissertation
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to a very special group of people who have been with me since the beginning of this process.

To my parents, Leroy and Kay Dupree. Thank you for modeling how to work hard toward what you believe, so I can model this work ethic of learning and dedication to my children. Thank you for supporting me and I would not have made it without your prayers, love, and support.

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my school's co-practitioner research team that assisted me throughout this study, without you this study would not have been possible. Thank you.

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A rose grew from concrete. Tupac Shakur

Tupac Shakur addresses life's injustices through his poem, *A Rose Grew from Concrete*. The poem illustrates how someone can achieve greatness even if they come from an unrecognized source of excellence. The rose symbolizes overcoming a neglected life to ultimately excel. Imagine the impact towards society if this successful individual received culturally responsive teaching; teaching that honored their strengths. So many of our students are being neglected because of teachers' lack of preparation in culturally responsive strategies (Dessources, 2018). What if we provided a nurturing garden for all of our roses? Educators strive to improve teaching and learning while trying to ensure success for marginalized students. Historically, schooling functioned through the lens of the dominant culture. However, in today's diverse world, educators must learn from and relate with people of their own culture as well as those from other cultures (Monte, 2019). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world (Lynch, 2016). Culturally responsive pedagogy has the potential to generate effective teaching methods that could have a positive impact on all students.

The introduction of culturally responsive pedagogy is not enough. Numerous professional development companies and researchers purport a "How to" initiative to reduce the achievement gap or the "silver bullet" initiative to fix the problems of education. However, according to Spillane and Hopkins (2013) "schools can adopt and purchase the best instructional programs for students, but effectiveness is determined by how school leaders analyze, design, and model these practices" (p. 38). The role school leadership plays to ensure culturally responsive pedagogy

implementation becomes critical to the success of students. Unfortunately, many school systems rely on new instructional initiatives and outside professional development agencies to fix teaching and learning and to address marginalized students' needs rather than school leaders. Additionally, culturally responsive leaders must acknowledge that relationships serve as a foundation to transform teaching and learning. According to Hollie (2017):

> turning the meaning of culturally responsive teaching into a quick fix for race relations, diversity issues, and achievement gap woes is a fleeting solution. The authenticity and relevance of the term is actually steeped in transforming instructional practices to make the difference for improving relationships between students and educators and increasing student achievement" (p. 18).

A culturally responsive school environment proves critical for teachers to successfully serve in a diverse classroom and the role of the leader is critical in establishing such an environment. According to Dessources (2018), educators neglect many students due to lack of preparation in culturally responsive teaching. This begs the question: How do leaders shift teacher practices using culturally responsive pedagogy to increase the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction?

The study takes place in an urban community, using the pseudonym South Mountain Middle School (SMMS) and located in South Mountain, North Carolina. The school serves approximately 410 students in the sixth through eighth grades with a 95% African American student and staff demographic. South Mountain Middle School has ranked in the low-performing middle school category since 2013, meaning the aggregate student scores on State Exams have not met the expected level of proficiency and serves a high number of historically underserved students. Since 2013, SMSS implemented 19 initiatives with varying degrees of success.

Ultimately, none of the innovations reached full levels of success due to the discontinuity and continual implementation of new programs. In addition, the school has experienced constant changes in administration and a 67% teacher retention rate that has impeded progress. In 2018, I became the fourth principal at South Mountain Middle since the school opened in 2013.

Rationale

An important factor of culturally responsive practices is the opportunity to consistently raise the level of expectations through teaching, leadership, and learning with all stakeholders (Krasnof, 2016). The district and school-wide initiatives and leadership turnover led to a culture of low expectations, these various initiatives are highlighted in Table 1. Despite leadership intent, the initiatives became barriers for teachers as opposed to increasing student achievement. Many programs lacked culturally responsive practices, instead focusing on restrictive test preparation. Therefore, the focus of practice is to shift teacher practices using culturally responsive teaching and to raise the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction.

In this PAR study, I addressed the need to improve instructional practices without relying on formal or pre-packaged instructional programs initiatives that have historically failed at SMMS. As Spillane and Hopkins (2013) contend, "It is tempting under such circumstances to rely on implementing prepackaged remedies. Although such a strategy may be necessary for instructional reform, it is unlikely to be sufficient" (p. 6). I chose to support teachers in shifting their teaching practices using CRP principles and strategies, so teachers learn the value of building relationships and providing access to high quality and rigorous instruction with all students. Spillane and Hopkins (2013) acknowledge, "Adopting a diagnostic mindset toward the practice of leading and managing instruction to design for the improvement of that practice is

Table 1

Principal, District Initiatives, and Instructional Programs, 2013-2020

School Year	Principal	District Initiative Program	School Wide Instructional Programs
2013-2014	Founding Principal, A	Ed Cite	Study Island Pearson
2014-2015	Principal A	Corrective Reading	Pearson Study Island Accelerated Reader Common Lit
2015-2016	Principal B	Nash Rocky Mount Public Schools Instructional Framework	Pearson Study Island Accelerated Reader Discovery Ed Read Theory
2016-2017	Principal B	Nash Rocky Mount Public Schools Instructional Framework Gradual Release of Responsibility Model	Pearson Study Island Accelerated Reader Discovery Ed Read Theory
2017-2018	Principal C	Nash Rocky Mount Public Schools Instructional Framework Gradual Release of Responsibility Model Data Wise	Pearson Study Island Accelerated Reader Discovery Ed Read Theory MTSS
2018-2019	Dupree	Nash Rocky Mount Public Schools Instructional Framework Gradual Release of Responsibility Model Data Wise	Pearson Study Island Accelerated Reader Discovery Ed Read Theory MTSS Read 180 / Math 180
2019-2020	Dupree	Nash Rocky Mount Public Schools Instructional Framework	MTSS Read 180 / Math 180 Paths Reading

essential" (p. 38). In order to promote access to rigorous education, I intended to create a culture where teachers are encouraged to grow and broaden their knowledge and expertise in cultural responsiveness and to critically assess pedagogical practices.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Assets and Challenges of the Focus of Practice</h2>

I reviewed the assets and challenges at three levels of the organization: the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level, as shown in Figure 1. The micro-level centers around assets and challenges in the classroom and school. The meso-level includes the entire school district. Finally, the macro-level assets and challenges expand to state and national funding and policy.

Micro Assets and Challenges

Micro-level assets and challenges drive the PAR study because they influence the implementation of culturally responsive practices in the classroom and school. Overall, South Mountain Middle School teacher and student relationships positively impacts our school culture. We increased the teacher retention rate in 2021 from 67% to 95%, a strong teacher retention rate. The teachers were ready and willing to make improvements for the students, and the bulk of the non-teaching staff were keen to do so. Teachers proactively pursued opportunities for professional development to increase their knowledge. I have served as the principal of South Mountain Middle school for the last four years. Having a consistent leader for the school provides the teachers a sustained academic focus and has increased the buy-in of the staff for positive instructional changes for our school; teachers desire success and work hard to implement best practices for students.

Despite the numerous assets of the school community, a few challenges persist. Overcoming the mentality of a fixed mindset with our staff challenges us. According to Hollie
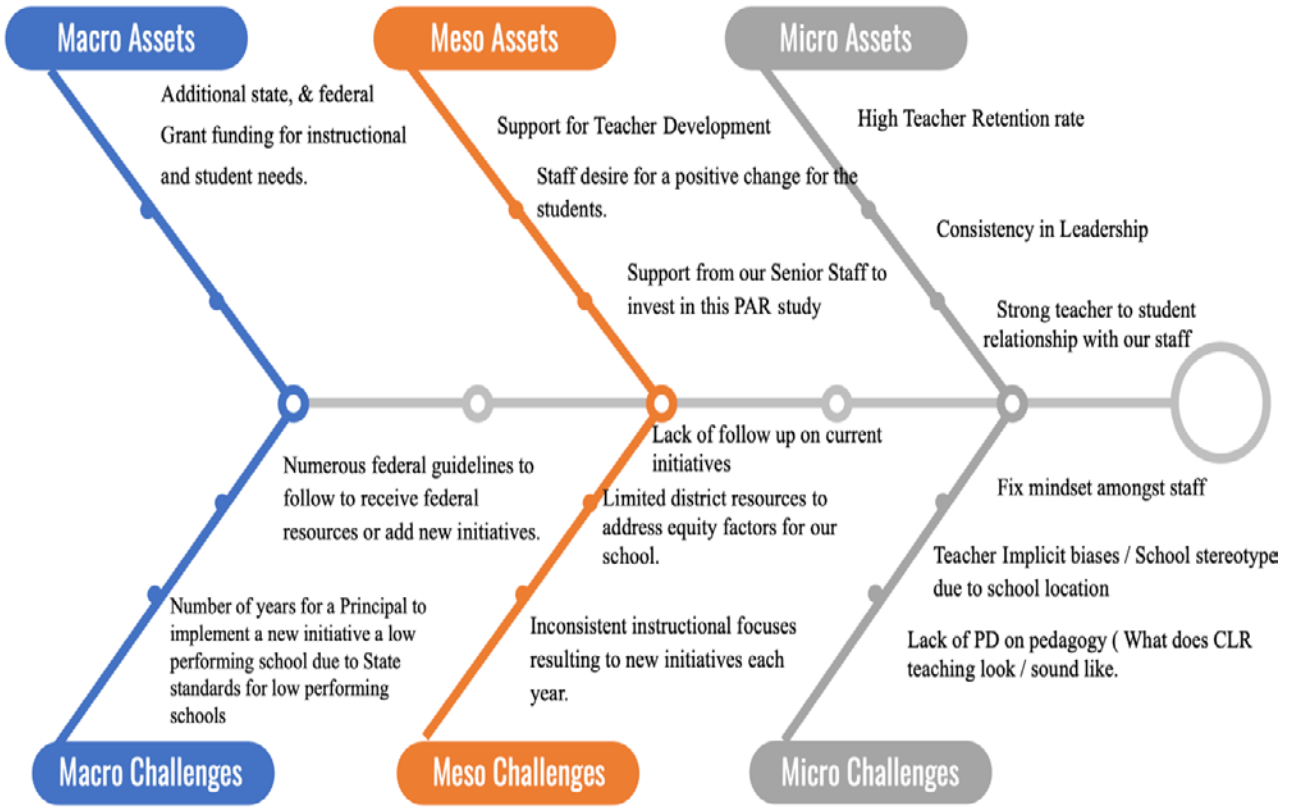
Figure 1. Fishbone diagram analysis of assets and challenges of FoP.

Macro Assets

Additional state, & federal Grant funding for instructional and student needs.

Meso Assets

Support for Teacher Development

Staff desire for a positive change for the students.

Support from our Senior Staff to invest in this PAR study

Micro Assets

High Teacher Retention rate

Consistency in Leadership

Strong teacher to student relationship with our staff

Numerous federal guidelines to follow to receive federal resources or add new initiatives.

Lack of follow up on current initiatives

Limited district resources to address equity factors for our school.

Fix mindset amongst staff

Teacher Implicit biases / School stereotype due to school location

Number of years for a Principal to implement a new initiative a low performing school due to State standards for low performing schools

Inconsistent instructional focuses resulting to new initiatives each year.

Lack of PD on pedagogy (What does CLR teaching look / sound like.

Macro Challenges

Meso Challenges

Micro Challenges

(2017), "When it comes to consideration of the cultures and languages of underserved students, many educators' beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets are deficit-oriented" (p. 30). In essence, this means that the students are blamed for their failures and are seen as the problem. Furthermore, we lack a singular focus for improvement and continue to attempt to implement the many different, and often contradictory, initiatives from previous years, resulting in initiative fatigue and confusion over which strategies to utilize.

Meso Assets and Challenges

The Superintendent provided support, resources, and the autonomy to implement the PAR study. District staff members and administrators engaged in professional development activities, and we analyzed district and school data in order to revamp our policies and ascertain school and district needs. In addition, a district equity team was assembled to review equity gaps and inequitable practices in our school system.

However, the Mountain County Public School System struggles to address equity issues or provide appropriate professional learning in CRP for educators. This results in limited opportunities for equity-centered professional development and a lack of follow-up. Another challenge is the uncertainty of how to effectively assess the efficacy of teachers' instructional practices. Recommendations for new instructional initiatives continued to come from the District Office, but progress monitoring is limited to determine the effectiveness of the initiatives. Over the last seven years, the lack of a consistent instructional focus has created another challenge at the meso level. The district and school leadership have introduced 15 instructional programs. The lack of continuity in instructional policies has made it difficult to shift teacher practices and to maintain staff buy-in.

Macro Asset and Challenges

South Mountain Middle School receives additional federal funding for instructional and student needs. The federal and state funding provides instructional support, classroom resources, and parent involvement resources to support our students and teachers. The federal funding provided teachers opportunities to participate in professional learning opportunities. We purchased professional literature on culturally responsive practices.

State and national funding comes with regulations and limited time to make progress with the financial support. Due to the school's academic performance challenges, the transition to remote learning during COVID-19 was a setback for effective teaching and learning. The accountability of the End of Grade test continued to exist as a time for academic success while we switched back to in-person instruction. Next, I discuss the significance of the focus of practice and the potential significance of the PAR study on practice, policy, and research.

<div align="center">Practice & Policy</div>

What policies and procedures can guarantee that all students have equitable access to rigorous instruction remains a question. Teachers need consistent, impactful, and culturally responsive teaching practices to improve teaching and learning; a learning culture to enhance their knowledge and skills in cultural responsiveness and to examine the curricular and pedagogical practices in the school. The PAR study potentially provides a strategy for co-constructing a school-wide CRP observation tool that directs teachers in using culturally responsive pedagogy and promotes access to rigor by providing improvements to the instructional policies and practices of the school system. The significance of the PAR study for policy and practice is that the study addresses the needs of all students and questions educational methods that limit a student's potential.

<center>**Research**</center>

For the PAR study, I analyzed the extent to which teachers used culturally responsive practices to increase equitable access to rigorous instruction. As a result of engaging in culturally responsive practices, we expected to gather evidence from the PAR study to spark educators to examine their own culturally responsive teaching practices. I planned to examine my leadership and how I supported teachers to become culturally responsive teachers. The findings may inform other educators and the research community.

<center>**Connection to Equity**</center>

Examining teachers' expectations for students and providing students with access to rigorous instruction is a critical issue of equity in United States schools. Many teachers at SMSS demonstrate low expectations of students due to the school's reputation of poor academic performance and the student community as academically deficient. In this participatory action research project, we engaged in conversations to identify the root causes of low expectations and the non-rigorous instructional practices. Two equity frameworks supported my Focus of Practice. First, I discuss the psychological framework supported by Eubanks et al. (1997) and Steele (2010). Secondly, I will explain the sociological aspects, referring to the work of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004).

Psychological Framework of the Focus of Practice

Creating a culturally responsive learning environment can provide equitable access to rigorous instruction for students but requires intensive work to educate teaching and support staff about creating a system centered around equity and access. However, schools play a major part in society's institutional processes for maintaining a relatively stable system of inequality. According to Eubanks et al. (1997):

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"Schools contribute to these results by active acceptance and utilization of a dominant set of values, norms, and beliefs, which, while appearing to offer opportunities to all, actually support the success of a privileged minority and hinder the efforts and visions of a majority" (p. 162).

The system convinces people that their failures are solely their fault. One of these dominant beliefs is that of individualism; the description of self-contained individualism lies in the idea that to be successful, one must achieve without depending on others for assistance. Individualism refers to one's disposition toward fundamental autonomy, independence, individual recognition, solitude, and the exclusion of others (Moemeka, 1998; Spence, 1985). Another type of individualism is possessive individualism, where an individual's identity and status are bound to what he or she owns or possesses (Boykin, 1983). Creating a culturally responsive learning environment requires educators to develop systems that dismantle inequalities and provide access to all students.

A mindset of low expectations is caused by a process called hegemony, a culture that limits equity and access to all students due to educators' practices. A hegemonic culture utilizes code words that reflect class, gender, and racial hierarchies; they are used by educators to preserve educational standards that create a psychological feeling of helplessness in students (Eubanks et al., 1997). This type of cultural mindset produces limited efforts for educators to go the extra mile for students and negative dialogue and deficit beliefs about students being successful fuel this narrative. I recognized the stereotypes that sustain and reinforce this hegemonic culture at school and see the impact on students. While SMSS students primarily receive instruction from African American teachers, many still employ stereotypes and deficit mindsets. According to Steele (2010), "A preponderance of evidence strongly suggests that

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underperformance, when not caused by discrimination against a group in grades, is likely caused by stereotypes and identify threats and the interfering reactions they cause" (p. 189).

School report data (Wadley, 2022) suggests that many of the African American educators create a hegemonic school culture of low expectations. One way to deconstruct a hegemonic school culture and promote high cultural expectations is by developing a school learning organization. Eubanks et al. (1997) state, "School learning organizations are those that provide intellectual and character development and a desire to become lifelong learners for all" (p.164). East Carolina University's Project I^4 program is federally funded grant from USDOE United States Department of Education that's focused on equitable academic discourse. With the guidance of the Project I^4 Framework (Tredway et al., 2019), I used CRP to shift teacher practices and create a learning organization focused on intellectual and character development.

Sociological Framework of the Focus of Practice

I aimed to build a robust learning organization with a culture of high expectations for student learning. This leads to a cooperative school community that, under any conditions, demands excellence from students, teachers, and parents. As educators, we need to be knowledgeable of our school community's deficits without allowing them to become "equity traps" that hinder our progress. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004):

> "The predominant reason the teachers gave for the students not being motivated to learn was that they felt the students' parents did not value education. Teachers identified the students as having "built-in" or "endogenous" deficits that the teachers could not be expected to overcome" (p. 608).

A Community Learning Exchange (CLE) provides one way to involve the parents and the community to work together toward creating high expectations and to counter the parent-deficit

narrative. I used the CLE axioms (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016) to guide our work: use local knowledge, engage in conversations and dialogue as critical for relationships and pedagogy, base conversations on assets and hopes, view leadership and learning as social processes, and model and authorize border-crossing to cultivate the data collection process and inform the learning. The axioms guided the PAR study as a philosophy and methodology; CLEs allow leaders to focus on the current context and work directly with constituents who are closest to the issues, as they may have responses that the researchers cannot know or see. School leaders can help teachers reframe their thinking about students, families, and communities away from deficit thinking to an assets-based orientation that recognizes the "funds of knowledge" that students bring with them (Moll et al., 1992).

Participatory Action Research Design

I utilized Participatory Action Research informed by activist research methodology to investigate the focus of practice and respond to the research questions (Hale, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2015; hunter et al., 2013). I examined the extent to which teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase equitable access to rigorous instruction. Achieving the intended results necessitates the development and expansion of our knowledge and skills in cultural responsiveness and utilization of the knowledge to examine the school's curricular and pedagogical practices. Next, I will discuss the purpose of the PAR study and the research questions that guides the study to its theory of action.

Purpose and PAR Research Questions

The purpose of this participatory action research project was to shift teacher practices using culturally responsive teaching and raise the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction. The overarching research question is: How can teachers co-generate and adapt

culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? To further refine the research question, I specifically examined:

- To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?

- To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?

- How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?

The research questions guide the participatory action research and inform the theory of action and proposed research activities.

Theory of Action

The Theory of Action (ToA) for the PAR study is: If a Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group can co-generate and adapt culturally responsive pedagogical practices with the intention to change teachers' practices, then the level of opportunity will increase for students to have equitable access to rigorous instruction. After observing current practices, teachers developed common protocols and practices to support culturally responsive teaching and then the teachers implemented those protocols and practices within their classrooms. The use of observations and post observation conversations provided data to inform the iterative changes to the protocols and practices throughout the study.

Focus of Practice

The Focus of Practice (FoP) was created as a result of South Mountain Middle School's poor academic performance ratings and my observations of the classrooms. I observed low levels of student engagement, the absence of engaging and culturally relevant teaching strategies, and

limited access to rigorous instruction. The focus of practice was influenced by survey results, the recent history of unsuccessful instructional initiatives, and the changes in principal leadership. The inconsistency of an instructional focus and ongoing school leadership changes created a hegemonic school culture of low expectations. The data led me to create the Focus of Practice: Shifting teaching practices using CRP to raise the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction.

The significance of the FoP allows staff to address the needs of all students and to eliminate teaching practices that hinder a student's potential. South Mountain Middle School runs the risk of school mandated instructional takeover by the North Carolina Department of Education. The guidance of those closest to the problem can provide the solution, not another series of outside initiatives; the students at South Mountain Middle School deserve more. These actions present a psychological barrier and the impossibility of change for teachers and students. Destroying the psychological fixed mindset amongst the staff aids in the deconstruction of hegemony, cultural beliefs, and sorting practices so that educators can no longer accept the existing system of schooling. We needed to focus on creating learning conditions and relationships that provide high levels of intellectual development for every student (Eubanks et al., 1997). CRP as our focus of practice set the stage for successful school culture change.

Proposed Research Activities

The change I proposed required a different skill set from teachers. It required a proactive, open-minded approach to problem-solving to meet student's needs. The PAR activities create a gracious space for individuals to reflect on their individual practices and philosophies, ultimately leading to change. The activities included action research cycles, working with a co-practitioner group, and community learning exchanges.

Research Cycles

I facilitated three action research cycles. During the Pre-cycle, we began the planning process. Following the Pre-cycle, we intended to organize two action cycles that followed the PDSA improvement cycle steps of Plan, Do, Study, Act. The plan was to research ways in which a group of teachers can learn culturally responsive practices and to critically analyze the school's curricular and pedagogical practices.

Co-Practitioner Research Group

The Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group met to refine the focus of practice, establish relationships, and define culturally responsive practices. The co-practitioner research group has a significant role in the PAR study because they respond to the data analysis. The primary focus of the data collection was the participation of the CPR group in the Community Learning Exchange. The group was co-generating effective culturally responsive pedagogical practices, engaging in the practices in the CPR meetings, transferring those practices to the classroom, and reflecting on their learning.

Community Learning Exchanges

The CPR members engaged in a Community Learning Exchange (CLE). During this activity, we built a foundation for creating a professional learning community centered around conversations that deeply enhanced our teacher's knowledge of culturally responsive practices. This Participatory Action Research (PAR) study and project examined a school culture of teaching centered around CRP. By establishing a group that meets regularly, we engaged in collaborative efforts to address a common problem while fostering a culture of teaching and learning. In addition, by selecting a CPR group, we used evidence gained from each PAR cycle to improve our culturally responsive practices.

Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations, and Limitations

In qualitative research, particularly PAR, it is important to examine the roles of the researcher and the participants as well as consider the limitations, the validity of the study, and address confidentiality and ethical concerns from the outset. The security of the data and the confidentiality of the participants is of the utmost importance in this study. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants in the study. In addition, I transcribed meeting agendas, reflective memos, classroom observation notes, and documents and they were kept in a secure, locked location. Finally, none of the material co-generated with the study participants will be replicated or disseminated in any way. An IRB consent letter of participation was signed and filed for each participant of the study. As the lead researcher, as well as the supervisor of the CPR group members, I paid close attention to my positionality and how it can impact all aspects of the study. I mitigated any issues through thoughtful reflection, careful planning, and triangulating evidence throughout the project, particularly with the use of reflective memos. There were limitations in the PAR study based on sample size. I invited four participants to be involved in the study. The study was specific to this context, and as a result, generalizations to other settings will be limited.

Chapter Summary

It continues to be an ongoing challenge to find effective instructional teaching practices to meet the demands of students in low-performing schools. Culturally responsive teaching practices benefit students and support all educational initiatives. In order to give teachers a solid foundation and make sure that we maintain high expectations and rigorous classroom teaching for learning, we implemented the concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

Our ability to develop a culturally responsive school atmosphere that will foster our children's aspirations for a better future is made possible by this PAR study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Finding effective instructional teaching practices to improve teaching and learning at low performing schools is an ongoing challenge. The instructional teaching practices should provide students with an equitable opportunity for rigorous instruction. It is imperative that educators' decisions on how to improve teaching and learning meet the needs of diverse students, schools, and communities and that the decisions are a baseline for their actions. Culturally responsive education has significantly evolved throughout several decades; thus, we need to recognize the history, the founding authors, and how the research has led to educational reform.

In this chapter, I examine three areas of literature that support the focus of practice: (1) the importance of culturally responsive pedagogical practices, (2) how school leadership matters, and (3) the use of academic discourse to improve student learning. I discuss the level of significance that the school leaders, teachers, and community relationships play in culturally responsive education. I provide an overview of the evolutionary process of cultural responsiveness, and its theoretical perspectives. Then, I emphasize the importance of school leadership for creating a culturally responsive learning environment, including the need for high-quality professional learning communities and community learning exchanges. Finally, I explain how academic discourse in a culturally responsive learning environment will increase rigor.

The Importance of Culturally Responsive Education

This literature topic focuses on the educational significance of culturally responsive education. It begins with the history and defines the different terms and educational theories that impacted culturally responsive education. I discuss the principles of culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant teaching. Finally, I will highlight what makes good culturally responsive teaching and how it can sustain student learning.

The History and Evolutionary Process of Culturally Responsive Education

The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has evolved over time but, in essence, CRP is a pedagogy that affects a "closer fit between students' home culture and the school with the aim of improving the academic achievement of students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 69). Cultural educational principles have been around for over 30 years and these cultural principles focus on bridging the gap between culturally diverse groups and providing ways to enhance effective teaching practices to be relevant and sustainable for children's learning (Krasnof, 2016). During the 1980s there emerged an anthropology of educational literature and several terms were introduced to describe the pedagogical strategies in an effort to make the school experience for students more compatible with their everyday lives (Grant, 1992). Those terms include cultural congruence (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), cultural appropriateness (Au & Jordan, 1981), cultural responsiveness (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), cultural compatibility (Jordan, 1985), and mitigating cultural discontinuity (Macias et al., 1987).

Cultural congruence is the idea that learning is best accomplished in classrooms compatible with the cultural context of the communities they serve. Cultural congruence was used in a study by Erickson and Mohatt (1977) where teachers used pedagogical strategies to approximate their language patterns to a group of their Native students' home cultural and language patterns which resulted in improved academic achievement. The study shows how academic success in classrooms is compatible with students' community context and the relevancy of the student's home culture. The home cultural perspectives or values of academic success sometimes motivate or hinder the success of students due to what is called "caste like" minority groups. In contrast, Ogbu's (1978) labor market explanation highlights the academic

success of immigrant students in the United States. Ogbu (1974, 1978, 1982, 1987) argues that the main reason for the low school achievement of many minority students, as well as that of their parents and peers, is that school success will not help them break out of a cycle of poverty. In contrast, immigrant minority students and their parents believe that the effort devoted to school success is likely to pay off in future employment (Erickson, 1987). As educators, we must recognize these different family values and properly plan to challenge our students with high expectations. Nevertheless, the importance of the link between community and school in the academic success of culturally diverse students is transferable across contexts since all cultural groups do not share the same home communication styles to be able to determine one fit of cultural appropriateness (Erickson & Mohatt, 1977).

Au and Jordan (1981) use the term culturally appropriate pedagogy to describe the differences between school learning and informal learning and is important in facilitating academic success for students. Some minority children may be unresponsive or show signs of confusion to the teacher's instructional delivery due to the student's lack of experience of the topic or unfamiliar actions that don't translate to their home environment.

The opportunity to teach and learn was at a critical standstill due to the teachers' lack of ability to convey content and the students' lack of recognition of the different types of learning; culturally appropriate content was shown to provide these opportunities (Au, 1980). The ultimate goal was to be able to create culturally appropriate instructional events for minority children. The study involved the Kamehameha Early Education Project in Hawaii. Au and Jordan (1981) centered around demonstrating a causal connection between the cultural communication patterns of classroom discourse and academic achievement. This experiment included two culturally different ways of teaching reading that was done with native Hawaiian first graders. One way of

teaching allowed students to follow a mainstream Anglo pattern of turn-taking while discussing reading that allowed only one student to speak at a time. Another way of teaching allowed students to overlap in speaking to provide comments and feedback. This type of teaching is similar to students' experiences in family and community life and is called "talk-story" (Au & Jordan, 1981, p. 94). The success of the reading program is attributed to the cultural congruence of the reading lessons, the constant interweaving of text-derived information with personal experiences or talk-story, leading to enhanced outcomes in reading.

According to Au and Jordan (1981) the project had to meet three criteria: (1) it would have to be comfortable for the children, (2) it would have to be comfortable for the teacher, and (3) it would have to promote the better acquisition of basic academic skills. This study led to reading interventions over the last two decades and has impacted the literature on academic discourse and culturally responsive pedagogy. "Story-like" teaching has impacted students who are culturally under-represented in schools. There is a need to promote relevant instruction and the use of culturally appropriate pedagogy. This study used common language and community attributes to align school and informal learning for student success (Au, 1980). The context of school learning is often different from informal learning and often unrelated to the child's culture.

Continuities or discontinuities between the home-community and school cultures impacted the quality of learning that takes place with a group of students in the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in urban Honolulu in the 1970s (Jordan, 1985). Discontinuity has often been viewed as a deficit of the racial/ethnic minority children or as cultural deprivation (Jensen, 1969). Teaching practices that have cultural discontinuity have an impact on a child's educational knowledge and behavior toward their culture. During this study,

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the term culturally compatible pedagogy was established as, "an educational practice that must be compatible with the cultures of the children being educated" (Jensen, 1969, p. 109). As a culturally responsive educator, one must highlight the student's cultural norms throughout the lessons, so the student can enhance their ability to think and perform successfully. "The point of cultural compatibility is that the natal culture is used as a guide in the selection of educational program elements so that academically desired behaviors are produced, and undesired behaviors are avoided" (Jensen, 1969, p. 110).

Ladson-Billings (1995) explored the ositive influences on the academic behavior of African American students. Eight teachers participated in demanding, reinforcing, and producing academic excellence for African American students. One of the points of the study was to highlight that "culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to attend to students' academic needs, not merely make them feel good" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). One of the teachers in the study, Mrs. Lewis, a white female, focused a great deal on giving positive attention to the African American boys. Most of the students in the classroom were African American males and the challenge was to highlight the students' cultural norms through her lessons, so the African American boys could perform successfully. "Mrs. Lewis recognized that the African American boys possessed social power and their interests were socializing with their peers inside and outside of the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161). Rather than allowing those conversations to influence their peers in a negative way, Lewis challenged the boys to demonstrate academic power through class discussions. "This approach arranges school and home culture in a dissimilar perspective of values where the home culture may be seen as something to be avoided in the context of the school" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). The other students noticed the positive trait from the boys and started to develop similar behaviors. The

teacher was able to find ways to challenge the students' knowledge and skills, so they can be channeled in academically positive ways. Teachers' awareness of the students' cultures assist them in making teaching adjustments, so they can maintain an effective classroom environment that addresses cultural differences.

Founding Authors of Culturally Responsive Education

Two primary authors, Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2018), have educational theories in multicultural education and have emerged as founders of culturally responsive education. I emphasize the authors' educational theories, practices, and impact on Culturally Responsive Education.

Substantial changes in our education system over the past few decades have led researchers and educators to find new approaches to instruction to establish an equitable education for all students. In response to the growing need for a pedagogy that recognizes the cultural diversity of America's students, Ladson-Billings (1995) fought to provide students from historically marginalized groups an equal educational experience. Ladson-Billings (1995) created the term culturally relevant pedagogy to describe "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 17). This pedagogy intends to disrupt the assimilationist teachings that were found in many urban public schools.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that the transformative agenda of culturally relevant pedagogy is two-fold: it challenges traditional views of teaching and learning, and it develops a social consciousness among students to confront various forms of societal oppression. The literature describes assimilationist teaching as:

a method of inducting students into the role that society has determined for them with an

unquestioning, uncritical view of the way schools miseducate all children; minority and

non-minority, females and males, middle-class and working and lower-class, disabled

and non-disabled. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 17)

Each proposition supports the idea that "culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize

teaching and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the

curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Gay (2018) offers a broader

conception of culturally responsive teaching, defining it as using the cultural characteristics,

experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more

effectively. Similar to the theory of action in this PAR study, Gay assumed that when academic

knowledge and skills are based within the personal experiences and frames of reference of

students, they are more meaningful, have higher interest, and are learned more easily and

thoroughly. Gay's notions of culturally responsive teaching insist that a different pedagogical

model is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic

groups with a routine and radical approach:

…routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African

American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions

do for middle-class European Americans. That is, it filters curriculum content and

teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more

personally meaningful and easier to master.…radical because it makes explicit the

previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational

institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving

learning outcomes. (Gay, 2002, p. 32)

As a result, all students' academic achievement improves when they are taught through their cultural filters. Collectively, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching have many features in common and the terms are often used interchangeably.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

The use of culturally relevant teaching provides students the opportunity to critically examine educational content and think about how it aligns within a multicultural society. Ladson-Billings (1995) defines Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural references to impart and build knowledge. Students benefit from studying their culture to create a meaningful understanding of the world. Thus, not only academic success but cultural and social success become evident. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), "if students' home culture is incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience academic success" (p. 159).

The eight teachers in the Ladson-Billings (1995) study came highly recommended from African American parents and each teacher's principal. One way of raising the level of expectations in the classroom is to model that same level of respect and expectations for our students. The parents' reasoning for selecting the teachers was the enthusiasm their children showed in school and learning while in their classroom, the consistent level of respect that students received from the teachers, and their perception that the teachers understood the need for the students to operate in the dual worlds of their home community and the White community. The principal's reasoning for recommending the teachers were the low numbers of discipline referrals, the high attendance rates, and standardized test scores. Their participation required in-depth interviews, unannounced classroom visitations, videotaping of their teaching,

and participation in a research collective with the other teachers in the study. As Hamachek (1999) suggests, "Teachers teach not only a curriculum of study, but they also become part of it. The subject matter they teach is mixed with the content of their personalities of high expectations" (p. 208). Successful teaching and learning seems to include the commitment stemming from the teacher's desire to teach and wanting to be a part of the school, regardless of demographics of income, race, or gender. The success of the study (Ladson-Billings, 1995) showed that the teachers exhibited a passion for helping students who were coming in with skill deficiencies, the teachers worked to help students build bridges or scaffold so they could be proficient in the more challenging work they experienced in the classroom.

Teachers will never find a one-size-fits-all curriculum mode for teaching culturally responsive education. To answer the call for a paradigm shift of what we assume and believe to be good teaching, we must learn from teachers who are dedicated to learning the specific nature of the culture of their students. Both Gay and Ladson-Billings explain critical conceptions of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that have significant implications for effective teaching strategies. Both methods of teaching have effective strategies to impact teachers and students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). Culturally responsive teaching is a means for improving achievement by teaching diverse students through their own cultural filters. Creating the opportunity for all students to learn through their cultural perspectives increases the opportunity of equitable access for student learning. Gay (2010) has

always preferred cultural and contemporary content, with historical experiences as foundational influences, in contrast to some of the early researchers who stressed historical knowledge and experiences. As a result, culturally responsive teaching incorporates learning of psychological reasons, social and political reasons, and historical reasons. Effective learning in today's society is centered on engagement, collaboration, and discussion of the lesson's relevance.

A study conducted by Sheets and Gay (1996) expressed the value of Western or mainstream cultural values in formal learning settings such as public schools. The study involved a group of elementary school teachers that felt pressured to maintain control of their classroom while serving predominantly African American students. It was concluded that the teachers in this study felt that quiet classrooms where students worked by themselves were optimal practices and learning conditions for student learning. An individualized learning environment doesn't allow equitable access for all students, and it minimizes learning. This type of learning environment presents pressure for students to understand the cultural norms of instruction and for teachers to teach to the mainstream norms. This study centered around the suggestions that mainstream or Western cultural values exist throughout public schools, particularly those where ethnic minority students predominate. Gay (2010) suggested that public school students are in a learning environment that minimizes social interaction and expects individualized, competitive efforts, which are characteristic of Western or mainstream society. Individualism refers to one's disposition toward fundamental autonomy, independence, individual recognition, solitude, and the exclusion of others (Moemeka, 1998; Spence, 1985). For instance, the description of self-contained individualism lies in the idea that, to be successful, one must achieve without depending on others for assistance. Another type of individualism is possessive individualism, where an individual's identity and status are bound to what he or she owns or possesses (Boykin,

1983). These types of learning environments place marginalized students at a disadvantage of being successful based on their home resources and the knowledge and status they bring to the learning environment. Competition refers to one's preoccupation with doing better than others (Boykin, 1983). Competition can manifest itself as an individual competition, where an individual is trying to be the best among others (e.g., "Me against the world"), an interpersonal competition, where an individual is attempting to beat out another indirect rivalry, and group competition, where an individual's "team" is attempting to surpass others (Boykin et al., 2005). This type of learning sets a precedent of non-supportive peer learning and collaboration for student success. The only relevance this learning style brings is the world's hierarchy of dominant status of what is classified as success.

Gay (2010) highlighted that if the educational process is a cultural process, then it's incumbent for all K-12 educators to use cultural responsiveness nuance for curriculum, instruction, and how we interact with students. However, with the use of culturally responsive teaching, we are aiming for other cultural lenses to be accepted as legitimate, natural, normal routines that we send instructional learning messages through those cultural filters to students of different ethnical backgrounds.

In a 2008 study of a mathematics intervention course for African American male students at a predominantly African American middle school, Brown invited a group of teachers to integrate cultural references from African history, such as the Ishango Bone and Yoruba number system, into math activities, with varying success (Brown, 2008). This way of facilitating instruction challenged the teachers and the students in multiple ways. Brown (2008) stated, "Creating a culturally focused environment that enhances students' thinking of how math and their personal culture are relevant will increase students' engagement and their capacity to sustain

learning" (p. 24). Brown hypothesized that the inclusion of these culture-based elements would nurture identification and motivation among the students mathematically; he discovered that these cultural artifacts carried little personal relevance to the African American males in the class, and therefore did not necessarily facilitate the kind of student engagement he anticipated (Brown, 2008). For the teachers, it pushed math educators to think more critically about cultural relevance among Black students. Though the use of such elements helped students develop new understandings about the mathematics of the African continent, and could therefore serve as a source of pride, he found these connections would clearly be dependent upon the degree to which African culture holds personal relevance for students (Brown, 2008). The goal of equitable education is not to help students learn to adapt to the dominant culture of the school. Instead, the goal should be to help students develop a positive self-image through the relevance of learning how to embrace differences in others (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Why Culturally Responsive Teaching is Needed

A very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of students from various ethnic groups, one that teaches to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments. This emphasis on "teaching to" cultural diversity helps students acquire more accurate knowledge about the lives, cultures, contributions, experiences, and challenges of different ethnic and racial groups in U.S. society, knowledge that is often unrecognized or denigrated in conventional schooling (Gay, 2010). Gay (2010) argues that the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living, promote educational equity and excellence, create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds, and develop students' agency, efficacy, and empowerment. Culturally responsive teaching is the kind

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of paradigm with a routine and a radical proposal. It is routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans (Gay, 2010). The overall effectiveness of culturally responsive practices in schools starts with the principal and culturally responsive leadership.

School Leadership Matters in Promoting Culturally Responsive Classrooms

Transforming teaching practices to demonstrate cultural responsiveness depends on leadership. With the increase in diverse cultural populations, school leaders are forced to develop methods of educating the students successfully if they want to improve student levels of achievement. Culturally responsive school leadership is critical to changing instructional methods that respond to the cultural needs of students and create a culturally responsive school environment. When considering the prevalent factors on student success, leadership is found to be second only to effective classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010).

In a school setting, cultural responsiveness is described as recognizing the cultural and historical experiences of marginalized student groups that legitimately influence how students learn and achieve in educational settings. There has been an increased focus on educational leadership and social justice to promote reversing the longstanding trends of educational inequities and school outcomes. To coordinate longstanding implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016). When school leaders merge curricular innovation with social activism they take on the role of being a Culturally Responsive Leader. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) expands upon the idea of culturally responsive pedagogy, which opposes assimilation by increasing cultural understanding beyond the classroom in the larger school environment and in

communities (Davy, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016). This section of the literature review explains how culturally responsive school leadership can dismantle oppressive ways of teaching and learning, using culturally responsive practices principles and beliefs, and addresses the challenges of community involvement.

Culturally Responsive Leadership: Dismantling Oppressive Learning &Teaching

The historical context of culture in American public schools explains that many educators and educational reformers assert that the American school system developed largely as a tool to assimilate immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities into the dominant Eurocentric culture (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ogbu, 1992). In some cases, the task of the education system was to erase the cultural heritages of some groups, such as Native Americans, in an effort to build a common Eurocentric culture (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). The overall objective of our school system should be to help students be successful with the students' best interests at heart. But this seems to be untrue thanks to the challenges school leaders have faced for years stemming from the forms of oppression that have dominated the educational landscape. School leadership models were situated in colonial schooling, which meant that schools were meant to build good citizens who would contribute to the economic viability of the society (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997; Ogbu, 1992). This is particularly problematic for Native American, Black, and Latinx communities because while the government prospered, these minority communities fell further behind; Whites became wealthy while Blacks and Native Americans were used to help build the nation's (White) wealth. Schools were crucial in this exploration and school leaders often led this charge (Muhammad, 2018, p. 51). Aronson (2017) states, "The way that school is set up is oppressive. A lot of the research around urban schools is that schools are actually doing exactly as they are intended to -- sort and train and assimilate (Aronson, 2017, p.

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164). So, when people say schools are 'failing,' and that's the problem, they are doing exactly what they were intended to do.

The meaningful use of a lens of equity requires leaders to continuously ask, who is being well served, and who is being left out or harmed by the policies and practices of the organization? Leaders of equity should be committed to interrupting policies, practices, and procedures that, explicitly or implicitly, perpetuate unequal outcomes for children who are furthest away from opportunity (Terrell & Lindsey, 2018). "The work of interrupting entrenched systems often requires redefining "success" and reframing how we understand problems and develop solutions" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2018, p. 9) Terrell and Lindsey further articulated, "courageous leaders change the focus from 'what is wrong with the student' to 'what is it we need to do to meet the student's needs" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2018, p. 19). The role of being a culturally responsive school leader starts with reevaluating ourselves as school leaders, the schools teaching practices, and policies that have a negative impact on student learning. Our pride for holding on to past methods of schooling stands in the way of students reaching their future full potential. Regardless of personality or leadership styles, the principal should articulate and model their own vision of what a successful school ought to look like and communicate their beliefs and vision to staff, students, and parents.

The Beliefs and Values of Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Culturally responsive school leaders must clearly understand their own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from themselves in order to lead effectively in settings with diverse student populations. Vassallo (2015) developed a five-step model for culturally responsive educational leadership designed to guide school leaders through reflection to challenge personal biases and hindrances to create culturally responsive leadership.

The focus of this study centered around how to implement culturally responsive leadership to sustain a culturally responsive school culture. Knowing the significance of effective leadership and its influence is critical to the success of any school, especially schools that are identified as low performing. This study elucidates methods and strategies principals employ to address teacher practices (Johnson, 2006) around cultural and instructional barriers to increase student access to rigorous instruction. Culturally responsive leadership is paramount in schools working with marginalized groups of students to ensure the inherent barriers to these students' academic progress are addressed (Vassallo, 2015). Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school (Khalifa et al., 2016). When leaders model the practice of school wide implementations, it provides a sustainable structured environment inside the school and in the community. It is important for school leaders to remember that they wield considerable "administrative privilege" and if not mindful and critically self-reflective, they will be unresponsive and thus oppressive toward student's needs (Muhammad, 2018, p. 46). This sense of pride from leadership must follow into the community, so examples of leadership can be displayed for teachers to model to their students how their school and community aligns with the classroom instruction.

Culturally Responsive Leadership and Community Involvement

Culturally responsive leaders are community leaders that strongly advocate for community-based goals. School leadership plays a role in supporting community-based goals, improving the neighborhood, and thus improving the lives of students. In other words, "leadership plays a central role in the development of the entire child, which is crucial to his or her continued academic success" (Muhammad, 2018, p. 53). Said another way:

Principals craft schools as a space inclusive of all students to not only make school

climates safe, but also to honor, humanize and promote all student identities and to build

capacity to courageously move toward cultural responsiveness and institutionalize ways

that educators used community based and ancestral knowledge in their curricula and

instruction (Muhammad, 2018, p. 192).

Johnson (2006) examines the notion of "culturally responsive leadership" through a

historical case study of the life of Gertrude Elise MacDougald Ayer, the first African American

woman principal in New York City. Principal Ayer's leadership style is an exemplar of

"culturally responsive leadership" by her serving as a public intellectual, curriculum innovator,

and social activist. Culturally responsive leaders promote schooling practices that ask educators

to engage in critical self-reflection and to constantly ask how they have been oppressive to

students or communities. Her leadership practices in Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s, in light of

the precepts of "culturally responsive" pedagogy to analyze how she incorporated students'

cultural knowledge as a vehicle for learning, fostered the development of sociopolitical

consciousness and democratic citizenship in her elementary school, and advocated for social and

political reform in the wider Harlem community (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas &

Lucas, 2002). Culturally responsive principals seek to understand and encourage their teachers

and staff to understand the community ancestral knowledge, experiences, and perceptions. In

short, during Ayer's tenure as a school leader, militant social activism was viewed as a

community responsibility by many of Harlem's movers and shakers. Her work was situated

within a network of African American intellectuals, labor organizers, religious leaders,

politicians, and community activists (and some White political activists as well) who provided

intellectual support, organizational and material resources, and constituted a critical mass of

progressive reformers bent on structural change in the schools of Harlem (Johnson, 2006). The success of these initiatives was because of her determination, networking, and passion as a school leader. Ayer's demonstration of how she cares about her work manifested in her attitude, expectations, and behavior about motivating her teachers toward their best efforts for the students. As a school leader it is imperative to provide teachers with professional development opportunities in community development. These opportunities enhance teachers' knowledge and skills to take on the task of educating students of diverse racial, ethnic, community, and social class, and provide equitable access to education.

Professional Learning Communities that are Culturally Responsive

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a form of professional development for improving teaching practices and student outcomes (DuFour et al., 2012). PLCs are known to positively affect student achievement by encouraging teachers to collaborate on a specific goal, share daily teaching practices, and provide social support and assist others toward co-designing effective instructional lessons. These ways of discussing daily teaching practices contribute to teacher development and improvement of student learning (Lomos et al., 2011). Culturally responsive teaching requires intentional planning for the teacher, students, and the school community. PLCs provide a structure to engage in the planning of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers seem to experience difficulties when teaching in a culturally diverse classroom and often lack profound knowledge about cultural backgrounds and teaching skills in these classrooms (Chouari, 2016). Working together in school PLCs helps to improve teachers' competence and the implementation of these culturally responsive practices in the classroom.

By collaborating, teachers learn how to teach in a culturally responsive manner. To implement CRT effectively, teachers will receive feedback from other teachers about their

experiences of implementing CRT. Researchers (Alhanachi et al., 2021) investigated whether CRT competence is improved by participating within-school PLCs. Learning CRT through a professional learning community is a shared experience that provides insight for teachers to enhance their professional development and grow in cultural responsiveness.

In the McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) study, the focus on the extent to which participating in PLCs impacted culturally responsive teaching competencies. Four PLCs were formed, six meetings were planned at the participating schools, and twelve teachers were interviewed to gain more insight of the impact of the PLCs. The results from the study showed that participating in a PLC seemed to result in joint work or shared practices that resulted in a change of attitude and beliefs of all teachers and the knowledge and skills of some teachers (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). The leadership support and resources provided through the PLC were the conditions teachers needed to grow and experience culturally responsive teaching practices. Several teachers mentioned that a gentle push or nudge from the principal to plan the PLC meetings helped them to attend the meetings and, as a result, to reflect on their culturally responsive competences.

PLCs require the leadership of the school to create conditions, routines, and practices that place learning at the center of teachers' work (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). PLCs envision schools as learning environments for teachers and students both, and thus PLCs rely on a community-centered perspective to promote professional learning within which teachers are supported in sharing and building on each other's knowledge (Bransford et al., 2000). Professional learning communities show promise as an evidenced based approach in which professional learning for teachers is situated (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), and yet leaders have to be intentional in the cultural responsiveness at the center of the PLC structures.

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Community Learning Exchange

A Community Learning Exchange is concerned with context and in working directly with constituents who are closest to the issues as they may have responses that the researchers cannot know or see. A study of Community Learning Exchanges (Militello et al., 2022) explored how a reimagined EdD program supports leaders to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective school and district leadership. The study conducted PAR methodology and employed inquiry that is conducted with people in an organization or community, but never to or on them (Cohen et al., 2018). The five axioms that guide CLE work are: (1) use local knowledge, engage in conversations and (2) dialogue as critical for relationships and pedagogy, (3) base conversations on assets and hopes, (4) view leadership and learning as social processes, and (5) model and authorize border-crossing (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016). These five axioms guided the project and study; by recognizing the historical and oppressive structural barriers for realizing culturally responsive leadership, I could move forward as the culturally responsive leader and teachers in the CPR team could join. Through feedback and authentic evidence from the CLEs, I used the qualitative analysis to build upon improving our teachers' knowledge to implement culturally responsive pedagogy that promotes equitable access to rigorous instruction. Next, I discuss the significance of academic discourse in this study.

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Academic Discourse

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Academic discourse is how teachers and students use communication when engaging in academic discussions. The use of academic discourse enriches all classroom interactions and supports deeper learning with culturally responsive teaching. In this section I discuss academic discourse as facilitating teaching and learning, the teacher's role in promoting academic

discourse, the five practice process to promote student to student dialogue, and the need for high cognitive demand.

Facilitating Teaching & Learning

Facilitating teaching in ways that support meaningful academic discourse among students can be a significant challenge. Teachers easily gravitate toward the traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) pattern in which teachers pose a question, a student responds, and the teacher evaluates the correctness of the response or otherwise provides feedback (Steele, 2019). One of the plans for the PAR study is to observe classroom teachers in relation to teacher initiation of questioning and student responses. The focus is on shifting from traditional Initiation-Reply-Evaluation (IRE), which is criticized for being "right answer" driven, factual, and yes/no oriented, to Initiation-Reply-Feedback (IRF), which can encourage more student reasoning and therefore mental processing and metacognition central to an expert's growing competence (Steele, 2019, p. 19). Likewise, Mehan and Cazden (2015) engaged in a study and analyzed that the shift implies a change from known information questions to information-seeking questions. The purpose of this shift gives engaging and sociable students the opportunity to strengthen their academic discourse skills, gain the ability to explain ideas in detail, and use evidence to support reasoning. The study revealed a shift in teaching practices from memorization and recitation to reasoning dialogue. Mehan and Cazden (2015) asserted that:

> A prominent goal of the reasoning game is to socialize students into academic discourse, that is, the genre in which ideas are presented (in written or oral form) in academic or scholarly contexts that privilege the analytical and the presentation of evidence to advance an argument (p. 20).

When teachers shift from IRE to IRF type structures, they move from known

information questions to information seeking questions, and students exhibit more complex responses using evidence-based reasoning (Bransford et al., 2000). "If minority students could be encouraged to take more turns at talking in classroom lessons, they could be better prepared to contribute more actively to the full dimensions of school life" (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 19). An important objective is to provide teaching and learning experiences for students through academic discourse so they can enhance their competency, develop the capacity for in-depth explanation of concepts, and demonstrate access to rigorous instruction.

The Teacher's Role in Promoting Academic Discourse

Developing student academic discourse empowers students to take ownership of their own learning, and significantly increases student engagement. When teachers are doing most of the talking, they are likewise doing the majority of the thinking, and the majority of the work in the classroom (Kagan et al., 2003). The role of a teacher in providing effective academic discourse is through less direct instruction. Students need the opportunity to adventure through the lesson on their own by following instructions from the teacher. This allows students to engage in academic dialogue with their classmates or individually figure out a solution for the problem. By building opportunities for students to engage in structured academic discourse in the classroom, students take on the work or learning of the classroom. The authenticity of academic discourse functions around structure and without the student dialogue component, it perpetuates inequality and fails to promote interdependence. Structured and well-planned strategies to provide academic discourse have the potential to empower students, ensure equity of voice, and push critical thinking (Triplett, 2019). Academic discourse needs to be clearly planned for, structured, and facilitated to maximize opportunities for students to talk. In the cycle of planning, teaching, and assessing, teachers might be tempted to focus on discourse primarily within the

teaching phase, but it is needed in all stages of lesson development. Shifting to a more discourse-centered classroom certainly means changing our interactions with students during the lesson and the teacher's role is critical to facilitating academic discourse.

The Five Practice Process to Promote Student to Student Dialogue

When using academic discourse in math classrooms, the Five Practice Process is a powerful planning tool that supports asking questions and steering discussions in mathematically fruitful ways during teaching (Steele, 2019). In the Five Practice Process, the teachers must plan for mathematics discussions by:

1. anticipating likely student responses,

2. monitoring student thinking while they work on the task,

3. select particular students to present their mathematical work to the whole class,

4. sequence the student responses that will be displayed, and

5. connect different students' responses to each other and connecting the responses to key ideas (Smith & Stein, 1998).

The Five Practice Process uses planning and monitoring to support stronger classroom discourse. Effective academic discourse practices create room for students to improvise within the lesson, so the student's creativity can be challenged within the group. The first step begins with teachers anticipating student thinking by noting the different approaches or lines of thinking that students might take with the task (Steele, 2019). "Advancing alongside monitoring student thinking is planning questions for student interaction. Planning questions in advance provides teachers with tools to get students talking to one another, and to the teacher, about their thinking as they are engaged in the task" (Steele, 2019, p. 7). The next two steps to the Five Practice Process includes strategically selecting and sequencing for the next academic task. During planning, teachers can

identify the type and order of solutions that they would like to share in a whole-class discussion to build a mathematical storyline that moves toward the instructional goal (Steele, 2019). Overall, this process allows teachers to be thoughtful and responsive to emerging student thinking around high cognitive level questioning and strategies, as shown in Figure 2. Decades of research (Carpenter et al., 2003; Lampert & Cobb, 2003; Michaels et al., 2008; Smith & Stein, 1998) show us that when students discuss and make mathematical meaning together, they learn more.

High Cognitive Demand Tasks

To engage students in high cognitive–demand tasks, teachers must pose purposeful questions that maintain a focus on student-generated strategies and mathematical precision (Mann, 2014). A high cognitive–demand task provides students with opportunities to wrestle with important mathematics by requiring them to make connections to mathematical concepts and to justify solutions and strategies rather than execute known procedures (Mann, 2014, p. 446). Teachers provide high cognitive–demand tasks while ensuring that shared ideas address important mathematics and maintain the focus on student thinking, not teacher thinking (Sherin, 2002; Smith & Stein, 1998). The level of questioning strategies provides teachers with the ability to develop and pose questions, so the lessons can engage students in tasks that target their thinking, call on students to communicate and justify ideas, and maintain cognitive demand.

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Literature Review Summary

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Access to rigorous instruction is not provided to all students due to the lack of knowledge and preparation of teachers, specifically their lack of cultural responsiveness. Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995) provided evidence of the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on
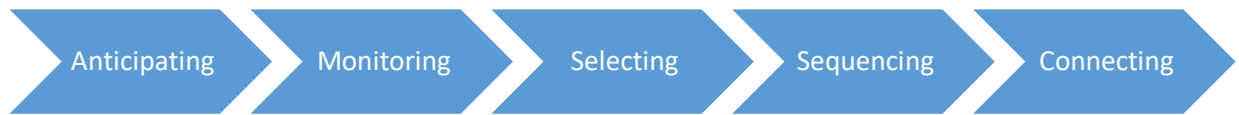
Figure 2. Five practice process to promote student dialogue.

student learning. Creating a culturally responsive environment makes learning more relevant and effective. This process starts with effective school leadership to ensure that CRP is designed in PLCs to allow for innovative teaching and means the leaders are providing opportunities for teachers to co-construct their knowledge and skills in a community with other teachers. We must realize that one's culture is the central point to learning and creating conditions for academic success for students from diverse backgrounds. The use of academic discourse provides an enriching culturally responsive learning environment that facilitates rigorous learning for all students. The three areas in my literature review, culturally responsive pedagogy, academic discourse, and the role of the leader, will inform the focus of practice for the PAR study and project.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I examined the extent to which teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase equitable access to rigorous instruction. As a result of engaging in Culturally Responsive Practices (CRP), the teachers expanded their capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and curricula in the classroom. In this chapter, I first provide the context of the study, then the use of participatory action research as the research design and methodology for the study, outline the research questions and action research cycles, and then provide detail about the data collection protocols and analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with limitations and validity of the proposed research methodology.

Context

The context of the study is South Mountain Middle School (SMMS) in South Mountain, North Carolina, which serves an urban community of approximately 410 students. The school consists of 95% African American students and staff, and 95% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. South Mountain Middle School has been identified as a low performing middle school for the last seven years, which means the academic achievement of students have not met state mandated proficiency levels and serves a high number of students who have been historically underserved and who have not had access to rigorous instruction. The teachers need consistent, impactful, and culturally responsive instructional practices that provide the students with equitable access to rigorous instruction.

Participatory Action Research

I used Participatory Action Research (Herr & Anderson, 2015) informed by activist research methodology to investigate the focus of practice. To achieve the intended results, I proposed to develop and expand staff members' knowledge and skills in culturally responsive

teaching, use the knowledge to examine the school's curricular and pedagogical practices, and implement those practices in the classroom. The Theory of Action (ToA) for the PAR study is: If a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group can co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices with intention to change teachers' practices, then the opportunity will increase for students to have equitable access to rigorous instruction.

Participatory Action Research is directed toward actions that promote social change and support researchers to engage in renegotiating power dynamics (hunter et al., 2013). Thomson (2002) states, "Doing justice is forever a daunting task and despite what appears to be insurmountable difficulties and obstacles, social justice reflects both the means and the outcome for each and every act of learning remaining unassailable" (p. 8). PAR works axiological with 'doing justice' by and for those oppressed by the practices that need changing (hunter et al., 2013, p. 8). The participants who are closest to this axiological approach are the teachers; they try different practices to honor our students' values and standards of education. My role as the facilitator of this study was to engage in conversations with the teachers toward promoting social change and culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Thus, the PAR used the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) methodology both to work with the persons closest to the problem to address the local issue (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016) and use the Freirean (1970) principles of equity, social justice, self-reliance, and liberator practices as the process.

McKernan et al. (1988) describes participatory action research as "a form of self-reflective problem solving, which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings" (p. 6). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2018), action research designs are systematic procedures completed by individuals in an educational setting with the purpose of gathering information to improve their practices. I selected participatory

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action research for this study because it provided us an opportunity to reflect and examine our own educational practices and systematically address the particular problem of how to raise the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction. Participatory Action Research can be applied to a wide array of problems and contexts; it can encourage change in a school, empower individuals through collaboration, position teachers and educators as learners, promote a democratic approach to teaching, and promote testing of new ideas (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). During the PAR study, it was key to identify problems, collect and analyze data, and implement solutions, so I could understand the change process and promising practices. In addition, collecting reflections was significant toward assisting our team in analyzing the root causes of the problems and inform our actions. Herr and Anderson (2015) found that, "action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (p. 4). The intention of this study was to use data to support iterative cycles of inquiry that addressed the PAR research questions and test the theory of action. This section includes a discussion of PAR and its supporting methods—improvement sciences, community learning exchanges, and the role of praxis. Then, I present the research questions and the PAR cycle of inquiry process.

Improvement Science

In the PAR study, we utilized the improvement sciences process (Bryk et al., 2015), and relied on the principles of networked improvement communities to engage together in the cycles of inquiry. As a group we implemented one of the improvement sciences processes, the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) improvement cycle as described by Bryk et al. (2015) and shown in Figure 3. "PDSA cycles are a basic method of inquiry that guides rapid learning and follows a logic of systematic experimentation common in scientific endeavors, now applied to everyday practices" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 121). The improvement sciences rely on networked improvement

Figure 3. Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle of inquiry model.

communities to help engage different stakeholders to build consensus and utilize different areas

of expertise to solve a problem. I used the five principles of the networked improvement

communities as described by McKay et al. (2017) throughout the PAR Study:

1. Understanding the problem - One of the network initiation team's most important

   tasks is to develop a theory of practice improvement. This means that team members

   must thoroughly investigate the problem they are aiming to solve (the problem of

   practice or the focal point of all the work of a NIC).

2. Learning The Method - The network initiation team must turn theory into action by

   learning and using improvement research methods. Network members, including the

   initiation team, should be well-versed and practiced in the methods used to test,

   analyze, and refine changes (which may be new tools, work processes, roles, norms,

   etc.).

3. Building The Infrastructure - In order to build a measurement and analytics

   infrastructure, the network initiation team needs to bring in practitioners with

   contextual knowledge of the system, people with research expertise about the

   problem to be solved, and analytics staff.

4. Sustaining The Work - The network initiation team is responsible not only for the

   above foundational tasks of the network's launch, but for creating the conditions to

   maintain its success and sustainability, which include initial leadership, organization,

   and operation activities.

5. Crafting The Narrative - The network initiation team is responsible for developing

   strong network culture, norms, and identity. Which means emphasizing on

collaboration, transparency, and the use and sharing of data for learning and

improvement.

This process provides a way to learn faster and to make educational institutions more effective,

efficient, and personally engaging.

Community Learning Exchange

During each cycle of inquiry, the CPR group participated in Community Learning

Exchanges (CLE). The CLE methodology employs an inquiry mindset that is conducted with

people in an organization or community, but never to or on them (Cohen et al., 2018). CLEs are

concerned with context and in working directly with constituents who are closest to the issues as

they may have responses that the researchers cannot know or see. The five CLE axioms guided

our work:

- use local knowledge,

- engage in conversations and dialogue as critical for relationships and pedagogy,

- base conversations on assets and hopes,

- view leadership and learning as social processes, and

- model and authorize border-crossing to cultivate the data collection process and
  inform the learning (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016).

I used the five axioms as a compass to guide my work and in preparing the CPR group for the

research project. The CLE provided authentic evidence to be used for qualitative analysis.

Role of Praxis

The role of praxis is an important part of the PAR study. Freire (1970) makes several

important assertions regarding the role of reflection; the first of which is that reflection will lead

the oppressed to their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. Freire (1970)

defined praxis as, "the combination of reflection and action, or the reflection leading to action" (p. 86). During the study, I designed activities to encourage praxis. Members were asked to reflect on past practices, including their prior knowledge of practices, and challenges with practice. As the facilitator, I designed and supported the space for the reflection and to guide us to action. The use of reflective memos played a significant part in the development of this study and allowed me to capture my thoughts and learning throughout the PAR study. Our team was able to use the reflection process to guide future PAR cycles, activities, and data collection. Throughout the PAR study a team of teachers engaged in discussions in culturally responsive practices to build consensus and identify ways to bring rigor into the classroom. The role of praxis provided evidence that helped us to address the research questions and test the theory of action. As an important part of the PAR study, we used the reflective exercises to expand our knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and to build on areas of improvement.

Research Questions

The research questions guided the project and study. The overarching research question is: How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction?

The sub-questions are:

1. To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?

2. To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?

3. How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?

In order to answer the research questions, I designed PAR activities that created a gracious space for individuals to reflect on their individual practices and philosophies, and to be open-minded to improvement. These PAR activities provided data to help me respond to the research questions. The qualitative processes included data collection, codifying, and categorizing data, and using the analysis to adjust throughout the study.

Action Research Cycles

The action research cycles occurred iteratively and simultaneously over the span of three PAR Cycles of Inquiry as described in Table 2. I utilized the PSDA Cycle of Inquiry model within the PAR Cycles of Inquiry. During the PAR Pre-cycle, I introduce the CPR team to the CLE protocols and engaged in activities to develop their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. We defined the focus of practice, examined the assets and challenges and built knowledge in culturally responsive practices. The teachers on the CPR team used the Project I[4] Framework to assess their knowledge base in academic discourse and culturally responsive practices. How the teachers identified their knowledge base in culturally responsive practices and academic discourse informed the starting place for the project and study. During PAR Cycle One, I used the data analysis from Pre-cycle to determine the next steps and PAR Cycle Two was determined by the data analysis from the previous activities in Cycle One.

During the next two inquiry cycles, participants implemented lessons plans; we observed classroom practices and documented practical measures. "Practical measures" are those that practitioners can collect, analyze, and use within their daily work lives (Shakman et al., 2017). The focus here was on collecting the right data that will inform the team that an improvement has occurred without overburdening them in the collection process. During this analysis,

Table 2

Three Iterative Cycles of Inquiry

Research Cycle	Time Period	Activities
PAR Pre-cycle	August – November 15, 2021	CLE protocols Project I^4 Framework
PAR Cycle One	January – April 2022	CLE protocols Analyze the data to inform next steps.
PAR Cycle Two	August – November 2022	CLE protocols Analyze the data to inform next steps.

participants raised questions to guide decisions about further implementation. Lastly, we decided

how to modify and fine-tune the implementation. During the action research cycles, I utilized the

PDSA cycle of inquiry model. The cycles allowed us to study trial efforts and then react in

evidence-based ways. The cycles, although relatively short, provided sound evidence and

implications for reflection and future actions, praxis.

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Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

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In this section I describe the process of selection of the Co-Practitioner Researcher Group

(CPR). The participants in the Co-Practitioner Researcher Group assisted me with the PAR study

and project. I describe the data collection protocols for this study and describe the data analysis

processes used. In the PAR study, we used multiple methods of collecting qualitative data.

Specifically, I used artifacts from the CPR meetings, observation notes, and reflective memos as

the key qualitative data instruments.

Co-Practitioner Research Group

The co-practitioner researcher group had a significant role in the PAR study because they

engaged in ongoing dialogue and reflected on the data analysis. A co-practitioner researcher

group offers a way to triangulate the experiences and data because they provide ongoing

responses to the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Gerdes & Conn, 2001). The primary focus

of the data collection were the individuals in the CPR group who participated in the meetings and

then transferred their learning to the classroom. In this study, individual classroom teachers were

the unit of analysis. The selection of the CPR group was completed with purposeful sampling,

which involved confirming, identifying, and selecting individuals who are knowledgeable or

experienced with an interest in increasing inquiry-based instructional practices (Creswell &

Plano Clark, 2011). I assembled a diverse participant group of teachers with varying years of

teaching experiences, different roles, and diverse racial, gender, and ethnic demographics. The participants willingly sought to improve the use of culturally responsive pedagogical practices in their classrooms, which are aligned with district instructional goals and provide equitable access to rigorous instruction. I facilitated collaborative CPR meetings once a month following IRB approval. Collectively, we engaged in the process and study the evidence from the product. We made decisions about co-generating effective culturally responsive pedagogical practices, transferring the practices to the classroom, and learning to reflect and use reflective memos. Secondly, I coached each teacher to engage in culturally responsive practices. When the teachers implemented culturally responsive pedagogical practices in their classrooms, I began observations and post-observation conversations.

Participants

The PAR participants were teachers at South Mountain Middle School. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), participants should be purposefully selected to help the researcher understand the problems and questions. I sought out participants with a common goal of willingness to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy and to co-generate effective teaching practices. This study focused on how teachers build their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in culturally responsive pedagogy and apply this pedagogy to their teaching practices. After approval of the study, they signed consent forms and were made aware that, at any time in the course of the study, they could decide to opt out of the project and study without any negative ramifications. A sample of this consent form is available in Appendix C.

Data Collection

In the early part of this qualitative field work I explored, gathered data, and began to allow patterns to emerge. This involved testing ideas, confirming the importance and meaning of

possible patterns, and checking out the viability of emergent findings with new data and additional cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the PAR study, I used multiple methods of collecting qualitative data. Specifically, I used artifacts from the community learning exchanges, documents such as CPR meeting notes, teacher observation notes, the Project I^4 Framework and rubric, and reflective memos as the key qualitative data as shown in Table 3.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools were consistently used to analyze data and inform the research study. Each tool was used as key qualitative data to provide evidence and respond to the research questions. In this section I describe the data collection method and how the tools were used in the study.

Community Learning Exchange Artifacts

The artifacts collected from the Community Learning Exchange played a significant role toward the data collection. During the CLE meetings, the researcher collected artifacts to code and analyze. The data was in the form of posters and notes that participants wrote, and drawings that participants made in response to prompts related to the research questions. During each research cycle, there was at least one CLE meeting with the CPR group to engage in culturally responsive practices. The artifacts collected informed the cycles of inquiry as we move through the PAR study.

Data collection documents consisted of the CPR meeting notes and agendas, as well as other meeting notes or agendas that were useful to inform the study. During each monthly CLE, we had an agenda and minutes recorded by a designee of the CPR group, as shown in Appendix H. These documents served as key qualitative data to provide evidence to support the following

Table 3

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Proposed Data Collection	Triangulation
To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?	• Community Learning Exchange artifacts • Documents	• Reflective memos • Member checks
To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?	• Teacher observation • Community Learning Exchange artifacts	• Reflective memos • Member checks
How do I, along with the CPR team develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?	• Reflective memos • Post Observation Conversations	• Member checks • Community Learning Exchange artifacts

research question: To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?

Teacher Observations

During the qualitative study, I engaged in classroom observations of our team members and engaged in conversations with the teachers to identify practices that provide equitable access to rigorous instruction. The teacher observations provided evidence of the teacher increasing their level of equity and rigor in the classroom. The observations provided evidence of how the teachers transferred the practices to classroom. Observations were my inquiry into how teaching practices generated effective learning and thinking with the use of culturally responsive practices. We created a classroom observation tool, and I took selective verbatim notes of the dialogue in the classroom. After the observation, I analyzed the notes and created initial codes to identify common themes and patterns.

Reflective Memos

Reflective memos are opportunities for written reflection about the research process (Argyris & Schön, 1984; Saldaña, 2016). I wrote a memo every week reflecting on my leadership and work with the CPR group members. The CPR team wrote reflective memos reflecting on the process of learning and using CRP strategies in their teaching practices. The teams' reflective memos guided us during our CPR meetings and our conversations during our post observation conferences. The memos are another tool of metacognition, which document our reflections about our thoughts, feelings, and connections after each CPR meeting or CLE with related theories, emergent themes and concepts, and other documents collected (Saldaña, 2016). These memos were intersected with other qualitative data and support the evidence for the PAR study.

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Post-Observation Conversations

Post-observation conversations served as follow up with the teacher after an observation was completed. I facilitated post-observation conversations with the teachers and used the coaching conversations protocol. Each post-observation conversation included evidence to support the teachers' development in culturally responsive practices. I coded the post-observation notes using a set of pre-established codes in four categories; those codes and categories have been validated by calibration by other researchers (Russell & Butler, 2020; Saldaña, 2016) and are available for review in Appendix F.

Data Analysis

This was a qualitative study, and I used the Grounded Approach Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as a methodology to analyze the data. The grounded approach theory usually involves meticulous analytic attention by applying specific types of codes to data through a series of cumulative coding cycles that ultimately lead to the development of a theory "grounded" or rooted in the original data themselves (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout this study, I analyzed documents, artifacts, and observational data. Coding was the primary way of analyzing qualitative data in the PAR study. This involved testing ideas, confirming the importance and meaning of possible patterns, and checking out the viability of emergent findings with new data and additional cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 179). Using Saldaña's (2016) coding method I moved from coding to developing categories to emergent themes and then themes, and finally developed assertions or claims as shown in Figure 4. As Saldaña (2016) indicates, "codes become categories/categories become themes/themes become assertions/findings and contribute to new theory" (p. 4).

Study Limitations

A main focus for the PAR study was that teachers collaborated on ways to provide rigorous instruction using culturally responsive pedagogical practices and, like any study, it has limitations. As the primary researcher for the PAR study and principal of the school, the setting allowed me to establish a place for an inquiry process of leadership and learning. The team discussions and conversations played a huge part in our learning. One limitation is that the potential members of the CPR team teach a similar subject area and they may receive limited perspectives from teachers in other subject areas. The sample size is small, and the findings may not transfer to the whole school. In addition, all members of the CPR team were hired under my leadership. As the lead researcher of the CPR team, I have a persuasive role as the building level administrator, which requires me to take special measures to ensure that all participants have given informed consent without any coercion or sense of obligation and that they understand we are all learners in this process. If at any time they decided to terminate consent, they could do so without reprisal.

Trustworthiness of Evidence

During the PAR study I observed similar themes across different settings to triangulate the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) illustrate a coding process to generate themes that emerge and then conduct member checks. Based on the analysis of evidence that was presented in our CPR team meetings and CLE's, we incorporated the new knowledge to develop themes and findings. Providing member checks with the participants created a gracious space of honesty toward the findings. Member checks and CPR meetings ensured the validity of data collection and analysis as were able to have ongoing dialogue regarding interpretation of the data and
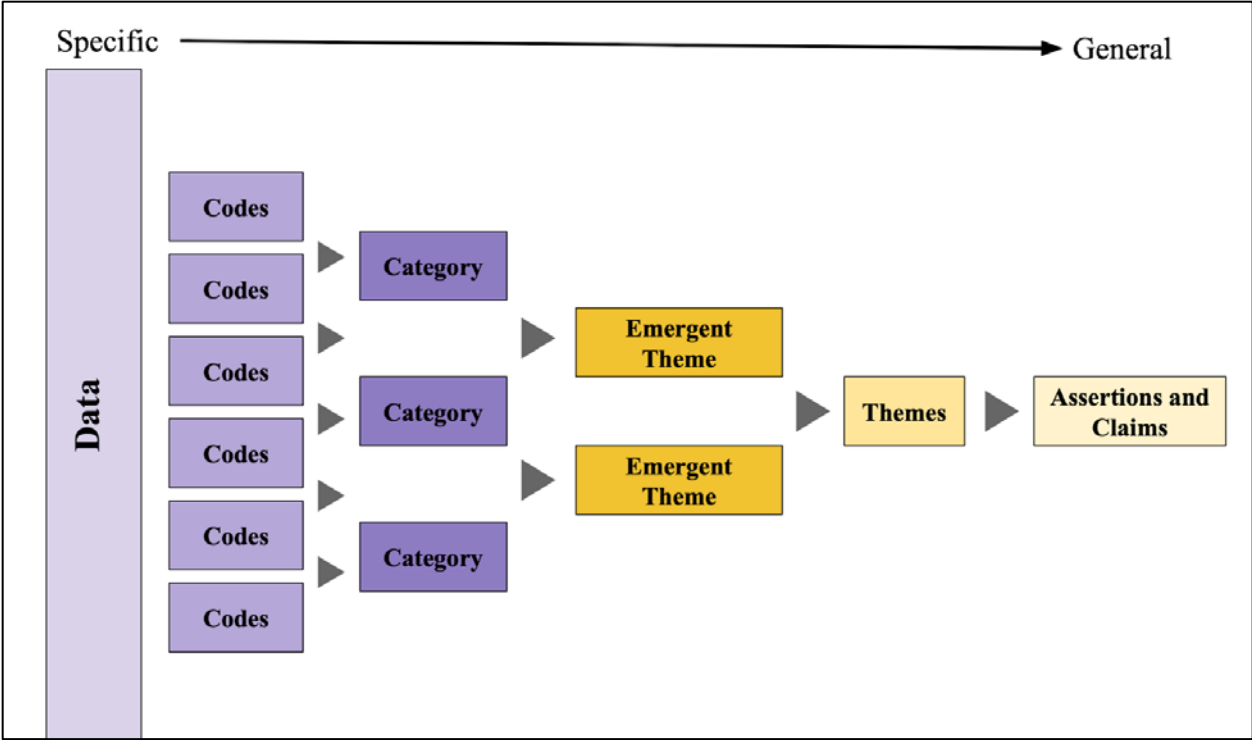
Figure 4. Data, codes, themes, assertions process.

create meaning together (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This allowed CPR members to internally validate the analysis and findings toward a new theory of action. The CLEs provided a foundational experience that helped me engage in deep and purposeful conversations to gain trustworthiness of the evidence. I utilized the CLE axioms and paid particular attention to the axiom, "trusting the people closest to the work to make decisions" and use their decisions to validate the findings. Therefore, I included the CPR team members in the triangulations of the findings. Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 126) This is a popular practice used by qualitative inquirers because of the use of multiple forms of evidence rather than a single data point and it eliminates any overlapping areas of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I utilized the reflective memos to adjust my leadership approach for the project as well as a method of triangulation of the evidence.

External Validity

I conducted the project and study within the school setting of a low performing middle school in Eastern North Carolina. The study may be generalized to the extent of work within South Mountain Middle School, and this can be viewed as a limitation of the study due to awareness of applying these study results with other teachers. External validity is the extent to which results of a study can be generalized as important to the world at large (McLeod, 2013). This is only one study in one district with one low performing middle school. Thus, while the process undergirding the study could be replicated in other schools or districts, the outcomes are not dependable across contexts. In this view, the extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations is determined by the people in those situations (Merriam, 1995).

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Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Throughout the PAR study the use of different perspectives played a huge role in providing patterns of factual evidence to follow besides researchers' biases. The participants in the study were site-based practitioners committed to enhancing their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy, so they can improve their teaching practices to increase equitable opportunities for our students. Selection of participants was based on work ethic, years of experience, and the impact they have on our students. While I believed that this diverse group of teachers would bring different perspectives, philosophies, and beliefs to the study, most importantly, they were open minded toward the evidence.

Each CPR member signed a consent form prior to participating in the study. My relationship with each CPR member was based on trust and the ability to have honest conversations about the evidence for the research project. The focus of the study is to shift teachers' practices using CRP principles and strategies in order to increase the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction. The participants in the study were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Data was presented in a non-judgmental way and used in a transparent manner with the CPR team. All appropriate consent for the study was in place prior to initiating the study. If at any time participants decided to terminate consent, they were able to do so without reprisal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the research design and methodology for the PAR study to answer the overarching research question guiding the project: How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? The CPR team participated in PAR methodology by engaging in three inquiry cycles, Community Learning Exchanges, and culturally responsive activities from the Project I[4] framework.

Reflection was an important asset I brought to the group as the lead researcher and leader of the school. The use of my reflections and the reflections of the CPR members was necessary to inform the PAR cycles, activities, and data collection. The overall efforts of the CPR Team repositioned our thinking during this PAR study, as we planned to increase equitable access to rigorous instruction for all students. In Chapter 4, I present the Pre-cycle process, data collection, and analysis that will take place in a low-performing, urban community Middle School located in North Carolina. The first set of data analysis was gathered by working with my CPR team that consisted of a group of teachers expanding their capacity to implement culturally responsive pedagogy, so they can promote equitable access to rigorous instruction for all students.

CHAPTER 4: PAR PRE-CYCLE

The purpose of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project and study was to examine the extent to which teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase equitable access and rigorous instruction. Specifically, the focus of practice for this study was how teachers engage in culturally responsive practices and transfer their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teaching practices. In this chapter, I describe the context of the project, the structure of the Co- Practitioner Researcher teams, the Pre-cycle activities, the codes, and codebook, analyze emergent categories from the codes that inform the next cycle, and finally, examine my role as a leader in the PAR study. I begin with the geographic, demographic, and economic context of the school and community. Next, I share the impact of the economic context and how these conditions create obstacles for the school and students. Then, I identify the equity warriors in my building that will serve on my Co-Practitioner Researcher team.

PAR Context

The context of the study was South Mountain Middle School (SMMS) which is one of six middle schools in the South Mountain Public School System. The school is the newest middle school and is in the city of South Mountain, North Carolina, near a revitalized downtown area and business district. The school is surrounded by several densely populated, low socio-economic neighborhoods, and serves an urban community of 410 sixth through eighth-grade students. South Mountain Middle School is located on Nashville & Bridges Streets, in the highest poverty area of South Mountain. The city of South Mountain has a high level of poverty, with 19.2% of families living below the poverty line, higher than the national average of 12.3%. South Mountain Middle School is a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school due to the high poverty rate of South Mountain. CEP provides breakfast and lunch at no cost to students.

The community demographics of South Mountain are split between the two counties of Nashville & Edgewater. In 2019, Nashville County, North Carolina had a population of 94,000 people with a median age of 41.7 and a median household income of $49,537. During the same period, Edgewater County had a population of 52,600 people with a median age of 41.7 and a median household income of $36,866. 81% of SMMS staff are Black-Non Hispanic, 15% White, and 4% are Middle Eastern. The staff of SMMS is relatively experienced, with 29% having taught for five years or less, 14% of teachers have taught between six and ten years, 14% of the staff have taught between 11 and 15 years, and 43% of the staff have more than 15 years of teaching experience. Staff demographics have changed very little in the last 3 years.

Co-Practitioner Researchers

In this section, I introduce the members of the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team. I chose to work with the CPR team because of my interest in supporting teachers with shifting their teaching practices toward equitable access and rigorous instruction. The CPR team consists of two teachers in 7th grade, one in 6th grade, one career and technical education teacher, and the Instructional Coach. I engaged in building relational trust and facilitated critical discussions centered around teaching philosophies and personal beliefs. During our CPR meetings, we assessed our knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy using the Project I^4 tools. The CPR team met bi-weekly as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and engaged in cycles of inquiry.

The diverse participant group consisted of teachers with varying years of experiences, ethnicities, and gender as listed in Table 4. The teachers in the PLC demonstrated an open mind, a strong belief in relationship building, and were willing to improve their teaching practices for the best of their students.

Table 4

Description of the Co-Practitioner Researcher Team

CPR Members	Gender	Race	Teaching Experience
Faye	Female	African American	2 years
Hakeem	Male	African American	7 years
Alanya	Female	African American	26 years
Stephanie	Female	White	3 years
Leon	Male	African American	20 years

Faye is a 7th grade Science teacher that began teaching in 2017 at an alternative school and came to South Mountain Middle School in 2018. Faye is an energetic African American female that has established a strong bond with her students and families. Faye is a member of our school student transition team, and the lead facilitator of our after-school tutoring and enrichment program. Faye has demonstrated the leadership skills to lead our school and students toward the vision and mission South Mountain Middle School has established. Her potential to provide relevant instructional lessons to grasp the interest of each student is evident and she is passionate about the Focus of Practice.

Hakeem is a 7th grade African American male social studies teacher. Hakeem started as an elementary school teacher in his hometown in Florida. He has experience as a Group Home Residency Coordinator and working as a Community School Facilitator in a high school in North Carolina. Hakeem has been at South Mountain Middle School for four years and has worked in several roles. Hakeem has served as an AVID teacher, Cultural Arts teacher, and as a Social Studies teacher. Due to his ability to engage students in culturally relevant teaching practices in many areas, Hakeem is considered an asset to our school. Hakeem is passionate about social justice and educating our students in their cultural values. Hakeem graduated from Florida A&M University as an African Studies History major. Throughout each role at SMMS he has incorporated his passion for cultural studies and reading and has assisted with effective culturally responsive reading strategies. Each year Hakeem conducts our yearly Black History Cultural program, which has impacted the school tremendously. Hakeem is a member of the SMMS leadership team, and a member of the ICare Program. Hakeem started a black male mentoring group in our school with our black male teachers and students. His dedication, and the way he inspires students and the staff, is an asset at each grade level.

Alanya is a 6th grade African American female English Language Arts teacher. Alanya has been at the school since its opening in 2014. Alanya has 26 years in education and worked as an elementary teacher before transitioning to SMMS. She was named the District Teacher of the Year in 2018. Alanya has held several leadership roles at SMMS, including as member of the Leadership team, student engagement committee, School Improvement Team, and a grade level chairperson. Alanya is an individual that strives to enhance her knowledge to help students and staff and has shown a strong interest in learning about culturally responsive pedagogy. She has established a strong relationship with her students and their parents. She uses her platform as the one of the district's Teachers of the Year to educate our teachers and students about culturally relevant topics that engage all students.

Stephanie is a white female that teaches Career Technical Education and STEM for all grade levels. She has been teaching for three years and all of her experience is at SMMS. Stephanie serves on our School Improvement Team, Leadership Team, Yearbook committee, and organizes the honor roll celebrations. Along with her many roles in leadership, Stephanie has organized a garden club for students. Stephanie created a partnership with community partners for several grants, allowing the students to experience gardening and other STEM activities. Her relationships with her students and parents are strong, and students come back over the summer to assist with the garden. Stephanie shows high expectations for all students, and she strives to motivate students and staff for excellence. She is originally from Newport News, Virginia, where she experienced her middle school and high school career in a setting with a high African American student population, similar to SMMS.

I am the Principal of South Mountain Middle School and was the facilitator of the PAR Study. I am an African American male that has served as principal of South Mountain Middle

School for six years. I transitioned from the alternative school in the district where I served as the principal for six years. I worked in the neighboring school district for 11 years as principal of the alternative school for three years, assistant principal of a middle school for five years, one year at the alternative school, and two years as a High School teacher. I have a passion to inspire, teach, and motivate students to their full potential. The opportunities of this PAR study aligned with my principles of supporting teachers with culturally responsive practices.

PAR Pre-Cycle Process

The PAR Pre-cycle process occurred during the Fall 2021 semester. During this process, I was learning how to facilitate Co-Practitioner Researcher meetings and how to code the evidence collected during those meetings. The CPR team met twice monthly to discuss ways of building relational trust and engaged in critical discussions centered in teaching philosophies and personal beliefs. Our CPR meetings included activities designed to encourage inquiry and dialogue about our philosophies and beliefs about what it means to be culturally responsive. I collected artifacts from meetings, including agendas, journey lines, transcriptions, and memos. I wrote reflective memos and engaged in conversations with each CPR member and my ECU coach throughout the semester. Next, I provide a description of the activities, the data collection, and an analysis of the codes. The details offer a vivid picture of what I did to develop the subsequent emergent categories generated from the codes.

Description of Activities

During our CPR meetings, we each reflected on our educational journey and acknowledged the differences in our past and current teaching practices. We began each CPR meeting began with defining the purpose of the meeting, reviewing the meeting norms, and engaging in Dynamic Mindfulness. We engaged in two protocols to encourage personal

reflection -- journey lines and personal narratives. During each reflection, we acknowledged the protocols as culturally responsive pedagogy. Sharing my personal experiences was a way to establish relational trust and model examples of culturally responsive practices for the CPR team to use in their classroom.

CPR members completed a journey line sharing their experiences in grade school, professional development as adults, as well as personal and familial experiences that influenced their beliefs of what it means to be culturally responsive. Each member acknowledged the similarities and differences in their teaching practices compared to how they received instruction. To ground our work in theory, I introduced a video, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* (Dessources, 2018). The video emphasized the importance of being culturally responsive in the area of student development. The PLC shared their definition of what it means to be culturally responsive. The CPR members selected quotes from the video that resonated with their practices and beliefs of being culturally responsive.

Data Collection and Analysis: Coding and Developing a Codebook

Next, I discuss the evidence collected in the PAR Pre-cycle and the coding process used to analyze the data. The data collected included artifacts and transcripts from the CPR meetings, journey lines, and personal narratives. I transcribed the CPR meeting notes, then coded the notes, personal narratives, and my reflective memos. I started a codebook as shown in Table 5, combined codes, and determined which codes were used the most. Next, I listed the number of times the code appeared and using those tallies to determine which codes were appearing most frequently and which might be outliers. Some of the codes were combined due to similar meaning. As I coded the evidence, I saw patterns in the codes which helped me to determine some emergent categories. I discuss the emerging categories in the next section.

Table 5

Code Book of a Par Activity: Journey Line of Pass Experience

Highlighted word / phrases	Round 1 & Round 2 Coding
Talking	Real-World Connections
Engaging activities	Engaging in Learning Engagement
Real world experience	Real-World Connections Real world experience
Lab experience	Engaging in Learning
Writing, taking notes	Writing Taking notes
Only child that wrote	Achievement Only Writer
Writing Notes on paper	Writing
Document by taking notes	Writing Taking notes
Memorization	Memorization Memorization
Lectures	Lecturing Direct instruction
Lecture	Traditional Learning Direct instruction
Videos and Technology	Use of technology
Teaching to	Direct teaching Teacher goals
Teaching Organizer	Teacher focus Teacher focus

Table 5 (continued)

Highlighted word / phrases	Round 1 & Round 2 Coding
Student Memory	Memorization Memorization
Experience Lectures	Direct Instruction Traditional Learning

Emergent Categories

Categories are supported by the analysis of the codes that emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2016). In the PAR Pre-cycle, the analysis of the data generated three emergent categories: (1) learning impacts teaching, (2) becoming a better educator, and (3) listening to students. These categories that emerged from the artifacts and transcripts from the CPR meetings centered around culturally responsive practices. I provided evidence to support the categories, which included CPR meeting notes, journey lines, personal narratives, and my reflective memos.

Learning Impacts Teaching

Learning impacts teaching is one category that emerged from the codes and explains why many teachers teach students in the same way they were taught. Many teachers teach in the same ways that they learned as students; therefore, their learning impacts their teaching. The evidence shows that the teachers in our CPR team were taught to be compliant as students, instead of engaging in "thinking out of the box" learning. Three out of five of the CPR members stated that their learning experience as students were centered around copying and writing notes and listening to lectures. Shown in Table 6, direct instruction that refers to lecturing and writing was indicated 10 or more times when coding the evidence.

One CPR member stated, "My overall experience was based on writing, taking notes, and "round robin" reading circles. Traditional teaching methods are focused on the teacher as the only source of information in the classroom. This involves face to face interaction, mainly from the teacher to student. Another CPR member said, "there was no opportunity for class discussions or talking with other classmates. I didn't have the opportunity to use my voice until I got to college." They defined traditional teaching methods as copying notes, listening to lectures, and being compliant. There was one CPR member that was taught in a nontraditional manner.

Table 6

Excerpt from Codebook Category "Learning Impacts Teaching"

Category	Codes	Frequency
Learning Impacts Teaching	Engagement	5
	Real World experiences	3
	Direct instruction	10
	Writing	11
	Memorization	8

This CPR member shared, "In high school, we did things with many animals and real-world experiences, and in college, we had more lab experiences. My teaching involves making science more interactive with more connection using real-world experiences." Two of the four teachers in our CPR group stated that they teach differently than they were taught. One CPR member motivates his students by reading books aloud and showing YouTube videos, using technology differently from how he was taught. While my overarching question is centered around how teachers can co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction, the evidence from the codes shows that half teach how they were taught, in a traditional manner. Two out of four teachers teach how they were taught; one CPR member believes in allowing her students to express themselves through writing and taking notes and demonstrating her lectures visually with power point presentations. The other CPR member believes in teaching how she was taught with engaging activities with student interactions with real world connections. On five different occasions the terms "memorization" and "lectures" were used in reference to past learning experiences. Each CPR member asserted that teaching and learning should not be centered around memorization and lectures. Three out of four CPR members are not using lecturing in their teaching. These findings inspired me to explore the question, "How can traditionally trained teachers be equipped to embed culturally responsive pedagogy in their lessons?"

Becoming a Better Educator

Another emergent category from the codes, as shown in Table 7, is that the CPR teams' beliefs of how to promote culturally responsive practices first started with reflecting on ways to improve oneself and how to help others. With a total of six times, these phrases were used in our CPR meetings by teachers planning to become better educators by improve their practice,

Table 7

Excerpt from Codebook Category "Learning Impacts Teaching"

Category	Codes	Frequency
Becoming Better Educator	Improve your practice	6
	Reflect your practice	6
	Adapt to change	6
	Being better	5

reflecting on their teaching practices and adapting to change. Improving starts with adapting to change and reflecting on how to improve to promote effective learning. CPR members stated, "This makes me reflect and know some things about myself, that I don't need to get content in one space," "You can have all this knowledge and not know how to use it if we don't better ourselves," and "Think outside yourself. Think globally, but better yourself."

On five different occasions the term "better" was used in reference to the participants improving their teaching practices to reach all their students. Examples of these phrases are "Something we can do better," "I want to be better for your brother and sister," and "I learn how to educate better." One teacher shared after viewing the TED talk video, she was inspired to reflect on her educational practices. She stated, "I'm moving forward to make sure that I'm reaching all of my students to be more culturally diverse. I would like to change their mindset, so when they go out in the community, they can help others change their mindset as well to make them feel like 'okay. I can be this way, but I can be educated when I talk.'" Culturally responsive teaching is something that is not easy to do in a classroom, it requires intentional planning for oneself, and adapting to change for students and the school community (Lomos et al., 2011). Again, during our personal narrative, one teacher stated, "You can have all this knowledge and not know how to use it if we don't better ourselves." It's evident that our CPR team is passionate toward impacting our students inside the classroom and preparing them for the future. They are willing to reflect on their knowledge, skills, and dispositions and change their learning methods to promote culturally responsive practices.

Listening to Students

Another emergent category was that our team agreed upon was that getting to know and listening to our students is a huge factor of promoting culturally responsive teaching. When

defining culturally responsive teaching, the team stated that culturally responsive teaching is generated from knowing your students, knowing who they are, and knowing their culture**.** Four of the five CPR members used the action verb "supportive" to describe being culturally responsive as providing support for the students by listening and showing interest. What emerged in the codes for this category, shown in Table 8, was that support was described using the following terms: listening (*n*=6) and interest (*n*=7). One teacher stated:

In education, relationships are everything; that's the first step of support, and a lot of times our students may not be able to connect with the content, but it's up to us as educators to reach out to them to help them make that connection and if we don't know their interests, it's gonna be difficult for us to get them to connect.

One CPR member shared that during his short time in educations his instruction has changed because he listens to his students. He stated, "I build off of what the students tell me by listening to their feedback, noticing their interest of what I can do better." It was evident that our team agreed that getting to know and listening to our students is a huge factor of promoting culturally responsive teaching.

Reflection and Planning

During the Pre-cycle, I reflected on my practice as facilitator of the PAR study. I noticed that my reflective memos articulated several emotions of feeling uncertain and wanting to be transparent. I stated in my memo, "Selecting my CPR team has been a back-and-forth decision. I am worried about who's going to stay employed at my school during the PAR study due to the need for some staff members to complete their licensure requirements." These feelings of uncertainty became more evident in the memos at the beginning of the process, and I decided

Table 8

Excerpt from Codebook Category "Listening to Students"

Category	Codes	Frequency
Listening to Students	Supportive	9
	Listening	6
	Interest	7

as the leader of this study I had to model the expectations for the CPR team. Terrell and Lindsey (2018) articulated:

> regardless of personality or leadership styles, the principal should articulate and model their own vision of what a successful school ought to look like and communicate their beliefs and vision to staff, students and parents. The role of being a culturally responsive school leader starts with reevaluating myself as school leader. (p. 19)

In my second memo I wrote," I decided to be more transparent with the participants because I will need them to be honest with their responses." One member of the CPR team emphasized the importance of leadership amongst the group by setting the example for our students and our team. Reevaluating my thoughts and actions after each CPR team meeting assisted me in monitoring my growth as a culturally responsive leader.

The process of coding taught me to observe details and evidence, instead of making assumptions or predictions of themes and categories. During the first revision of my code book, I labeled codes with limited details to describe "what it looks like" or explain "what's going on to determine this code." After completing a second round of coding, I was able to identify "listening to students" as the category and "interest" and "support" as the codes. After examining my code book, I noticed that my codes were not specific enough to support my categories. The codes I selected should have provided details of what the "category" looks like to determine what was going on for me to make that determination of a code. I had to pay closer attention to the small details and supporting evidence when coding in order to identify the codes rather than assuming or speculating at the themes and categories.

CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE ONE

In the Participatory Action Research Cycle One, I facilitated conversations with the Co-Practitioner Researcher team as they reflected on their beliefs and actions of what it means to be a culturally responsive teacher. I collected and analyzed data based on the focus of practice: *Using culturally responsive practices to increase the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction.* As a result, we identified effective culturally responsive teaching practices. In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of Participatory Action Research (PAR) Cycle One by describing the process of PAR activities and evidence, a timeline of the CPR meetings, and the analysis process. I describe the themes that emerged from the coding process and respond to the research questions. Finally, I reflect on my leadership learning and detail next steps for PAR Cycle Two.

PAR Activities and Evidence

The co-practitioner research (CPR) members (n=5) and I participated in PAR activities from February to April 2022. I designed the PAR activities to create a gracious space for individuals to reflect on their individual practices and philosophies, and to be open-minded toward improving their teaching practices (Aguilar, 2020). I collected data from the CPR meetings (*n*=3), including agendas, personal narratives, reflective memos, and transcriptions using Jam board and Google documents, classrooms observations (*n*=2), and one Community Learning Exchange. During PAR Cycle One, I designed activities to provide data to respond to the PAR study research question: (1) To what extent can teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of culturally responsive practices?

Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) Meetings

Community Learning Exchange (CLE) protocols were a major pedagogy used during the CPR meetings to generate discussion. We collected evidence during the meetings for the data collection. Each member, including myself, wrote a reflective memo after each meeting. I wrote reflective memos after informal conversations with staff members. During our first CPR meeting, the members participated in a Jam board activity to define culturally responsive teaching. Next, they compared a research-based definition of culturally responsive teaching with their own definitions. Finally, each CPR member rated their dispositions as a culturally responsive teacher using the Project I^4 framework (Tredway et al., 2019). Each member shared a culturally responsive teaching practice they used in their classrooms. To conclude the meeting, each member shared one idea they learned during the session, one way they were implementing CRP practices, and one strategy they would like to know more about moving forward. Their reflective responses assisted me with generating ideas for the next CPR agenda.

During the second CPR meeting, I explained the process for conducting informal observations. First, I utilized the "What I Notice & Wonder" protocol and practiced selective verbatim notetaking to observe culturally responsive teaching practices for the observations. During the CPR meeting, I led a discussion about the observations. My purpose for these informal observations was to acknowledge culturally responsive teaching strategies and prepare the team members to co-develop a formal observation tool based on the informal observations. Next, I invited the members to write reflective memos about their experiences using culturally responsive practices. Then, the CPR members collectively discussed their responses using these questions: (1) What is your overall focus or objective to support what is needed for culturally responsive teaching practices? and (2) What improvements or changes do you need to do to

improve your teaching practices moving forward? I used the CPR team's responses and feedback to fully comprehend what the team had learned and what they needed to know, as well as create the agendas for the upcoming CPR meeting. Next, I discuss the evidence from PAR Cycle One and the coding and analysis processes.

Evidence

I collected artifacts throughout PAR Cycle One, including CPR meeting agendas, personal narratives, reflective memos, transcriptions from a Jam board and google document, and observations. I recorded and transcribed the CPR meeting notes and created a coding document for each member with specific and general codes. I conducted this process of coding twice to generate a list of primary words or phrases. The reflective responses from the CPR Team shown in the Table 9 indicate the CPR team's highlighted phases and the assigned codes: know your students, building relationships, making connections, and embracing diversity. In addition, the team indicated that being more culturally aware of students' needs is an area of improvement for their teaching practices. I continued the same process for each CPR meeting, adding new codes and refining previous codes. I coded the all the artifacts to determine which codes were still appearing most frequently and were similar to other PAR activity codes. The codes that frequently appeared were building relationships with a diverse group of students (17 times or 22%), embracing diversity (16 times or 20%), and knowing your students (14 times or 17%). These are shown graphically in Figure 5. Once the codes were refined, I was able to identify patterns and group the codes into categories. Categories are supported by the analysis of the codes that emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Next, I describe the emergent themes and supporting categories.

Table 9

PAR Activity Reflective Responses to Questions

Question	Highlighted word / Phrase	Code
What's your overall focus or objective and what's needed for culturally responsive teaching practices?		
	Have a focus in striving to build background knowledge of students	Know your students
	I plan to increase my efforts to build relationships	Building Relationship
	A focus to shine light on the various contributions of other cultures	
	Embracing Diversity	
	My focus is on building relationships with my students and making connections with them	Building relationship
	Another focus for culturally responsive teaching is making connections with the students	Making connections
	Learning about the different cultural backgrounds of students	Knowing your students
What improvements or changes do you need to do to improve your teaching practices moving forward?		
	I am becoming more aware of culturally responsive teaching	Cultural awareness
	Knowing my students background and prior knowledge is a weakness	Knowing your students

Table 9 (continued)

Question	Highlighted word / Phrase	Code
	I plan to improve by having a much broader prospective on diversity	Embracing diversity
	How to include various cultures in the lesson	Embracing diversity
	I am going to reframe from my biases	Adapting
	I need to become more aware of culturally responsive teaching	Cultural awareness
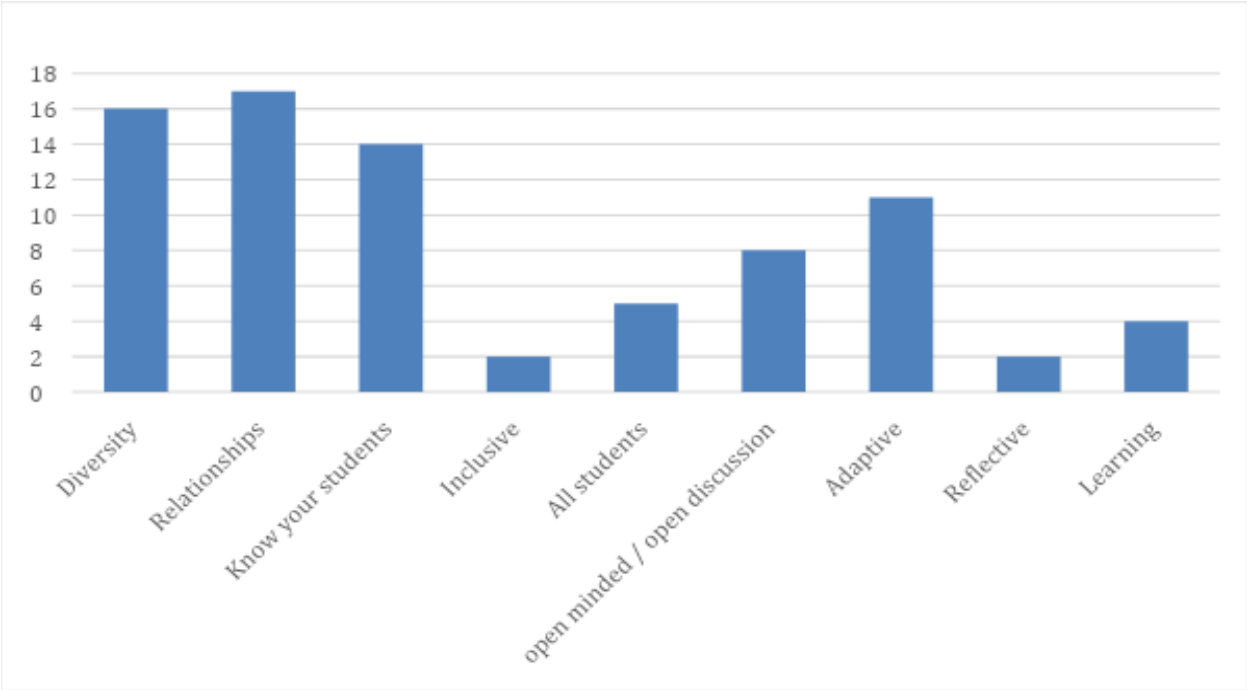
Figure 5. Frequency of codes throughout the PAR activities.

Emergent Themes

The two themes that emerged from the analysis in defining culturally responsive teaching were (1) building an intentional relational bond and (2) utilizing practices that embrace diversity. Figure 6 shows the development of two emergent themes that developed based on our inquiry to define what culturally responsive teaching looks like. Building a relational bond means that teachers are more intentional about building and sustaining relationships with students; those relationships are foundational to effectively engaging in culturally responsive teaching. The primary factors that teachers indicated were necessary included making personal connections and creating a welcoming and inviting classroom. Secondly, teachers needed to utilize practices that embrace diversity -- diversity in the student identity as well as diversity in the curriculum and pedagogy.

Building an Intentional Relational Bond

Culturally responsive teaching starts with building an intentional bond with students. Ladson-Billings (2006) says, "Good teaching starts with building good relationships" (p. 136). The CPR group consistently described the importance of the relational bond with students as an intentional relational bond they have to build and sustain with students, and based on that bond, know what motivates their students to do better and can act as warm demanders of students (Simon, 2019; Ware, 2006). The importance of building an intentional relational bond was further defined in two categories (1) making connections and (2) welcoming and inviting learning environment.

Making Connections

During the PAR Cycle One activities, our CPR team agreed that building intentional relational bonds involves making connections with students. Making connections meant to
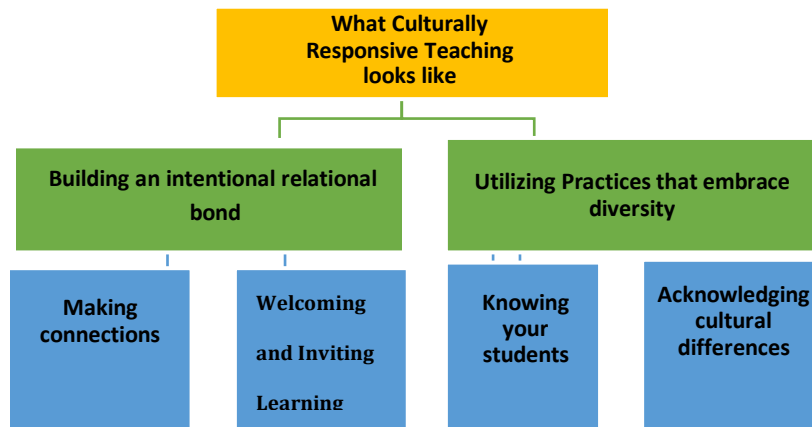
Figure 6. Two emergent themes: Defining culturally responsive teaching.

teachers that they should build relationships and show interest in their students' lives. The codes that emerged consistently for this category are building relationships (22 times or 65%) and showing interest in students (12 times or 35%). Making connections meant building an intentional relationship with students and developing an understanding of student individual interests and background knowledge to support learning. Until students connect with their teacher, then the student will not engage in the content. Thus, these two factors are intimately intertwined.

Building Relationships. During PAR Cycle One activities, the CPR team consistently used the term, building relationships, meaning building an intentional relational bond with each student. Building relationships emerged as a code 22 times or 65% throughout the PAR activities. Using the Project I[4] framework to rate their teacher disposition in using culturally responsive practices (Tredway et al., 2019), the teachers highlighted building relationships as a key disposition of successful culturally responsive teaching. They rated building relationships as the highest importance for all culturally responsive practices and rated themselves in general as moderately inclusive. Teachers believed that truly knowing their students in deep and meaningful ways was foundational; however, they still knew that they could grow in this area and were seeking to be fully inclusive.

Showing Interest. The second most common code that supported the practice of building an intentional relational bond was showing interest in students, meaning knowing their background knowledge, interests, and learning style. When teachers show an interest in students' lives they have more success with instruction because the teachers can use that knowledge to frame the instructional program. Showing interest emerged 12 times or 35% throughout the PAR activities. The CPR team expressed that students give their best to teachers who show interest in

them. Ruth, who serves as an instructional coach for our school, says her beliefs about students come from her teaching experience and what she observes from classroom walkthroughs. She stated that "In education, building relationships is everything and the first step. If we don't even know our students' interests, then it's difficult for us to bring them in to relate to some of the content that we teach every day." All of the CPR members rated building intentional relationships as a significant factor in their use of culturally responsive practices.

Some of these examples of showing interest in students included centering teaching strategies around students' interest and listening to students' feedback. Hakeem, a seventh-grade social studies teacher, shared that he developed his lessons by listening to the feedback of his students and adjusting his lessons to reflect the students' interest. Faith stated:

A lot of times our students may not be able to connect with the content, but it's up to us to make that connection by showing interest in the student, but if we don't know their interests, it's going to be difficult for us to get them to connect.

The CPR team agreed that showing interest in students is a huge factor of promoting culturally responsive teaching. They connected showing an interest as a factor in intentionally creating and sustaining relational bonds with students to promote culturally responsive teaching.

However, the teachers noted challenges. Faye, a 7th-grade teacher of the CPR team stated:

We can all try to make connections with our students, but all students will not be open to building a relationship. We must understand that some students may have prior trauma that hinders them from being open with others, so this is the importance of building a relationship.

Obviously, making connections through showing interest is developmental and may take time. Students have had multiple experiences in life and in school that cause them to question the authenticity of teachers; therefore, teachers need to keep making the effort to connect to the students and adapt their teaching to what they know about the student's interests, backgrounds, and learning styles.

Welcoming and Inviting Learning Environment

When defining culturally responsive teaching, the evidence supported that creating a welcoming and inviting learning environment is an essential component of building an intentional relational bond. The teachers displayed their beliefs about creating a welcoming and inviting learning environment to promote culturally responsive teaching by the motivational visual messages displayed on the classroom walls and the classroom atmosphere having in terms of greetings and specific teacher actions.

Motivational Visuals. The CPR team has a strong belief that using visuals such as quotes, pictures, or classroom mottos is effective in creating a welcoming classroom setting and motivating their students to learn. The discussion about the use of visuals to create a learning environment and to build student relationships occurred 15 times or 42%. Figure 7 provides examples of the motivational visuals that were displayed in the classroom. Stephanie stated:

> Your classroom learning environment must set the tone to motivate and make students feel welcome to express themselves to learn. Starting with our actions of inviting the students into the classroom and providing motivational visuals that express our beliefs of the students to make them feel welcoming toward learning.

One revealing example of a teacher using a motivational visual was when Faith shared that she

Figure 7. Classroom motivational visual images.

used one of quotes as a question to ask her students: How are you going to be a better person today than you were yesterday? Faith stated, "By using what the students see and believe creates a motivation for them to do better each day." Teachers believed that the motivational visuals created a safe and welcoming space for students but did not observe many examples of the use of visuals in teaching or refer to them during their lessons.

Classroom Atmosphere. The data from the classroom observations provided evidence of what teachers currently think and enact as a welcoming and inviting classroom. During PAR Cycle One activities, the CPR team expressed the importance of using classroom observations to observe the teacher's actions in creating the learning environment. Two descriptors were most common during the CPR team's classroom observations: inviting and respectful learning environment. The word inviting describes a learning environment that means creating an environment in which the students to feel comfortable to learn. The word respectful ($n=7$) describes a learning environment that demonstrates precisely what the teacher does or says to make the students feel comfortable to learn.

To support an inviting and welcoming physical environment, I observed designated seating areas in each CPR member's classroom where students could work together or independently in a comfortable space. Some of the CPR member's classrooms provided music while the students entered the classroom and while the students worked to create a calm working environment. In terms of specific teacher actions, all CPR members greeted their students entering the room and started their lesson with an overall welcome to the class. A few CPR members used one of the classroom-displayed motivational quotes to illustrate their learning objective for the day. To connect with their students and foster a friendly learning atmosphere, the CPR members used the quotes as inspiration for the day's teachings.

Blackburn (2017) stated:

When considering ways to create a classroom environment that is inviting to students,

there are two areas to observe that form a classroom that will be welcoming and inviting

for all students: building a relationship and creating a physical environment. (p. 9)

We observed both areas and feel confident that the classrooms were inviting and welcoming.

Next, I explain a second theme about how we learned to use practices that embrace diversity.

Utilizing Practices to Embrace Diversity

When teachers defined what culturally responsive teaching looks like, they

acknowledged that they must embrace the diversity of the students to be fully culturally

responsive. They identified these factors as critical to diversity: (1) teachers need to get to know

their students by learning the background of the students, and (2) teachers must acknowledge the

cultural differences of the students in the classroom.

Knowing Your Students: Building Background Knowledge

Background knowledge intersects with prior knowledge; in constructing prior knowledge

about a student's life and experiences, the teacher should want to know the student's

background. However, in the learning theory, background knowledge is that knowledge that

teachers draw on regarding what they think students have previously learned in school. Prior

knowledge, on the other hand, is what students bring to the classroom because of their familial

and cultural experiences. "Work on cross-cultural differences demonstrates that the environment

in which a person lives matters; people construct their perceptions by drawing on their prior

learning experiences, including cultural ones. Teachers need to tap both in order for learning to

occur" (National Academies of Sciences, 2018, p. 25). Strong, culturally responsive teaching

starts with teachers being knowledgeable about their students' prior knowledge so they can plan

effectively to meet their students' needs. The evidence suggests that knowing your students (*n*=14) is defined as knowing the background of the student so you can adapt as a teacher to their cultural needs. Thus, teachers needed to adapt teaching practices as noted (13 times or 43%) in the data and presented in Table 10. When defining culturally responsive teaching, the CPR team stated that culturally responsive teaching is when you know your students, know their culture, and adapt to who they are.

During PAR Cycle One activities, the CPR team expressed that the teachers needed to adapt their teaching practices to the cultural needs of the students once they know their cultural background. When teachers build background knowledge of their students and adjust of their teaching practices by incorporating student's cultural interest; this motivates students to excel. The CPR team expressed that their knowledge about culturally responsive teaching has helped them adapt their lessons. Hakeem shared that during his short time in education his instruction has changed for the better of his students. Hakeem shared that he listened to his students' feedback and incorporated some of their interests in the classroom. Hakeem was able to implement culturally responsive practices that embrace the diversity of his students through poems, music, and personal narratives as a way to express their culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that if students' home culture, interests, and values are incorporated into the classroom, students are more likely to experience academic success.

Acknowledging Cultural Differences

Teachers acknowledging the students' cultural differences to better understand students is culturally responsive teaching and is a practice to embrace diversity. During the CPR meetings there were discussions about the classroom learning environment and teachers wanting to build

Table 10

Excerpt from Codebook: Knowing Your Students - Background Knowledge

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Utilizing Practices to Embrace Diversity	Knowing your students by building background knowledge	Adapting teaching practices	13
		Seeing what motivates students	6
		Cultural awareness	11

their skills of acknowledging the cultural differences of students in the classroom. The triangulation of our CPR meeting discussions and the observation notes highlights the need for implementing more strategies to embrace differences as a way to understand students' culture. Teachers must acknowledge the cultural differences that students bring to the classroom, so they can meet the learning needs of all students. Table 11 shows that the codes that emerged consistently for this category were awareness of cultural diversity (n=18 or 38%) and being inclusive (n=17 or 35%). Acknowledging the cultural differences of students first starts with the teacher's awareness of their students' cultural background and then identifying ways of being inclusive.

Awareness of Cultural Diversity. A teacher's awareness of their students' cultural diversity was identified as a key factor to utilize culturally responsive teaching practices to embrace diversity. Diversity was summarized as acknowledging cultural differences and co-existing with various people's different beliefs, ideas, and practices. Teachers who are unaware of the cultural diversity of their students are limiting their opportunities of acknowledging the students' cultures in the classroom. The evidence showed the teachers were aware they must honor the diversity of the students. During the PAR activities the code awareness of cultural diversity emerged 18 times (38%) and showed that the CPR team was aware they must honor the diversity of the students. The CPR members shared their limited ability to demonstrate teaching that reaches their students' cultural needs in the classroom. The CPR team specifically reflected on their awareness of cultural diversity as a way to promote culturally responsive teaching practices. Stephanie, a STEM teacher, and a member of our CPR team shared:

Being aware of cultural diversity to me means being proactive by getting to know your students when it comes to learning about the different students' cultural backgrounds. My

97

Table 11

Excerpt from Codebook: Acknowledging Cultural Differences

Theme	Category	Codes	Frequency
Utilizing practices that embrace diversity	Acknowledging cultural differences	Awareness of Cultural Diversity	18
		Celebrating various cultures	8
		Co-existing with various people	5
		Being Inclusive	17

teaching disposition as a culturally responsive teacher is my strength due to being able to

connect with my students regardless of our cultural differences.

Stephanie's class created a garden that allowed students in STEM classes to plant and manage

the growth of plants and vegetables. During a PAR activity, Stephanie shared that she learned

that a large majority of her students have a lot of gardening experience. In listening to her

students Stephanie became culturally aware that her students spend most of their time with their

grandparents doing things such as gardening, but this strength had not been acknowledged in the

classroom. The CPR team concluded that they are aware of the importance of paying attention to

the cultural diversity each student brings to the classroom.

Being Inclusive. The CPR members were open to discussing suggestions for teaching

strategies to be more inclusive in order to acknowledge students' cultural diversity. Being more

inclusive means creating ways to embrace their differences and cultures. Students feel more

comfortable and motivated toward the learning environment when the value of their culture is

acknowledged. Gay (2002) stated," that the skills to stimulate learning in all children means

having the awareness about different cultural backgrounds that include norms and values of other

cultures which acknowledges the contributions of different ethnic groups in society" (p. 57).

When coding the PAR activities, the code, being inclusive, emerged 17 times (35%). The CPR

team expressed their concerns of not being inclusive of the various cultures in their classroom.

When CPR members were asked how they celebrate Hispanic, Arabic, and White cultures in

their classroom, fewer answers were compared to the celebration of African American culture.

South Mountain Middle School is a majority African American school. The school's dominant

culture is centered around African American culture, and there is limited cultural

acknowledgment for our Hispanic, Arabic, and White students. Hakeem, a 7th-grade social

studies teacher and member of our CPR team, expressed his feeling of neglecting the cultures of

his Hispanic and Arabic students, specifically not acknowledging, and celebrating various

cultures throughout the school year, except for the African American cultures. Hakeem

implemented a culturally responsive protocol that allowed his students to express their opinions

of their culture in an emulation poem. Hakeem stated:

> The poem, *I come from a place,* allowed me to understand and have the awareness of the
>
> different cultures of my students. I had a level of relationship with my students at first but
>
> allowing the students to express their true feelings allowed me to have a better awareness
>
> of their cultural needs, so I can make the adjustments to be more culturally responsive.

Hakeem followed up by selecting music in the classroom that included Latino and Arabic music.

This adjustment resulted in Hakeem learning from his Latino and Arabic students that their

culture has never been recognized in their classes. The dominant culture of Hakeem's classroom

was centered around providing culturally relevant materials centered around urban hip hop

music. He said, "I see all of our students listening and enjoying the sound of urban hip hop

culture music, but now after playing a different culture of music in my class, I wonder did all the

students love the hip hop culture music?" Ladson-Billings (1995) stated:

> The goal of equitable education is not to help students learn to adapt to the dominant
>
> culture of the school. Instead, the goal should be to help students develop a positive self-
>
> image and to learn how to embrace differences in others. (p. 25)

Hakeem implemented more culturally responsive practices to be more inclusive of the interest of

his students. The evidence suggested a strong belief from the teachers that having an inclusive

learning environment is a significant factor to promote culturally responsive teaching.

Summary

Building relationships and establishing procedures that embrace diversity are crucial elements of developing culturally responsive practices, according to the themes of the PAR study. Because of the deliberate relationships that our CPR team has built with students, teachers have had the chance to hear from students about the topics that interest them, which then helps them develop engaging lessons and classroom environments that inspire students and meet their needs. Knowing about students' prior learning enables teachers to make effective plans to address their requirements. This is the foundation of effective culturally responsive teaching.

The necessity to embrace diversity has been apparent over the course of the previous two PAR cycles. Teachers must employ strategies that value diversity, including diversity in the curriculum and pedagogy as well as diversity in the identities of their students. In supporting cross-cultural conversations, a person's environment matters, and people form their views by drawing on their prior learning experiences, including cultural ones. Although teachers acknowledged that having a deep and meaningful relationship with their students was a core skill, they recognized room for improvement. Students do not typically engage with the material until they establish a relationship with their teacher. Since the teachers can use this knowledge to structure the instructional program for equitable access to rigorous instruction, transferring culturally responsive teaching practices that foster relationships and use practices that embrace diversity would have greater success with instruction.

Implications for the PAR Research Questions

During the PAR study the two emerging themes aligned with the research questions. The two themes that emerged are: (1) building an intentional relational bond and (2) utilizing practices that embrace diversity. The overarching question guiding this study is: *How can*

Table 12

Research Questions Intersection with the Themes in PAR Cycle One

Research Questions (sub-question)	Alignment of Themes
To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?	The data analysis indicates that CPR members have a strong belief that embracing diversity and building relationships is needed to successfully implement culturally responsive practices. This belief has informed their knowledge, skills, and disposition of using culturally responsive practices.
To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?	I designed PAR activities that created a gracious space for individuals to reflect on their individual practices and philosophies, and to be open-minded toward improvement. I modeled embracing diversity and the importance of relationships; and teachers are implementing strategies in the classroom. We have not yet to see how this increases access and rigor.
How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction?	The data analysis indicates that 2 teaches are transforming their practices to be more culturally responsive. The initial observations and debrief data provide evidence to support this claim.
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?	My own development as a culturally responsive leader has been transformative by modeling and being more transparent and intentional in the discussions.

teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? Table 12 illustrates the research questions in this PAR study and the intersection of themes. The evidence shows an intersection between the research questions and the themes.

Throughout our CPR meetings I observed the CPR members developing their knowledge and skills toward using culturally responsive practices. The CPR team acknowledged and demonstrated the importance of building a relational bond with students as a priority in their teaching practices. The team was open to implementing new teaching strategies to continue to build relationships with students and to increase equitable access to instruction. The CPR team has acknowledged the need of being more aware of the cultural diversity of the students and acknowledging students' cultural differences to increase equitable access. The PAR activities continued to provide data to help me respond to the research questions and help teachers continue to explore ways to be more culturally responsive. Our next step in the PAR study was to engage in culturally responsive practices, so we can demonstrate how to increase equitable access to rigorous instructions for students. We identified the needs and improvements in moving forward. Additionally, the data analysis and findings will assist me in my leadership in the next cycle of the PAR study.

Leadership Reflection and Action Steps for PAR Cycle Two

Throughout this PAR Study, my leadership changed; I gradually became more transparent and open-minded toward sharing personal experiences with my CPR team. I experienced a difficult adjustment in shifting from the evaluator or supervisor role to supportive researcher practitioner and partner. Having the patience for teacher development and understanding the study was a challenging process. As school leaders, we present new things to

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our staff to learn, buy in, and expect them to complete the task. In the Pre-cycle, I expected the CPR meeting and PAR activities to expeditiously accomplish the goal of the team's understanding of the process. During this process, I had to share more of my personal experiences, facilitate discussions, and provide reflections to receive a deeper understanding for the study to move forward.

My skills as a researcher-practitioner have developed by modeling the PAR activities, analyzing the data, and making adjustment for the PAR study. I shared my emulation poem during one of our CPR meetings and one staff member used this tool in his classroom. When the class presented their poems, the teacher invited me to appear as a special guest to present my emulation poem to the class. The class had to critique and reflect on the words and tone of my poem. This level of transparency allowed the teacher and students a deeper understanding of my personal life. I made a connection with my students. For example, they learned where I am from and that I have two daughters. The PAR activities and use of modeling have provided the CPR members with resources and protocols to use in their classroom, which resulted in them giving me great feedback.

My development as researcher practitioner included my ability to analyze the notes from a discussion and look for any triangulation with codes from the reflective memos and observation notes. The new skills allowed me to conduct a meaningful post conferences with the teachers. Leading post conferences with evidence provided a more effective process toward supporting teachers in their development. In order to continue supporting the teachers with culturally responsive practices, I reflected on a teacher's practice during one particular post-conference. The PAR Pre-cycle is aligned with PAR Cycle One because I noticed we were demonstrating teaching practices that motivate our students but were focused on a dominant

culture and needed to provide more teaching practices that embrace diversity for an inclusive learning environment.

Implications for PAR Cycle Two

The analysis from PAR Cycle One suggested two emergent themes are needed to establish culturally responsive teaching: building an intentional relational bond and utilizing practices that embrace diversity. We worked on developing our skills to create teaching practices that are culturally responsive and build upon the work of the two themes. Our next step for PAR Cycle Two was to observe classrooms and co-generate culturally responsive teaching practices that promote an inclusive learning environment and that increases the level of rigor in the classroom.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

After reflection and analysis of the data I prepared for PAR Cycle Two, the team analyzed the observation notes presented and then determined the culturally responsive teaching practices and the level of rigorous instruction. I continued my coaching stance to support and guide the team with any issues that could potentially deter our goal of culturally responsive teaching and increased opportunities for rigor. Our team continued to identify the priorities that should be displayed in the classroom to embrace diversity so culturally responsive teaching is evident. The team created an observation tool to determine what was needed in the classroom to show what culturally responsive teaching looks like. I was eager to see how I would lead and support my teachers as they adjusted their teaching practices and to analyze the data I collected in the cycle. This was an area of development in my leadership, and I learned to provide more evidence-based decisions to guide our school and instruction.

CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I detail the evidence from the PAR Cycle Two and discuss the findings from the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project and study. I conducted the PAR study in a middle school in an urban community in North Carolina. The school had been designated as a low-performing school for the prior seven years and serves a large number of children who have been instructionally underserved. I formed a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team of four teachers and an instructional coach, and we co-created a learning environment in which we could engage in dialogue and co-generate culturally responsive pedagogical practices that address rigor in the classroom.

The findings are based on evidence from a three-cycle inquiry process. In the Pre-cycle (September-December 2021), we built relationships and developed our knowledge and skills in culturally responsive teaching. Based on the evidence, I identified four categories: making connections, creating a welcoming and inviting learning environment, knowing your students, and acknowledging cultural differences. In PAR Cycle One (January-April 2022), we engaged in practices and protocols that supported teachers to become culturally responsive. Two themes emerged from the evidence: Teachers built intentional relational bonds and teachers utilized practices that embraced diversity. The two emergent themes provided anchor points to further examine and collect additional evidence to understand the overarching research question: *To what extent can teachers develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?*

In PAR Cycle Two (August-October 2022), the teachers deepened their knowledge, skills, and dispositions of culturally responsive teaching by developing an observation tool based on their values, beliefs, and experiences related to rigor. They continued to recognize the

importance of relationships and utilizing instructional practices to embrace diversity as critical to culturally responsive teaching and creating rigor in the classroom. The evidence of PAR Cycle Two fortified the PAR Cycle One themes. Then, I analyzed the data from the three cycles to determine these findings:

1. Teachers require appropriate learning conditions that foster their development as adult learners.

2. Creating rigorous instruction for students is a developmental process for teachers.

3. Teachers transfer their learning to practice when they have opportunities for peer dialogue and input on observations processes.

In the timeline of the PAR study's three cycles of inquiry over eighteen months, I outline the categories in the Pre-Cycle, the emergent themes in PAR Cycle One, and the fortified themes from PAR Cycle Two that are the foundation of the findings (see Figure 8).

I begin this chapter with a description of PAR Cycle Two. I describe the PAR activities in four phases: (1) co-constructing five components of rigor in the classroom, (2) analyzing lesson plans using the five components for rigor through the Critical Friends protocol, (3) engaging in peer and principal observations, and (4) co-creating an observation tool using the five components of rigor. Then I describe the key findings of the PAR study. I conclude with how the findings helped me to understand the overarching research question with specific attention to the sub-questions: (1) To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor? (2) How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? (3) How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?
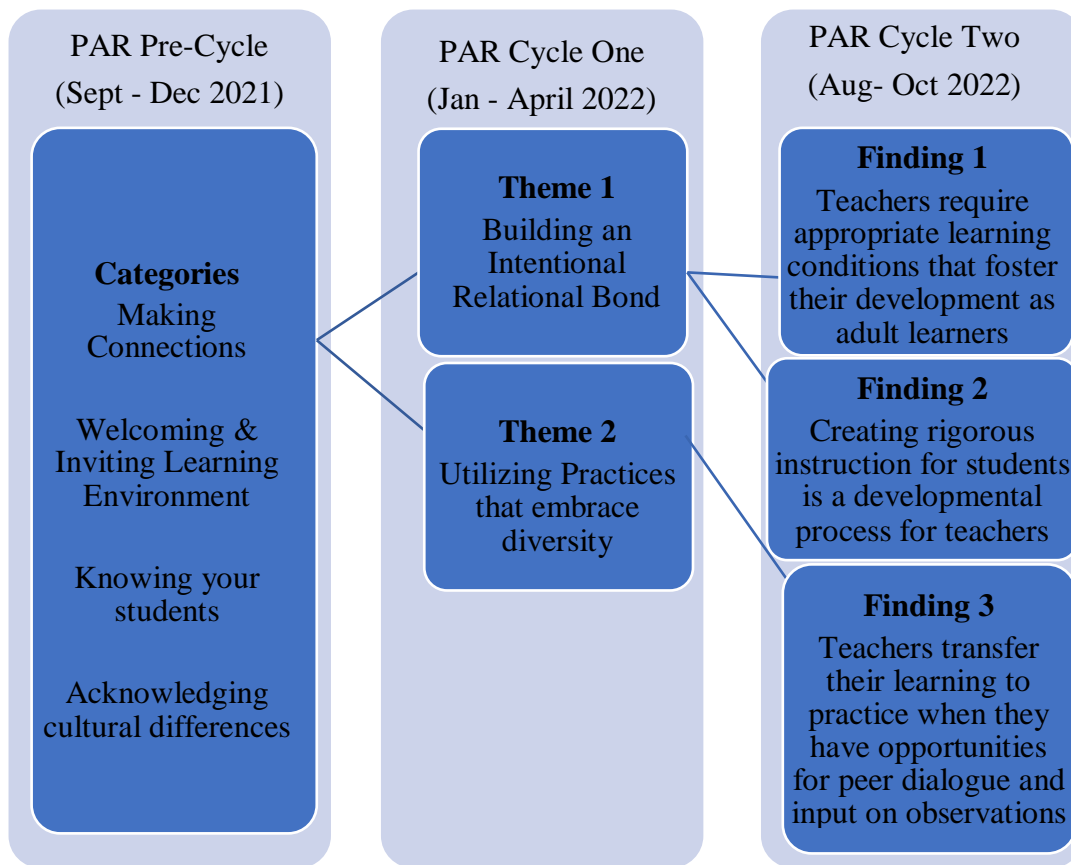
Figure 8. Three PAR cycles of inquiry resulted in three findings.

PAR Cycle Two Activities

In this section, I describe the PAR Cycle Two process in which the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team and I engaged. I provide a timeline of PAR Cycle Two, including the four phases, and the key activities. In addition, I describe how the four phases led to the co-construction of the five components of rigor and the observation tool that the CPR team co-created and used to conduct peer observations and have discussions about the meaning of rigor and the need for continuous improvement in their instructional planning and implementation.

PAR Cycle Two Timeline

During PAR Cycle Two (August-October 2022), I facilitated five CPR meetings, and the team and I conducted and analyzed a total 12 classroom observations (see Table 13). I facilitated PAR activities during each CPR meeting which consisted of personal narratives, member checks, Critical Friends' protocol, and group discussions. Then, I analyzed data from the PAR activities, including agendas, personal narrative responses, reflective memos, field notes, rubrics and tools, feedback forms, observation notes, and conversation debrief notes. I describe how the CPR team engaged in a four phase process within PAR Cycle Two.

Phase 1: Co-Constructing Components of Rigor in the Classroom

During the first meeting (August 29, 2022) the CPR team reviewed the emergent themes from PAR Cycle One to acknowledge the team's efforts and progress on the PAR study. The review served as a member check by receiving input on the emergent themes and helping to guide the next phases. As we transitioned into the opening activity, we centered our focus on the research question: *To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?* The CPR members responded to a personal narrative about defining rigorous instruction. The CPR team wrote about their personal experiences engaging in a rigorous lesson

Table 13

Par Cycle Two: CPR Team Activities

Activity	Aug. 29 - 31	Sept. 5- 9	Sept. 12- 16	Sept 19- 23	Sept 26 – 30	Oct. 3 – 7	Oct. 10 – 14	Oct. 17 – 21
Meetings with CPR (*n*=5)	*	*			*	*		*
Observations Round 1 (*n*=6)				*				
Observations Round 2 (*n*=6)							*	

from two perspectives – as a student and as a teacher; each member described their learning styles and their teaching practices with evidence of rigor. The team created a chart to document the shared qualities of rigor, highlighted the common qualities, discussed any qualities that were not mentioned, and added them to our team's chart. When establishing the components of rigor, we developed a collective understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of the group. Two themes that emerged from PAR Cycle One, relationships and embracing diversity, were named as key components of rigor. The CPR group shared evidence of how the components were a part in their teaching practices. In support of the themes, one CPR member stated that relationships and diversity were the foundation of rigor: "Having a good relationship with your students, knowing how they learn, and having knowledge of diverse cultures promotes rigorous learning for all students."

During the first activity, I shared a definition of rigor (Jenkins et al., 2011); rigor is evident through the observation of a number of essential components: content acquisition, critical thinking, relevance, integration, application of concepts, long-term retention, and student ownership of the learning. However, aside from student ownership, these elements were connected to content and did not include the key elements we had identified as preconditions of implementing rigor – relationships and diversity. I shared an example of the four priority components of rigor in the classroom (The Teachers Academy, 2020), which included relationships with students, high expectations, differentiation, and options for assessment. The CPR team discussed each quality of rigor and compared those definitions with the research-based definition and priority components.

During the second CPR team meeting, the CPR team established examples of what the components of rigor should look like in a culturally responsive classroom. I facilitated a

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discussion with the CPR team to determine the similarities between the components and their values. The team's strong relationships helped to further the discussion as we agreed to five components: collaboration, differentiation, diversity, relationships, and critical thinking (questions). In particular, we clarified that we needed to be specific about diversity and that embracing diversity was important to the group when identifying rigor. They shared ideas about other elements as key actions that might demonstrate rigor. For example, critical thinking required teacher questions that communicate higher levels of cognitive demand (Cawn, 2020). Figure 9 shows the number of times the team stated the need for each of the five components. The two components of collaboration and relationships were identified the most often (n=10 or 24%), and the two components of embracing diversity and providing critical thinking questions (n=8 or 20%) were second highest in defining rigor. Differentiation was an important component of rigor and was mentioned five times in the discussion. We used these five components to identify rigor in classroom observations.

Phase 2: Analyzing Lesson Plans Using the Five Components of Rigor

During our third CPR meeting (September 7, 2022), I facilitated the Critical Friends protocol (see Appendix J) with the CPR team; each member shared a lesson plan that had evidence of the five components of rigor and the other members identified the evidence of rigor in the lesson. The Critical Friends protocol, which requires warm and cool feedback to the presenter, was effective because we had created intentional relational bonds in the Pre-cycle and had established relational trust. We gave each other constructive feedback and heard different perspectives so that each member could improve the lesson. Having a group engaged in a critical thinking process such as the Critical Friends provided an opportunity for the members to hear different perspectives and led to improvement in their teaching practices; most importantly,
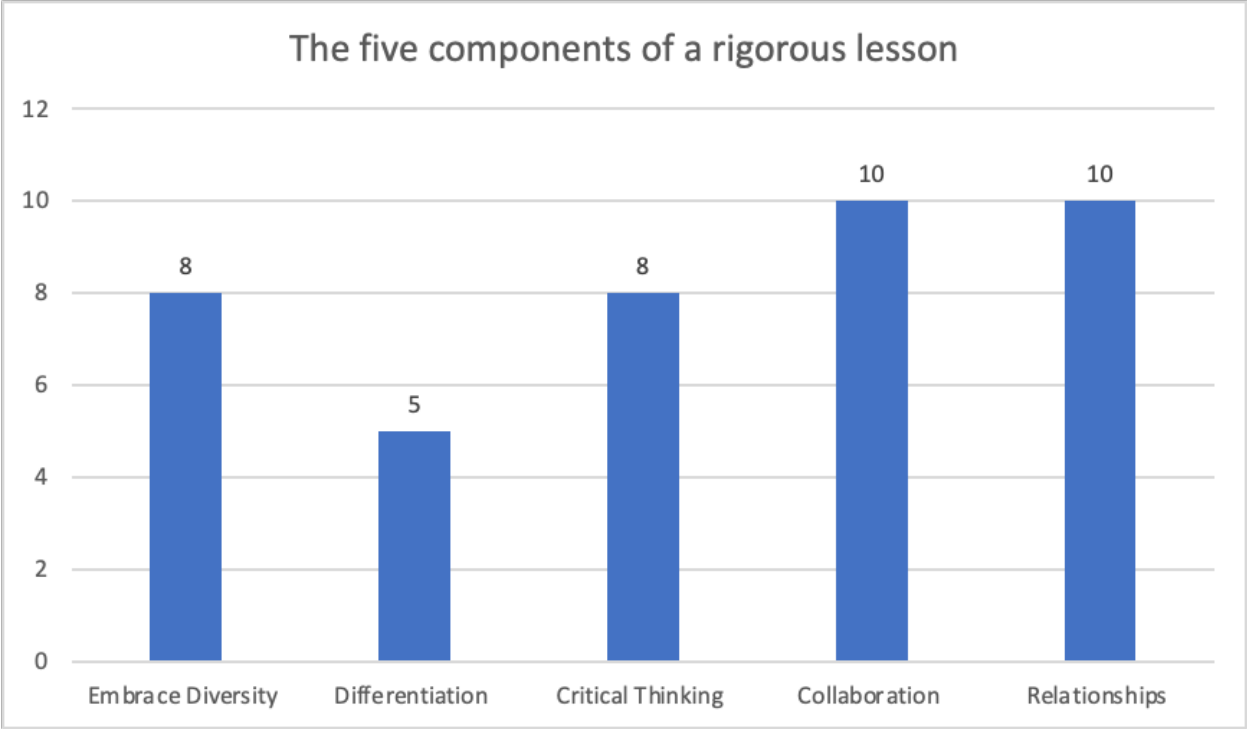
Figure 9. Five components of a rigorous lesson.

they acknowledged growth in their learning. Each CPR member had the chance to receive feedback on the lesson planning and consider which components of rigor the lesson needed to focus on most. Members modeled strategies for developing rigor and received suggestions on how to increase the level of rigor. Next, we conducted another CPR team meeting to plan for classroom observations and collect evidence of the five components of rigor.

Phase 3: Engaging in Observations

Before the fourth CPR meeting, the CPR team and I conducted classroom observations among the CPR team (n=6). We created a draft observation template using the five components of rigor. Each team member observed another CPR member's class looking for evidence of rigor. During the fourth CPR meeting, the CPR team participated in an activity in which each member looked for evidence in the observational data of one of the five components. Each member elaborated on the evidence they collected. The team's perspective was critical in defining the components of rigor and identifying the evidence. Ruth, one of the CPR members, looked for evidence of the component of critical thinking. Ruth stated, "Asking critical thinking questions provided opportunities for students to think out of the box without the need of the teacher to think for them. I observed Stephanie's class, and she had the critical thinking questions posted but didn't use them." Stephanie said that she was not sure that her students could handle the level of critical thinking questioning due to their lack of knowledge of the content. Although the teachers had identified critical thinking questions as an important component of increasing the level of rigor in a classroom, this example of a teacher's concern about student capability was a factor in teachers taking the risk to ask more complex questions and know how to scaffold student responses to support their thinking.

The CPR team felt that collaboration was needed to promote rigor, but, initially, there was not much evidence of student collaboration during the observations. The CPR team had defined collaboration as an opportunity to engage in academic discourse by working with various people, hearing different perspectives, or demonstrating the ability to express their ideas or interests; however, collaboration was planned but not generally observed in the classroom observations. Teachers always highlighted the importance of collaboration when asked to define the components of culturally responsiveness; however, enacting their espoused beliefs about rigor was more difficult (Argyris & Schön, 1984). As the leader, I realized that, while we could talk about improving our classroom practices and had established the professional conditions for change, the next step for teachers was more complicated than I perhaps had realized. As a CPR team, we used the evidence from the observations to discuss the qualities of each component, the descriptions of each component, and what type of lesson and learning environment successfully demonstrates each component or rigor. Then we used this information to construct an observational tool.

Phase 4: Creation of an Observation Tool

During our fifth CPR meeting, (October 4, 2022), the CPR team co-developed an observation tool with a detailed description of each component of rigor (see Table 14). We added a section in the tool to write observation notes and script teacher and student actions. The descriptions of the five components of rigor in a classroom we developed were collaboration differentiation, (embrace) diversity, relationships, and critical thinking questioning. We used the tool to identify evidence of rigor in the instruction.

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Table 14

Descriptions of the Five Components of Rigor

5 Components of Rigor	Collaboration	Differentiation	(Embrace) Diversity	Relationships	Critical Thinking Questioning
Description of the components	An opportunity to engage in academic discourse by talking with various people to hear different perspectives or express ideas or topics of interest.	Finding different ways to adapt teaching practices that motivate and challenge students according to their learning styles.	Creating an inclusive learning environment that shows cultural awareness.	An intentional bond with students that allows the teacher to make a connection with the student and provides a welcome and inviting learning environment.	Providing opportunities that enhance the student's ability to speak, listen, and to learn different perspectives or cultural differences.

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After analyzing the evidence of the observations, we learned that not all lessons demonstrated all components of rigor; therefore, during the next round of observations, we opted to look for evidence of specific components of rigor in the lesson. Next, the CPR team developed attributes of each component of rigor and used the attributes to analyze the observation notes for evidence of rigor. During the week of October 18-20, 2022, the team used the tool for our last round of observations (n=6). We developed a tool to analyze the classroom observation notes. Because the team contributed to the creation of the observational tool, they demonstrated ownership and teacher agency.

As we engaged in the process of developing the tool, what was obvious is that we were using the five components of rigor that we co-created in our professional learning. In Figure 10, I present the tool we used to observe teaching practices, and the highlighted areas are the adult experiences during the CPR meetings. Throughout the entire PAR study, a crucial step for teachers included experiences in rigor that we wanted to emulate in the classroom. We had strong relationships in which we recognized diverse perspectives. We were in professional collaboration with autonomy and agency to observe others and used the process we had learned in Critical Friends to offer warm and cool feedback. Often, we had peer partners for short discussions to express our thoughts and bring ideas back to the full group. We were working on a complex task – co-constructing an observation tool – that required us to ask critical and higher order questions. Finally, because we were adjusting to each teacher's level of readiness, we were differentiating feedback and expectations, but maintaining our commitment to rigorous professional learning. For example, in modeling how to differentiate, at the start of each meeting, I asked metacognitive questions about what they had learned and practiced from the prior meeting; they had sufficient think time to reflect in writing and then discuss.

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Component	Circle the Attributes of what you observed Highlighted areas = adult experiences in the CPR group.	Name the evidence you observed.
Collaboration	● Allow students to ==stop periodically to engage in academic discourse== with their neighbor and effectively transition back to the lesson. ● Engage students in ==working together to be useful to each other== in finding their own answers without using the teacher. ● Construct student groups to ==challenge the communication and social skills of the student with different peers==. Arrange the appropriate time allowed for students to effectively collaborate.	Observation notes:
Differentiation	● Provide ==a variety of activities that empower students to shape their learning== (including open-ended responses, student-generated questions, and student-generated learning targets) ● Evidence of prior procedural knowledge that fosters the students learning styles. ● ==Using equitable questions strategies== to find different ways to challenge each student according to their strengths and weaknesses.	Observation notes:
Embrace Diversity/ Content Relevance	● ==Provide examples== that the students can connect to and aligns what they are learning to standard and day-to-day life. ● Gives students o==pportunities to express their thoughts and ideas== that align with the relevant topic to generate class discussion. ● ==Construct or co-construct additional information about the topic== that teaches the students a better understanding of the importance of considering the topic from different perspectives. (Ex. Wide open questions)	Observation:
Critical Thinking Question	● ==Engage in questioning that allows students to draw different conclusions from the same topic, image, or lesson.== (Examples: Open-ended questions) ● ==Provide a variety of activities== that empower students to speak, listen, and display critical thinking with interactions. (Socratic Seminars, Philosophical chairs) ● Evidence of student-generated high-ordered questions that facilitate class discussions into multiple questions/answers that students respond with complete sentences. (Personal Narrative Writing or student expression through Exit/Entrance Tickets)	Observation:
Relationships	● ==Evidence of strong rapport== is established between the teacher and students to effectively motivate and challenge each child. ● Use equitable techniques that redirect students back on task effectively or motivate them to participate in the discourse.	Observation:

Figure 10. Highlighted sample of the observation tool.

They set learning goals for the meetings, and I used the reflections at the end of each meeting to set goals for the next meeting.

While the teachers did not yet fully transfer rigor practices to classrooms, we had designed and implemented a cohesive and rigorous process for engaging in critical dialogue and reflecting on our processes that we could continue to use to build our professional capacity. As I discuss the findings from this study, we recognize that we still have work to do, but the foundation for a different kind of teacher professional learning is in place.

Findings

The teachers who participated in the PAR study enhanced their knowledge of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and co-designed an observational tool to support shifts in their teaching practices. The participatory action research project and study present a potential model of change for shifting teacher practice relative to culturally responsive teaching and academic rigor. When teachers engaged in conversations about practice, they had the opportunity to co-develop processes and observation tools that supported improvement. The process of co-developing a tool supported teacher agency as competent professionals and helped to create an authentic learning community (Woods, 2010). Three findings emerged and were supported by the evidence from the three cycles of inquiry: (1) Teachers require appropriate learning conditions that foster their development as adult learners; (2) creating rigorous instruction for students is a developmental process for teachers; and (3) teachers transfer their learning to practice when they have opportunities for peer dialogue and input on observations processes. The findings are represented in Figure 11 and described in the next section.

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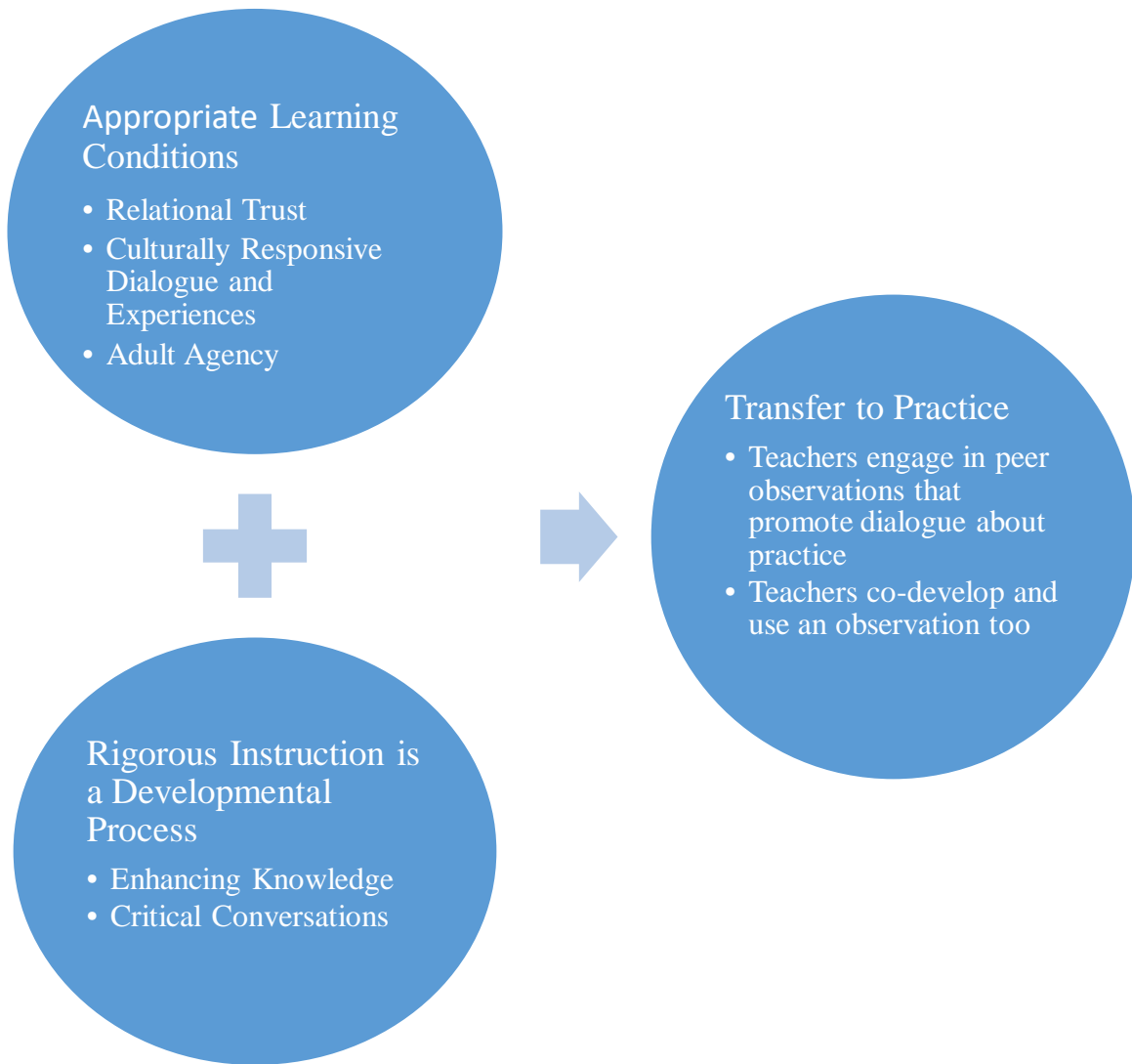
Figure 11. The PAR study findings.

Appropriate Learning Conditions

Establishing conditions for adult relationships and learning supports teachers in developing the knowledge and skills to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. Adult learning conditions, like the best student learning conditions, include establishing relational trust, participating in dialogue to bring in divergent viewpoints, and sharing experiences to build knowledge, skills, and agency (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The CPR team members were able to start implementing culturally responsive protocols and practices in their classrooms as a result of participating in effective adult learning. Building new adult muscles for changing practice is like exercise – happening slowly over time with repetition and guidance. Ng and Leicht (2019) characterize the process of abandoning old practices to adopting new practices as a journey of dilemmas in the space between abandonment, which means giving up familiar, and adopting, which means charting new territory. They report that concentrating on the process and not the content of the change is critical for adults in the change process; hence the conditions for adult learning are critical.

The CPR meetings provided a space to establish and foster adult learning conditions that supported the development of the members' culturally responsive pedagogical practices. The process provided opportunities for the team to conduct classroom observations and analyze evidence of practice together; a key factor in conducting peer observations is that the person most likely to be supported is often the observer (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005). The CPR team members reflected on instructional practices, engaged in honest conversations, and were eager to implement new practices. However, at times, they hesitated to fully implement what they had discussed and decided; that hesitation is a part of the learning process for adults as well as students when trying to accomplish new ways of working. Through this process, we

established adult learning conditions that were intentional, trusting, respectful, caring, and trusting (Drago-Severson, 2012) so that they could be secure and learn.

Relational Trust

An extensive body of work) characterizes relational trust as a pivotal feature for the efficacy and sustainability of change through action research in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Bryk et al., 2010; Lingard et al., 2003; Malloy, 1998; Wenger, 1998). The learning conditions fostered in our CPR meetings strengthened the relational bonds between teachers. Our team developed a level of trust by believing in one another's expertise and the capacity to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies. This degree of trust allowed the participants to engage in critical feedback on their teaching practices. As a result, this group of individuals were better equipped to improve their teaching practices. By building relational trust over the first two cycles of inquiry, the CPR members were prepared to collaborate and accept constructive feedback. While leading this study, I identified how adult learning conditions encouraged the CPR team to support the development of strong relationships which value everyone's perspectives. "The role of the school leader is vital as a facilitator of adult learning" (Bredeson, 2000, p. 391).

Our team began the PAR Pre-cycle study with the strong belief that developing relationships was and remained a key component of learning culturally responsive teaching practices. The data in Figure 12 show each category of relational trust (welcoming and inviting environment, making connections with students, and building relationships) increased as the team continued to learn from each other and shift their teaching strategies. During the Pre-cycle, there was minimal evidence of teachers developing relational trust. Transitioning to PAR Cycle One, our team increased our attention to developing relationships with our students by making
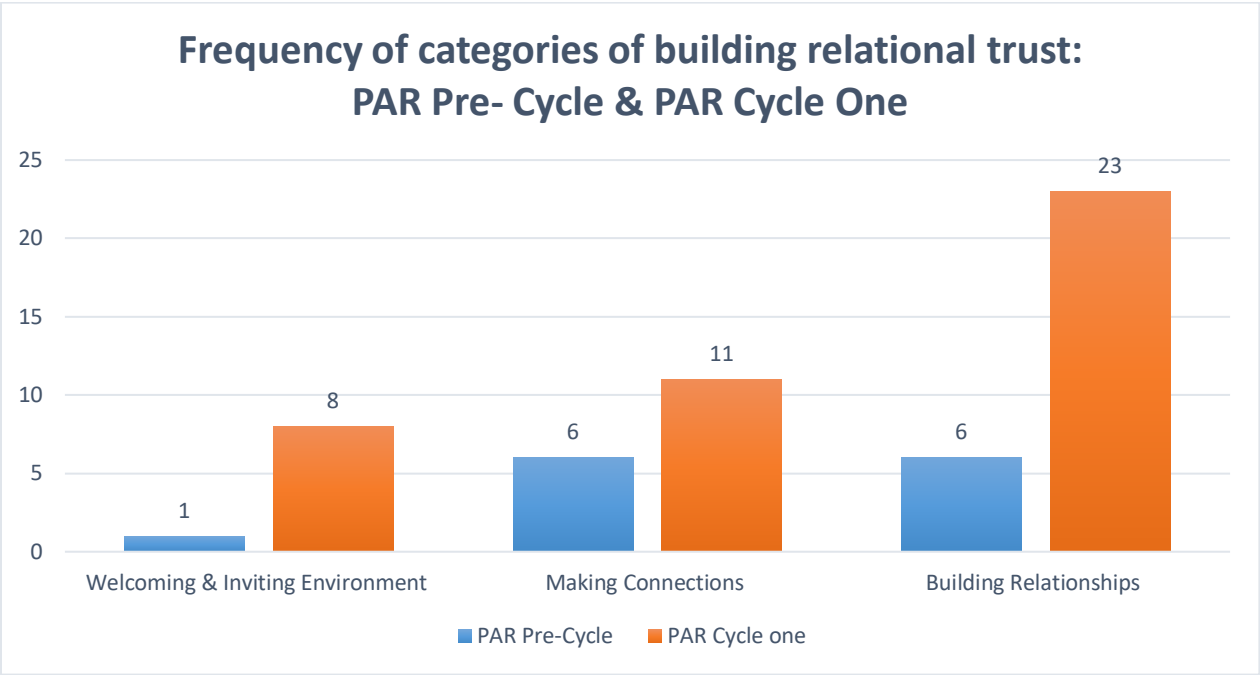
Figure 12. Increase of building relational trust with CRT over two cycles of inquiry.

connections and creating a welcoming and inviting learning environment. Our CPR team's relational trust and support for one another grew over the two cycles of inquiry.

Relational trust as a resource for change entails more than teachers feeling good about their work environment and colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Schools do not achieve relational trust through participating in a workshop or retreat with others interested in changing teaching practices. Rather, to successfully build professional partnerships for appropriate learning conditions, participants need to build relational trust in their day-to-day dialogue and social exchanges of experiences. Building and maintaining trust depends on repeated social exchanges (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Relational trust grows over time through interpersonal exchanges in which the dialogue, actions, and experience are shared. In general, the team was committed to building relational trust so that honest dialogue and constructive criticism could help each team member to improve their teaching practices.

Culturally Responsive Dialogue and Experiences

When appropriate learning conditions are established, adults have an opportunity for culturally responsive dialogue and experiences that, in turn, support the implementation of rigorous culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom. Through dialogue and shared experiences in the first two cycles, we increased our understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, so that, in the final inquiry cycle, the teachers demonstrated the use of culturally responsive teaching and began to provide access to rigorous instruction. The CPR meetings enhanced the CPR team's opportunities to engage in intriguing conversations that brought different perspectives to the group. The protocols and tools used throughout the PAR study guided the team in conversations about their experiences and assisted the CPR team to adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies. The CPR team learned how to apply rigor to their

practices because we provided the learning conditions for the team to share and hear everyone's point of view and experience with rigorous instructions. Mujis and Harris (2003) emphasized that participating in communication about change and participating in action for change requires organizational practices that provide conditions for teachers to be able to learn from and with one another. These learning conditions form preconditions for effective, democratic, and respectful relationships to emerge through democratic dialogues (Gustavsen, 2001) or deliberative conversations (Englund, 2000) focused on change.

The CPR team engaged in dialogue when defining the five components of a rigorous lesson with culturally responsive teaching practices. During the team's dialogue, I coded how often the CPR team acknowledged each component (see Figure 13). I discovered that collaboration and relationships were discussed because CPR members had more experience with these components in our adult meetings. The components of differentiation, (embrace) diversity, and critical thinking questions were somewhat less in frequency because the team needed more support for their implementation of new teaching practices. Due to the dialogue and sharing of experiences, I identified that the teachers could discuss what should be considered for diversity, differentiation, and critical thinking, but they did not yet seem to have sufficient skills and experience to fully implement those practices.

Overall, when establishing appropriate learning conditions, it is best for us to have a fluent dialogue about personal experiences with rigorous instruction so we can understand the needs and improvements in the team's teaching practices. Kemmis et al. (2014) stress that communication and professional conversations happen through a range of interactive approaches such as team teaching, collegial reflection, informal group discussions, formal focused dialogue groups, coaching conversations, mentoring conversations, and professional learning staff
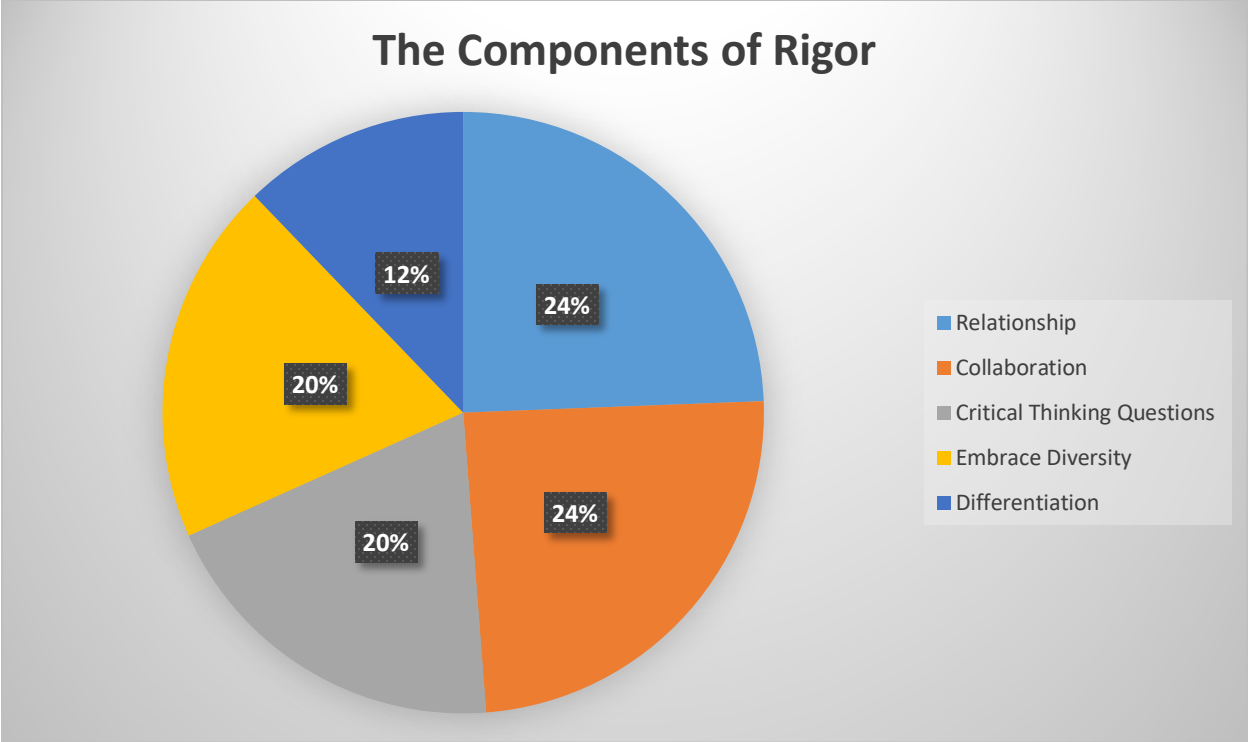
Figure 13. Percentage CPR team acknowledged each component of rigor.

meetings that impact instructional changes. These interactions require teachers to engage with one another in genuine, open dialogue to focus on professional learning. The CPR team continued to work hard to improve their practices by reflecting on their experiences and engaging in dialogue with the team. Through the team's dialogue and experiences, this demonstrated how the teachers took on responsibility and developed agency for their learning.

Adult Agency

The protocols and tools used throughout the PAR study assisted the CPR team to adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies and equitable access to rigorous instruction in a variety of ways that demonstrated their strength in developing agency. Imel (1988) defined adult agency as moving from dependence toward self-direction; adults want to be treated as responsible individuals with the capacity to determine things for themselves. The CPR teams' conversations led to them defining the components of rigor and co-creating the observational tool; sharing their experiences was an example of teachers taking agency in their learning. As a result of the CPR members' newly found confidence, one CPR member took the initiative to model culturally responsive teaching and rigor in the classroom in a professional learning session for other teachers.

We used the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) methodology to develop adult agency. When teachers were involved in the process, they took more pride in their work, as noted in the CLE axiom, *working with persons closest to the problem to address the local issue* (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016). We engaged *in critical conversations*, another CLE axiom that allowed others to make suggestions and therefore, the necessary adjustments to improve instruction. Over the course of the study, I learned that by setting the appropriate learning conditions, the teachers gained more confidence in reflecting on their teaching strategies,

identifying what worked, and collaboratively co-constructing a tool to assist in transferring the new teaching practices to their classrooms.

Rigorous Instruction is a Developmental Process

By engaging in the four phases of PAR Cycle Two, the CPR team learned that the implementation of rigorous instruction is a developmental process; teachers gradually improve their adult capacities as learners and teachers. The teachers shared their individual culturally responsive experiences, and we built bonds and trust among the group during times of reflection and sharing. However, this process was not quick; over 18 months and numerous conversations we created a group of participants who were willing to give each other intentional support and provide honest criticism in order to improve our teaching practices. As part of the developmental process, the teachers focused on creating a nurturing classroom environment to support students through our conversations and observations.

However, we realized that, even though teachers believed that academic rigor is a requirement of CRT, students were not often exposed to rigorous lessons. Most classroom dialogue and questioning experiences reflected a basic cognitive level, and students were not challenged to engage in critical thinking. Thus, our focus toward the end of PAR Cycle One and PAR Cycle Two was on academic rigor. First, we needed to enhance our knowledge through critical conversations; then, with our increased knowledge and awareness, we co-defined five components of rigor to support the creation of an observation tool. I modeled culturally responsive protocols and practices that the team might use in their lessons and activities. However, building academic rigor into the teaching practices is not a simple process. Recognizing the developmental process for adult change is a complex one. The grammar of schooling is strong, and that grammar is what the teachers experienced in K-12 schooling and

most probably in their university experiences (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). Shifting is complex, as Ng and Leicht (2019) reported, teachers had a hard time shifting from what they consider teacher control to releasing to establish student control of their learning. Part of the issue is emotional – they are giving up the familiar to try something that does not quite fit their narrative of being a teacher. Another part was enhancing their knowledge about what we mean by rigor so that they knew what to do; then observational cycles were necessary to support teachers to analyze their practices and make strategic decisions to change from teacher-centered to student centered classrooms (Cuban, 2013). In any case, the process is developmental.

Enhancing Knowledge

After the CPR team developed their confidence and ability to implement some culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom, they began to enhance their knowledge of rigorous teaching and learning. They enhanced their knowledge through engaging in personal narratives, tapping their prior knowledge, co-constructing components of rigor, and developing an observation tool. As the members gradually enhanced their knowledge of rigorous teaching and learning, we observed some evidence of increased rigor in their teaching practices.

By the middle of PAR Cycle Two, the team members had acquired some of the skills necessary to identify the components of rigor. Each CPR member gathered evidence, gave each other constructive criticism on lesson plans, and reflected on their improvement to their teaching practices. Figure 14 shows the frequency of how often the CPR members acknowledged the importance of two components of effective and rigorous teaching -- critical thinking and differentiation. During the PAR activities, while the CPR acknowledged the need of critical thinking questions, we found that minimal differentiation and little support for critical thinking questions in each member's lesson plans. After the team provided feedback to each other's lesson

Differentiation- beliefs and practices

Acknowledged
33.3%

6

observed
66.7%

12
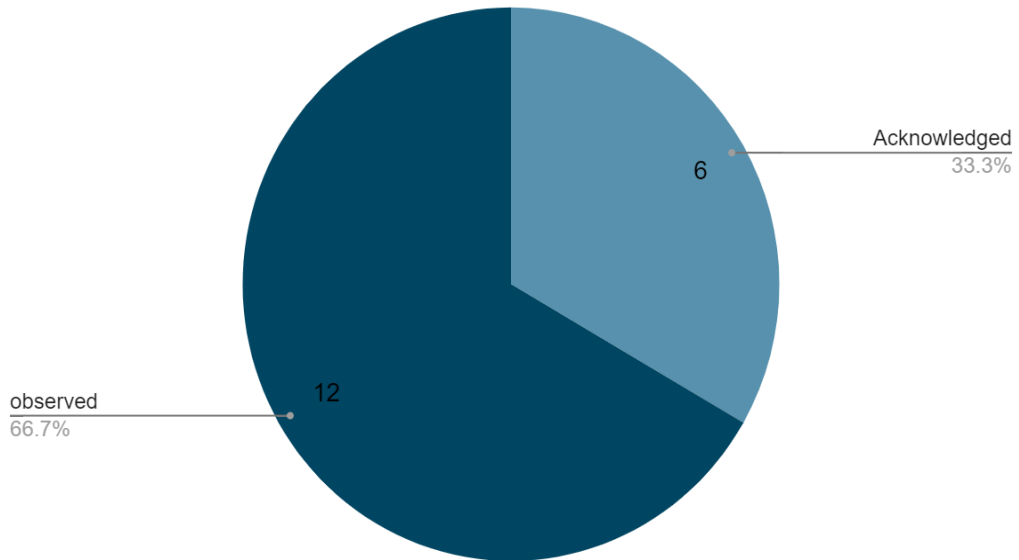
Critical Thinking questions- beliefs and practices

observed
33.3%

6

12
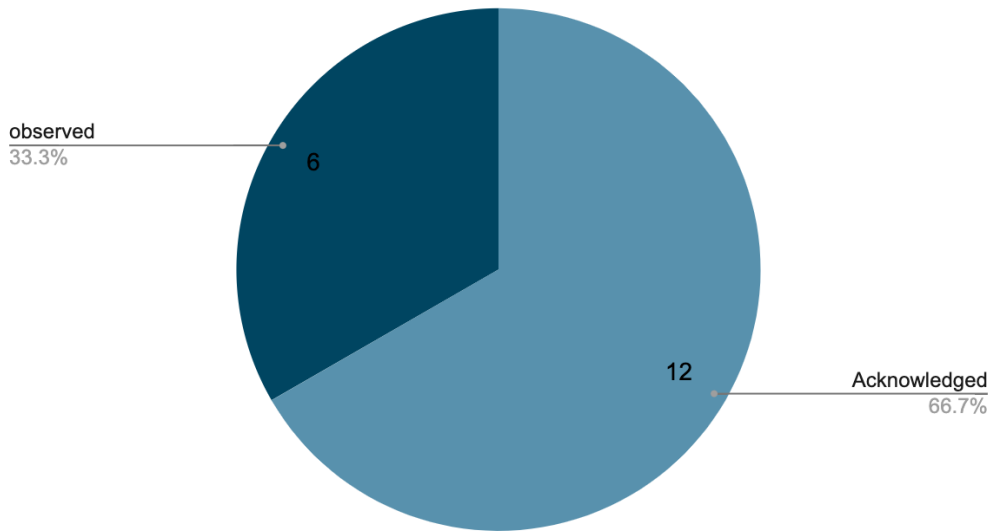
Acknowledged
66.7%

Figure 14. PAR cycle two: Frequency of rigor acknowledged and evidence observed.

plans in the area of critical thinking questions and strategies of differentiation, we observed evidence of improvement during the classroom observations. Overall, applying rigorous instruction is a developmental process that takes time for individuals to enhance their knowledge through collaboration and constructive dialogue. Enhancing knowledge of rigorous teaching requires adults to engage in critical conversations and the use of the critical friends' protocol serves as a transformative tool.

Critical Conversations

When the CPR team engaged in critical conversations, they began to change their practices. Edwards-Groves (2013) described these professional interactions as collaborative analytic dialogues or critical transformative dialogues that require teachers to engage with one another in genuine, open dialogue or focused professional learning conversations as they interrogate their practices together. When the CPR team began using the Critical Friends protocol to analyze one another's lessons, use evidence to make decisions, and give each other feedback, the level of rigor in their teaching practices became more apparent. Grubb and Tredway (2010a) expressed that the reservoir of craft and knowledge that teachers have and could share with their colleagues should become the foundation of their professional development. By using the Critical Friends protocols, teachers co-developed strategies that had the potential for influencing classroom practices (see Figure 15 for frequency of the components of in two rounds of observations). In the observational data, four of the components of rigor (relationship, embrace diversity, critical thinking questions, and collaboration) increased or remained the same. Differentiation decreased from the first observation to the second observation. When we discussed the decrease, the teachers said that they were not fluent with the strategies and wanted professional development on ways to differentiate.

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FREQUENCY OF RIGOR

■ Observation 1   ■ Observation 2

	RELATIONSHIPS	EMBRACE DIVERSITY	DIFFERENTIATION	CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS	COLLABORATION
Observation 2	8	7	5	3	3
Observation 1	8	3	7	3	
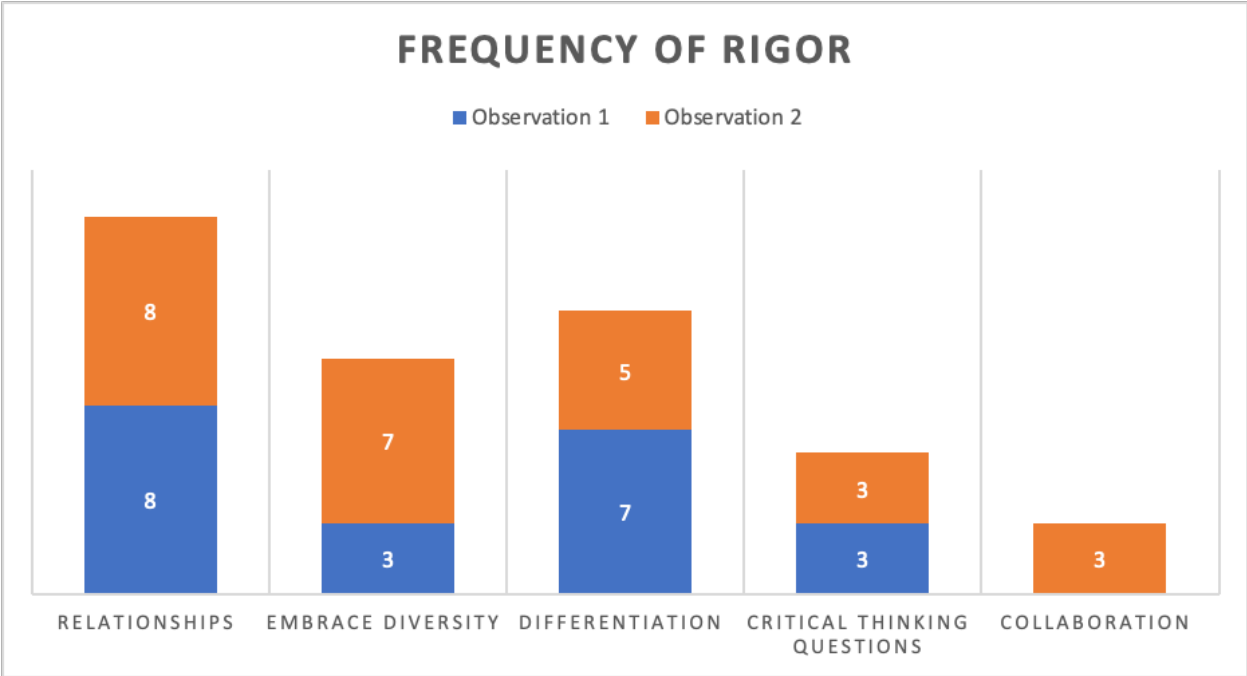
Figure 15. Comparison of the use of rigor over two classroom observations.

All members of the team remained open-minded toward receiving constructive feedback and working together to understand the different perspectives. Examples of open-mindedness were that they listened to each other, asked questions, and embraced multiple perspectives. Being open-minded was critical to the adult conversations and was an essential component of creating gracious space (Hughes, 2010). One CPR member noted to another member that she saw evidence of critical thinking questions on the board but wondered why she chose not to use the questions in the lesson. Another CPR member shared her experience of having critical conversations with her team members and helped her realize ways to improve her teaching practices. "I need to expose my students to more critical thinking questions, to get them thinking out of the box." The CPR team's growth kept evolving over time as we dug deeper into more critical conversations about changing our teaching practices. Next, I discuss how findings resulted in the next finding, transfer to practice.

Transfer to Practice

When teachers engaged in conversations about practice through activities and co-developed processes and observation tools, they increased their knowledge and confidence to attempt to transfer culturally responsive teaching practices to their classrooms. As is clear, this is an incremental and development process that I nurtured and supported over time. The CPR team transferred some culturally responsive protocols and practices to the classroom as a result of facilitation in setting the appropriate learning environment and being relentless and dedicated to their developmental processes. Gay (2002) emphasizes that "through proper training, teachers can learn how to transfer effective teaching practices to bridge the gap between instructional delivery and diverse learning styles to establish continuity between how diverse students learn and communicate; and how the school approaches teaching and learning" (p. 107). Some nascent

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examples of transfer occurred because teachers engaged in conversations about their practices through a variety of protocols.

One CPR member shared that his instructional practices have changed for the better for his students due to the professional learning he received throughout the study. He stated, "I noticed that the agenda for our CPR meetings are generated by our feedback from each previous meeting. I took this concept and transferred it to my classroom practice as I adjusted my lessons by utilizing my students' interests and feedback." This example of transfer is evidence that creating the appropriate learning conditions with culturally responsive protocols and practices supported the CPR team members in starting to apply these practices to their classrooms.

Collaboration

In every CPR meeting, I engaged the teachers in collaboration and co-construction of knowledge, which is essential to all learning of adults (Driscoll, 1984; Resnick et al., 2015). The process of collaboration was beneficial; teachers enjoyed learning from one another, and co-learning accelerated the process for all, even when we acknowledged that transferring into the classroom practice was different. Figure 16 shows collaboration appeared 12 times during the PAR Cycle Two activities; however, when data was analyzed from ten classroom observations, collaboration showed up only three times – perhaps demonstrating that "teacher change is challenging as it requires one to acquire new knowledge and ways of thinking that feel unnatural and impractical while simultaneously abandoning familiar, reliable, and often comfortable practices" (Ng & Leicht, 2019, p. 464). The CPR members discussed the importance of collaboration in creating culturally responsive classrooms, but they were minimally transferring collaborative structures in their teaching practices. I believed that teacher collaboration could lead to larger teacher efficacy and my responsibility was to provide time, space, and support for
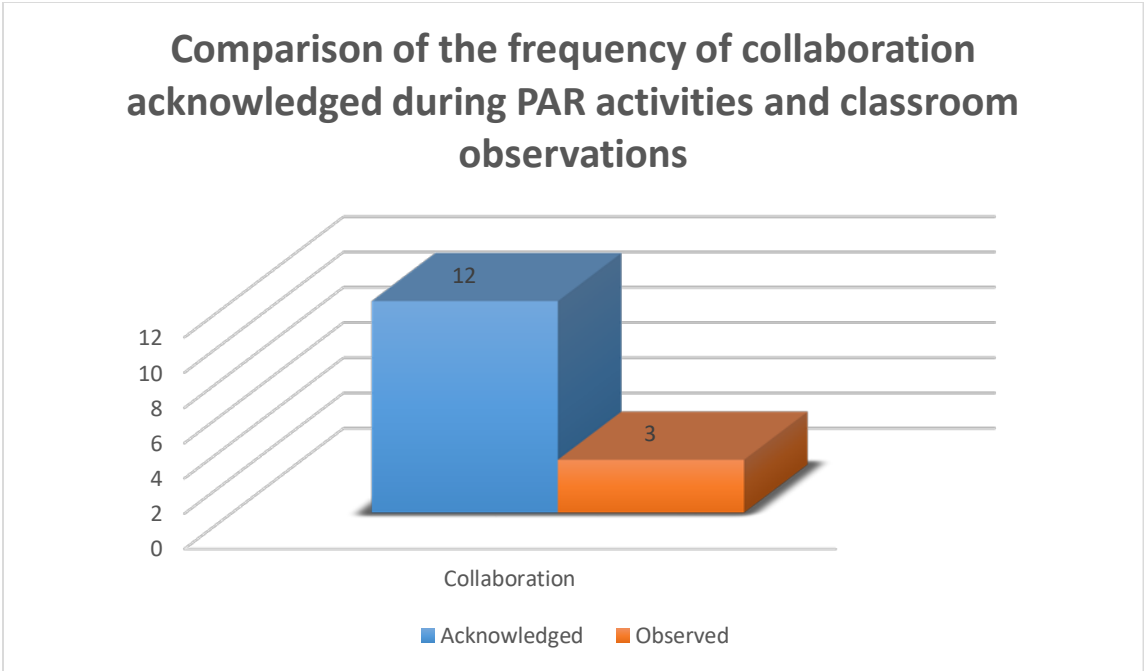
Figure 16. Frequency of collaboration in PAR Cycle Two.

collaborative efforts (Goddard et al., 2017). "Through getting involved in design processes, teachers reported increasing their teaching confidence and renewing their enthusiasm for collaboration" (Woo & Henriksen, 2023, p. 2). However, the transfer to practice for the teachers in this group might take longer. As one member cited in their observation noted, "The students are seated in groups, and the learning environment is safe, structured, and inviting, but there is no instruction that promotes collaboration so students can engage in academic discourse." The teachers set up structures for collaboration, but they were not consistently promoting instructional strategies for students to collaborate.

In the two areas in which teachers felt most confident – relationships and diversity, they showed growth. At the beginning of the study, the CPR team expressed a need to build relationships with the students and embrace diversity in their teaching practices. The team enhanced their knowledge of ways to build relationships and embrace diversity during the Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One, and these practices continued to emerge in the classroom observations throughout the final cycle of inquiry. These themes continued to be amplified in PAR Cycle Two.

Figure 17 shows a comparison of relationship and embracing diversity in PAR Cycle One and PAR Cycle Two. Relationships were acknowledged 17 times during the PAR Cycle One team activities and observed six times in classrooms. During PAR Cycle Two, relationships were acknowledged 11 times during the PAR activities and observed 16 times, the highest component observed during classroom observations. Embrace diversity was acknowledged 16 times during PAR Cycle One activities and not observed in the classroom observations. However, by PAR Cycle Two, embracing diversity was acknowledged 11 times during the PAR activities and observed 10 times. The CPR team created relational bonds by engaging in personal narratives,

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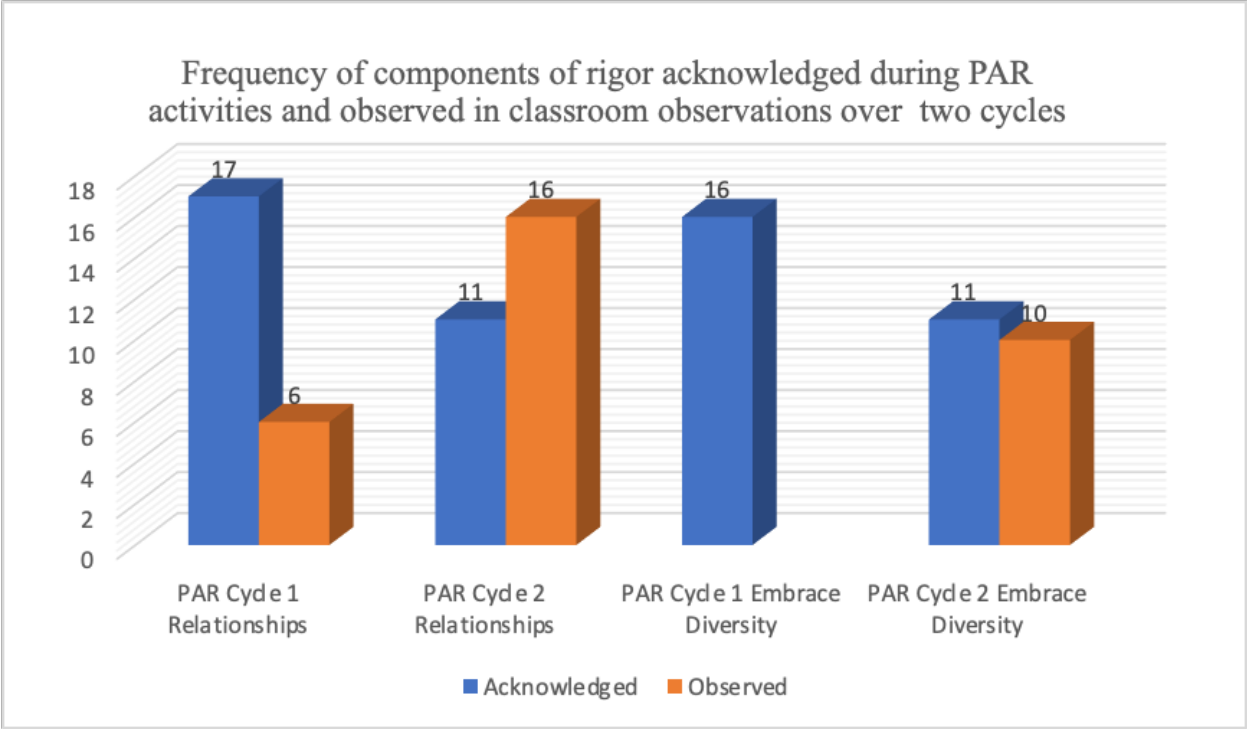
Figure 17. Comparison of building relationships and embracing diversity in cycles one and two.

participating in constructive conversations, creating activities to build relationships in their

teaching practices, and implementing the activities as observed in the evidence. The CPR team

utilized practices such as collaborative structures with group discussions, Critical Friends

protocol, and personal narratives to embrace diversity. The CPR team established themselves as

culturally responsive teachers with the belief that embracing diversity in the classroom was

critical. Thus, the teachers were laying the foundation – in terms of knowledge, skills, and

dispositions – to gain confidence to enact all the components of rigor they had identified. These

might be considered baby steps, but I believed that, as the CPR team became more confident in

their knowledge of the components of rigor and continued to have an opportunity for peer

dialogue, those components were more likely to transfer to practice.

Conclusion

Through the experiences in the three PAR cycles of inquiry, the teachers developed a

deep commitment to the process of learning together, and I gathered evidence of teachers'

growing knowledge, skills, and dispositions of culturally responsive teaching. I described the

four-phase process which resulted in the creation of an observational tool to identify rigor in

culturally responsive teaching practices. The evidence from the three cycles of inquiry supports

three findings: (1) teachers require appropriate learning conditions that foster their development

as adult learners, (2) creating rigorous instruction for students is a developmental process for

teachers, and (3) teachers transfer their learning to practice when they have opportunities for peer

dialogue and input on observations processes. However, as I have identified, the process is

incremental and depends on teachers gradually building their confidence to enact what they

know about rigorous teaching and learning environment. The CPR team fostered trust with each

other, engaged in a rigorous learning process, analyzed their teaching practices, and as a result,

transferred some of those practices to their classrooms. The CPR team acknowledged that there is more that has to be done going forward to ensure that rigorous teaching is consistently transferred to their classroom practices. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings and the intersection with the existing literature, and I reflect on my leadership development as a result of leading this study.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study was to examine the extent to which teachers changed their practices to use culturally responsive strategies that increase equitable access to rigorous instruction. A Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team and I created a community of practice in which we supported each other in learning about culturally responsive practices and examined how teaching practices could provide access to rigorous instruction. The intent of this work was to enhance the knowledge and skills of a team of teachers so they could implement culturally responsive pedagogy in their teaching practices. The theory of action for the study was: ***If** a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group of teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices that support rigor, **THEN** they change their teaching practices.* Throughout the project and study, I facilitated collaboration among teachers, collected and analyzed data, and supported teachers. Because the team of teachers developed relational trust, they developed a learning culture for themselves and thrived on learning about culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance teaching practices that supported access to rigorous instruction for their students.

The context of the PAR study was an urban community middle school in North Carolina. The school, 95% African American students and staff, had been identified as a low-performing middle school for the prior seven years, which means the academic achievement of students had not met proficiency. The school serves a high number of students who have been historically underserved, and who have not had access to rigorous instruction, demonstrating the historical and pedagogical education debt and the opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). While the school was primed for success because of strong teacher-to-student relationships, high retention in leadership and teachers, and the staff's desire for positive change for the students, challenges

remained. The teachers needed to use consistent and culturally responsive instructional practices that supported student learning at the school and increased their opportunity for equitable access to rigorous instruction. The staff wanted to provide relevant instruction that sparked the students, but most importantly they wanted to challenge them. However, the teachers did not actually have experiences in the pedagogical approaches that they wanted to implement. Through a focus on collaboration, teachers in the study gained a reinvigorated passion for improving access and rigor in their classrooms (Boykin & Noguera, 2011), de-privatized their teaching practices (Louis et al., 2010), and shared their learning with other CPR teachers (Grissom et al., 2021). As a result of our work over three cycles of inquiry, the CPR team co-created an observational tool to identify rigor in culturally responsive teaching practices. As a group, they exemplified the attributes of a Community of Practice (CoP): commitment to engage in collaborative activities, discussions around the work that is taking place in the classroom and being active practitioners toward improvement in classroom practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

In this chapter, I connect the literature to the findings. Then, I respond to the research questions and offer an expanded framework for how a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) team can collaborate in in a professional environment can enhance their knowledge of culturally responsive teaching practices to change teaching practices and increase access to rigorous instruction. Then, I discuss the implications of the study findings on practice, policy, and research. Finally, I reflect on my leadership growth and development as a school leader before concluding the chapter with a synopsis of what we learned by exploring the overarching research questions for this study.

PAR Overview

The PAR study occurred over 18 months (see Table 15). Throughout the study, the team and I engaged in inquiry cycles to develop our knowledge, skills, and dispositions of culturally responsive teaching. The team developed strong relational bonds, and the team's dispositions and beliefs about the importance of culturally responsive teaching were evident. The team felt comfortable being vulnerable in sharing their experiences and asking for support on ways to improve their teaching practices with other CPR members.

During each research cycle, I collected and analyzed data to respond to the research questions (see Figure 18). During the Pre-cycle, the CPR members built relational bonds and reflected on beliefs about culturally responsive teaching. A key community learning exchange axiom guide our work -- conversations are a critical and central pedagogical process (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016). During the CPR meetings, I modeled culturally responsive pedagogy, and we transitioned from co-constructing an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy to examining teaching practices. By the beginning of PAR Cycle Two, our team had created a working environment in which individuals were determined to and persistent about monitoring the development of practices and protocols that promote culturally responsive teaching. As a result, CPR team used the processes and shared their experiences using the new teaching strategies. The study findings were:

1. Teachers require appropriate learning conditions that foster their development as adult learners.

2. Creating rigorous instruction for students is a developmental process for teachers, and

3. Teachers transfer their learning to practice when they have opportunities for peer dialogue and input on observation processes.

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Table 15

Activities: PAR Cycle of Inquiry Activities

	PAR PRE-CYCLE (September – December 2021) Week 1-12	PAR CYCLE I (January – April 2022) Week 1-12	PAR CYCLE II (August – October 2022) Week 1-8
EC-NIC Meetings (n=6)	• • • • •	• • • •	• • • • • • • •
CLEs (n=1)		•	
Classroom Observations (n=12)			• • • • • • 2 2 2 2 1 3
Post-Observation Conversations (n=3)			• • •
Reflective Memos	collected continually throughout the study		
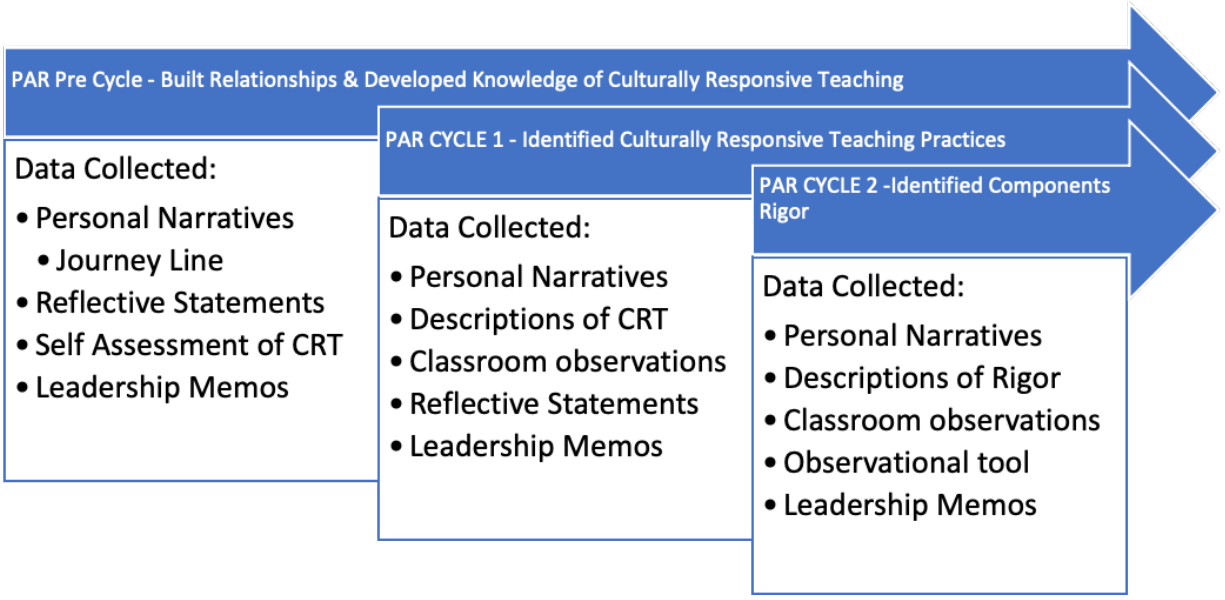
Figure 18. Data collected from PAR Pre-cycle to PAR Cycles One and Two.

Discussion

In connecting the findings from this study to literature, I revisit the three findings from the PAR study and intersect the findings with the literature. As a result of our process, I claim that teachers needed a constructivist-developmental learning environment (Drago-Severson, 2012) in which we cultivated appropriate learning conditions for adults and co-developed rigorous instructional practices so that they could begin to transfer our learning to practice. At the conclusion of the discussion, I share a framework for implementing rigorous culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom. Then, I revisit the research questions connected to this PAR study.

Appropriate Learning Conditions

By providing the appropriate learning environment, the team members established relationships, promoted collaborative learning, and supported the CPR team in increasing their knowledge of using culturally responsive teaching to increase access to rigorous instruction. Drago-Severson (2012) indicates that a constructivist-developmental framework is one in which the persons are "active meaning maker[s] with respect to cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (internal) experiences and how these aspects of experience intersect" (p. 22). The CPR members engaged in a professional learning community using community learning exchange protocols. When teachers were involved in the process, they took more pride in their work, as noted in the CLE axiom, working with persons closest to the problem to address the local issue (Guajardo, 2016). The learning conditions we established included the use of meeting norms to create a gracious space and using protocols and practices to augment our collaborative learning. As a result, we built and sustained relational trust.

Gracious Space

At the first CPR meeting, we established norms focused on fostering a gracious space for making connections and considering all points of view (Hughes, 2010); a gracious space is a place where participants feel a spirit and establish a setting so they can invite the stranger to learn in public. By using the norms during the PAR activities, we created a brave space (Quadros-Meis, 2021) to plan and reflect on our experiences, take time to think deeply about our learning, and share resources. As a result, we developed the confidence to discuss topics and to act on them by inviting new ideas and learning how to enact culturally responsive practices (Theoharis, 2010). Drago-Severson (2012) calls this a space where participants feel held and nurtured in order to do the difficult work of school change.

As we progressed through the three PAR inquiry cycles, teachers became more knowledgeable of culturally responsive practices (cognitive learning) and confident about their abilities to implement the practices (affective learning). When participants are invited and expected to engage with each other through sharing their individual and community stories and experiences on a shared topic of interest and inquiry, such engagement fosters a creative agency that helps people find their power and voice, and the process responds to the need for local communities to own their destiny, though not in an individualistic manner (Wong et al., 2021). In such a space of grace and feeling held and nurtured, participants can overcome the dynamics of change that often confound them moving forward: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Shields, 2018). As we developed the learning processes and experiences to frame questions, conversations, and other pedagogical activities in age-appropriate, context-responsive, and culturally sustainable ways, we made headway on change (Militello et al., 2009). By creating gracious space and relationship-building, teachers grew in their understanding and confidence

and enacted their beliefs about culturally responsive pedagogical approaches (Argyris & Schön, 1984). We used protocols and practices as tools to reflect on our experiences.

Power of Protocols

The use of personal narratives and protocols served as a powerful tool to reflect on our experiences during the CPR meetings. Personal narratives are a critical practice we used consistently (Militello et al., 2020). The protocols enhanced our knowledge of ourselves as teachers and how to use culturally responsive teaching practices to access rigor in our teaching practices. I collected the CPR meeting agendas, including personal narratives, the team's reflective statements, and my leadership memos for me to facilitate.

Modeling for Adults. During the CPR meetings in PAR Cycle Two, I designed PAR activities to encourage praxis by having the team reflect on their experiences and lessons. Freire (1970) defined praxis as "the combination of reflection and action, or the reflection leading to action" (p. 86). In discussing the role of the school leader, Terrell and Lindsey (2018) reminds us that:

> regardless of personality or leadership styles, the principal should articulate and model their own vision of what a successful school ought to look like and communicate their beliefs and vision to staff, students and parents. The role of being a culturally responsive school leader starts with reevaluating myself as school leader. (p. 19)

Sharing my personal experiences was a way to establish relational trust, and modeling examples of culturally responsive practices for the CPR team provided adults with the necessary experiences they needed to experiment with culturally responsive practices in their classrooms. Unless the principal intentionally promotes practices, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school (Khalifa et al., 2016).

When leaders model the practice of school wide implementation, they provide a sustainable structured environment inside the school and in the community. As leaders model pride in the community, school, and teachers, the hope is that teachers follow the leader's model in constructing learning environments in which students feel that their school and community align with the classroom instruction (Khalifa et al., 2016). Modeling from school leaders supports teachers in reframing their thinking about students, families, and communities -- away from deficit thinking to an assets-based orientation that recognizes the "funds of knowledge" that students bring with them (Moll et al., 1992).

Critical Friends Protocols. The use of the Critical Friends consultancy and tuning protocols to improve teachers' lesson plans was useful. Because the Critical Friends protocols rely on the CLE axiom of the people closest to the issue are the best people to solve local issues, they can engage in problem-solving, and that knowledge and skill can become a foundation of their ongoing professional development. By using Critical Friends protocols, the teachers co-developed strategies that have the potential for influencing classroom practices (Grubb & Tredway, 2010a). In our CPR meetings, the team members shared their lesson plans and provided each other with feedback using the Critical Friends tuning protocol. The CPR team aligned what they had learned about culturally responsive teaching with the evidence of the five components of rigor that we had co-developed and how their lessons demonstrated rigorous instruction.

If teacher teams are to effectively take on different practices, norms, and identities, they need be confident of their identity as knowledge producers so they can inquire about their practices and relate those to educational ideas and values (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). The Critical Friends protocol process challenged the CPR members to analyze their beliefs and to

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adjust their teaching practices on how to establish rigorous instruction. According to Glickman's (2002) description of his four methods for collaborating with teachers to enhance their instructional practices, working collaboratively is advantageous when the teacher is aware of best practices and uses the evidence from observations to consider how to improve; in other words, I had collegial or non-direction conversations with teachers and did not act as a supervisor. As a result, I supported teachers individually and collectively to develop plans for improvement by listening empathetically and guiding not directing them what to do (Tredway et al., 2019). The critical conversations about the evidence from the observations and the Critical Friends' process highlighted the importance of adult dialogue and meaning making as necessary ways to change practice.

Grubb and Tredway (2010a) expressed the importance of teacher leadership in changing their practices:

> In nearly every action research project when teachers are given the opportunity to make strategic decisions about agendas, norms for meetings, classroom observations methods, and ways of discussing their own work and student work, teachers are willing to take the responsibility for self-improvement and continuous learning. (p. 41)

The CPR team believed their purpose was to change their teaching practices to best fit the needs of the students. Student achievement increases when teachers focus on the intellectual quality of student learning through the rigorous structure of their teaching practices (Louis & Marks, 1998). That is what we were striving for in this work, and the foundation of our ability to achieve what we did was due to our focus on relational trust as a driver of school change.

Relational Trust

Relational trust is described as collegial relationships that results from educational development that is cultivated and nurtured over time in a professional learning journey (Ingold, 2007). Grubb (2009) names these an abstract resource that is critical for accomplishing change. Building a level of relational trust was fundamental to the practitioners as we collaborated and accepted constructive feedback. By believing in one another's knowledge and capability to put culturally responsive teaching practices into practice, our CPR team was able to establish a degree of relational trust so that eventually they could trust the process sufficiently to develop as self-authoring learners, who viewed themselves as capable learners – exactly what we wanted to accomplish for students.

Drago-Severson (2012) describes adults who achieve this level of learning as a "socializing way of coming to know" that supports "self-authoring knowers" (pp. 37-38). The teachers had opportunities to demonstrate their expertise and critique others' proposals and ideas through dialogue and finally decide on self-determined goals. Because of this level of trust, participants provided honest feedback to each other on their teaching practices. As a leader, I had to set the conditions for enabling relational trust as fundamental for sustainable teacher development and educational change in communities of continuous inquiry and improvement (Hord, 1997). Leading and facilitating changes in practices for learning in school-based action research is not simply a function of what a school principal, or indeed any other individual or group of leaders, knows and does (Spillane et al., 2004) but is a function of group knowledge and support. Relational trust grew over time through interpersonal exchanges in which we shared the dialogue, actions, and experiences.

Changing practices involved establishing meaningful sustainable professional learning

partnerships and the preconditions for effective, democratic, and respectful relationships (Kemmis, 2009); these are the principles that sit at the very heart of action research. Leading or facilitating such educational change happens as parallel practices, as "teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build and sustain enhanced school capacity" (Crowther, 2010, p. 36). As the CPR team members learned about various team members' points of view for constructing various teaching approaches in the classroom, the team built relational trust in each other to offer and receive constructive feedback throughout our CPR meetings.

Capacity-building among teachers (Stoll et al., 2006) within a school culture receptive to school improvement and change is crucial (Nehring & Fitzsimmons, 2011). In our view, understanding educational practice is largely, but not only, a matter of understanding the relationships formed among people in educational settings. With regard to persons individually and in relation to one another, as they engaged with one another through relationships, we practiced a high degree of caring (Noddings, 1992), relational trust, and mutual respect collaboration and agentic collegial responsibility (Kemmis et al., 2014), and viewed teaching as emotional work (Hargreaves, 2003; Moksnes-Furu, 2008). With respect to these social–political dimensions of life in a community or society, we practiced civility and interdependence (MacIntyre, 1981), deprivatized practice (Kemmis et al., 2014), and solidarity (Habermas, 1987). Their analyses illustrated how the dynamics of relational trust across a school community influenced its reform efforts; in fact, they argue that such "trust is not only a powerful resource but is instrumental for influencing school-based reform" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 40).

Community of Practice

A community of practice recommends key attributes that we strove to develop. Another term for a community of practice, a professional learning community (PLC), requires the

leadership of the school to create conditions, routines, and practices that place learning at the center of teachers' work (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Bransford et al. (2000) explain that PLCs support teachers to envision schools as learning environments for teachers and thus rely on a community-centered perspective to promote professional learning within which teachers are supported in sharing and building on each other's knowledge. I discovered that by facilitating the CPR meetings and providing the team the opportunity to engage in culturally responsive protocols and teaching practices, I could better address their questions and reservations about CRT teaching practices.

Working together within a school and teacher group helped to improve educators' knowledge and the implementation of teaching practices in the classroom (Chouari, 2016). In order to create professional learning communities that were best suited for the CPR team's learning, I used the community learning exchange methodology and CLE axioms (Guajardo, 2016) at each of our meetings. The participants who are closest to the issues are the teachers who experimented with practices to honor students' values (hunter et al., 2013). Our CPR team's confidence grew as we progressed from the awareness to implement culturally responsive practices to collaborating to build relationships and utilizing teaching practices to embrace diversity. However, during the course of PAR Cycle One, we observed evidence that described the need to improve rigorous instruction, and our CPR team learned how to incorporate more rigor into their lessons.

Rigorous Instruction is a Developmental Process

The data collected throughout the study showed us that creating access to rigorous instruction is a developmental process. I understood that "the way that we make meaning of our experiences and construct reality can become more complex and develop throughout our lives

provided we have a holding environment that offer developmentally appropriate supports and challenges" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 29). While the CPR team members were extremely motivated and eager toward shifting their teaching practices to better meet the needs of students, the team needed to co-construct what they meant by rigor and how teachers demonstrated rigor in classroom instruction. Adult learning is, like student learning, a process of making meaning in collaboration with others, and the teachers engaged in a collaborative process, one of the key components of rigor they identified – which is critical for teachers as well as students.

Constructivist Developmental Learning for Adults

As part of the developmental process, while the teachers had focused on creating a nurturing classroom environment to support students, in our conversations and observations, we realized that even though teachers believed that academic rigor is a requirement of culturally responsive teaching, our ability to provide equitable access and rigor in student learning was absent. To integrate academic rigor, we co-created an observation tool and increased academic rigor in the classroom by making meaning together of what we knew about rigor and what we observed in each other's classrooms. Constructivist development learning is how learners take in observations or new knowledge and incorporate that in their actions. As adults engage in sense-making, they gradually develop new knowledge and skills; given the right conditions, we can continue to grow throughout our lives (Drago-Severson, 2012). We developed the professional learning environment by emphasizing how adults learn by sharing their experiences and collaborating with each other to provide additional solutions for a better understanding.

When designing professional learning environments that support adult and leadership development, constructivist development theory is useful. The theory helps us to consider how to shape environments that can support development and enables us to better understand others and

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ourselves. This theory, when translated to actions, helps us understand how teachers and leaders can make sense of issues related to "adaptive challenges, authority, responsibility, ambiguity, complexity, and the kinds of holding environment that might best support their leadership development" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 29). The CPR team started advancing their understanding of rigorous teaching and learning once they gained the confidence and skills necessary to use some culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom. However, we found that these two elements – a holding space for the teachers and the use of common tools were critical to our developmental learning.

   Learning Space as a Holding Space. Drago-Severson (2012) explains holding spaces as environments that help educators shape professional learning initiatives with supportive growth at individual and group levels. Throughout the CPR meetings, the team engaged in in-depth conversations about their personal experiences to receive honest feedback for the improvement of their teaching practices. "Having transparent, honest discussions about one's experience and expectations is crucial to shaping mentoring or coaching relationships as holding spaces for adults on both sides of the partnership" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 339). The use of conversations are a critical and central pedagogical process. A critical conversation needs a holding or safe space to discuss important topics to build a strong relationship (Guajardo & Garcia, 2016).

   The CPR team established a viable holding space for the development of their knowledge by the end of PAR Cycle One. Team members must feel comfortable expressing problems and making suggestions to improve. This is connected to an authentic relationship orientation representing openness and truthfulness in relationships with individuals in an organization (Ilies et al., 2005). The overall objective of holding spaces is to provide a space of guidance support,

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nourishment, development of appropriate challenges or stretching, and care to include the kinds of environments that would provide opportunities for personal growth (Drago-Severson, 2012). In addition, common tools helped to promote learning. Social learning theory with a safe space environment that supported vulnerable, honest conversations and relational trust helps explain why common tools provide critical component of change efforts.

Common Tools. When leaders acting as collegial or nondirective coaches introduce common tools in a community of practice, they support participants in developing capacity more systematically and rapidly. The tools act as cognitive and social mediators for enhanced teacher learning teachers in co-constructing learning (Wise & Jacobi, 2010). The co-construction of our team's observational tool played a significant role in this developmental process in which we started to observe evidence of rigorous instruction being used in the classroom. Wong et al. (2021) describe the usefulness of tools in any creative design process that educators take on. Tools act as material and social mediators; in our case, the tools acted as a springboard for the teachers to socially co-construct their ideas about culturally responsive practices. As a result of the tools for group activities, the group took on co-design of a change efforts. "Although co-design requires long-term commitment, co-design processes can be initiated by one education stakeholder or a small group of stakeholders who are passionate about empowering teachers, solving problems, and improving education" (Woo & Henriksen, 2023, p. 3). The responsibility of the facilitator is to choose tools carefully and plan for their use as the tools themselves offer meeting routines and rituals and support teachers to collectively grow as a result of group interactions. As a result, we examined the attributes of rigor and used our experiences in the group to ensure that key attributes were a part of our co-design.

Co-Constructed Attributes of Rigor

As a result of the conversations and constructivist development learning in which we engaged, we co-constructed an observation tool in which teachers had significant input. What we observed is that most of the definitions and attributes of rigor had to do with the cognitive content (Blackburn, 2017; Cawn, 2020). For example, Strong et al. (2001) define rigor as helping students to learn content that is complex, ambiguous, and personally or emotionally provocative. However, as the teachers and I explored the attributes of rigor for students in our school, we knew that the relationships with students were critical as students would not respond to more complex content unless they felt a relationship with the teachers.

In other words, because the teacher had relationships with the student, the teacher could be warm demanders (Ware, 2006). We recognized that to provoke students cognitively, emotionally, or personally without the support of a relationship would probably lead to students shutting down. For example, Simon (2019) found that teachers who knew students well could phrase questions and prompts according to an individual student's personality, identity, and cultural experience – offering a form of differentiation that occurred because of the relationship between the teacher and the student. When a teacher knows "what makes a student tick", then the teachers can motivate and push in ways that support students to take risks (Delpit, 2012). This comparison of our elements of rigor with other researchers clarifies that our attention to relationships and collaboration are essential pre-conditions for student engagement in more rigorous instruction (see Table 16). The CPR team's reflections and discussions during the CPR meetings showed how the process of increasing access to rigorous instruction is a developmental process before transferring to classroom practice.

Table 16

Comparison of Attributes of Rigor

Rigor Elements CPR Team	Rigor Teacher Academy	Attributes of Rigor Blackburn, 2017	Ambitious Instruction Cawn, 2020
Relationships of trust and teachers as warm demander	Relationships with students		
Collaboration of students with students and teachers with students			
Differentiation of lesson and assessment tasks	Differentiation	Supporting Student by scaffolding	Diverse options for tasks completion Access tasks in different ways
Critical Thinking Questions that communicate higher levels of cognitive demand	High Expectations	High Expectations through higher level questions	Rich tasks that require depth of understanding; learning occurs over several days
Diversity of learners	Options for assessment	Demonstrate learning at high levels by checking for understanding and equitable access	Performance assessments

Transfer to Practice

Transfer to practice is the benchmark of the PAR study; we measured our success in a collaborative environment as we put theory into action. As a result of our process, teachers now understand that they need appropriate learning conditions bolstered by processes that support adult learning to change. Changing teaching practices is not easy as teachers resort to familiar practices—termed the grammar of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). Therefore, learning and transfer occur when learners are given an opportunity to "observe and practice in situ" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 34). If the learner becomes an active participant in a highly connected community in which knowledge and culture are integrated, then teachers are more likely to take the risks to enact their espoused values about teaching and learning – in this case, more rigorous instruction. When teachers engaged in conversations about practice through activities and co-developed processes and observation tools, they increased their knowledge and confidence to experiment with transferring culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms. The entire process helped us understand the conundrum of the black box of teaching (Cuban, 2013).

Throughout the PAR study, transfer to practice increased because teachers engaged in conversations about their practices through tools and protocols. The teachers used information from the team conversations and made decisions about what and how to transfer components of rigor to their classrooms. The learning conditions supported individuals to learn from each other through conversations, reflections, and the use of personal narratives. For example, during one of the PAR activities, the CPR team engaged in a conversation on how often they used the five components of rigor and which components they needed to improve for implementation into their lesson. We valued all perspectives; therefore, all participants took risks, pushed each other's thinking, and implemented new practices in their classrooms.

As a result of the feedback each teacher received during our CPR meetings, we agreed to conduct peer observations to look for growth. "Observations can promote teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-leader conversations about instructional practice and broader conversations about student learning and school cultures" (Grubb & Tredway, 2010b, p. 43). Peer-based classroom observations are one useful method for improving our instructional practices (Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Paryani, 2019). One interesting benefit is that teachers as observers gain confidence to try new practices in their classrooms. In general, we used the collaborative model of peer observations:

> The collaborative model involves colleagues who observe each other in a reciprocal process for the purpose of stimulating improvement in teaching and student learning through dialogue, and self and mutual reflection. The relationship between the observer and the observed faculty is based on equality, mutual trust, and respect, and must include confidentiality and the creation of a non-judgmental environment. (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005)

When peers provide support through discussions, the teachers understand that while they may not experts in research or theory, they are experts on the local situation in the school. Teachers tend to trust their peers because they can offer feedback, perspectives, and insights based on similar experiences. Daniels and Oberg (2013) termed this analytic reflection because teachers are using what they know, what they have observed, and what they learn from others to reframe their attitudes about teaching, and, in some cases, about students. Nevertheless, the goal of peer observations is to help teachers learn to give and receive useful feedback to colleagues (Kurtts & Levin, 2000). We enhanced our goals to improve practice by observations of what we were doing and then deciding what we needed to do. We recognized that we would not reach our goal

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during this study, but we were committed to continuing peer work in discussions and observations.

The Conundrum of Transfer

We were not the first nor will be the last to try to better understand why and how teachers change their practices. Black and Wiliam (1998) discussed how the conundrum of transfer related to assessment; the space between how teachers move from their beliefs (and even planning) to the complex interactions between teacher and student is the black box of teaching and learning. They confirmed that widespread evidence indicated that change in education occurs quite slowly. A teacher needs to practice many times in order to form a habit of the kind of teaching needed for rigor, and building this repertoire is a slow process. Cuban (2013) reports that the process of change pressing on individuals' classrooms is so complex – the physical environment, the classroom, the teacher, the school leaders, and the numerous outside influences pressing on any teacher – that reformers never know quite where to start and where to apply resources for change. For him, the black box is a somewhat mysterious process in each classroom in which learning occurs or does not. Cuban recommends that change comes by capturing and analyzing over time what happens in classrooms in short and long lessons between and among teacher and student. Then and only then do we know how that teacher is thinking and acting and how we can promote changes.

As reported, the mystery of how to accomplish enduring teacher change has often stumped us – as we do not fully understand how to ensure that teacher change happen. However, this process of building trust, co-constructing meaning, and together analyzing teacher practice is critical. We practiced exactly what Grissom et al. (2021) recommended for improving student outcomes: Engage in instructionally focused interactions with teachers and facilitate productive

collaboration and professional learning communities in which teachers are "working together authentically with systems of support to improve their practice and enhance student learning" (p. xv). In sum, we followed a deliberate process of change, and teachers are committed to continuing to engage in continuous improvement suggestions from Yurkofsky et al. (2020) to improve outcomes for students and share with their colleagues across the country, including:

- Grounding improvement efforts in local problems or needs.

- Empowering practitioners to take an active role in research and improvement.

- Engaging in iteration, which involves a cyclical process of action, assessment, reflection, and adjustment.

- Striving to spur change across schools and systems, not just individual classrooms. (p. 404)

Summary

Together, the three findings are confirmed as important extensions of the extant literature to support first with appropriate learning conditions that foster their development as adult learners. If they have experiences that offer the parallel conditions for learning that they should create for students, they engage in the process of understanding, identifying, planning, and implementing rigorous instruction. Because we understand how the developmental process for teachers works, teachers demonstrated some transfer to practice; however, the process is not yet complete. The CPR team transferred culturally responsive protocols and practices to the classroom as a result of professional learning that included setting the appropriate learning environment and our collaborative commitment to be relentless and dedicated toward the development process. As a result of the facilitation, the CPR members experienced nurturing relationships and collaborative learning and were able to transfer some of these processes to their

classrooms. We valued all perspectives; therefore, all participants took risks, pushed each other's thinking, and implemented new practices in their classroom. However, the teachers still need practice and more conversations to fully transfer their new knowledge to practice.

I see our process as the Drago-Severson (2012) growth rings, and Figure 19 demonstrates how we progressed. As a result of our work, we have moved through stages of development as a community of practice; we extended personal and professional connections, developed transparency, welcomed questions, and radiated from our inner core of trust and intentionality to collaborate. Overall, the learning conditions supported the CPR team's belief that their teaching practices promoted effective and rigorous culturally responsive teaching. Leadership in a low-performing school requires us to respond to external demands for improving student achievement, so we developed an internal system of accountability with a small group of teachers. Instead of using the external data as the lever for change, we centered the lever of change on student needs, responding to a moral accountability for change -- mine and theirs (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013). Thus, as leadership needs to be mindful of the bigger picture, I supported teachers as they developed an internal accountability to each other by co-designing tools and using those tools to conduct peer observations. At the same time, as the school leader, I conducted observations. The discussions about planning for rigor, co-constructing a tool for rigor, observing for rigor, and then engaging in continuous improvement (Yurkofsky et al., 2020) provided a process of internal accountability to each other -- a durable process for enacting the CLE axioms of critical dialogue and the people closest to the issues working on solutions to local problems.
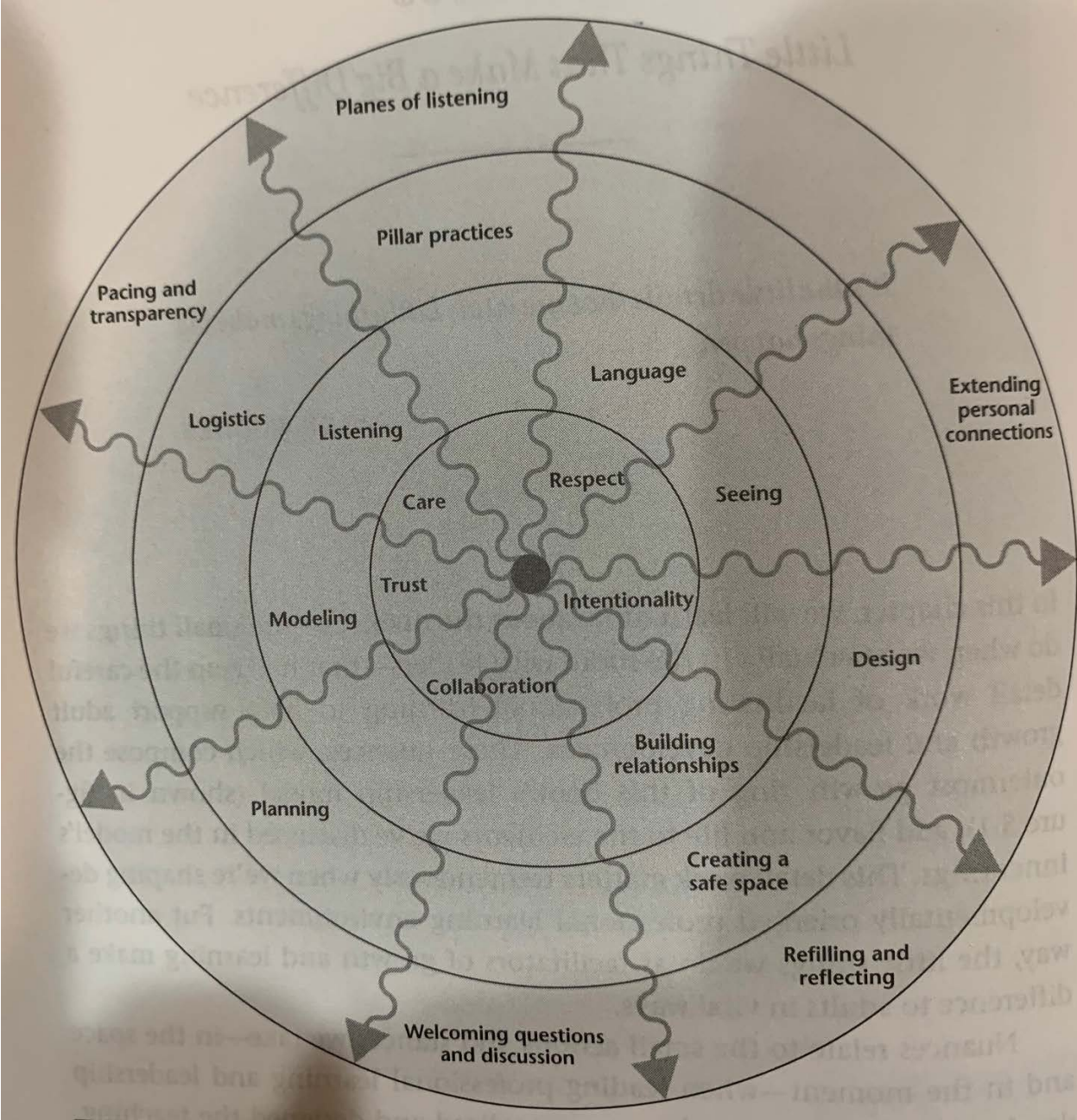
Figure 19. Growth rings of facilitating professional learning.

Figure content (labels, from center outward):

Intentionality

Respect · Care · Trust · Collaboration

Listening · Language · Seeing · Modeling · Building relationships

Pillar practices · Logistics · Planning · Welcoming questions and discussion · Creating a safe space · Refilling and reflecting · Design · Seeing

Planes of listening · Pacing and transparency · Extending personal connections

Research Questions Re-Examined

The overarching question guiding this study was: How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? The three sub-questions were:

1. To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices?

2. To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor?

3. How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor?

Throughout our CPR team meetings, CPR members reflected on their practices and shared with each other. This professional development was supported by PAR activities that created meaning and generative knowledge regarding culturally responsive teaching. The findings of the PAR study showed that participants used CRP with a high level of confidence, demonstrating the focus on culturally responsive practices. The findings supported an increase in rigor with respect to the emphasis on relationship-based instruction, the use of practices that embrace diversity, differentiated instruction, and the use of critical thinking questions.

Secondly, teachers in this study demonstrated a high level of productivity when I created the appropriate learning conditions to support the team in developing their knowledge and skills for implementing CRT and increasing their capacity for rigorous instruction. Teachers were able to analyze data from observations and engage in critical team conversations to support changed practices to increase rigor. Teachers needed to build on their skills of increasing the level of rigor by differentiating instruction and implementing critical thinking questions. We developed the

framework for adult learning to support teacher change by analyzing lesson plans, using protocols, and conducting classroom observations using our observational tool.

Framework for Change

This PAR and study led me to develop a framework for supporting teacher change. Based on the PAR findings I developed a framework that represents the change in teacher practice based on the findings of this PAR. The results of these findings revised our theory of action to a theory in action. Our original theory of action was: *If a CPR can co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices with the intention to change teacher practice, then the level of opportunity will increase for students to have equitable access to rigorous instruction.*

Figure 20 represents the framework for change in teacher practice based on the findings throughout this PAR. To increase the level of access of rigor we engaged in focused professional learning to address teacher practices. In this case, the focus was on culturally responsive teaching practices. The vessel that best supported the focus of the framework was the input of change through the PAR study.

The input of change was to create appropriate learning conditions and we used protocols to create the learning conditions. We created intentional bonds with the CPR team and acknowledged the importance of diverse perspectives. The protocols helped us to tap teachers' past experiences through the use of Journey lines and used the critical friends protocols to analyze teachers' lessons and provide different perspectives in structure. The input of change resulted in a theory in action:
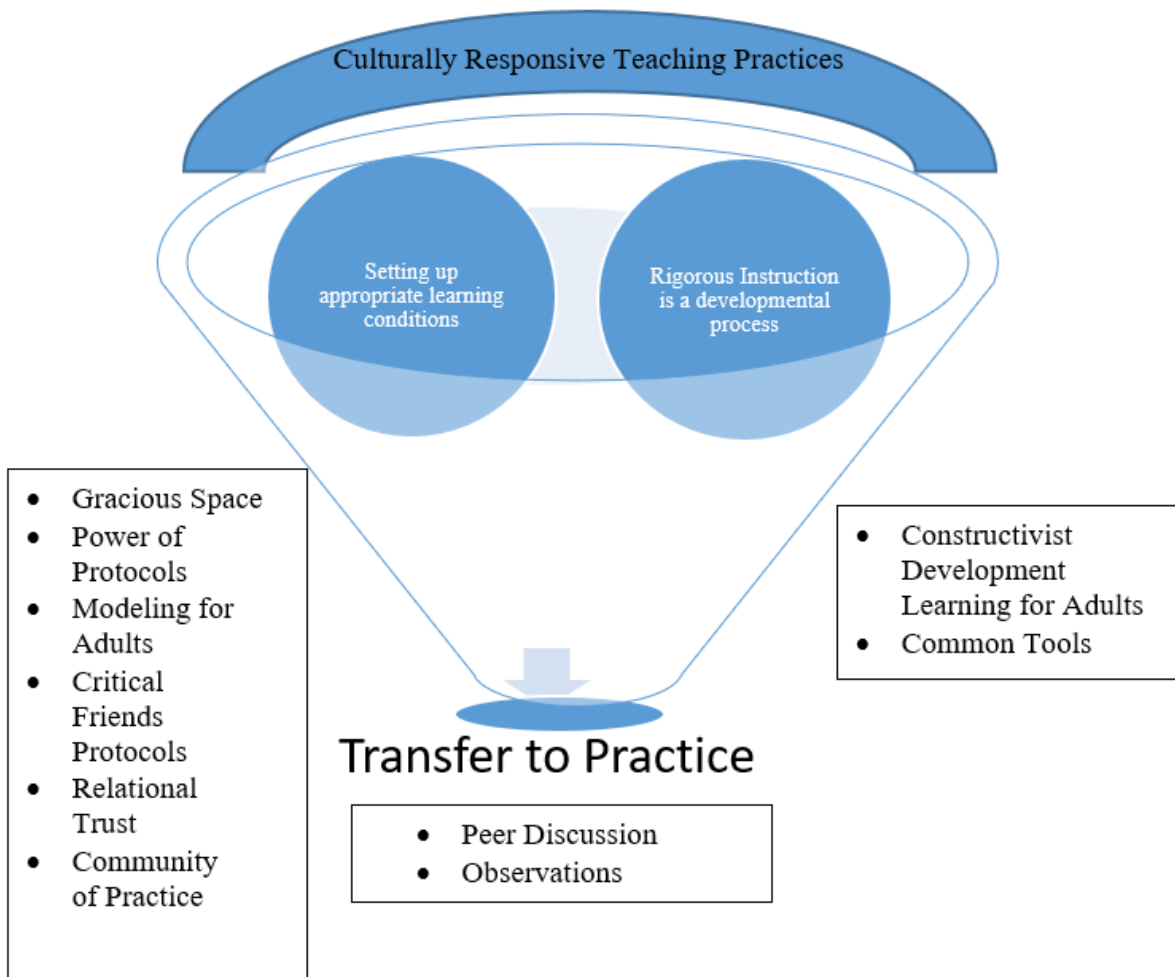
Figure 20. Framework for changing teaching practices for rigorous access with CRT.

If a co-practitioner researcher group is provided the appropriate learning conditions to establish intentional relational bonds and to utilize practices that embrace diversity (perspectives), then the CPR team co-generated and adapted culturally responsive practices to increase the level of equitable access to rigorous instruction.

Furthermore, to promote transfer to classroom practice, my role as a cultural leader and facilitator during the CPR meetings was critical. Particularly my reflections, feedback, and leadership while considering the CPR team dynamic coaching model was significant for the change. The combination of these three drivers of change led to changed teacher practices with the intention of improving student learning.

Implications

There were multiple implications for the PAR study related to practice, policy, and research. I have recommendations for improving current educational practices, informing state and national educational policies, and future research to expand on the findings of this study.

Practices

The PAR study took place in an inner-city middle school that is listed as a low-academic performing school. This school receives academic initiatives as demanded teaching practices to solve academic problems. According to Spillane and Hopkins (2013) "schools can adopt and purchase the best instructional programs for students, but effectiveness is determined by how the educators learn to analyze, design, and model these practices" (p. 57). The PAR study created a professional learning community, which provided the space for teachers to realize the learning environment at South Mountain Middle needs culturally responsive practices to increase the level of learning for students. The PAR activities and discussion throughout this study show the development of teachers' knowledge and how they adjusted their teaching practices to be more

culturally responsive teachers. The impact of this professional development created intentional relational bonds with each team member to help improve their teaching practices to address the needs of our students at South Mountain Middle School. Grubb and Tredway (2010b) identify that the teachers generate methods and evidence from their teaching practice to promote learning at the same time they established shared responsibility for outcomes. During this practice, team members became more culturally aware of utilizing practices to embrace diversity, so their students' cultural needs are being addressed in class. This PAR study brought attention to the CPR team that our school has been acknowledging a dominant culture of students due to our school demographics and the resources that are provided by our district. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized that the goal of equitable education is not to help students learn to adapt to the dominant culture of the school. Instead, the goal should be to help students develop a positive self-image through the relevance of learning how to embrace differences in others. Due to the appropriate learning conditions for the CPR team members to learn the skills for implementing culturally responsive teaching and allowing the time to develop the process to increase the team's capacity for rigorous instruction, this acknowledgment of a dominant culture would not have been recognized.

The results from this PAR Study revealed that involving teachers in the process of changing teacher practices to better instruction is more successful with their input. Letting teachers have more authority for decisions about their learning and more structure paradoxically produces more freedom. By clearly delineating outcomes and learning tasks, protocols and procedures allow teachers to learn instead of trying to figure out how to do something (Grubb & Tredway, 2010a). The PAR study shows how a team of teachers, and an instructional coach assisted me through a holistic process to learn about culturally responsive teaching while

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engaging them in identifying components of rigor, so we could co-construct an observational tool to pilot at our school that will identify the needs of our students more accurately than generic instructional initiatives. The individuals that are working with our students have the knowledge to address the student's academic needs, and, if given the opportunity to express and enhance their knowledge in a professional learning community, then effective instructional change can impact teaching practices for equitable access to rigorous instruction. Overall, setting the appropriate learning conditions for a team of educators to build relational bonds through collaboration, developing their skills of using culturally responsive teaching practices that embrace diversity, and allowing the team to identify access to rigor in practices demonstrated evidence of transfer in classrooms.

Policy

The power of policymakers is the overall focal point of change at all levels. Effective teaching practices in low-performing schools are in high demand nationally as a solution for schools like South Mountain Middle. However, current policies adhere to the district's instructional framework, which is implementing mandated instructional initiatives that are expected to work for all schools. Teaching practices that inherit mandated instructional practices are difficult to establish teacher buy-in to transfer instruction and access to relevant instruction for students.

The PAR study has established the ability of transfer of practices that have influenced staff buy-in toward ownership of implementing rigorous culturally responsive teaching practices in our school. The PAR study results can have an impact on the meso level of policy by creating an evidence-based framework to establish a professional learning environment that results in educators enhancing their knowledge to implement culturally responsive teaching practices and

co-construct an observational tool that benefits their school. The level of understanding of this PAR study allows participants the autonomy of learning and creating the needs of facilitated professional development for participants, so the autonomy allows all levels of understanding. When the level of success is established locally through the micro and meso level, then these results can inform the macro level of patterns to follow for the needs of other schools.

Although the emphasis of the school's culturally responsive pedagogical needs and the team's identification of the components of rigor differ from the macro level, users will still create a rigorous environment for cultural learning. Through my participation in this PAR study, I have learned that effective change begins with leadership, that culturally responsive pedagogy impacts teaching and learning, and that feedback and data from professional learning communities and community learning exchanges can actually impact effective change in instruction. The two themes that were established throughout the PAR study can be used to inform our school improvement team on how to observe school items that address the needs of our school. Our SIP team can evaluate how the decision of our school policies establishes intentional relational bonds with students and staff and how our policies are culturally aware of embracing diversity. The results from the study's framework demonstrated the results of rigorous teaching practices, progress monitoring for effectiveness, staff efficacy, and culturally relevant instruction for student learning. These results can persuade policymakers to allow low-performing schools to pilot this study for academic growth and success.

Research

During the PAR study I analyzed the reflective memos of the participants to get to the root cause of the focus of practice. The root cause was that teachers needed to develop their knowledge and skills in culturally responsive pedagogy and how to implement culturally

responsive teaching with rigorous access for students. Once I understood, I began to model and create the learning conditions. I facilitated a decision-making process through data triangulation and the use of the community learning exchange protocols with the CPR team. Weiss (1995) explains that:

> Much of the knowledge that people bring to bear on a decision comes from their direct experiences. The majority of decisions to improve schools and districts are made from the lens of practitioner research by receiving onsite feedback from participants that work close to the problem, but otherwise, decisions are made by analyzing data from external individuals of the problem. (p. 576)

CLE axioms guided the work of the CPR members throughout this study. The PAR process demonstrated that the majority of the CLE axioms in ways of learning through leadership, and conversations by participants closest to the issues of the teaching practices to implement CRT. The CPR meetings were facilitated through my leadership, and I provided opportunities for critical conversations with people close to the focus of practice. We analyzed the team's lessons and identified the best possible solutions. During the meetings, the team engaged in PAR activities that resulted in impactful conversations, reflective memos, and professional learning experiences that were transferred into their classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) tells us:

> It is through the relationships being developed that the cognitive experience of co-constructing knowledge occurs. This social and cognitive learning process is informed by opportunities to story the experiences, reflect upon the experience, reauthor or re-narrative the experience and, finally, act on the experience. (p. 27)

The findings supported the claims that setting the appropriate learning conditions for adults to build relationships engaging in the developmental process of identifying rigorous instruction of culturally responsive teaching is a way to transfer practices into classroom instruction.

The study provided evidence that a framework process is capable at the meso level, but an additional question arises: How can the process be regularly sustained or monitored if participants at the macro level suggest changes in teacher practices and introduce culturally responsive practice with access to rigor? Militello et al. (2022) suggest, "Organizers of the CLE believe that learning is a leadership act, and that leadership is at its best when it is in action. All participants have something to contribute, and they are active in framing their learning" (p 30). Using the CLE methodology, I learned how to align my leadership actions to a shared decision-making process that involves the building of relationships, therefore, I could receive a genuine understanding of the root cause of the problem.

How to support other low-performing schools that struggle with a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy with equitable access to rigorous instruction for students in a developmental process is still a question that remains after the research of this PAR study at my school. How much of the feedback from the conversations between the teachers who are most familiar with the problem will be used in a district rollout if this study is performed at a district or macro level? Having the opportunity to conduct this study again, I would consider having a member of our district instructional team included in our CPR team or invite them to our CLE to learn a different way to introduce district instructional initiatives. I would include students' perspectives to help determine the level of rigor of the culturally responsive practices. I believe these changes would contribute to the research world.

Limitations

The limitations of the PAR study were important in future planning. Overall the PAR study developed a systematic way for school leaders as instructional leaders to promote change in teacher's instructional practices through a collaborative professional learning community network with teachers providing input toward the development of this change process. Throughout this process, the areas of effective teaching are identified, but the students' input on the satisfaction of equitable access to rigorous instruction is still unknown. While this study focused on changes in teachers' practices and their perspectives, one limitation was receiving the voice of students to determine the effectiveness of these practices.

Although many programs encourage replication, I strongly believe that after the three inquiry cycles have established the foundation for implementing CRT with equitable access of rigor, school administrators and teachers should make use of sources for student feedback to improve this process. "Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourages teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 469).

While there is a large amount of information on culturally responsive pedagogy and what it entails, there is limited literature on how to put it into practice because its cultural development process. Due to the limited time in the study our team was not able to re-evaluate the disposition of cultural responsiveness from the last evaluation in PAR cycle one. I would recommend two opportunities of using the Project I[4] rubric as evidence to distinguish the level of growth among the CPR participants. Our CPR team definitely showed evidence of their development of their knowledge, skills, and disposition throughout the study. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students

as conduits for teaching them more effectively (Gay, 2000). This study is a process of developing knowledge, skill, and disposition, and when it's acknowledged the impact of this process will definitely spread school wide.

Due to the limited number of participants that I believed would be committed to this process, I would recommend selecting participants that would have the time and flexibility in the school's schedule to conduct classroom observation among the CPR team. Our team was able to conduct classroom observations amongst the team, but they were limited to certain team members due to our school schedule. Overall, in this PAR, teachers, an instructional coach, and an administrator learned to reflect on the ways to recognize challenging instruction by applying procedures that value diversity, differentiation, and critical thinking exercises. As a result, it is important to make sure that collaborative, culturally responsive teaching strategies are used to establish relationships through teaching students.

Leadership Development

During this participatory action research project, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my growth as a leader. Specifically, I have looked at how my role as an instructional leader has changed into that of a more evidence-based researcher-practitioner and increased my facilitation skills. The opportunity to work in a learning environment with an excellent Co-Practitioner Researcher group, allowed me to reflect on my leadership development, understand ways to implement the community learning exchange axioms, and a belief in the role of facilitation.

Regular Reflection on Leadership Development

One factor that contributed to my leadership growth was my ability to reflect after each CPR meeting so I can understand that my development over the PAR process was different from my occupational duties as principal. My coach, Janette Hernandez, always stated through the

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process, "You must step out of the role of a principal and look at it from a different lens." Prior to this PAR study, I led small groups in professional development, but my approach was to design the entire process, keep a watch on the participants, and then decide the results for the follow up. My motivation to lead the project was challenged by feelings of uncertainty. After reflecting on the initial CPR meeting, I made the decision that in order to establish trust among the CPR team members, I needed to set an example by articulating the team's vision as the lead co-researcher practitioner. Terrell et al. (2018) articulated:

> regardless of personality or leadership styles, the principal should articulate and model their own vision of what a successful school ought to look like and communicate their beliefs and vision to staff, students and parents. The role of being a culturally responsive school leader starts with reevaluating myself as school leader. (p. 19)

Throughout the PAR study, I established a level of transparency so that I could discuss my weaknesses with my coworkers and write reflective memos without feeling self-conscious about my position as principal. Following each CPR team meeting, I engaged in a moment of reflection; that practice me track my development and increase my awareness of effective procedures and practices to improve my skills as a culturally responsive leader. Khalifa (2016) states that school leaders must "deeply understand their local impulses and context of oppression to see if they are unequitable practices" (p. 52). As an African American male principal in the PAR study, I developed more into a culturally responsive leader starting with my mindset of challenging the status quo and specifically my purpose of leading low performing schools such as South Mountain Middle. I was tasked to bring structure and order to South Mountain Middle School, and the main priority was to create a safe learning environment.

School districts that support the status quo will attempt to find minoritized individuals who will lead schools in ways that maintain current conditions. While Black principals were hired to deal with problems of racism in the district, some of those Black principals instead reproduced systems of White supremacy and oppression by focusing mostly on disciplining practices. (p. 190)

My goal was to establish a structured environment for learning that placed a strong emphasis on providing our students with the quality instruction they need. Overall, I encountered challenges in changing the mindsets of people who were content with maintaining the students' behavior but unable to see how the school could improve in other ways. I had to model for the staff my vision as a culturally responsive instructional leader; this helped me gain their support and buy in for driving this change. To coordinate long-standing implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Understand and Rely on the Community Learning Exchange Axioms

At first, the CLE axioms presented me with another level of uncertainty, but as I fully incorporated them into the study, I gained a deeper understanding of the axioms and used them as the basis of my leadership work. These were and are my espoused values and I learned to enact them in new ways (Argyris & amp; Schön, 1974; Freire, 1970; Guajardo et al., 2016): I enacted learning and leadership as dynamic social processes in the PAR study by utilizing the perspectives of all participants to contribute to the study for others to gain knowledge through questions responses, discussions, and memo reflections.

1. I enacted learning and leadership as dynamic social processes in the PAR study by utilizing the perspectives of all participants and co-constructing knowledge through the use of inquiry-based questions, facilitated discussions, and reflective memos.

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2. I believe that the use of conversations are critical and central pedagogical process. I created a safe space to discuss important topics and to build strong relationships. I facilitated reflective practices and protocols in groups that promoted social learning theory within a safe environment that supported vulnerable, honest conversations and relational trust.

3. Throughout my feelings of uncertainty, I learned that to rely on trusting the people closest to the issues to discover answers to local concerns was possible by utilizing intentional structures and actions based on my leadership reflections.

4. Crossing the boundaries meant that I invited the CPR members to leave their comfort zones of traditional methods of thinking and to consider culturally responsive teaching. Listening to others and taking risks allowed the team to begin to shift the status quo of a school that's academically low performing.

5. I firmly know from my experience that hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities. Supporting the CPR team to engage in meaningful participation when proposing and implementing solutions to the issues will inspire their belief in any plan of action, rather than external authority figures deciding what should work for members of the school. The solutions thus are built on the actual assets and strengths of all participants and requires a shift from a deficit model of change to an ideologically and relationally growth mindset model (Guajardo et al., 2016).

My development as a culturally responsive leader was impacted by my learning the significance of the community learning exchange axioms and how they are needed to support the growth of the CPR team and informed the PAR study.

Belief in the Process of Facilitation

I realized the power of facilitation as a process to implement the PAR process. My role as the facilitator of this study was to engage in conversations with the teachers toward promoting culturally responsive practices in the classroom. I was proud that the team gained confidence in knowing about culturally responsive teaching practices in PAR Cycle One, which resulted in some members sharing implemented practices with our entire staff. Entering PAR Cycle Two, I was uncertain of how I was going to teach them how to increase the level of rigor using CRT due to the following research question: To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor? From the beginning of this study I mentioned that implementing CRT does not have a manual of implementation, so learning to facilitate the CPR group was new learning for me. Throughout this PAR process, I led with open-ended questions to start the discussion and the team took the lead on the development of each activity. The team took ownership in identifying the components rigor due to my process of facilitation. The progress monitoring piece was profound due to the team taking ownership of what they created and being intrigued to see how it's effective in the classroom. The use of the Critical Friends protocol was a key example of one of the facilitations tools I utilized. The CPR team engaged in critical conversation and embraced all comments as an opportunity to improve their teaching practices. The protocol helped me to focus on one of the CLE axioms of using critical conversations and a central pedagogical process.

Conclusion

The PAR study was a journey and exploration of how I led a change in practice by shifting the learning environment and contributed to innovative academic solutions. The question I asked myself is how this study would be different from my current practice or role in this

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school and how would this be embraced by my teachers on a sustainable basis. Thomson (2002) states, "Doing justice is forever a daunting task and despite what appears to be insurmountable difficulties and obstacles; social justice reflects both the means and the outcome for each and every act of learning remaining unassailable" (p. 8). I provided appropriate learning conditions for a group of individuals to embrace new knowledge without an expert; rather, a team of individuals co-constructing meaning with each other had one goal -- bettering instruction for students. My role as the facilitator of this study was to engage in conversations with the teachers toward promoting social change and culturally responsive practices in the classroom. The commitment and dedication was palpable among the team. The process of learning about culturally responsive pedagogy and shifting our thinking toward making these innovative practices rigorous was a challenge.

To complete this challenge, we had to be transparent about our beliefs and the weakness in our teaching practices, so we can receive the support of each other towards as we continued to co-construct protocols and tools of how to use culturally responsive teaching practices. The PAR works axiologically with 'doing justice' by and for those oppressed by the practices that need changing (hunter et al., 2013, p. 8). In this journey, we developed our tools by listing to all perspectives of our team members. Through collaborative discussions, reflective memos, and classroom observations we built an intentional relational bond and acknowledged the focus of practices that we sought to address. We co-constructed a tool to address the use of rigorous culturally responsive teaching practices. We incorporated the CLE axioms in our work to empower educators to be agents of change for equitable education. The goal of equitable education is not to help students learn to adapt to the dominant culture of the school. Instead, the goal should be to help students develop a positive self-image through the relevance of learning

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how to embrace differences in others (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This act of an equitable change in educational practices expands our knowledge of teaching and learning as educators, so we can recognize the greatness in our students achieve.

Throughout my leadership journey I embraced learning as a facilitator through a dynamic social process in the PAR study by listening to the perspectives of all participants who contributed to the study. Observing how our team co-constructed an observational tool to identify access of rigor in instruction was an accomplishment and a highlight of my leadership growth that will continue to push the project school wide. Culturally responsive leadership is paramount in schools working with marginalized groups of students to ensure the inherent barriers to these students' academic progress are addressed (Vassallo, 2015). Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school (Khalifa et al., 2016). When leaders model the practice of school-wide implementations, it provides a sustainable structured environment inside the school and in the community (Khalifa, p. 46).

The PAR study highlights promising practices for leaders and teachers involved in the CPR team. As a result of participation in this PAR, CPR members have developed their skills and understanding of CRP to include attention to rigorous instruction. The PAR study offers a framework for change in teacher practice that can be replicated by principals and teacher leaders. Our CPR team demonstrated that if a team engaged in sustained professional learning communities about culturally responsive teaching practices with a focus to increase access to rigor based on adult learning principles that are facilitated by the leader of the school, then changes in teaching practices can occur.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

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: Leon Dupree
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 10/18/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-001658
         Repositioning Thinking Using Culturally Responsive Principles

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 10/18/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

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
AppedixFTeacher Observationtools.pdf(0.01)	Additional Items
APPENDIX CConsentForm.pdf(0.01)	Consent Forms
AppendixDInterviewprotocol (1) (1).pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Full Proposal (0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
I4 CALL Master Survey.pdf(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Observation Tool Calling-On- Type One.pdf(0.01)	Additional Items
Scripts for Recruiting Participants.pdf(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.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL & DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER

Nash County Public Schools

DATE 6/11/2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Nash County Public 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 Nash County Public Schools and its mission of educating students.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to conduct your dissertation study titled, "How do teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access and rigorous instruction " with participants in our schools. We also give permission to utilize the following spaces at Rocky Mount Middle School to collect data and conduct interviews for your dissertation project: Community Learning Exchanges, Co-Practitioner Research meetings, PLC meetings, and classroom observations /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 Leon Dupree to conduct his study and his project will not interfere with any functions of Rocky Mount Middle School. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and Nash County Public 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,

Dr. Steve Ellis
Superintendent, Nash County Public Schools

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: Repositioning Thinking: Using Culturally Responsive Principles To Increase
Equitable Access To Rigorous Instruction For All Students

Principal Investigator: Leon Dupree
Institution, Department or Division East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership
Address: PO Box 246 612 Railroad St. Macclesfield, North Carolina
Telephone #: 252-341-0708
Study Coordinator Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #:   252-328-6131

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 the research.

This is a participatory action research study to help support teachers to shift their teaching
practices to provide equitable opportunities for rigorous instruction. The research is using
culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance teacher's knowledge and practices throughout the
study. Teachers with an open mind, a strong belief in relationship building, and who is willing to
improve their teaching practices for the best of their students are being recruited for this study.
Participants will be involved in critical discussions about teaching philosophies and personal
beliefs and rate their knowledge level of culturally responsive pedagogy to guide the study.
Participants will also participate in PAR activities to generate data that I will examine to
determine the next steps of the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to work with a team of teachers to co-generate and adapt
culturally responsive pedagogical practices with attention to change their teaching practices to
raise the level of opportunity for students to have equitable access to rigorous instruction. You
are being invited to take part in this research because you are an educator that displays a level of
motivation for learning to achieve what's best for our students. The decision to take part in this
research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn to what extent can the
teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices.

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

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at Rocky Mount Middle School located in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. You will need to come to the PLC room located at Rocky Mount Middle School in room 160, approximately twelve times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 12 hours over the next eighteen months.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to do the following: If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in a cycle of participatory action research activities centered around equity and culturally responsive principles, a community learning exchange that will ask for your feedback, observation during the school year and completing reflective memos of the activities. The observations may be recorded in addition to handwritten notes by me. All of the PAR activities and meeting discussions will focus on your personal experience throughout the study to improve teaching practices and principles at Rocky Mount Middle School.

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 includes 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 records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from surveys, meeting notes and reflective memos will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years and will be destroyed upon successful completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to 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 (Mr. Leon Dupree) at (252) 341-0708 (weekdays, between 7:00 am - 5:00 pm)

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) 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.
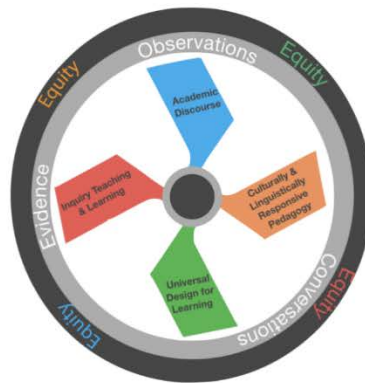

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)   Signature   Date

APPENDIX D: PROJECT I⁴ FRAMEWORK

Framework of Classroom Learning and Practice: Propelled by Equity-Driven Tools for School Change

Real inspiration means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better.
Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro*

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;

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APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Protocol

Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Artifacts

Each semester for the duration of the participatory action research study, the researcher will host a Community Learning Exchange on a topic related to the research questions in the participatory action research (PAR) project. At the CLE, the researcher will collect and analyze artifacts that respond to the specific questions listed below. The researcher will collect qualitative data based on the activities in which the participants engage at the CLE. The data will be in the form of posters and notes that participants write and drawings that participants make in response to prompts related to the research questions.

Participants will include the Co-Practitioner Researchers and other participants who sign consent forms. If students are participants, consent and assent forms will be used.

Date of CLEs: Fall 2021/Spring 2022/Fall2022
Number of Participants: 5 to 8 participants

Purpose of CLE: The purpose of the CLE is to determine to what extent the teachers can develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions about culturally responsive practices, so they can co-generate and adapt these culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction.

Questions for Data Collection:

1. What evidence shows that this PAR activity supported the teachers with developing their knowledge and skills about culturally responsive practices?
2. What does the data reveal about the root cause of limited access for all students to rigorous instruction?
3. How can we shift the teaching practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction for all students?
4. What does the data reveal that I as the leader should improve or develop to support equitable access and rigorous instruction?

APPENDIX F: CODES FROM POST OBSERVATION NOTES

Collaboration	Differentiation	Embrace Diversity	Relationships	Critical Thinking Questions
An opportunity to engage in academic discourse to work with various people to receive a different perspective or express my ideas or interest of the topic.	Finding different ways to adapt teaching practices that motivate and challenge students according to their learning styles to promote a rigorous classroom.	Creating an inclusive learning environment that demonstrates cultural awareness by delivering instruction that is related to standard and day-to-day life.	An intentional bond with students that allows the teacher to make a connection with the student to provide a welcome and inviting learning environment.	Providing opportunities that enhance the student's ability to speak, listen, and critically think to draw different perspectives or cultural differences of the lesson.
Yes 1 1 1 No: 1 1 1 1 1 (n=3)	Yes 1 1 1 1 1 No 1 1 1 (n= 5)	Yes 1 1 1 1 1 1 No 1 1 (n = 7)	Yes 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 No (n= 8)	Yes 1 1 1 No 1 1 1 1 1 (n= 3)
Teacher To Student discussion Class Discussions from teams Students working in teams with modules.	Different learning styles Various learning styles Different learning modules to maximize learning Guided notes provided to some students due to level of understanding Given guided notes for specific students	Relevant to students culture Prior knowledge to use Embrace cultural music to the lesson Relevant to student learning Real world examples of all cultures. Prior Knowledge of what's learned	Students felt comfortable with the teacher Teacher knows their students Room feels welcoming Students attentive and loves to participate Welcoming classroom and safe environment Teacher is respectful to all students. Knows their students Teacher has a strong bond with students	Students engage in creating questions DOK questioning

Pre-Cycle	Date	Pre-Cycle PAR Activities	Activity 2) Write your definition or statement of culturally responsive teaching?	Share a teaching practice that you have used or can use in your class and how does it emphasizes being culturally responsive.	What are some things you would like to know moving forward?	Definition of CRP.	Personal Narrative (Journey Line Except)	TED Talk Video on being cultural responsive	Journey Lines - How were you taught the subject you teach throughout your life?	PRE CYCLE Total
To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)										
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)									Review this data because the group is teaching like they were taught.	
Themes										
Embrace Diversity			5	2	1	2		5		15
Categories										
Knowing your students				1		1		1		3
Acknowledging cultural differences				1	2	1		3		7
Themes										
Relationships			2	3			1			6
Categories										
Making Connections			2	3	1					6
Welcoming & Inviting Environment			1							1
To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor? PAR Cycle 2)										
How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? (PAR Cycle 2)										
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (PAR Cycle 2)										
5 components of Rigor										
Relationships										
Embrace Diversity										
Differentiation			3	2						5
Collaboration				1					1	2
Critical Thinking Questions										

	PAR Cycle 1 PAR Activities	Activity 1) Write your definition of cultural responsive teaching / pedagogical practices	(Activity 2) Write your definition or statement of cultural responsive teaching?	(Activity 3) Share a teaching practice that you have used or can use in your class and how does it emphasizes being	(Activity 4) What are some things you would like to know moving forward?	Activity 5 Jamboard disposition chart	Classroom observation	
To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)								
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)								
Themes								
Embrace Diversity		4	4	2		6		16
Categories								
Knowing your students		2		6		6	1	15
Acknowledging cultural differences								
Themes								
Relationships		2	3	8		4	6	23
Categories								
Making Connections		2	2	2	3	2		11
Welcoming & Inviting Environment							8	8
To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor? PAR Cycle 2)								
How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? (PAR Cycle 2)								
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (PAR Cycle 2)								
5 components of Rigor								
Relationships								
Embrace Diversity								
Differentiation								
Collaboration								
Critical Thinking Questions								

	PAR CYCLE 2	Personal Narrative (Think of a time as a student when you participated in a rigorous lesson.	Partner reflections based on the conversation with your partner what are some of the qualities of rigorous lessons / as a teacher	PAR 2 Activity 2 As a group establish and list components or qualities of how rigor is displayed in culturally responsive teaching from PAR cycle activity 1.	PAR activity 3 Personal Narrative Critical Friends Protocol (One of the CPR What additional information do you need	1st Round. Informal Observations (8 observations out of 4 teachers.)	Observation with the Observation tool. 8 observation out of 4 teachers	Total of PAR 2 cycle	Total for 3 cycles
To what extent can the teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions about culturally responsive practices? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)									
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (Pre & PAR Cycle 1)									
Themes									
Embrace Diversity		8	1		2	3	7	21	52
Categories									
Knowing your students									18
Acknowledging cultural differences									7
Themes									
Relationships		10	1			8	8	27	56
Categories									
Making Connections									17
Welcoming & Inviting Environment									9
To what extent do teachers use culturally responsive practices to increase access and rigor? PAR Cycle 2)									
How can teachers co-generate and adapt culturally responsive practices to demonstrate equitable access to rigorous instruction? (PAR Cycle 2)									
How do I develop as a culturally responsive school leader to support equitable access and rigor? (PAR Cycle 2)									
5 components of Rigor									
Relationships									
Embrace Diversity									
Differentiation		5	1			7	5	18	23
Collaboration		10	1		1		3	15	17
Critical Thinking Questions		8	1		3	3	3	18	18

APPENDIX H: CPR / CLE MEETING AGENDA

Community Learning Exchange (CPR) meeting 3 Feb. 14th
Agenda **Monday, Feb. 14th, 2022** **Virtual Meeting 10:00 am - 11:00 am**

Topics:	Facilitator: Leon Dupree,
● Highlighting elements of effective culturally responsive teaching practices centered around the discussion.	**Attendees: CPR Team members (teachers)**

Schedule: 10:00 am – 11:00 am

Time	Minutes	Activity
		● Welcome Meeting Norms ○ Jamboard activities Jamboard Activity
	10 mins	● Dynamic Mindfulness ● Review the definitions of Cultural Responsiveness
	20 mins	● Rate yourself with the characteristics of a (Cultural Responsive Teacher with the ECU Project I^4 Framework *(Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy) (orange rubric)* https://www2.ecu.edu/coe/web/Project%20I4/FRAMEWORK.pdf ● Discussion / Reflection ● *(Elaborate on 1 that describes your teaching practices and 1 improvement from the framework)* (Jamboard activity)
	10 mins	Personal Narrative / Group Reflection Activity ● Share a teaching practice that you used in your class and how does it emphasis being culturally responsive. ● In your opinion what makes teaching practices culturally responsive? Reflect from the chart

	5 mins	Next Steps:
		  a. Introduce the PDSA model
		  b. Review the Personal Narrative suggestions from the team.
		     Review the ECU Project I^4 Framework
		  c. Schedule a time to visit a lesson that the teacher selects to be culturally responsive.

		Collective Evidence:
		  1. Jamboard Responses
		  2. ECU framework/rubric responses

APPENDIX I: OBSERVATIONAL TOOL

Teacher: _____   **CPR Team Member:** _____
          Date: _____

Disclaimer: Not every lesson should display all of the attributes of rigorous access.
   Please circle the component(s) of how you believe the teacher is demonstrating how rigor is evident in this lesson. The lesson may utilize multiple component(s) to demonstrate rigor in culturally responsive teaching.

Levels of Rigor in Culturally Responsive Teaching:					
Collaboration	**Differentiation**	**Content Relevance**	**Relationships**	**Critical Thinking Questions**	
An opportunity to engage in academic discourse to receive a different perspective or express my ideas of the topic.	Finding different ways to challenge each student according to their learning styles to promote a rigorous classroom.	Student learning that is related to standard and day-to-day life.	An intentional bond with students that allows the teacher to make a connection with the student to provide effective teaching and learning.	Providing opportunities that enhance the student's ability to speak, listen, and critically think to draw different perspectives of the lesson.	

Selective Verbatim Notes (Brief details of the learning purpose or class events):

Categories	Components	Circle the Attributes of what you observed	Explain the evidence of what you observed.
Descriptive Components of how rigor is evident to support Culturally Responsive Teaching.	**Collaboration**	• Allow students to stop periodically to engage in academic discourse with their neighbor and effective transition back to the lesson. • Engage students in working together to be useful of each other in finding their own answers without the use of the teacher. • Construct student groups to challenge the communication and social skills of the student with different peers. Arrange the appropriate time allowed for student to effectively collaborate. • Gives students opportunities to process their ideas before they collaborate with other students, so the discussion is intentional and prepared for sharing the students' thoughts. (Ex. Think Alouds)	Observation:
	Differentiation	• Provides a variety of activities that empower students to shape their learning (including open-ended responses, student-generated questions, student-generated learning targets) • Evidence of prior procedural knowledge that fosters the students learning styles • Using equitable questions strategies to find different ways to challenge each students according to their strengths and weaknesses.	Observation:
	Content Relevance	• Providing examples that the students can connect to and aligns what they are learning to standard and day-to-day life. • Gives students opportunities to express their thoughts and ideas that align with the relevant topic to generate class discussion. • Construct or co-construct additional information about the topic that teaches the students a better understanding or importance for them to consider the topic in different perspectives. (Ex. Wide open questions)	Observation:

Categories	Components	Circle the Attributes of what you observed	Explain the evidence of what you observed.
	Critical Thinking Question	• Engaged in questioning that allows students to draw different conclusions from the same topic, image, or lesson. (Examples: Open ended questions) • Provides a variety of activities that empower students to speak, listen, and display critical thinking with interactions. (Scratic Seminars, Philosophical chairs) • Evidence of student generated high ordered questions that facilitate class discussions into multiple questions/answers that students respond with complete sentences. (Personal Narrative Writing or student expression through Exit/Entrance Tickets)	Observation:
Categories	**Components**	**Circle the Attributes of what you observed**	**Explain the evidence of what you observed.**
	Relationships	• Evidence of strong rapport is established between the teacher and students to effectively motivate and challenge each child. • Using equitable or culturally techniques that redirect students back on task effectively or motivates them to participate in discourse. • Provides appropriate knowledge of their students and understands their triggers of challenges, confidence level of rigorous task, and provides support for the student to overcome the task.	

Observer: (What is needed more to promote rigor?)	**Observed:** (What you Noticed or Wonder for improvements of the lesson.)

APPENDIX J: CRITICAL FRIENDS PROTOCOL

CRITICAL FRIENDS TUNING PROTOCOL		
PRESENTERS	**Presentation**: Project Title & Idea, Driving Question, Culminating Products, Entry Event*, and any concerns you'd like feedback about	7 min
EVERYONE	**Clarification**: Audience asks short clarifying questions	3 min
AUDIENCE	**Good Stuff**: Audience shares what they liked about the project	4 min
	Wondering Stuff: Audience shares their concerns and questions for consideration	4 min
	Next Stuff: Audience shares ideas about resources and ways to enhance the project	4 min
PRESENTERS	**Reflection**: Group reflects on useful feedback, next steps	3 min
	TOTAL TIME	25 min