

ABSTRACT

Virginia G. Jacobs, **BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN CLASSROOMS** (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, December, 2023.

This study examined how teachers and leaders could work together to build capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy that influenced the school culture. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the primary methodology, educators work together to understand Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and integrate pedagogical principles into their curriculum and practices. The research revealed educators' surface relationships with students in the areas of access and inclusion. Educators had surface relationships with students and families due to challenges and barriers of fear and avoidance due to their experiences within the school community. During the three PAR cycles, teachers resolved that if they wanted to reach all students, they must know how to make learning relevant and relatable. To accomplish this, teachers must build and foster relationships, by learning and understanding their students, families, backgrounds, and experiences. Doing so will allow them to create and implement culturally responsive practices intentionally. As a result of the study, we are making incremental growth in culturally responsive pedagogy. Despite teachers' willingness and effort to effectively serve students and families, teachers had a surface level of cultural understanding. Ultimately, we desired for our teachers and staff to embark on a transformation to integrate and immerse the environment, curriculum, and practices in culturally responsive pedagogy, one classroom at a time. This study's results can guide leaders who expect quick radical change to recognize small increments of progress while creating a strategic plan for total school improvement. Further research study needs to examine professional identity development and wellness support for Principals of Color working in predominantly white spaces.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY
IN CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Charles Hezekiah Gilchrist, Sr. I was blessed to have you on earth for seven years, but your last words will forever be etched in my mind. I hope I am making you proud. Rest in Peace, Daddy.

To my mother, Linda Faye. Words cannot express my gratitude for your continued prayers and support throughout my life. You are the strongest woman I know. You have been the anchor that keeps me grounded. You deserve all the blessings that God has in store for you. I look forward to witnessing them all! I love you, Ma.

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING THE FOCUS OF PRACTICE

“If I never step foot on this campus again, it would be too soon.” ~ former student

Students should never utter those words after graduating from a formal K-12 educational experience. I do not want my child or any other child to feel alone or misunderstood. However, the reality is we do have students feeling this way because of a lack of representation and a lack of knowledge of their backgrounds and identities. As school leaders, our job as educators is to find ways to make educational practices more inclusive to get equitable student outcomes. Curriculum and teaching practices must be inclusive and responsive to students’ culture. This study aimed to work with a group of teachers to look at how they understood Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), how to integrate CRP into our curriculum, and how we were to include CRP in our classroom practices.

East Wake Academy is a K-12 public charter school established in 1998. The school’s population was approximately 1,250 students, with 77.5% Caucasian, 9.8% African American, 7.4% Hispanic, 5.3% American Indian, Asian, or Pacific Islander at the time of this study. Our admissions process allows any student in the state the opportunity to apply, though we primarily serve students from six surrounding counties. Our school has a college and career-ready focus that strives for academic excellence. The school has met or exceeded growth according to the state standards for the past eight years. Students, however, need to feel represented, acknowledged, and seen daily. As a predominantly white school of students and staff, we must ensure that all students can and should learn. Leadership and teachers must examine their beliefs and practices relating to each of their students by learning and connecting their identities to our teaching practices and curricula. When this is done, we can implement CRP.

All staff need to be able to see the assets that each student brings to the classroom. I posed the question: *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms?* We examined this question throughout the study.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the Focus of Practice (FoP) and the rationale for this study. I highlight the assets and challenges related to the study, the context significance, and the study's connection to equity. I then discuss the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, research questions, and theory of action. Finally, I end with a list of research activities conducted for this study.

Focus of Practice

Educators who can make connections and relate to students form undeniable bonds. Students learn from those who are vested in their potential to excel. Learning about students, their families, backgrounds, values, and beliefs can lay the foundation for creating a classroom environment where students feel that they belong (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994). With support from leadership, teachers must learn how important connections are with their students and be able to embed this new knowledge into their classroom practices. Thus, this FoP is important: Teachers and leaders developing and building capacity to infuse CRP in classrooms. In discussing the rationale for this study, I continue to share the importance of understanding the lives and backgrounds of students and the need to validate them in our practices and policies.

Rationale

The FoP in this study centered on cultural responsiveness as it relates to classroom practices. East Wake Academy is a K-12 public charter school in eastern North Carolina. For the purposes of this study, we focused on the middle school, serving the fifth through eighth grades

from six area counties. Our school, approximately 385 students, is not very diverse, with most of our students (79%) being Caucasian. Our staff demographics are a replica of our student population. We had 38 staff members, with 78% being Caucasian. From my experience as a female Black leader and a parent at this school, I have seen students who do not feel connected to the school and environment. This study aimed to build the capacity of staff to understand and utilize culturally responsive practices to change how students were seen, heard, and validated in this setting.

Every student who enters this campus does not always see others that look like them. Students can go throughout the school year without having a classroom teacher of color. Some students have a difficult time relating to their teachers and other students. Perhaps this is because their life experiences differ, or neither have shared their stories. All students must be acknowledged and valued in every way possible within our organization. During this study, we analyzed our practices to gauge whether they contained any inequities that needed to be addressed. Students should be seen and heard on our campus and know they have a place there (Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). In the past, we have had students of color and a few allies express that they did not feel safe or supported when they were vocal about concerns related to race or representation on different parts of our K-12 campus. I do not want those thoughts and beliefs to penetrate the middle school. To address this, our staff collaborated to build capacity for CRP in ideas, mindset, and purpose. The knowledge teachers attained gave them tools to use in their classrooms and to handle situations of concern with students. During this PAR, I examined what was working well and what we needed to focus on to align the expectations for meeting the needs of all. I began by examining the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges related to the FoP.

Analysis of Assets and Challenges

Analyzing the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges is essential to understanding the context for supporting teachers to build teacher capacity to design and create culturally responsive practices (see Figure 1). The micro level refers to the teachers and their classrooms at our school. The meso level focuses on the school and district. Finally, the macro level focuses on state and national assets and challenges connected to the FoP. The assets and challenges identified the starting point for this work.

Micro Assets and Challenges

Teachers and students are assets in our school community. Our teachers are at the frontline of duty daily, working to meet the academic needs of our students. Teachers are given the opportunity to teach with creativity, spontaneity, and engagement. Our school has no robot or “cookie cutter” classrooms; each classroom is unique, based on the personality of the teacher. Teachers enjoy the opportunity to engage in the standards and they teach in ways that students look forward to coming to their classes. Most students do feel a sense of safety and security on our campus.

Although teachers are working to keep students interested in their method of delivery, a common challenge would be the acknowledgment of the varied backgrounds and experiences of the students they are teaching. I have explored how teachers could ensure students can relate to the content and delivery when teaching with our demographics. Our school lacks diversity, with approximately 79% of students and staff being Caucasian. This lack of diversity is a challenge for Students of Color who don't feel a sense of belonging within our environment. Teacher awareness of this was imperative. Teachers also should be self-aware of their implicit biases while teaching all students. Careful, inclusive consideration of practices should occur before

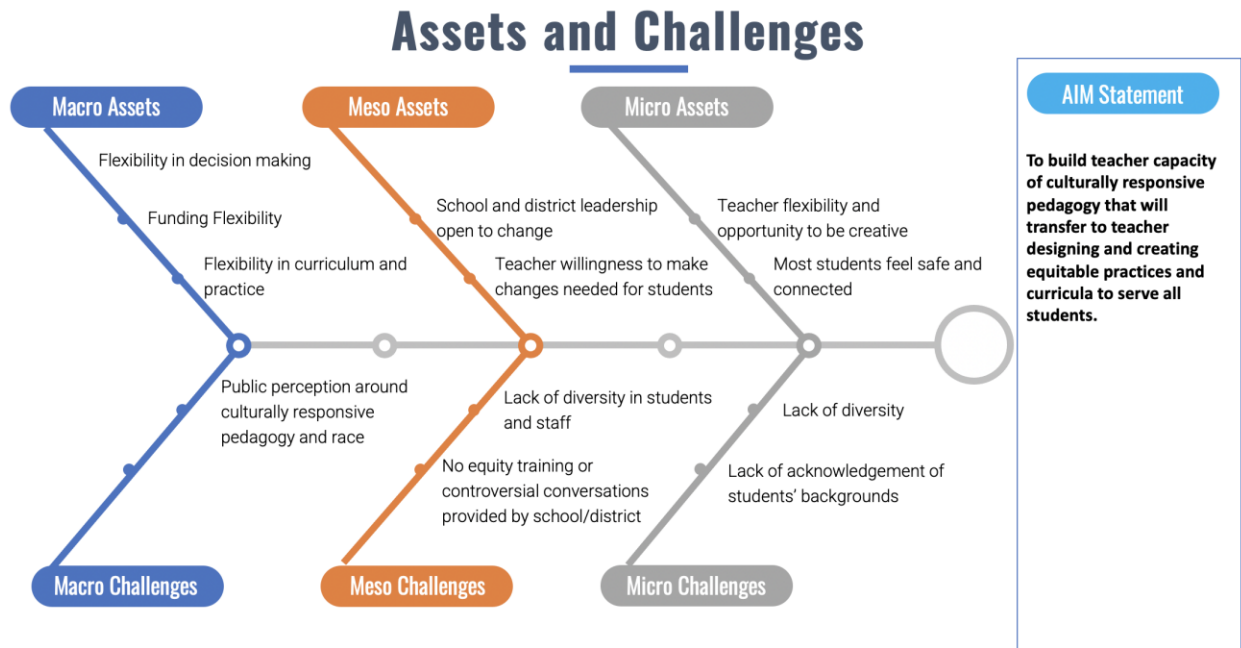


Figure 1. Assets and challenges of the FoP.

classroom implementation. To bring these considerations to the forefront, I was interested in working with my teachers on CRP related to implementing their classroom practices to support all students.

Meso Assets and Challenges

The meso assets encompassed our Local Education Agency (LEA), including our middle school and the K-4 and senior academies. Our LEA's leadership is open to equitable structural changes supporting all students. Our LEA comprises the school board, superintendent, and three principals. Teachers are on board with leadership in fulfilling what needs to be done to meet the needs of every child that enters our doors. The LEA is open to ideas to enhance the staff's knowledge of CRP. When making campus decisions regarding curriculum and practices, considerations for CRP must take precedence.

Our challenges at the meso level begin with our limited diversity in students and staff. The school is currently 79% Caucasian. Many of our students have a limited outlook on the views of others, their thoughts, beliefs, and practices. Before this study, the district had not intentionally provided strategic equity professional development for all staff where practice and accountability have been put in place. In addition, crucial conversations with students and staff are avoided.

Our challenges were acknowledged and addressed to evoke change on the meso level. Open dialogue was one way to bring light to the need for equity-focused professional development, implicit bias, and crucial conversations. Being active in our students' communities and expanding to more diverse areas could draw other families to our school, as well as ensuring all literature, websites, and promotions for our school promote the inclusiveness of all students.

Macro Assets and Challenges

As a North Carolina public charter school, one of the greatest assets via state and national legislation is that we have flexibility in the decisions made for our school. We are also allowed the flexibility to allocate funds as we deem necessary for the growth and enrichment of the school, as well as hiring educators to serve in our environment. The opportunity to make decisions that are best for our school and within our context allowed those closest to the school to do what was right. Unlike many other local education agencies, we can create, adjust, and eliminate policies, procedures, curricula, and practices that do not serve our students and staff. With this allowance, our school took advantage of how we enhanced a student's experience by first seeing our decisions from different points of view, perspectives, and experiences.

One of the biggest challenges on the macro level was centered around historical and political views about race. The recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, other People of Color, and the reactions to those killings have threatened the willingness of some staff and community to engage in conversations around race. While these thoughts and beliefs challenge our work, they highlight the need for culturally responsive work.

In the following section, I will discuss the context of this project. In addition, I will share the significance of engaging in this study.

Context and Significance

Next, I discuss the context of the PAR project and the significance of the practice's focus on our students and school environment. Working with teachers to provide the proper support structure for understanding CRP helped us begin to move to a more equitable educational experience for all students. We examined and focused on practices that helped to integrate and implement cultural responsiveness in classrooms daily.

Context for PAR Study

In the rationale, I shared the demographics of our school. With these demographics, our school tended to lean toward the majority in the ways that they practiced and engaged in instruction. Many of our students come from very similar backgrounds, but not all students have that experience. We knew our teachers must first acknowledge these differences. We then provided guidance on recognizing the needs of students and what we could do to support them. As a school, we began this by learning about student backgrounds and listening to their stories. This study allowed us to examine what we currently had in place and what we needed to implement to serve all students adequately. We had to provide our staff with the knowledge, understanding, and tools to be effective, culturally responsive teachers.

Significance

As a practice, our school strives to center everything around the students. When making decisions about any curriculum or practice, we considered how the decision will benefit students. The significance of this FoP garnered support and validation for all our students. As the school examined itself, there needed to be a shift to an all-inclusive environment. Students must be represented and respected. Acknowledgment of the contributions that the varying backgrounds of students in the school bring to the environment is important for teachers and students. It was time to view our school through an equity lens and adjust where we see subpar areas. We began this work with our choice of curriculum and the practices we implemented across campus. This PAR project and study were significant to my context because we needed to enhance the level of acknowledgment for the students who come through our doors. Instruction and content needed to be relevant and rigorous. Our school's strength was ensuring rigor, but relevancy was what needed attention in various areas. Being a public charter school in one of the largest counties in

North Carolina, future families and potential staff members should know that everyone's story will be told and represented in classrooms. Our goal was for our school to be intentional in our practice to make sure whatever was decided is equitable across the board.

Practice, Policy, and Research

In terms of practice, policy, and research, this PAR study can help those within our school implement equity-based practices and protocols in their classrooms. Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) can be used at the local, state, and national levels through protocols that will assist with solving various problems faced within the school or governmental setting. Open dialogues about CRP should be occurring in the local, state and national levels to equip teachers with the common understanding to meet the needs of all children. Educator prep in higher institutions should also include CRP within their course of study so that new teachers come prepared to work with all students. Research can continue to be conducted on black female leaders in predominantly white spaces and how that impacts their social-emotional well-being. Adequate support should be put in place to support leaders who carry the load and responsibility of ensuring their staff is well-equipped with the tools needed to ensure students are seen, heard, validated, and acknowledged.

Connection to Equity

The FoP related to equity in that I desired to study whether we ensure that all our students feel seen and valued on our campus. Teachers interact with students in multiple ways, but do they really know the students that they serve? Specifically, “Do teachers and students engage in cultural responsiveness in their classroom routines and practices?” and “Do we as a staff acknowledge our students and their cultural backgrounds?” How do we shift from being blind or

close-minded to appreciating who students really are and recognizing the many stories and experiences in our school environment?

Our school is a predominantly white school with predominantly white teachers. As an African American leader and parent of a child who has graduated and one who currently attends this school, I believe there is work to be done within the scope of our school as it relates to all students. The political and psychological equity frameworks are most applicable to this focus of practice. In the following section, I will discuss these equity frameworks as they relate to this study.

Psychological Framework

An invisible undertone is ever present on our campus. This feeling is subtle when students enter the building, participate in class, walk the halls, and converse throughout the grounds. Wilkerson describes it as “An unseen skeleton, a caste system that is as central to its operations as are the studs and joists that we cannot see in the physical buildings...Caste is the infrastructure of our division” (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 17). There is an invisible presence of a hierarchical system on the campus due to the backgrounds and experiences of the students who attend. At times it may feel to some students that they are inferior to white students because whites are the majority. Decisions are made with this silent infrastructure being ever-present. This infrastructure guides how people behave, speak, and interact daily (Wilkerson, 2020).

Unfortunately, this political framework appears to be embedded in parents, students, and some staff. A few of us advocate for policies, programs, and curricula that go against this status quo to ensure students are handled equitably. Many on campus have embodied what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) have termed *Equity Traps*. Teachers, students, and parents claim they do not see race or do not have a racist bone in their body. These equity traps are “patterns of

thinking and behavior that trap the possibilities for creating equitable schools for children of color” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 603). Appropriate strategies must begin in my school to open the eyes of those unaware of their behaviors, biases, and practices that prohibit an equitable environment.

Political-Economic Framework

The political-economic framework was evident throughout our school campus due to structural barriers. We can choose whether to serve lunches or provide transportation as a charter school. Our school currently does neither. Families must be able to provide lunches and transportation from their home to school and back. This prohibits many students from attending our school as they have parents who cannot get off work to pick up their children or provide daily lunches. Families who do have difficulty are noticeable and stand out.

In addition, the school dress code set for the school does not allow for equitable practices. Over the last five years, the dress code has shifted some, but for a long time, students could only purchase their uniforms from one store with very strict limitations. At times there were those who felt that if they could not afford the attire or their hair did not fit the dress code, they should not attend our school. The dress code was a window opening to the deficit thinking and views of students. School leaders and teachers typically have very little knowledge about families and their biases (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004); this statement was very true in our case.

We serve students from six area counties and often do not know the neighborhoods in which students live. Some students travel 45 minutes to get to school, and none of us have visited the community in which they live. In addition, we have students who live two blocks from the school in subsidized housing. Many of our staff have not visited these neighborhoods or engaged in the communities because they are removed from the area after leaving work. How

can we serve students that we do not see? We needed to take steps to learn the students their cultures, backgrounds, and experiences that bring various perspectives to our school. No longer could we allow poverty to be an excuse for inequitable practices and policies. We had to take a stand and take the steps necessary to help every student who walks through the door feel that they have an identity and place within our school buildings.

I worked to investigate what I could do as a leader to build capacity for CRP for my teachers. I investigated through PAR design.

Participatory Action Research Design

During this study, I engaged in Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is a research methodology where participants examine a problem of an educational practice that affects a school environment. I allowed those who work closest to the situation to give additional insight that the lead researcher may not be aware of. The collaboration was a start to total school improvement for our environment. Our focus was to create a culturally responsive environment. I worked with a collaborative team on the areas that needed improvement and gathered and investigated evidence because of our changes. Action research is defined as “Inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community.... a reflective process.... deliberately and systematically undertaken” (Herr & Anderson, 2014, pp. 3-4). This study was conducted in collaboration with my Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPRs), who all had a stake in the improvements needed in our environment. The CPRs are participants who are “close” to the study and provided consistent feedback and points of view throughout the project.

Our focus was on growing the capacity for Culturally Responsive Classroom Practices (CRCP). The CPR and I participated in iterative cycles that included identifying and examining a problem, developing a plan, implementing the plan, observing the effects, and ultimately

reflecting on the plan to decide the next course of action. These cycles of inquiry are one of the methodologies most often used in improvement science. Improvement science is a method of disciplining inquiries to improve practice (Bryk et al., 2015). The CPR group and I worked together to create relational trust, identify common understandings of CRP, to later examine rules, policies, and procedures by collecting data within our context. We took the evidence collected to implement best practices that would influence staff to examine their behaviors to employ mindset shifts. Ultimately our goal was that students would feel seen, heard, acknowledged, valued, and appreciated within our setting.

In the following section, I reiterate the project's purpose and detail the research questions. I articulate the theory of action behind the approach to the PAR study and describe a set of activities that I plan to participate in to address the FoP.

Purpose Statement

This PAR project aimed to discover how I could support my teachers to build capacity in understanding and developing culturally responsive practices to engage all students and their backgrounds. I worked with a co-practitioner researcher team of five staff members in three action research cycles and explored what could be done to teach and influence staff on the improvement needed.

Research Questions

The overarching research question: *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive practices within the school setting?* This question was further supported by the following sub-questions:

- To what extent do teachers and leaders develop common understandings for culturally responsive practices?

- To what extent do educators integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices to support equitable student participation?
- To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

These research questions guided the PAR and informed a theory of action.

Theory of Action

During this study, we collected evidence that would assist us in creating a plan to further teacher growth and understanding equitable practices that will directly influence students' learning at our school. The study was a collaborative effort of a CPR group consisting of five staff members. Using those closest to the FoP at our school allowed staff to participate in the shift for our environment. Our theory of action was: *IF* teachers are supported in increasing their capacity as culturally responsive educators by examining beliefs and practices, *THEN* teachers will be able to integrate culturally responsive practices in their classrooms to benefit all students.

Research Activities

For this PAR project, I invited five educators to participate in this study. The participants were four fifth and sixth grade teachers and our instructional coach; these people served as my CPR group. I invited them to participate in this study for the duration it took place. These participants were chosen using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. During this study, I engaged in three action research cycles.

The PAR Pre-cycle consisted of forming the CPR group, meeting with the group to establish the goals and objectives for the study, establishing relational trust, and creating a plan for the implementation of the research project. Additionally, I conducted initial interviews with the CPR group members to get a baseline for their understanding of equity and CRP. I wrote

reflective memos after the interviews, meetings, conversations, and various leadership experiences.

I conducted follow-up interviews with the CPR group during the PAR Cycle One. I wanted to ask additional questions and gain clarity on previous responses. Our CPR group continued to meet and participate in a book study and various activities to build a common understanding and review data collected from conversations with staff and students. The CPR team also helped to create the agenda for and facilitate the two CLEs during this cycle. These CLEs were used to gauge their understanding of cultural responsiveness and how they implement it within their classrooms. The CPR team assisted with the collection and analysis of data after these events. I continued to write reflective menus throughout PAR Cycle One.

PAR Cycle Two consisted of a third CLE that focused on barriers and fears surrounding implementing equity and cultural responsiveness practices within the classroom. CPR meetings continued during this cycle which consisted of interpreting and triangulation of data that was collected throughout the duration of the study. I kept reflective memos to document what I learned and my thoughts and feelings about the occurrences I experienced during this time. In Chapter 3, I will present more detailed descriptions of the activities conducted and the evidence collected during the study.

Conclusion

While engaged in this study, we built the foundation for the capacity of teachers in CRP in our classrooms. This study helped staff understand their thoughts and beliefs about building student relationships. Building relationships is just the tip of the iceberg of fostering culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy in the classroom. Throughout the study, teachers would self-reflect and look at what hindered them from successfully implementing culturally responsive

practices. Teachers had the opportunity to share their fears and feelings that lead to the avoidance of this implementation. Doing so would encourage them to implement CRP in our curriculum and engage in pedagogical practices. In addition, teachers needed to know and understand how to be able to fluidly honor students of all backgrounds. As the lead researcher, I helped to build capacity for teachers to gain an understanding and shift the trajectory for students as it relates to their understanding and classroom practice. I relied on the teachers who worked alongside me to create an intentional, culturally responsive plan for the school. Those who worked closest to this situation were the teachers. They can identify the problem and spring to action on different solutions. Our assets and challenges gave us the direction in how we would approach solutions to get to our aim statement. We engaged in the plan, do, study, and act cycles of inquiry to create plans for our school, examined their effectiveness, and altered or adjusted as necessary after analyzing the results.

If we understood and adjusted practices and curricula, we could change the experience of the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Hearing my son say the above words forced me to spring into action. I now work to change this experience for all the students we serve. Reflection on my son's experience in my school was the launching pad for this study. In response to my son's perspective of his school experience, we needed to make changes to ensure that students are appreciated, valued, seen, and heard in our classrooms.

Chapter 2 will provide a comprehensive review of the literature research surrounding this study's focus of practice, including CRP and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Chapter 3 outlines the research design as well as data collection and analysis methodology, while Chapter 4 details the context of this action research project, including a description of the people and place, as well as a discussion on PAR Pre-cycle of inquiry. Chapter 5 will discuss the two

cycles of inquiry (PAR Cycle One: Fall 2022 and PAR Cycle Two: Spring 2023). Chapter 6 will be the summary and discussion of key claims and assertions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the educational setting, the knowledge of those in the room impacts how new information is taught, received, and understood. To build capacity for teachers within a school, the leader must first have a vision of what the organization is to accomplish. Teachers must know and understand how to vet their curriculum and practices effectively to serve all students adequately. In our school setting, little intentional professional learning was given to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) related to curriculum and practice.

In this literature review, I first explore the literature on what CRP is and examine the studies of seminal researchers known for research on strategies for teaching Students of Color. In the final section of the literature review, I examine the research about Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) and the practices leaders can utilize to support Students of Color.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

When considering CRP and teaching, the pioneering and foundational work of prominent scholars and teacher educators Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Geneva Gay (2018), and Lisa Delpit (1995) must be examined. Their studies have aided in the creation of the first frameworks for culturally responsive approaches. I first explore these scholars' seminal research and then move to the researchers who have expanded on their work. I close with a discussion on key culturally responsive dispositions that teachers and leaders can use as they relate directly to this PAR study.

Foundations in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1994) book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, introduced the phrase "culturally responsive pedagogy" to describe a method of instruction that involves including students whose backgrounds and cultures have

historically been marginalized in conventional settings. Ladson-Billings (1994) defines Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical references to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitude” (p. 13). Teachers must have procedures or strategies that permit students to share their prior experiences to improve the learning environment. The content taught must be connected and relevant to students. Teachers in Ladson-Billings’ study expressed a common appreciation for the society in which they teach, a respect for all students' cultures, a belief that all students should excel and that students have important information that can be discussed and used in the classroom. The underlying belief that all students come from the same background and study in the same way has a fundamental flaw (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teachers who immerse themselves in the community they teach often have a better understanding and compassion for the students they serve. Their appreciation for the students, families, and community they serve is evident in their classrooms, and students and parents often have a different respect for them because of the sense of belonging and familiarity they tend to provide.

Geneva Gay (2000) defines CRP as “the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for them” (p. 3). Gay (2002) shares that teachers need knowledge of cultural diversity and how to shift this diversity into culturally responsive instructional strategies and designs. Gay (2002) further posits that culturally responsive teachers know how to vet curriculum to find strengths and weaknesses in culturally responsive instructional materials. She shares that these teachers can improve the culturally responsive quality of the lesson presented. Many controversial topics, including race, are often avoided and

not discussed in most school curricula. This is the case in our school environment. Staff, students, and families want to avoid discussing or displaying current events to broaden their child's thinking. We need the teachers that Gay (2002) discusses in her work. Culturally responsive teachers engage in these topics head-on and work to create instructional experiences that engage every learner. Teachers should be aware of the representation of diversity, or lack thereof, displayed in textbooks and novels with students. This awareness will allow them to address any misrepresentation and create an environment where all students' backgrounds are acknowledged, appreciated, and affirmed (Gay, 2002). In summary, a teacher must ensure their classroom is culturally responsive. They can do this by examining the texts and content they teach and ensuring their methods are strategic for their context.

Lisa Delpit (1995), a well-known advocate for young people of color, wrote about her experiences as a teacher. Her essays criticized pedagogies that fail to meet students' cultural needs, emphasizing the importance of those who educate other people's children to thoroughly comprehend ethnic and family cultures, particularly those of people of various races. Delpit talked about how power plays a role in establishing the agenda for educational reform, and how the demands of individuals with less power in marginalized groups are sometimes disregarded. Delpit (1995), based on Ladson-Billings' research, stated that to recognize students' strengths, teachers must have some awareness of their life outside of the classroom. Teachers must be curious about who their students are. Teachers can't understand a kid, appreciate their skills, gifts, and strengths, or serve students if they don't know about their family and neighborhood. Teachers can use what they know about students to create lessons that reflect the backgrounds and heritage of the kids they teach.

Research which builds on the foundational work of these scholars' ideas on CRP has expanded. While numerous scholars have explored these ideas, I highlight the research and work of Hollie (2017), Hammond (2015), and Howard (2014). Sharroky Hollie (2017) defines Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (CLR) as “the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society (p. 23). The work of Hollie (2017) focuses on making the necessary mental shifts to be culturally and linguistically responsive, as well as recognizing areas where you need to improve your skills in how you communicate with your students, build rapport, and relate to them, as well as how you teach them. Hollie (2017) placed a major emphasis on validation, affirmation, building, and bridging students. So much so that he coined the terms VABB, VABBing, and being VABBulous. Students who are validated can see themselves in adding to the environment they are in. Students who are affirmed have the opportunity to see alternate perspectives and views as options. Building requires understanding the culture of students so that relationships and rapport can be formed. Lastly, bridging is where teaching academics and social skills comes into play, and students can take what is learned outside the classroom to be successful global citizens.

Hollie (2017) continues to share that teachers must first look at themselves, and CRP begins with each individual. “Cultural responsiveness, no matter how you are viewing it now, begins with you and where you are in your heart and mind.” (Hollie, 2017, p. 18). Teachers should know, love, and understand their own identities to relate to students and their identities. Culturally responsive teachers know their thoughts and biases and how they influence their interactions with students. “We have to be omni-aware of our implicit biased thinking to combat it with the cultural lens of validation and affirmation” (Hollie, 2017, p. 30). Awareness of your

thoughts, beliefs, and feelings allows you to be empathetic to the needs of your students. The mindset of culturally responsive teachers shifts from deficit thinking to opportunity and potential seeking. If a teacher sees their students' full potential, they naturally respect them, form relationships, and are sure to validate and affirm them. "If we stay stuck in a deficit lens, we are unlikely to validate and affirm. This can affect our instructional practices, the school climate, and organizational issues related to equity and institutional racism" (Hollie, 2017, p. 30). Self-awareness of one's thoughts and beliefs helps one be mindful of judgmental thoughts and opinions. Being true to oneself and addressing biases leaves one potentially open to others and accepting their thoughts and beliefs. In addition, they are more likely to affirm and validate others.

Hammond's (2015) definition of culturally responsive teaching is the ability to scaffold and connect what a student understands to new concepts while the teacher is aware and recognizes cultural demonstrations of learning exhibited by students. The teacher in this context must recognize the importance of having a rapport with students so that learning can happen in a safe environment. Hammond (2015) starts with raising awareness. Hammond demonstrates that children of color receive less instruction in higher-order thinking skill development, depriving them of what neuroscientists refer to as productive struggle. As a result, a disproportionate number of pupils of color are classified as dependent learners. According to Hammond (2015), dependent learners are pupils who have been denied the opportunity to engage in productive struggle and consequently require ongoing assistance. Additionally, students are being pushed out of classrooms and schools due to inadequate reading abilities and a lack of social-emotional support to deal with their growing discontent.

Hammond (2015) also introduces the concept of three levels of culture: surface, shallow, and deep. Surface culture includes observable attributes such as holidays, dress, food, and music. Shallow or intermediate culture involves social norms and behaviors of one's culture. A culture's awareness of time, attitudes among age groups, rules regarding eye contact, and deep cultural values are within this level of culture. Deep culture consists of knowledge and assumptions that govern worldview. Additionally, how information is learned and experienced is formulated in this level of culture. Hammond (2015) believes that understanding these levels of culture is important for the culturally responsive teacher.

Tyrone Howard (2001) conducted a qualitative case study of four elementary teachers in urban settings. The study aimed to acknowledge how pedagogical practices are used daily with African-American children in classes. In the study, Howard (2001) expresses the belief that students have a broadened potential for cognitive growth when information is shared in a familiar cultural context with students. Bringing the student's environment and cultural cues to the classroom makes the content and curriculum relevant to them. Student achievement increases when teachers adjust their instruction to match the student's cultural beliefs and backgrounds. In this study, Howard (2001) examined how the four teachers used culturally responsive strategies with their students. After a selection process, the teachers were interviewed three times and observed over the course of a four-month period. As a result of the study, the findings included that understanding students' culture was extremely important. Teachers in this study used similar cultural forms of expression with students in their home environment. Doing so made the content more accessible to students, who could relate and find the material relevant.

This study utilizes the works of each of these scholars in understanding and designing the study. In terms of working with the participants of this study, we utilized the culturally

responsive definitions of Hammond (2015) because staff were already familiar with her text. In this study, we seek to find ways to meet the needs of all students. We seek to learn to effectively adjust curricula that do not adequately represent students of various cultures in a positive light. We seek to re-design lessons and activities that connect with our students' beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Teachers and leaders will collaborate to learn ways to shift to a culturally responsive classroom environment; classes where students can embrace themselves, and their identities, and still be high achievers

Dispositions for Culturally Responsive Teaching

A variety of skills, knowledge, and dispositions work to build teachers' capacity to implement and utilize CRP in their classrooms. I discuss three dispositions that are central to this study and common across the culturally responsive literature. The three dispositions are understanding and addressing bias, knowing and understanding student's cultural backgrounds, and respecting and valuing differences.

Bias

One of these dispositions is that teachers must acknowledge and redress biases within the system. Teachers' awareness of any biases will help when trying to reach students. Educators are encouraged to consider their own contexts and unconscious prejudices. They will be able to see how their cultural frames of reference manifest in their teaching (Hammond, 2015). Many life experiences influence implicit biases and cause people to stereotype others naturally. Doing so is not necessarily blatant racism. Awareness of biases assists with being intentional when interacting with others. However, the key is to identify and acknowledge any biases that might be present.

Tests have been created to identify unconscious thoughts and biases. The Implicit Association Test (IAT), created by Greenwald et al. (1998), identifies biases through word or name associations that reveal people's feelings and beliefs about others. When test takers receive their results, many are surprised that they subconsciously have thoughts of prejudice. Ideally, people should acknowledge their biases and train their brains to adjust their beliefs.

Culture and Background

In addition, teachers must know and understand the cultures and backgrounds that can help shape the lessons they create for students. Using one's culture and background when creating a task would allow rich learning opportunities for students and teachers. Culturally responsive teachers acknowledge and value every student's culture and create inclusive classrooms. They use the strength of their students to drive instruction, assessment, and curriculum design (Gay, 2010). Classrooms with students of differing cultures should have teachers who recognize that these differences should be considered when creating practices, policies, and lessons for the students to engage.

Unfortunately, in some contexts, students experience the opposite of a culturally responsive environment. Many students walk into classrooms daily and never feel a part of the classroom environment. In some cases, they don't see others who look like them. The curriculum being taught does not recognize diverse backgrounds, so the topics discussed are things they cannot relate to. A teacher's ability to understand how students' experiences connect to content and pedagogy and determine the resources needed is evidence of a teacher engaging in culturally responsive practices in their classroom (Khalifa, 2018). In addition, the policies and practices within the school environment may appear to be one-sided and not have consideration of their

history, community, or background. These things happen often because teachers are not necessarily equipped to view their classrooms through a culturally responsive lens.

Respect and Value

Teachers must learn to respect and value others that are different from them. Teachers recognizing and affirming the value their students' cultures provide can bring a broader perspective and influence how that teacher connects with that student. Creating an environment where all students and staff find value and respect for each other's backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and differences would build a harmonious and safe environment for those who may not feel that they belong (Fulton, 2009). Teachers should embrace inclusivity and welcome all to their school environment. Teachers should be self-aware and have relationships and connections with Students of Color. When teachers place students' ideas at the center of their lessons, they demonstrate that they respect and value their students' thoughts (Hollie, 2017).

When students know that their teachers genuinely respect them, they respond similarly. They will do what it takes to please their teachers if mutual respect is present. In Ladson-Billings's (1995a), *But That's Good Teaching* article, she shared the story of a teacher who sought to focus on positive interactions with African American boys. To do so, she knew instead of engaging in a tug of war with them, she would get more out of them if she valued their skills and abilities. Doing this would allow for their positive social traits to influence others positively, and she could channel them to complete the important academic tasks assigned.

In reviewing the authors and their work that led the research in CRP, we strongly understand how this research was used in our PAR project to rethink our current curriculum and practices. In the next section, I focus on CRSL and the leadership moves that supported this PAR study.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)

The leadership in a school is the driving force of the vision and mission of the organization. Leaders tend to build, shape, and mold their environments as they engage with students, staff, and families. This section will discuss the research behind CRSL. I discuss the importance of adult learning and relational trust in this work. Finally, I discuss what it means to support the work of culturally responsive teachers and how to do this. To make sure that there are equitable curricula and practices that meet the needs of Students of Color, leaders have to be culturally responsive in their school environment.

Foundations in CRSL

School leaders must be in touch with the pulse of what is happening in their buildings. Principals are the instructional leaders responsible for providing instructional leadership, supporting professional development, and setting a vision for the school environment and academic expectations. The principal influences teachers' learning and student achievement (Anderson, 2008). Khalifa (2018) points out that principals must prioritize instructional leadership and lead in establishing and maintaining culturally responsive schools and classrooms. Khalifa (2018) further asserts that teachers are not innately culturally responsive, so leaders must develop and implement practices that create a culturally responsive school environment. In a literature review on CRSL, Khalifa et al. (2016) identify four behaviors of a CRSL:

- A leader who has critical self-awareness
- A leader who has culturally responsive teacher education preparation
- A leader who maintains a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment
- A leader who engages students and parents in community contexts (pp. 1280-1282).

A CRSL that embodies these attributes will foster an environment of students and teachers on a total school improvement and achievement trajectory.

Leaders must ensure that they are hiring culturally responsive teachers to meet the needs of every child that enters their building. Doing so requires the leader to be very clear about their vision that sustains culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016). How does one create this vision? Marshall and Khalifa (2018), purport that this can be done when CRSLs engage teachers in ways to improve student achievement by building capacity of teachers through effective mentoring, culturally relevant evaluation and assessment practices, and professional learning communities. They also are continuously working to build a welcoming and healthy atmosphere for students and families by insisting on fair and culturally sensitive responses from teachers (Ware, 2006). Teachers must have the understanding and background knowledge necessary to teach students in a way that they feel seen, validated, and a part of the learning process.

To win the confidence of their staff and community, CRSLs must be able to share their personal stories, educational philosophies, and dedication to culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive pedagogy (Johnson, 2007). Administrators must build empowering relationships with their families and community members by actively listening to them and collaboratively creating solutions (Guajardo et al., 2016). The culturally responsive school leader must be aware of their buildings' current beliefs and practices and utilize this knowledge to shift practices and curriculum. In the next section, I discuss the importance of adult learning theory and the development of relational trust in supporting change in schools.

Adult Learning

Adult learning theory is being aware of how adults learn and is important to building the capacity of teachers. Caine (2010) believes that adults learn best when addressing the whole aspect of the person. Creating professional development that focuses on how adults learn will have more impact on teachers applying what they have learned during the sessions. Caine (2010) also shares that there are optimal conditions from which learning can take place within adults. These include adults being engaged in the learning process, being immersed in the experience in which the context is embedded, and being in a relaxed state of mind. Adults being active and interested in learning leads to a successful experience. Opportunities for adults to work within learning communities to discuss, reflect, and analyze what is being taught and expected is important to adult learning. In this study, the area of focus is teachers and leaders who work collaboratively together to create change in the school environment. In this section I discuss adult learning theory and strategies that can be used for adults to process information and how adults can come together to learn.

This PAR study centers around working with adults in effective ways. Knowles (1980) describes adult learning theory, also referred to as andragogy, as the study of how adults learn and includes how that learning differs from that of children. Adults need to be engaged in the planning, delivery, and implementation of their training. Adults need control within the process of their learning. Adults can connect new material to past experiences and bring knowledge to the learning environment (Knowles, 1980). Reasoning and problem-solving are the best ways for adults to process information being taught. In addition, adults need to be able to apply what they are learning and implement swiftly.

Adult learners' developmental progress and preparation were not prioritized in traditional professional learning models for new and beginning instructors. The goal of such learning opportunities was frequently to improve adult practices to improve educational results for pupils. The value and power of having instructors collaborate was often emphasized in research and literature, as was the relationship that collaboration provides between professional growth, improved instructional practices, and improved academic outcomes for students (Bryk et al., 2015; Drago-Severson, 2009; Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Although the literature emphasizes collaborative learning structures and necessary team components differently, researchers agree that a shared and collaborative professional learning experience is useful in enhancing teaching knowledge, competence, and student outcomes.

Drago-Severson (2009) offers a learning-centered model of school leadership built on four pillars: teaming, giving leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring to encourage adult learning and establish learning schools. Her concept was based on four years of ethnographic research with one principal and a second research project with 25 principals. There was a need for a learning-centered model of school leadership that combines learning theory, professional development, organizational development, and leadership practices since educational systems face what she refers to as adaptive difficulties. Drago-Severson (2009) distinguishes between informational and transformational learning, claiming that transformation occurs when schools promote learning across the system, allowing all to fulfill the demands of teaching, learning, leadership, and life. According to Drago-Severson (2009), mentoring communities or learning centers and locations that promote the learning of children, teenagers, and adults are excellent learning-centered communities. She points out that effective school reform occurs from the

inside out (Elmore, 2004; Grubb & Tredway, 2010). The four pillars she presents promote development by emphasizing a greater understanding of how to assist adult growth and capacity-building.

The support of teachers plays a role in total school improvement. Bryk et al. (2010) shares that the local community of practice helps to determine the efficacy of individual teachers. A school's measure of greatness is contingent upon hiring the best, providing professional development that supports their learning, and the ability of a staff to work together to improve their school. No collective work can happen without adults trusting and respecting one another.

Relational trust and respect are the glue that holds a school together when emerging upon growth and change. Principals or the leader of the school plays an integral part in forming and developing this trust (Bryk et al., 2010). Leaders should work to cultivate collaboration among staff and establish respect and rapport with others by acknowledging their fears and vulnerabilities, actively listening to their concerns, and mediating any conflicts equitably (Bryk et al., 2010). Trust among staff members can be realized when all participants show commitment to the work. Patton and Parker (2017) share that communities of practice are places where new opportunities can be explored among developed trusting relationships in a safe environment. Teachers' respect for one another allows them to have difficult discussions yet be open to opportunities to be reflective and new ideas to be presented for the betterment of the organization. Teachers having an opportunity to have a voice is necessary for growth and change within the school.

As it relates to this PAR project, it was necessary for the staff to collaborate and work together to create a culture that is making equitable decisions for all students. Being engaged in social justice from the equity standpoint will be one step to making this happen. The

collaboration among staff allowed a safe space for the teams to engage in crucial conversations that will drive change in our building. The goal was to create school structures that support the success for every child. Professional development and modeling equity was a start to make this change. Theoharis (2010) listed four kinds of injustice present in a school that were remarkably similar to the injustices in the school context for this current study. One of them was to professionalize the staff in their understanding of equity and social justice. Adult learning theory and knowing how to engage the staff at this school effectively was key to making the change for growth that needs to take place. Understanding how adults think about new learning, ways to properly apply this new information and collaborative learning communities hold all participants accountable for their part in the school's transformation. Engaging staff to work together was initiated through the work and vision of the school's leader. In the next section, I will discuss culturally responsive leadership moves that can promote equitable curriculum and practice.

Leadership Moves

School leaders play an important role in creating a culture and environment for teachers to implement culturally responsive curricula and practices successfully. Principals must be culturally responsive if they expect teachers to re-think and change practices. There are a variety of leadership moves emphasized in the CRSL literature – for the purposes of this study, I focused on shifting deficit thinking to an asset-based approach and how leaders utilize critical self-reflection throughout this journey.

To develop culturally responsive practices, leaders must support a shift from deficit thinking to an asset-based approach. The research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) describes four equity traps that can negatively and disproportionately impact Students of Color. One of the four traps is teachers and leaders having a deficit view of their students. We must examine our

teachers' beliefs and biases in the school and classroom. Assumptions and beliefs can prevent educators from believing that Students of Color can learn at the same level as white peers, falling into what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) define as an equity trap. A deficit view attributes Students of Color's behavior or achievement to "cultural inadequacies, lack of motivation, poor behavior, or failed families and communities" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 608). These deficit views prevent teachers from being able to implement culturally responsive practices. Culturally responsive school leaders must develop processes for teachers to uncover beliefs, biases, and assumptions that create barriers to a culturally responsive practice. A key aspect of this study was to support teachers in uncovering their beliefs, practices, and curriculum for deficit views of Students of Color. Teachers had first to acknowledge and be aware of any deficit views before they could take action to change them. Deficit views sometimes cloud educators' perceptions that some students cannot achieve at the highest level. However, removing those thoughts and allowing students to excel will provide evidence refuting their thoughts and beliefs.

Another key leadership move highlighted in the research was the critical self-reflection of the leader. The principal's ability to do the work on themselves before trying to engage the staff in the work is imperative. Research indicates the need for CRSLs to emphasize self-reflection in their leadership practices (Cooper, 2009; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Lomotey, 1989; Theoharis, 2007). Examining and understanding one's own biases is crucial for leaders when engaging in this work. One must know and understand one's identity before molding and shaping the people one works within their context. Adequately preparing yourself to do the work that you want those around you to follow allows the leader to connect to their people. The self-reflection also helps the leader prepare for any challenges their staff may face and consider any misgivings or misconceptions. It allows time for the leader to be prepared to address them.

As indicated through the research, the culturally responsive school leader is the driving force to shape the environment for students and staff. These leaders carry the weight of the personal work of self-reflection, to prepare the educators and bring a pillar in bringing the communities within the school together. Although the task is large, all this work is necessary to sustain a culture where every student has their needs met.

Conclusion

This literature review has provided a research-based underpinning to inform and guide this PAR study. I first examined the research on CRT and essential teaching strategies and practices that will be included in this study. I also explored the research on CRSL and how leaders can support teachers in implementing culturally responsive curricula and practices to support Students of Color. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

In the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I worked with a group of co-practitioners who served our students daily in the classroom. This group acknowledged and examined evidence of cultural responsiveness in our organization or the lack thereof. Together, we created a plan for transforming our school into an educational environment for all students.

The study context was East Wake Academy (EWA) in Zebulon, North Carolina, which has served six surrounding counties since 1998. EWA is a K-12 public charter school located in eastern Wake County. For the purposes of this study, we focused on the middle school. The middle academy served approximately 390 students from varying counties, with many students living in Wake County. East Wake Academy is a collaborative community of educators who strive for academic excellence and engage students to meet their full potential.

In the PAR project and study, I investigated the presence of cultural responsiveness within the school's environment and worked to build staff capacity. PAR informed by activist research was used to investigate the Focus of Practice (FoP) and respond to research questions. To reach the desired outcome, I supported teachers to strengthen and expand their capacities to adjust to culturally responsive practices and curricula. I proposed this theory of action: *IF* teachers are supported in increasing their capacity as culturally responsive educators through an examination of beliefs and practices, *THEN* teachers will be able to design and integrate culturally responsive practices in their classrooms to benefit all students.

In Chapter 1, I examined the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges of the focus of practice. Following this examination, I chose to work with four classroom teachers and an instructional coach to build the capacity for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) to implement cultural responsiveness in classroom practices and curricula. The aim of the FoP is:

Build teacher capacity for CRP that will transfer to teacher designing and creating equitable practices to serve all students.

In this chapter, I describe the research design, including the methodological approach to the study, the cycles of inquiry in PAR, and the proposed process for selecting and working with participants. In addition to reiterating the study questions, I discuss the data collection and analysis. I conclude with considerations for the study, including the limitations and validity of the research methodology.

Research Design

The research in our study is what drove our design. The primary methodology of this study was PAR in collaboration with Community Learning Exchange (CLE). These two methodologies work well together. During the study, we participated in iterative cycles of inquiry to address the research question and theory of action in our PAR. Next, I will discuss the qualitative research process and provide information on PAR, research questions, and action research cycles.

Qualitative Research Process

Qualitative research has characteristics that are different from that of quantitative research methods. Data is collected more organically and through a collection of artifacts, narratives, memos, and other visual and written pieces of evidence. Qualitative research methods also give insight into what the researcher is thinking and their self-reflection, also known as reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This means that the researcher takes on the role of the researcher and, at times, the participant. As with the axioms in CLEs, qualitative research occurs in a natural setting where data is collected by talking directly with participants. The participants are usually close to the educational practice of concern within the context. In the following

section, I will discuss PAR, the methodology used in this study, the research questions explored, action research cycles, and context.

Participatory Action Research

PAR methodology was chosen because action research is a technique in which participants work together to investigate an issue involving an educational practice that impacts the school's environment and culture. Allowing those within the organization to consider and analyze practices to acknowledge and address problems within a context is powerful because those involved are very close to the situation and are vested (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Educators must be fully engaged to learn and improve (Bryk et al., 2015). Participatory action and activist research are other significant aspect of our work in schools and communities.

Activist PAR

Participatory action and activist research, on the other hand, have another significant component to our work in schools and communities. Activist PAR aims to promote social change while assisting researchers in renegotiating power dynamics (hunter et al., 2013). Because the evidence is typically qualitative and iterative, PAR as activist research differs from traditional research methods and is particularly beneficial when dealing with issues of fairness, social justice, self-reliance, and oppression. The PAR technique involves inquiry that is performed with, rather than on, people in an organization or community (Cohen et al., 2018). When trying to solve a problem or devise a solution for a context, utilizing those closest to the issues can be more effective than using someone outside the organization.

In this study, I strove for change in our practices related to all students. All students should feel some sense of pride and representation on our campus. The curriculum and practices

implemented in our classrooms need to be examined to be sure that all students' needs are being met.

Improvement Science

Bryk et al. (2015) defined improvement science as a methodology that disciplines inquiries to improve practice. Our study employed an inquiry action research cycle and engaged in a network improvement community. In our study, the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group and I worked and learned together using our background experiences. Once we acknowledged the issues within our context, we devised ways to solve them. The CPR group worked with me on this study to offer guidance, analyze evidence, co-facilitate the CLEs, and ultimately provide leverage across the school. This group included four teachers and an instructional coach. Participants in the network community applied their knowledge to specific difficulties in their environment (Bryk et al., 2015).

We used the improvement science's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) inquiry cycle to hypothesize what would happen and collected evidence to determine whether the changes were improvements. As evidence was collected our CPR group analyzed whether the predicted outcomes worked. If the suggested changes did not improve the situation, the team repeated the cycle of planning what would happen, carried out the change, analyzed the data, and then acted on what to do next.

During the iterative cycles of inquiry, the network worked to plan, do, analyze, and reflect to engage with the data and evidence collected. Using this process allowed for quick action and responses to problems and solutions. According to Bryk et al. (2015), rapid change directs the creation, revision, and fine-tuning of new technologies, processes, job roles, and

connections. In improvement science, iterative cycles bring previously concealed problems to light and lead to activities that may be required to solve these new concerns.

Community Learning Exchange

A CLE brings together people from different parts of the community for a period of active, deep learning (Guajardo et al., 2016). Together, these community members openly explore their common issues and collective gifts, and then freely share successful approaches and resources that can help them, their organizations (including schools), and their communities transform (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 3).

A CLE is a dynamic experience that brings together the insights of those engaged in meaningful dialogues with individuals devoted to collaborating and learning from one another. The five CLE axioms led and informed our group's learning and served as the cornerstone for CLE instructional techniques. The axioms that led this work used local knowledge, actively engaging in conversations and dialogue as critical for relationships and pedagogy, focused conversations on assets and hopes, and acknowledged leadership and learning as a social process while modeling and authorizing border crossing (Guajardo et al., 2016).

I focused on two of the axioms while participating in this study. Learning and leadership were dynamic social processes, the first axiom important to our study (Guajardo et al., 2016). The collaboration with myself and the participants had a tremendous influence on learning (Guajardo et al., 2016). We worked together by sharing our stories and experiences, creating questions of inquiry to examine our school, and making plans for our course of action to engage our staff in CRP. The second axiom emphasized that the people closest to the issues were best situated to discover answers to local concerns. The participants in our CPR group were given the opportunity and power to have their voices heard throughout this process (Guajardo et al., 2016).

They not only taught within our classrooms, but they had the opportunity to collect data throughout our study. The data collection and analysis allowed the collective opportunity to create and test solutions to our question: *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive curriculum and practices in the school setting?* I welcomed ideas, feedback, and suggestions as we worked to evoke change on our campus.

Role of Praxis

We enacted what Freire (1970) calls praxis, or reflection, to act when we reflected on our practices. Freire (1970) offers four key assumptions about the function of reflection. The first was that contemplation would lead oppressed people to their necessary participation in the liberation movement. During our CPR meetings, the participants reflected on any notes collected, successes, challenges in the classroom, and ways to improve cultural responsiveness in our environment.

Leading a school required reflection on our school's daily operations and practice. While engaging in this study, we intentionally reflected on all activities to help inform the next steps in building capacity for CRP. These reflections were the guiding light to the steps we would take moving forward in the study. I documented my own reflections throughout this process to track how my leadership shifted during PAR cycles, data collection, and CPR activities.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was: *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive curriculum and practices in the school setting?* I designed PAR activities that aligned to help answer these research questions, which are outlined in Table 1. These activities are more deeply defined in the data collection section. The following are the sub-questions that guided data collection to address my over-arching question:

- To what extent do teachers and leaders develop common understandings for culturally responsive practices?
- To what extent do educators integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices to support equitable student participation?
- To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

Action Research Cycles

For this study, we had three iterative cycles. PAR Pre-cycle took place beginning in October 2021. PAR Pre-cycle (October 2021-April 2022) included the following activities:

- creating and convening the CPR group,
- conducting interviews of CPR members, and
- reflective memos.

In PAR Cycle One (August-November 2022), in addition to continuing activities from PAR Pre-Cycle, new activities included facilitating CLEs. Par Cycle Two (January-May 2023) included CPR meetings, facilitating a CLE, reflective memos, and member checks. Table 1 indicates each PAR cycle and the activities that were conducted. We also analyzed the evidence and data collection from all cycles.

Context

The PAR took place in a public charter middle school in North Carolina over a period of 14 months. The CPR attempted to meet monthly as a Network Improvement Community (NIC) to address the study's research questions. An NIC is a community that works to solve problems

Table 1

PAR Research Cycles

Research Cycle	Time Period	Activities
PAR Pre-cycle	October 2021-April 2022	CPR Team Meetings Interviews Reflective Memos
PAR Cycle One	August-November 2022	Community Learning Exchanges CPR Team Meetings Reflective Memos Interviews
PAR Cycle Two	January -May 2023	Community Learning Exchange CPR Team Meetings Reflective Memos Member Checks

collaboratively. Each participant was a trusted expert in their subject area and brought value to our quest for total school improvement (Bryk et al., 2015). CPRs used praxis as they engaged in a NIC structure. Next, I will share more information about the participants and how data was collected and analyzed. In this study, the CPR team I invited consisted of four math and science teachers representing fifth and sixth grades. Additionally, our instructional coach was invited to participate. Our study examined meeting the needs of all students in our classrooms. Our instructional coach was a resource for all teachers, was active in the classrooms, and provided a different perspective on what was happening in the classrooms.

Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

Engaging in this PAR study required awareness and acknowledgment of several structures that lay the foundation of our study. The following section contains information regarding the participants, data collection, and data analysis for this study. I discuss how the participants were selected for this study. I also share what data were collected for the duration and how I analyzed the data that was collected.

Participants

Participants were invited to engage in this work. Each participant completed a consent form that was evidence of their willingness to be included. Participants could remove themselves from this work at any time throughout this study without reprisal. Those who received an invitation for the study were chosen because their area of expertise was in the math and science middle grades classroom. These teachers worked to serve the students in our building and wanted to provide the best educational experiences for the students. The teachers included were open-minded and willing to be vulnerable when having difficult discussions, debriefs, and opportunities to make hypotheses about situations. The teachers' insight on the pulse of our

campus was truly meaningful to this study. Next, I will discuss the sampling used to determine who would participate in our CPR team.

Sampling

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that participants are to be purposefully selected to assist the researcher in having a clear understanding of the problem and the research question. Anyone I sought for the study completed a consent form (see Appendix C) to participate and had the opportunity to leave the study at any time. Purposeful sampling is selecting knowledgeable individuals who show interest and are willing to participate in the study (Patton, 2015). It was important that those involved truly wanted to engage in the work that took place. The participants were selected because they worked directly with students and served them academically in some capacity. These participants were willing to pursue and shift their thinking to an equitable focus. They were student-centered and made decisions that benefit the students they worked with. Participants invited have integrity and strong ethical stances. They advocated for students and staff in the pursuit of cultural responsiveness and equity. Working with this team drove the change necessary in this participation action research study. They are advocates and did not have an issue speaking up for the cause. In addition, they examined and made tough decisions to guide our staff in the right direction for growth and equity.

Co-Practitioner Researcher Group

A Co-Practitioner Researcher group (CPR) worked together to build capacity for all staff to equitably meet the needs of students of color throughout our school. As stated above, I invited and selected CPR participants through purposeful sampling. The team consisted of four math and science teachers and our instructional coach. Working collaboratively with a team had many benefits, including reflective dialogue that engaged deep thought about a problem, leading to

deeper thinking and learning (Foulger, 2010). The participants in the CPR were qualified and willing participants interested in improving equitable practices in their classrooms and our school. They signed consent forms (see Appendix C) to participate in this CPR group and had the opportunity to leave the study at any time.

Other Participants

We are a school with 36 staff members. I invited all staff to participate in the CLEs. As the CPR group members became more familiar with the protocols, they supported the facilitation of the CLE with other teachers who chose to participate. Anyone who attended the CLE signed consent forms to participate (see Appendix J).

Data Collection

Data collection is an essential part of qualitative research. Qualitative methods are a layered process of analysis where the researcher engages and records data from multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this PAR study we used multiple methods of data collection using specific protocols. Throughout this study I collected data through interviews, CPR artifacts, CLE artifacts, and reflective memos (see Table 2). It is important to note that CPR meeting notes and reflective memos were generated by myself and did not require a protocol. Table 2 lists the research questions and indicates the data I collected, analyzed, and triangulated.

Interviews

Interviews are an important source of data collection as they allow you to elicit views and opinions from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I conducted two interviews with the CPR team members during the PAR Pre-Cycle. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and provided insight into the CPR members. I used a pre-determined list of interview questions and an individual interview protocol (see Appendix E) to facilitate the interviews. Later in PAR

Table 2

PAR Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Collection	Triangulation
To what extent do teachers and leaders develop common understandings for culturally responsive practices?	Interviews CPR Artifacts CLE Artifacts Reflective Memos	Member Checks
To what extent do educators integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices to support equitable student participation?	Interviews CPR Artifacts CLE Artifacts	Reflective Memos Member Checks
To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?	Reflective Memos	Member Checks

Cycle Two, I interviewed the remaining CPR members. These interviews were to understand each member's perspective on the data we collected in all three cycles and the start of our member checks. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, and notes were taken from the transcribed recordings.

CPR Artifacts

While meeting with our CPR group, we collected meeting notes, agendas, anchor charts, and other artifacts that helped to guide our process. Participants completed journey lines on their educational experience and relationships of value to them. In addition, each meeting began with a personal narrative defined as a story from one's life or experiences. Keeping a running record of what was discussed helped us reflect and return to previous thoughts in our meetings to ensure we addressed all items of this study. I collected any evidence we utilized in our CPR meetings to add to our data collection.

CLE Artifacts

During this project I conducted three CLEs. Two took place in the fall or early spring of the PAR Cycle One. The third CLE took place in the spring of PAR Cycle Two. Participants were invited to share their stories, experiences, questions, and ideas at the meetings (Guajardo et al., 2016). CLEs are central to the work grounded in the five communities of practice axioms. This was an opportunity for several stakeholders to share their thoughts on the issue of equity within our school. CLE artifacts included art pieces, notes, anchor charts, personal narratives, and photos using the CLE protocol (see Appendix H). Utilizing those closest to the situation that work to find actionable solutions to bring change to meet the needs of the community they serve is one of the benefits of CLEs (Guajardo et al., 2016). Participants having the ability to share,

question, and engage in the process of discussing their concerns as it relates to their stories, experiences and the context of their plight can be transformational for any school environment.

Reflective Memos

Memos are reflective entries made during the research process that aid in coding and identifying developing topics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). The memos documented my reflections about my thoughts, feelings, and experiences after meeting with the CPR team, interviews, and engaging in CLEs. These memos, triangulated with other qualitative data, supported the evidence for the study. Reflective memos collected throughout this study's iterative cycles were used as evidence of reflection.

Throughout this section, I have discussed the data collected throughout this study and how it was used. The triangulation of the multiple data sources assisted with validity and data analysis that informed our study. In the following sections, I discuss the method by which data was analyzed to document and record the study's results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was continually used to inform the progress of this study. I began with specific codes and ended with broad generalizations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) posit that data analysis intends to make sense of all the data collected. They connect it to pulling the layers of an onion and then putting it back together to make the information make sense. The data is the reoccurring guide to the work in this study. I collected data from various artifacts throughout the study. I used Saldaña's (2016) coding strategies, deciphered the coding, analyzed the data for any patterns or themes, and then employed ways to represent the finding for the study. I first utilized codes, which later became categories, by identifying notable patterns in the data. Analysis of the patterns and codes led to several iterations of possible concepts or themes. After

reviewing the evidence that supported the themes and categories, I combined the information into an ultimate finding for this study. Data was then triangulated through member checks and reflective memos (Saldaña, 2016).

There were several iterations of analyzing the data as more evidence were collected and activities were completed. To organize the data, I stored codes in a codebook (see Appendix F). Evidence for codes derived from artifacts during meetings, CLEs, interview transcriptions, and reflective memos. By the end of PAR Cycle Two, I was able to determine my themes and present the finding for the study, using the process shown in Figure 2.

Study Consideration: Limitations, Validity, and Confidentiality and Ethics

In this section, I discuss limitations in our project and how validity was enacted throughout. Confidentiality and ethics will also be discussed and how we kept participants safe and secure while completing this project.

Limitations

As I began the work in this study, I realized that there would be several limitations that would impact the research. As the administrator of the school I am researching, I knew there would be supervisor bias that I had to overcome. I strived not to let my preconceived notions, thoughts and behavior influence the integrity of the research. I knew time would also be a limitation that may interfere with this study. CPR members who have been at our school for some time would have to make note of any thoughts or biases they have about the staff that would prevent open-mindedness throughout the study. We were scheduled to have three PAR cycles over the course of 14 months, which may not be enough time to engage the CPR group and participants in a way that would show significant change in our environment.

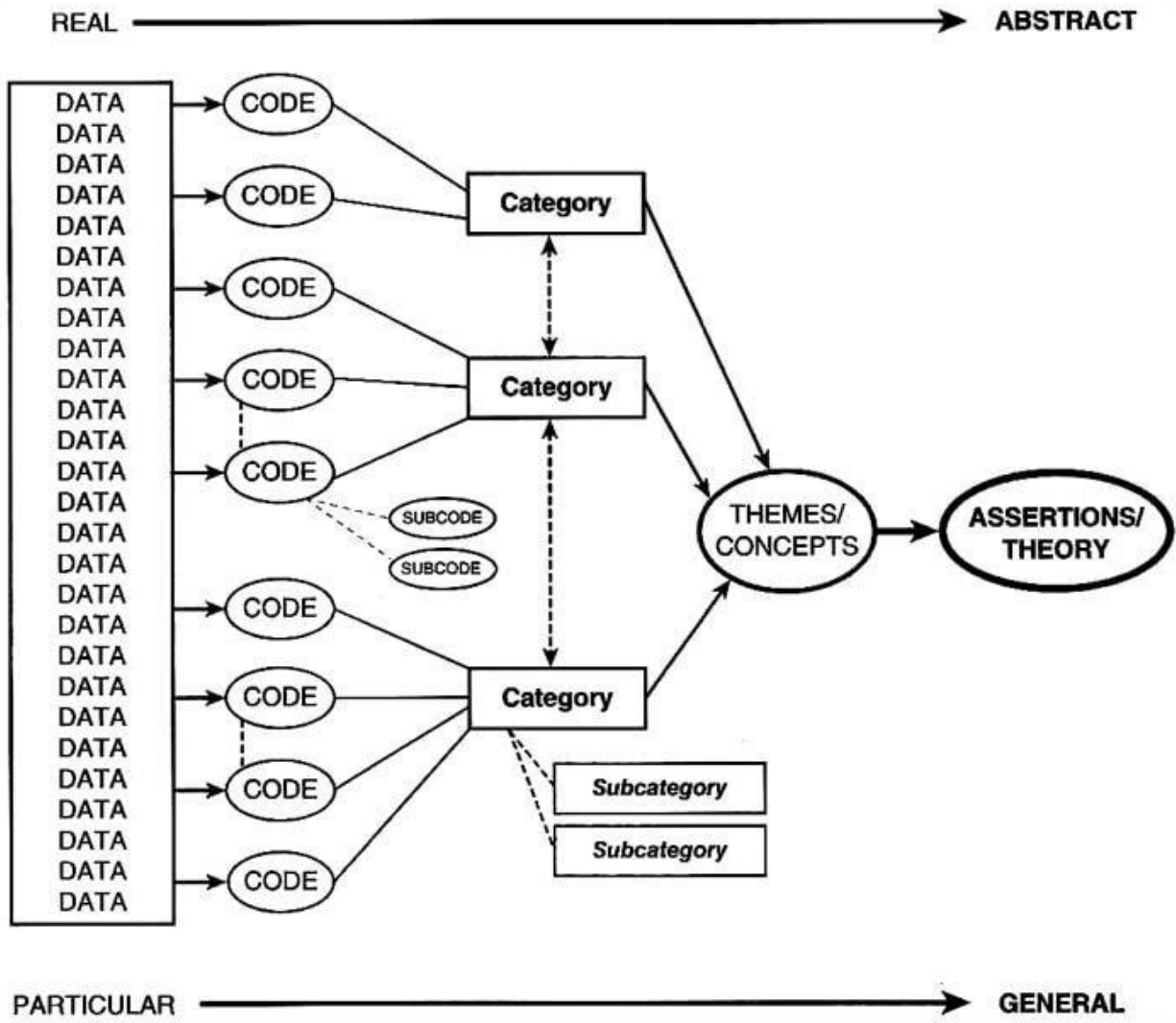


Figure 2. Saldaña's (2016) coding method.

Another potential limitation I considered was in regards to the participants of the CLE. The CLE included multiple stakeholders with various backgrounds and understanding of the classroom experience. Some may have cultural beliefs or implicit biases that might have influenced their engagement in the CLE and their conclusions about various tasks. The CLE methodology was founded on the notion that all stakeholders have knowledge to offer and deserve a platform (Guajardo et al., 2016). We wanted every voice to be heard and have something to add to our research.

Validity

In this study it was imperative that our research findings were validated for accuracy and credibility. To check for the accuracy of the findings, we used different approaches to validate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to triangulate the data using multiple sources to establish credibility, our CPR group used member checks, asked colleagues to comment on findings, triangulated the data, involved participants in each research phase, and clarified the researchers' worldviews and biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checks were a way to avoid researcher bias. At the end of each PAR cycle, I utilized member checks to respond to the evidence collected to ensure the validity criteria established in the data analysis and limitations were met (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Gerdes & Conn, 2001). By involving participants in confirming and checking results, researchers can ensure trustworthiness in their results (Birt et al., 2016). We used member checks to ensure we were reporting results solely on the evidence, and that the data collected was accurate and valid. The credibility of the truth in the study's findings creates confidence due to the confirmation from multiple sources (Guba & Lincoln, 2000).

The following categories of validity are necessary to address, according to Herr and Anderson (2014): dialogical and process validity, outcome validity, catalytic validity, democratic validity, and process validity. In this work, I enlisted the help of a CPR team who co-created new knowledge, thereby bolstering dialogical and process validity. The PAR's purpose was to improve teacher capacity and understanding of cultural responsiveness related to their curriculum and practice. CPR group members drew awareness by commenting on observational evidence. The impact on all participants supported catalytic validity because this PAR was designed to engage me, as the lead researcher, with co-practitioner researchers. The study's findings were relevant to the local context, implying democratic validity. I offered a strong logic model for action and thorough inquiry cycles that lent itself to process validity.

Finally, trustworthiness is what binds the validity of our study. The value of the study is predicated on trust (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). The methodology used in this study was completed ethically to respect the participants and those in the community we serve. Our techniques and methodology needed to be done in a way that was truthful to participants within the context (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). A few ways to make this happen were through prolonged engagement, observation, triangulation, member check-ins, referential adequacy, and peer debriefing (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). We knew our findings would be found trustworthy if we were steadfast in participating in these practices. I worked to continue to build relational trust by establishing rapport with each of the participants. This relational trust was established through activities and meetings during the year. Having conversations with those involved, and, not just conversing but actively listening and assisting where possible, was essential to building this trust. We engaged in activities such as journey lines, personal narratives, and being supportive of one another to fully establish trust while participating in our study.

The process that was used for this study can be used in other environments or contexts. We used protocols that we have used in previous studies, such as dynamic mindfulness, personal narratives, and examining and analyzing data collected during CLEs. CLE is a methodology used to gather information from various stakeholders invested in the context and closest to the problem to help create solutions (Guajardo et al., 2016). The above methods are transferable to other contexts and environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results, however, varied based on the experiences of those involved in the study.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

The participants in the study were site-based practitioners committed to equitable implementation in their classrooms. The participants were chosen based on their previous work experience, skills, and working relationships. I met with each participant one-on-one and asked if they'd be interested in participating in the study. Prior to beginning the study, participants signed consent forms (see Appendix C) approved by East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and they could terminate their participation without reprisal. I had a trusting relationship with the participants, and we discussed the importance of having open and honest discussions regarding the study's results.

My formal request to conduct the study was approved by my direct supervisor, the Superintendent of East Wake Academy (see Appendix D). I completed the Institutional Review Board Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (IRB CITI) certification in January 2021 to comply with the ethical requirements governing human research (see Appendix B). I understood that even if these protections were put in place before the start of the project, the study could be terminated at any time and for any reason. The focus of the study was to examine the extent to

which teachers and leaders could build capacity for cultural responsiveness in classrooms. Data would be presented non-judgmentally and used transparently with the CPR team and the school. Data security and the confidentiality of the participants was a priority for the study, and I stored the data in a locked location.

Confidentiality was maintained through the following measures, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018):

1. Important and personal papers and data files were stored in a locked file cabinet.
2. All electronic forms for data collection were kept in a password-protected file.
3. Data and copies of reports were shared with the CPR group for purposes of transparency, improvement, and reflection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shared the PAR research design that was used throughout this study. Our CPR group engaged in three cycles of inquiry that allowed us to gather data that supported our FoP to build teacher capacity in CRP to meet the needs of all students served within our context. I have discussed the PAR and CLE methodology approaches that were used for this study. I have shared the iterative cycles that will occurred through three PAR cycles and discussed ways the data was viewed, coded, and analyzed. PAR immersed the elements of an embedded inquiry cycle where data was collected with improved science strategies and protocols from the CLEs. The information gathered was triangulated with data that is coded, categorized, themes identified, and findings shared. In the next chapter, I will discuss the action research pre-cycle and context.

CHAPTER 4: PAR PRE-CYCLE

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) study focused on implementing and integrating Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) in STEM classrooms. I aimed to engage my staff in acknowledging their cultural identity and learning their students' cultural identities. In doing so, I hoped to collaborate with teachers to integrate cultural responsiveness into their classrooms. In this chapter, I provide the context for the PAR project, describe the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group, and describe the Pre-cycle activities and data collection process. I then describe the data analysis process, and I engaged and then present emerging categories from the data. Finally, I reflect on my leadership in the initial stage of the PAR study and lessons for PAR Cycle One.

PAR Context

The study context took place at East Wake Academy (EWA). This small K-12 school strives to serve students to excel by focusing on a college preparatory trajectory. East Wake Academy strives to equip students with the skills to thrive in a college preparatory atmosphere and experience academic excellence through rigorous curriculum options. In this section, I provide details about the school's geographical, historical, and cultural environment. Finally, I discuss the individuals involved in the CPR group and this study.

Context (Place)

The school in this study is a K-12 public charter school established in 1998. East Wake Academy is physically located in Wake County, but is not a part of this county's system. As a public charter school, we are a Public School Unit (PSU). EWA has a governing board of five to seven volunteers elected to office to govern the school's operations.

The school is situated in the easternmost town of Wake County, Zebulon, NC. This area was mostly forest, and the original plot of land had a one-room schoolhouse and three residential homes. Plans to build the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad attracted attention to this area. Edgar Barbee and Falconer Arendell created the Zebulon Company for land development. As they built and sold, the town of Zebulon began to unfold. Zebulon was incorporated in 1907 and named after civil war governor Zebulon B. Vance. The first school, Wakelon School, was opened in 1908. However, schools were not fully integrated until 1970 (Cunningham et al., 1998).

East Wake Academy originated with a few parents who were unhappy about their children's educational choices in the area. The story circulated that a group of unsatisfied parents sketched the idea of the school on a napkin during lunch. This sketch of ideas was put together, and a plan was made to begin a public charter school. As part of the North Carolina general statute 115C-218 Article 14 A, an application must be submitted for a charter school to be approved. East Wake Academy was formed during the second iteration of charter schools in North Carolina. Although charter schools were favored at that time, some skeptics were concerned with the direction of these schools. EWA started on a muddy lot with two modular buildings (mobile mansions). The school began accepting students in 1998. In 2005 the elementary building was completed; in 2010, the high school was designed by students and built; and in 2015 the middle school moved into their new building.

This study focuses on the EWA middle school campus, which serves approximately 386 students. The student demographics include 77.5% Caucasian, 9.8% African American, 7.4% Hispanic, and 5.3% of American Indian, Asian, and Pacific Islander. Our admissions process allows any students in the state the opportunity to apply. We serve students in six surrounding counties (Wake, Johnston, Franklin, Wilson, Nash, and Vance). Table 3 indicates the

Table 3

Area Demographics by County

County	Caucasian	African American/ Black	Asian	Latino
Wake	67.9%	21%	7.7%	10.4%
Nash	54.7%	41.3%	1%	7.4%
Franklin	70.1%	25.9%	0.7%	9%
Johnston	78.8%	17%	0.9%	14.1%
Vance	45.1%	51.5%	0.8%	8.3%

counties we serve and the demographics of the population of that county. Although we serve six counties close to ours, the demographics of our students and staff do not match those we serve. Our staff is 90% Caucasian and 10% people of color.

Historically, EWA Middle School has been academically successful, as measured by state testing and presented in Table 4. The performance reports included elementary, middle, and high school results. Although the school averages as a B or C school over the years, if the layers of the onion were peeled off, there is evidence that more work needs to be done to adequately serve all students in a way that intrigues, engages, and piques their interest in the content and standards taught. Specifically, our school community is interested in exploring equity regarding both the curriculum as well as classroom pedagogical practices. This PAR project aimed at gaining awareness and understanding of the EWA middle school's environment, equity, and cultural responsiveness. In turn, the hope is that awareness leads to more equitable actions in the classroom.

Context (People)

The PAR participants consist of four classroom teachers, two in math and two in science, and our interventionist and instructional coach, who have agreed to serve as the CPR group (see Table 5). Participants were chosen based on their experience, knowledge, and desire to improve their teaching methods. The participants' expertise ranges from beginning teachers to veteran teachers with almost 20 years in the field. I have known one of the CPR group members for 15 years, with four of those years working at another location. We have worked together as colleagues for all those years and have a strong working relationship. The remaining team members have worked with me for five years or fewer. The Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR)

Table 4

East Wake Academy Historical Data

School Performance Report	School Letter Grade	School Performance Grade
2021-2022	C	66
2020-2021	N/A	N/A
2019-2020	N/A	N/A
2018-2019	B	80
2017-2018	B	77
2016-2017	B	82
2015-2016	B	78
2014-2015	B	78
2013-2014	B	81
2012-2013	N/A	N/A

Table 5

CPR Member Profiles

Participants	Profile Details
Instructional Coach/Interventionist	Veteran Teacher Female 11 years at EWA 18 years in education
Math Teacher	Veteran Teacher Female 6 years at EWA 10 years in education
Math Teacher	Beginning Teacher Female 3 years at EWA 3 years in education
Science Teacher	Veteran Teacher Female 3 years at EWA 15 years in education
Science Teacher	Veteran Teacher Female 4 years at EWA 5 years in education

team were interested in this study because they wanted to make a positive impact on our students.

They realized that in our self-assessment, the Facilitated Assessment of MTSS at the School level (FAM-S), we are not implementing changes in any areas that centered around cultural responsiveness. The team wanted to find ways to improve our ranking in this area and directly impact the students within our buildings. We realized that there was work to be done and they would be willing to work alongside our staff to assist with the shift that needed to take place. To provide a full scope of staff, the demographics of all staff members are included in Table 6 to indicate the varying backgrounds of those who serve students in the school.

Our first participant serves as our instructional coach and interventionist. She wears many hats as a part of our staff. Allison is in her 18th year of education. Not only does Allison serve as our interventionist, but she is also a co-coordinator for our Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) team. Before this role, Allison taught science and math in the second, third, and fifth grades. Allison recently completed her master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and is currently working on her administration and supervision degree at Barton College. Allison is solution-oriented and looks to solve problems in multiple ways.

Our sixth-grade math teacher Marina is in her third year of teaching. Marina is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education, a concentration in health and science, and a minor in Spanish. Marina is a natural leader and educator who considers alternative ways to teach children and meet their needs. Marina is a fantastic communicator with her parents. Marina served as our fifth-grade teacher for the first two years of her career.

Table 6

Staff Demographics

Position	Black	White	Other	Male	Female
Core Classroom Teacher	1	19	0	0	20
Coaches	1	3	0	0	4
Elective Teacher	0	4	1	1	4
Instructional Assistant	0	1	0	0	1
Counselor	0	1	0	0	1
Administrative Assistant	1	0	0	0	1
Administration	1	0	0	0	1

Our fifth-grade math teacher has been employed at our school for five years. She is in her 10th year as an educator. Alex is a graduate of Grand Valley State University in Michigan. Before arriving at EWA Alex taught kindergarten, fourth, and sixth grades. While at EWA, Alex has worked in the middle school, teaching math and science to fifth and sixth graders. Alex has a heart for the students that she serves. She strives to build relationships with and support them in any way possible.

Our sixth-grade science teacher is in her fifth year of teaching. She has worked at our school for four of those years. She previously worked in Wake County Public Schools (WCPSS), located in the same area where our school is. Sarah is a highly organized and goal-oriented teacher. She works to meet the needs of students in her classroom. Sarah also has a way to reach students who have difficulties that many teachers do not understand. Sarah lives close to our school and can be seen by families in the area frequently.

Our fifth-grade science teacher has been in the field for 15 years. She has been at EWA for three of those years. Lisa has taught fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades in language arts, social studies, math, science, and special education. Lisa is a Salisbury University graduate certified in North Carolina, Maryland, and Georgia. She has also completed graduate classes at McDaniel College and Walden University. Lisa sought after our school for some time to join our staff. Her personality and the relatable tasks that she does in class encourage all our students to do their best to demonstrate their full potential.

PAR Pre-cycle Data Collection

The PAR Pre-cycle began in the Fall of 2021 and concluded in the Spring of 2022. At the start of the semester, I decided on those I would invite to join the CPR team. Our group met four times during the Pre-Cycle. During the Pre-cycle, I interviewed the CPR group members, wrote

reflective memos, and wrote reflective memos. Table 7 displays the activities completed during the PAR Pre-Cycle, denoted by the week number across the top of the table. I thoroughly describe the activities completed during this cycle in the following sections and the data collected. In addition, I detail the coding process that was used. These details reveal how I began identifying the emergent categories from interviews, reflecting memos, and CPR group meetings. Finally, I'll discuss what I learned about coding and how I used the codes to infer categories.

CPR Activities

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, our CPR group met formally four times. During these meetings, we began to set the tone for relational trust among our group. Our meetings consisted of dynamic mindfulness, personal narratives, debriefing our core text, and discussing how the information learned can be used while serving our students. During our meetings, we followed established norms set by the team. Our core text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching, and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015), allowed our team to begin the conversations around cultural responsiveness in our classroom and the entire school environment. Teachers began to learn and share their thoughts and understanding.

In our first CPR meeting, the personal narrative was with teachers describing when they felt seen, heard, valued, or acknowledged. Team members were introduced to gracious space and our text for this time. Our team also completed journey lines of key moments that influenced our educational experience. I collected data by taking notes of the discussions during the personal narrative and journey lines. At the end of the meeting, the team was asked to bring a photograph that shows how we make students feel valued at the next meeting.

Table 7

PAR Pre-cycle Activities by Week

Activities	1	3	5	6	8	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	
CPR Meetings (n=4)	•		•													•			•	
Interview (n=10)					•														•	
Reflective Memos (n=14)	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•		•		•	•	

For our second CPR meeting, we participated in dynamic mindfulness through a video centered around *The Table* protocol (see Appendix I). Team members were asked to share a table (actual or representative) of their childhood or youth that was important to them. This activity allowed for reflection. We also discussed the text and how the first chapter resonated with the team members. Additionally, I asked them to share how this chapter can begin discussing cultural responsiveness with colleagues. We discussed the photographs we brought and shared how students feel valued. I was allowed to take notes and collect the photos that team members brought in to add to my data collection. Team members were asked to bring a photo of a tree that displays how we know or learn from each other to our next meeting.

During our third meeting, we practiced dynamic mindfulness through mindful breathing. Our personal narrative surrounded our definitions of relationships and what it means to be in a relationship with someone. We discussed what valued relationships feel like. We then discussed how we can create the attributes described in our context with students and how this creation could impact teacher interactions. During this meeting, we debriefed Chapters 2 and 3 of the Hammond (2015) book. We shared the brain rule that resonates with each of us and discussed culture, individuality, and collectivism. As a follow-up from the previous meeting, teachers were to describe when people only knew them at the surface and how they could dig deeper to know them better. How can we as a school get to know each other at a deeper level as staff and with our students? Data collection was through notes taking while listening to the responses from team members.

This cycle's fourth and final meeting was after teachers completed journey lines and interviewed students on their educational experience. Teachers came to the meeting with their reflections on their experiences with students. Teachers then wrote a reflection on how this

experience was and how it impacted what they knew about students. In addition, teachers began thinking of ways to use the information learned in the classroom. During this meeting, I collected teacher reflections and took written notes for data collection.

Interviews

I completed individual interviews with each CPR team member in December 2021. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 20-25 minutes. During interviews with the CPR team, teachers shared what they would look for in culturally responsive classrooms. Teachers discussed ways they could recognize a classroom where the teachers had relationships with students. Using their senses, teachers described what both culturally responsive classrooms and relationships with teachers looked, sounded, and felt like. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and later transcribed. From the transcriptions, I took notes to be used for data collection.

Reflective Memos

I wrote memos throughout Pre-cycle to reflect on observations and conversations with teachers. Memos provide a safe place to express my thoughts and ideas on the activities and help me triangulate the different data sources, verify the evidence collected, and offer perspectives on working with participants and other teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The evidence from memos informed the process I engaged in with teachers during observations, conversations, and other interactions and activities during Pre-cycle. Further, reflective memos gave me a record of my learning and how the PAR supports my growth and development as a school leader. These reflective memos provided data to address my leadership question of this study.

PAR Pre-cycle Data Analysis

Throughout the PAR Pre-Cycle, I analyzed the data to demonstrate what happened. I used meeting notes, interviews, field notes, and reflective memos. My reflective memos were varied in topic, but most of the memos centered on what was happening within my context and how I felt. Other memos were focused on learning during the school assignments. I also noted information learned after meeting discussions. The notes and memos are pieces to the puzzle of my learning and how this work has impacted how I currently or will lead in the future.

Coding

I analyzed different forms of data collected from CPR meetings, activities, interviews, and reflective memos. After collecting data, I used open coding to code inductively (Saldaña, 2016). I began to note any patterns within each code. While looking at the codes I sought to find any opportunities to find meaning that may be similar in nature. I used a codebook that listed the codes that emerged and in order to note the frequency of codes, I tallied every occurrence. As I continued to attempt to bring the ideas together, I began to go through several rounds of coding to bring my ideas and thoughts together to help with any emergent categories that are present as related to equity and CRP in classrooms. One emergent category developed from the analysis is entitled equity novice. In the next section, I discuss the emergent category and the codes that support that category, including the number of times each code appeared in the data.

Emergent Category

While engaging in the coding and analysis of the data collected during the Pre-cycle an emergent category was developed, which I have entitled equity novice. I use the phrase equity novice to describe someone inexperienced or new in their understanding of equity and equitable practices. In our work as a CPR group to develop our understanding and practices of culturally

responsive teaching, much of the evidence pointed toward how novice our understanding was of what culturally responsive teaching was and how we describe and/or implement it in practice. In my codebook, novice understanding is labeled as awareness, and implementing practices is labeled as practice (see Figure 3). This section describes these two codes and their related sub-codes that informed my category naming of equity novices. The frequency of the occurrences of the codes within this category are shown in Table 8. Finally, I summarize how this emergent category connects to my research questions, some promising learning emerging in our work, and what evidence still needs to be collected.

Awareness

During activities and CPR meetings, participants began to share the new knowledge and understanding they gained from each other and their students. The group was becoming more aware of not only the thoughts of students but their thoughts and feelings. As I reviewed and analyzed the data I collected, it became apparent that when teachers talked about their awareness of culturally responsive teaching, they tended to talk about it in three specific ways. I have labeled the three areas as inclusion, access, and relationships. Figure 4 displays the three areas of awareness discussed. The data suggest that teachers' awareness was at a novice level of understanding. Table 9 shows the frequency that which these three areas were discussed. I describe and provide evidence from my data to support this coding.

Inclusion

In our CPR meetings and activities, team members frequently discussed inclusion in multiple ways. The two most frequent ways that inclusion showed up in the data were around being inclusive of gender and being thoughtful about cultural celebrations. The participants

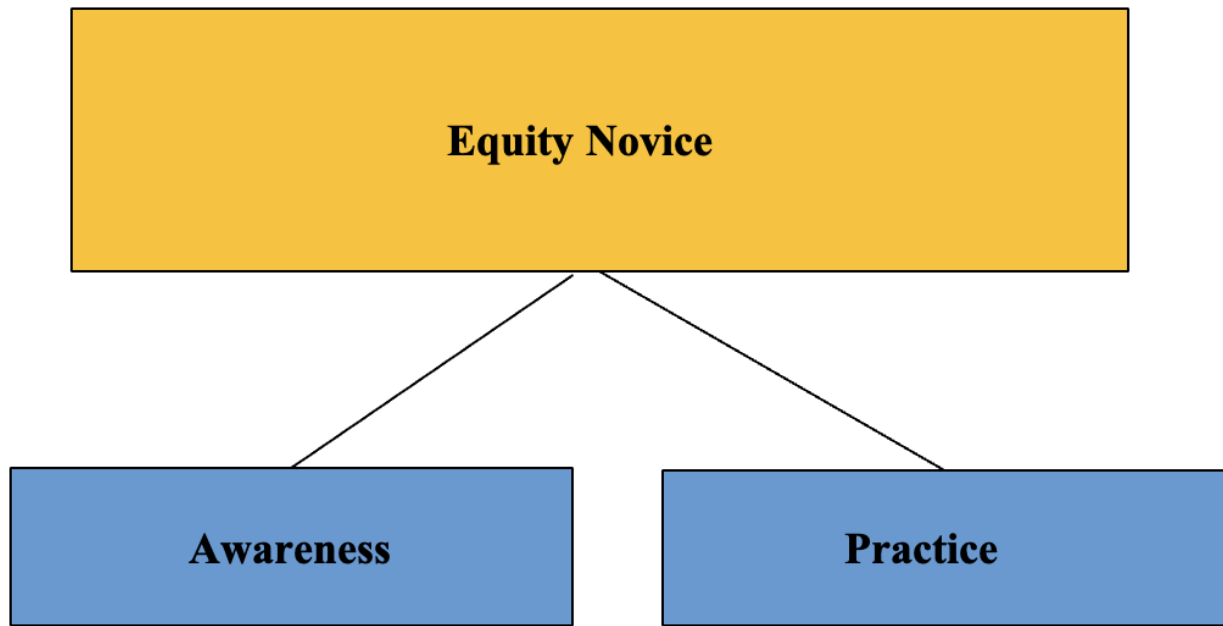


Figure 3. Equity novice category and codes.

Table 8

PAR Pre-cycle Categories, Definitions, and Frequency

Category	Codes	Definition	Frequency
Equity Novice	Awareness	Recognition and acknowledgement	80
	Practice	What teachers do	117

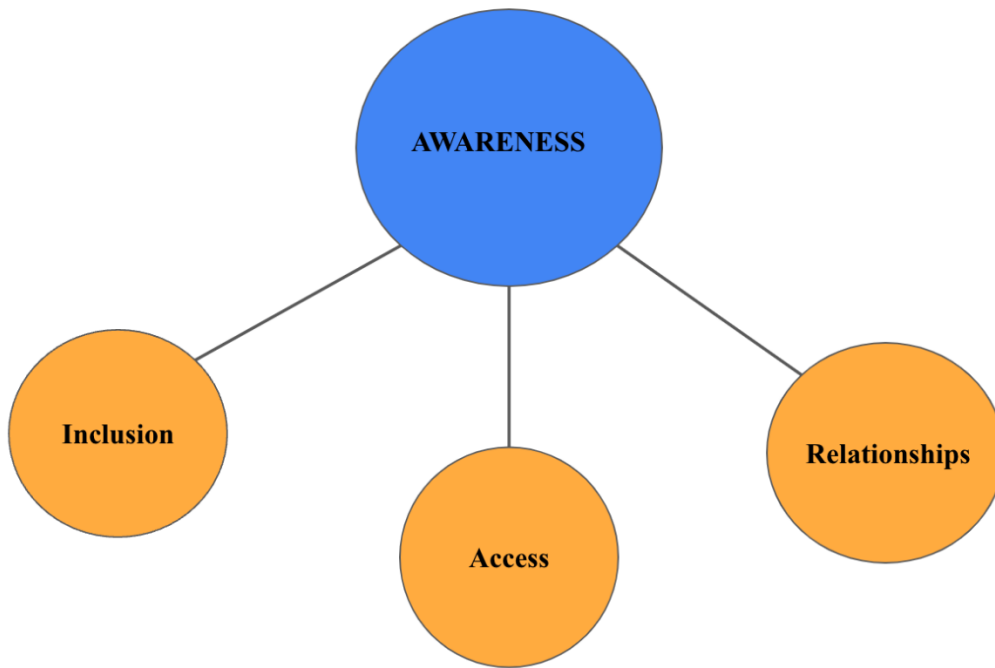


Figure 4. Ways in which awareness was discussed.

Table 9

PAR Pre-Cycle: Awareness

Code	Sub-code	Frequency
Awareness	Relationship	33
	Access	26
	Inclusion	21

discussed being inclusive of genders when discussing careers and science and math topics. There were also frequent mentions of including students' cultural backgrounds in holidays and celebrations – how to be more thoughtful. Mrs. Little shared, “To prevent Rachel from being excluded in holiday activities, I created an author’s tea for her class. Rachel could shine because she felt a part of her community.” Another participant acknowledged that students should refrain from breaking off into different groups, saying, “There shouldn’t be a division between the different cultures as all cultures should be celebrated in the classroom.” CPR participants recognized that the school is not doing enough to ensure all students feel seen, heard, acknowledged, and validated.

Access

CPR members shared and reiterated the importance of students having the ability to understand and retain the content being taught in classrooms. The data highlighted that folks were thinking about access in terms of learning things about students to connect to the content and with them. Teachers tend to connect with students to build their confidence and allow opportunities for access. In addition, when designing a curriculum, teachers will take a content area and design an activity that relates to something they know the students enjoy or understand to draw them into the task. Bringing content and interests together will help student retention. After participating in several activities with the CPR group, members identified some actions they need to take as they continue to serve our students. “Participating in activities made me think I needed a more diverse perspective in lessons and materials.” What stood out in this data is that many of the connections teachers made were from the beginning of the year, which seemed to lead to the realization for some that this type of work is ongoing when that may not be the case.

Relationships

When discussing awareness, one repeated area was the notion of building relationships with students. Participants talked about building relationships with students by discussing attributes of important relationships and ways they learned about their students. Members of the CPR team were vocal about connections with students to meet them where they are. When creating a personal narrative with the team members about the attributes of someone they admired or their favorite teacher, principal intern Ms. Stancil shared that all her memorable recollections were based on personal connections and relationships she made with teachers and how teachers influenced her socially and emotionally, saying “This speaks volumes about how important those connections and relationships are if we want to reach students.” Due to the impact of these experiences, she makes sure to get to know her students by asking them how their day is going, what they like, what they do on the weekends, etc., to find something she can connect to the content she teaches. Ms. Roe shared that she does surveys to get to know her students so they can share “what they like about themselves, the student's favorite things, their favorite songs, etc.” She then takes the information they shared to create a playlist of the songs students chose for class to listen to while working or studying. Relationship building can be done in multiple ways. Participants felt that it was important to consider what attributes they look for in the people they value to build relationships as well as what other ways they could connect with students.

As our CPR team completed various activities individually or with students, many areas of awareness came to light after completing these tasks. Team members had reflections that presented light bulb moments for them when thinking of culturally responsive ways to design and implement curriculum and practices that would serve all. Notably, teachers spoke very little

about high-level instruction or belief in students, which I will comment on in my later summary. I use the same three sub-categories in my description of the evidence for practice.

Practice

The other major way the CPR group talked about culturally responsive teaching was through their own practice. Practice is defined as how something is done or expected to be done in the classroom. As was the case with their awareness, teachers placed the description of their practice in the same sub-categories. The data suggest that teachers' practice was also at a novice understanding. Figure 5 indicates the ways in which practice was discussed, while Table 10 indicates the frequency. I describe and provide evidence from my data to support this coding.

Inclusion

Teachers' practices can demonstrate the level of their understanding of culturally responsive understanding in how they found ways to be inclusive of others. Participants felt that their actions demonstrated their inclusivity practice by being present for students, students seeing themselves in the classroom, as well as altering lessons to be sure that all students are included. Team members shared ideas of what they felt was done to be inclusive of all. Members shared that they would attend non-academic activities for students, create a space where students can feel free to talk and be friends, relate to them in sports and activities they enjoy, including their names in various assignments, among other ideas. When asked what someone might see in a culturally responsive classroom, a CPR member shared:

You can tell even if the teacher is not in the room by what is on the walls, the types of assignments students must complete, even posted inspirational quotes. I share with my students a mathematician of the week. This mathematician may be an athlete, someone

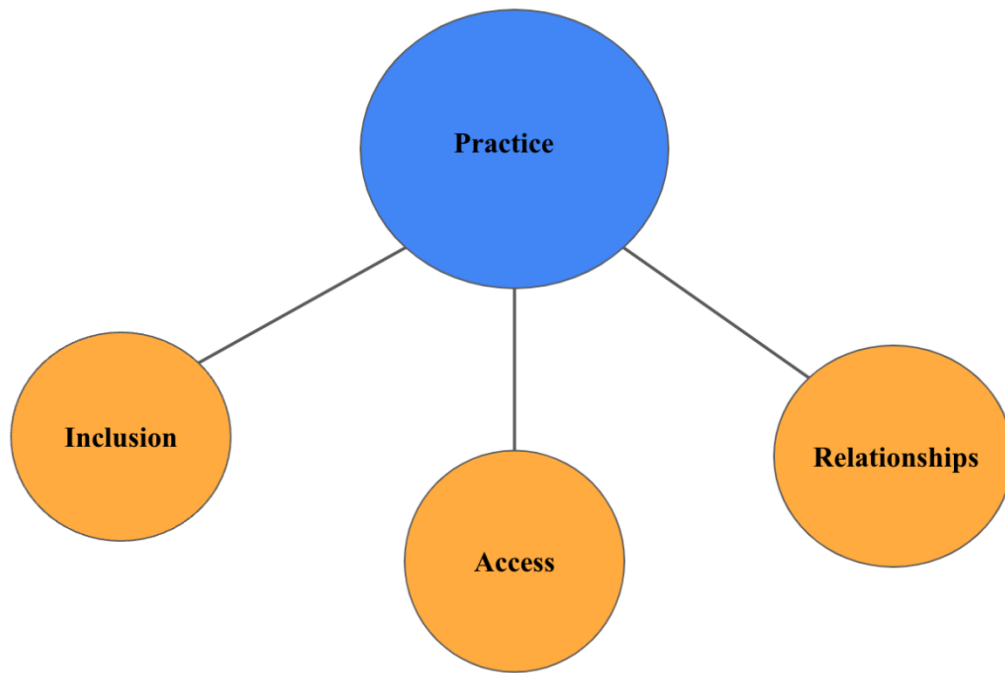


Figure 5. Ways in which practice was discussed.

Table 10

PAR Pre-Cycle: Practice

Code	Sub-code	Frequency
Practice	Relationship	49
	Access	39
	Inclusion	29

from the LGBTQ+ community, a female, etc. Students can look around and see others that look like them, act like them, or even have the same hobbies.

Mrs. Little gave examples of including students who have different beliefs from others. She discussed redesigning her holiday activities so that all students could be included despite their religious upbringing. Implementing and integrating inclusivity in our practices is one way of meeting the needs of all students. It is the key to leaving no child behind or unnoticed.

Access

During this study, the CPR team members began to think, discuss, and explore the access of students as it related to their practice in the classrooms and areas on campus. Access means that students can approach, handle, or tackle a task or content. Mrs. Gray stated:

Differentiation is important in being equitable. If differentiation is being done, the teacher provides tiered accommodations for those needing it. If I see students are not engaged, then there's something that's not going on in the classroom that needs to be done and I will adjust accordingly.

Mrs. DeJong shared how teachers should be sure that the questions they place on activities or tests be accessible to all students. "If a student has never golfed or has been exposed to golfing, they may have difficulty relating to questions without any prior knowledge or experience."

Access in practice requires teachers to be intentional in their approach to designing lessons in the classroom. Teachers should consider how each student will understand, wrestle with, and retain the material based on how the content is delivered and expressed.

Relationships

Relationships are vital in the culturally responsive classroom. Relationships are ways that teachers can connect with their students. Teachers in this study shared that seeing students

outside the academic setting, having one-on-one conversations with students, and surveying students are a few ways to get to know and build those relationships. “I enjoy seeing students outside of the classroom by attending sports and extracurricular events. Their personalities shine through when they do not have the stress of academics in front of them.” One-on-one conversations were given as an example of fostering relationships with students. Some teachers give surveys to learn about the students and how to support them best in class. “I incorporate the results from their survey into my classroom and lessons.” When asked how you can tell whether a teacher knows her students, Mrs. Stancil responded:

Just listen to the conversations between the teacher and students. See if she can connect to the students and refer to what she learned. If that teacher knows what the child engages outside of school, then I would consider that evidence of that teacher.

Teachers should consider that their relationships with students shape and foster the experience one will have in their classroom. Many say that people learn from those they like. Having a foundational relationship will help engage students to want to engage in the content that the teacher is sharing.

In summary, the members of the CPR team have a novice understanding of culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. Some suggestions barely scratch the surface of what I believe should be done to learn who our students are genuinely and to create lessons that will evoke student excitement and academic growth. Initially, when we talked about awareness, the conversation was surface and surrounded differentiation and access. Teachers used examples of ensuring everyone has materials or scaffolded lessons. Their awareness and practices, in the beginning, match. After completing activities with the CPR team, there was a shift in how they responded to the needs of students.

One area that needed to be addressed is student expectations, standards, and rigor. In our awareness about students, participants needed to examine how kids are different and how we respond to them, indicating that I would have to dive further into this. I also noticed that we needed to mention discovering the unique gifts each person brings to the community. I also became curious about their true beliefs regarding CRP, CRT, and students. We only talked about treating students fairly or getting to know them, but we may not have been digging deep enough. I determined that I needed to also collect evidence on student expectations, standards, rigor, and group member beliefs.

Reflection and Planning

Reflecting on my time in the PAR Pre-cycle, much of the cycle was spent building relationships between the co-practitioner researcher group and me. The foundation needed to make this project successful began with the engagement I had to get to know each person who would do this work, with me and the team members learning about one another. The time spent together to form bonds and a safe space was necessary so that all participants would feel as if they could speak openly and freely about personal information. I did not anticipate that two of the five participants would not be here to continue the project going into PAR Cycle One. In addition, another member changed roles and would no longer work directly with students, so the insight she would provide could be different moving forward. I also hadn't fully anticipated the impact that the Covid-19 era would have on staff and myself. The pandemic's impact on us all made this project challenging to keep together. There have been times when meetings had to be canceled due to staff absences and illnesses without an available time to reschedule. The stress and weight of the school year weighed heavily on staff members, so it was painful to ask anyone to do anything above and beyond what they were currently struggling to do. This time was tough

on everyone involved. The following section will include thoughts on leadership reflection thus far.

Reflection on Leadership

The PAR Pre-cycle was a difficult time for all educators in my school. Our small school has limited staffing, and everyone plays multiple roles. I spent a great deal of time worrying whether I was supporting teachers enough for them to be effective in their classrooms, keeping sickness at bay among the staff and students, and maintaining cleanliness as a priority. At times I felt as if so much grace had been extended that teachers could not get back to the intentional business of school. At other times I felt as if I asked for one more thing from teachers that they would leave and not return the next day. Therefore, many times I was stuck as to what I should do, not only to be sure that the instructional learning in my building was sound but that the discussions that needed to take place around the shifting of our community were also a priority. Due to the nature of all that was happening around me, which was out of my control, my engagement with teachers, staff, and students was surface at best.

I have noticed that there is a tendency to avoid crucial conversations around changes that need to occur within our context. I need help with being the person to deliver the message about cultural responsiveness within the school. The current impacts of Covid weigh down teachers, but adequately adding actions to make this shift happen requires intentional attention and planning. In my experience, when I deliver a message, it is not received as something that will help them in their practice but as just another thing or task being added to their plate. I am concerned with how we will effectively dig deeper and expand the learning from the CPR group to the remaining staff.

Reviewing the collected data, I realized that I was not digging deep enough in the conversations and activities with the CPR team members. I could have engaged them further with follow-up questions, thoughts, and comments about their statements and activities that could assist in immersing CRP in their classrooms. What I needed to do was capture more substance to what their beliefs were surrounding the different topics we discussed. I want to get to the heart of how the information we are discussing and the material we are reading can truly empower them to be leaders within our school as they share knowledge surrounding CRP. I want to know and feel the impact on students as their practices shift to be sure all students' needs are met and that they are seen, heard, acknowledged, and validated.

Planning for PAR Cycle One

Looking forward to PAR Cycle One, I wanted to push beyond the surface level of information I had gathered from participants. I wanted to be sure that I was employing depth of knowledge on the concepts and topics we discuss regarding our Focus of Practice. I wanted to maintain a consistent calendar of activities that model the expectation of CRP, CPR meetings, and a scheduled CLE to begin employing our CPR team's learnings with the entire staff. The consistency would provide an opportunity to collect data that will lead to the answers to the overarching and sub-questions of this PAR. Moving forward, I elected to start engaging the participants in activities that push us toward answering all the questions in our focus of practice. I hoped the meetings and activities would push us toward the curriculum and practice portions of the research. As a result, teachers could design and integrate lessons and create inclusive practices for all students. In addition, observations would start using the protocol chosen by the CPR team to provide data on what was occurring in their classrooms. After each observation, feedback was provided with a guided conversation regarding what was viewed during that time.

After they were observed several times and we had post-observation conversations, they felt comfortable enough to observe one another and provide feedback to each other. After their rounds with each other, I hoped they would be willing to conduct observations of teachers in other content areas so that our community of learners is increased and our awareness of CRP spreads.

I wanted to be sure that we defined all the components of building and fostering relationships with students. I also wanted to be sure that the participants understood that we could form relationships and maintain expectations of students by being warm demanders. Our role as educators is to be there and support students and guide them to meet their full potential in a way that will push them to their next level of understanding. We want our educators to be aware of themselves and all the students they serve. They must know students' backgrounds, cultures, and family stories to be able to include them in their lessons, curriculum, lessons, and tasks that they give them. We want to teach students how to have productive struggle and realize that although they may not access the material the same way, they can access the material no matter their pathway.

In this chapter, I provided the data collected from the CPR meetings and interviews with the participants, which provided insight into the steps needed to address our overarching questions in this project. I determined the necessary direction to continue the work with the CPR group and the depth that I would need to take in my discussions with the team. The observations that were conducted in the later cycles provide concrete data for staff that led to discussions that evoked awareness and change.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

I was the principal and lead researcher during this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. ~~However,~~ Being close to the work in this study allowed me to recognize the ongoing need to implement and integrate cultural responsiveness within our beliefs and practice. In this chapter, I examine the method of collecting cumulative data, focusing in detail on PAR Cycles One and Two. I then explain the tasks I facilitated and provide a description of the coding and analysis process. This study took place from August 2021 to May 2023. During this time, two findings emerged; I share these findings using the evidence gathered and analyzed for each claim.

Data Collection: Pre-Cycle, PAR Cycle One and Two

The PAR Pre-cycle occurred from October 2021 to April 2022. PAR Cycle One occurred from August to December 2022 and PAR Cycle Two occurred from January to May 2023. The study began with six members in the CPR group, but over time, because members either moved to another school or left education, changed to four members. This adjustment in our core group required the continued work of the project for the remaining participants. In this section, I describe activities completed that relate to the PAR: CPR team meetings, Community Learning Exchange (CLE), CPR member interviews, and reflective memos. In closing, I describe how I analyzed the data collected during these activities to develop the findings for this study.

Activities

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, PAR Cycle One, and PAR Cycle Two, I collected data through CPR meetings, CLEs, interviews with CPR members, and reflective memos. In Table 11, I include the activities conducted during these cycles. I utilized the CPR group to review the data collected from the CLE and to provide guidance on the next steps as we worked toward the

Table 11

Participatory Action Research PAR Pre-cycle, PAR Cycle One and Two

Cycle	Time Period	Data Collection Activities
PAR Pre-Cycle	October 2021-April 2022	CPR Team Meetings CPR Team Member Interviews Reflective Memos
PAR Cycle One	August 2022-November 2022	CPR Team Meetings Conducted CLE CPR Team Member Interviews Reflective Memos
PAR Cycle Two	January 2023-May 2023	CPR Team Meetings Conducted CLE Reflective Memos

goal of this study. I collected data during the Pre-Cycle and continued adding to that data for PAR Cycles One and Two. Categories emerged during the Pre-Cycle. In PAR Cycles One and Two, I gathered more data that led to the major finding in this study. Tables 12 and 13 indicate the frequency of the activities conducted in both the Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycles One and Two.

CPR Meetings

The CPR team met a total of six times during PAR Cycles One and Two. Table 14 provides examples of activities with the group. The CPR meetings during these cycles were the guiding force to enhance the learning taking place within our group and across the school. During each meeting, I facilitated dynamic mindfulness with the team to ensure that we were all present in mind and body and focused on the day's task. We participated in personal narrative writing and discussion during each meeting. Each meeting had an agenda, with notes and artifacts collected to utilize in planning and data analysis. See Appendix G for an example of a personal narrative and an agenda from the CPR meeting.

During our first CPR meeting of these cycles, the CPR group met to discuss the school year opening and what we wanted to do as a staff to create unity and oneness. With unity in mind, the team decided to facilitate a mini-CLE that would include all voices in determining what is needed for effective school culture. The idea was to gather this information from the school community, set non-negotiables, and later measure the success of these ideas with students and staff later in the year. The CPR team members also discussed ways they would consider using in getting to know their students, such as journey lines. During this meeting, data was collected through CPR meeting notes.

Table 12

Summary of Activities in PAR Pre-cycle

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	22	23
Month	Oct			Nov			Dec			Jan			Feb			Mar			Apr			
CPR Meetings (n=4)		*			*															*		*
Interviews (n=10)								*														*
Reflective Memos (n=14)		*	*		*			*			*	*	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*

Note. Asterisks indicate activities completed during the respective week of the cycle.

Table 13

Summary of Activities in PAR Cycles One and Two

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	13	14	15	16	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	37	38	39	40		
Month	August				September				November				January				February				March				May			
CPR Meetings (n=6)	*						*		*								*					*				*		
CLE (n=3)			*			*																			*			
Interviews (n=3)														*														
Reflective Memos (n=13)							*	*		*	*		*		*	*		*		*	*		*	*	*	*		

Note. Asterisks indicate activities completed during the respective week of the cycle.

Table 14

Activities during CPR Meetings in PAR Cycles One and Two

Meeting	CPR Meeting Activities
CPR Meeting 1	Planned the beginning of the year CLE Discussed plans to get to know students Personal Narrative on school culture
CPR Meeting 2	Personal Narrative based on Brene' Brown's definition of equity Jamboard Reflection of 2 nd CLE
CPR Meeting 3	Personal narrative based on Kafele's definition of equity minded teacher Examined Hammond's Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain Decided on GAP text for staff integration of content learned
CPR Meeting 4	Created surveys for students and staff to measure effectiveness of commitments staff made for the year Personal Narrative on Commitments
CPR Meeting 5	GAP Book with Staff Reflections Personal Narrative on GAP
CPR Meeting 6	Debrief on Spring CLE Personal Narrative reflecting CPR experience

Our next CPR meeting began with the personal narrative regarding Brene' Brown's definition of empathy and followed up with a reflection on our second CLE. The second CLE was focused on relationship attributes within our school and how it relates to CRP. The CPR group utilized data collected through quotes, responses, anchor charts, and drawings to draw inferences and conclusions about participants' thoughts and interactions with the content. I asked group members to put their thoughts on a Jamboard in response to the reflection questions. In addition, participants responded to a Google form reflection on what they would like to do to continue to grow in CRP and immerse and integrate relationship attributes into their practice. The information in the Google reflection would guide moving forward throughout the school year.

The third CPR meeting was held toward the end of PAR Cycle One. Our school is an early start school which means there are regular breaks throughout the school year that influenced how the work was distributed in this study. This meeting began with a personal narrative regarding Principal Baruti Kafele's (2021) definition of an equity mindset teacher:

An equity mindset teacher is a teacher who utilizes a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies that consider the differing academic, social, and emotional needs of each of the learners in a student-centered, culturally responsive, culturally relevant, barrier-free, equity mindset classroom where student individuality, student cultural identity, and student voice matter exponentially. (p. 19)

After reading, I asked several questions of the CPR team members to determine what resonated with them and how this definition related to the book study chosen for the school. The questions led to conversations about the group members' individual responses to the text and definition and what they should continue to consider when working with students. I next posed a question in relation to staff commitments, student expectations, and rigor. Group members

shared their perspectives on what we must do as a school to address student expectations and rigor during the post-Covid era. Staff commitments created at the CLE seemed to have been forgotten so team members devised a way for us to review them again and create a mantra for all staff that embodies what everyone shared.

Additionally, at the beginning of our study, the CPR team engaged in reflection on Hammond's (2015) *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. I wanted to know from the team whether this text would be well-received as an anchor text to focus on the work we desired to do with the whole staff regarding practices within our classrooms. During the meeting, another book was suggested to tie the group member's learning to the desired awareness and practices for all staff engagement. In response, Wagner's (2008) *The Global Achievement Gap* was chosen as the school-wide text. Throughout the remainder of this study, this text will be referred to as GAP. One of the CPR members read and studied this text in her classes to stimulate teachers' thinking as they engage in their work and develop lessons and curricula for the students we serve. The members of the team felt that this text would be relevant to the direction we wanted our staff to consider as they create lessons, content, and curriculum in the classroom. During PAR Cycle One, members of the school community read and discussed Chapter 1, and notes on CPR members' reflections were collected. The CPR team provided the staff with reading guides for the assigned reading sections that would be followed up with grade-level teams and whole group discussions and activities. In addition, the team felt it was important to follow up with staff on the content of the previous CLEs to determine any progress on campus. During this meeting, the survey was created and scheduled to be issued. After each activity, the CPR team debriefed and gave their reflections captured in meeting notes.

The CPR group felt it was important to survey staff and students to get the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Our fourth meeting during PAR Cycle Two was an opportunity to discuss and examine the staff and student survey that was conducted in PAR Cycle One. CPR members shared feedback that they received from both staff and students regarding the anonymity of the survey, a concern with students and staff. The team discussed students' and staff's thoughts on completing the survey and how their reflections might impact the school's climate.

During PAR Cycle One and in response to input from our CPR meeting related to the connection between Kafele's (2021) definition of an equity mindset teacher and the first CLE, surveys were created for students and staff on school culture and relationships. During the CLE conducted at the beginning of the year, staff members created commitments that they would work on to build relationships with students and to create a positive culture. To monitor the progress of these commitments, the CPR team created surveys to be completed by staff and students. The hope was that the responses from both students and staff would give us information about setting the right direction to meet all our students' needs. Surveys were conducted at the end of PAR Cycle One. The CPR team analyzed the data received from the survey and planned an opportunity to share the results with staff members. The goal of sharing this information with staff was to be transparent about student perspectives, hear their voices, and create plans for the next steps as a school.

Our fifth meeting focused on the CPR members reflecting on the work done during the book study and its impact on our staff. CPR Team members' responses were based on their experience with the text and their colleagues' reactions to what was learned over time. Much of the conversation derived from the team members' perspective of whether the book's content was

being put into practice by fellow staff members. Team members felt that the context of the book was valuable in building awareness and necessary issues to the forefront. However, we noted that we were not doing enough within our school to be culturally responsive and increase the rigor and expectations. Data collection included meeting notes and narrative responses of team members.

Our sixth meeting was an opportunity to debrief on the last CLE of the year. Team members reflected on their interactions with other staff members and their responses to the questions posed during the CLE. One of the members took copious notes during the CLE along with another staff member, which allowed multiple perspectives of the information collected to be analyzed by the team. Team members shared how impressed they were with the openness and transparency of their colleagues during the final CLE of the year. They felt that more conversations about their shared experiences needed to happen so that they could understand one another. In turn, they felt that students could benefit from participating in CLEs so that teachers can understand the student perspective and use the information shared to impact teacher practice. Time was also spent reflecting on the CPR experience. The team felt that the more we involved staff in the decision-making, the more they would take ownership of what was expected.

Community Learning Exchanges

I facilitated three CLEs during this study. Two of the CLEs were conducted in Cycle One and focused on creating an environment where students and staff were affirmed, validated, seen, and heard. The first CLE also focused on building a cohesive school community among students and staff. The second CLE involved staff discussing meaningful relationships and their attributes. Participants engaged in applying what they knew and understood about these relationships in their present relationships with students. A third CLE in Cycle Two focused on

fears, barriers, and concerns with building relationships and addressing cultural responsiveness, equity, and accountability in the school environment. Next, I describe each CLE in detail.

The first CLE focus was solely on school culture. Teachers worked to crowd-source the school's expectations for an effective school culture through a protocol that allowed them to narrow down the year's non-negotiables to foster this culture. Individually, teachers listed five non-negotiables for a positive school culture. After the first round, teachers met with a partner, shared their thoughts, and narrowed their 10 non-negotiable attributes to five. In the third round, staff members gathered in groups of four and repeated the same procedure. At the end of several rounds, the school staff narrowed down the five commitments we would focus on for the year to create a better student culture. Teachers created anchor charts to narrow down what these expectations were. Once the anchor charts were completed, the group worked to list the actions needed to address and measure progress toward each non-negotiable.

The second CLE continued to build on establishing the school community. This CLE included a personal narrative asking participants to consider a valuable teacher or mentor in their lives and what attributes, characteristics, and actions were necessary for those types of relationships. After participants worked individually on their personal narratives, they discussed their narratives and attributes with a partner. Once this was complete, the duos formed groups of four and used chart paper to represent those relationships with words, pictures, or whatever they believed would best capture the representation. In the next activity, participants identified where the attributes from the personal narrative might be displayed throughout campus. Participants were to pick a photo and caption what they thought was happening. They identified the location if not evident. Once photos were chosen and captions were created, participants were asked to discuss the pictures and captions they chose in groups of four or five. They were to discuss

commonalities or differences in their pictures and represent their thoughts and ideas on an anchor chart. The final task for participants was to create a personal commitment that would assist them in advancing positive relationships with students.

The third CLE occurred at the end of PAR Cycle Two and focused on the culmination of the book study that staff participated in and identifying barriers they feel they are facing within our school community that may prohibit or limit them from engaging in equitable practices. Staff began the CLE with a personal narrative by being posed with two questions:

1. What's been your biggest barrier in forming relationships with new people?
2. When was the first time you realized a social construct, such as race, complicated the ability to form a relationship?

After completing their personal narrative individually, staff volunteered to share their experiences with the group. At the conclusion of the personal narrative, small groups responded to one of the questions posed on chart paper. After each group answered their question, participants utilized the learning walk and talk protocol (see Appendix H) to participate in a gallery walk (see Figure 6) and add comments to other groups' responses with affirmations or additional thoughts related to their questions. Figure 7 lists the questions placed around the room on different anchor charts to be answered by the participants. Anchor charts, meeting notes, and Google form reflections were collected as data for this activity.

Interviews

I completed follow-up interviews with the CPR group members to gain more insight into their previous responses to the questions posed in the Pre-cycle. I interviewed three of my team members for approximately 30 minutes each to gain clarity, as I wanted to capture a full picture



Figure 6. Staff participating in gallery walk activity during the CLE.

1. What fosters or inhibits teachers' equitable practices within your classroom?
2. What are the barriers to forming deeper relationships with students?
3. What brings you discomfort? What are you afraid of?
4. What inhibits you from pushing students to productive struggle and rigor?
5. What are we afraid of with families?
6. What's our fear about addressing some of these barriers/complications when our background doesn't match?

Figure 7. CLE gallery questions.

of teachers' practices to get to know their students and their understanding of CRP. I also wanted to understand the CPR members' awareness of equitable practices and culture evident within our school environment. These interviews were recorded and transcribed as a source of data collection.

Reflective Memos

I wrote memos throughout PAR Cycles to reflect on the activities and conversations with teachers. In the reflective memos, I expressed my thoughts and ideas on the activities that took place during this study. I used reflective memos to share insights on the process of working with participants and other teachers, triangulate the many data sources, and validate the evidence gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The information from the memos assisted in reviewing what activities had taken place and gave guidance on the next steps. Additionally, reflective memos provided a record of how this study impacted my growth and development as a school leader. I worked to complete reflective memos bi-weekly or as different events occurred that impacted my thoughts regarding this study. Memos were an opportunity for me to write freely about my experiences, thoughts, and feelings. I needed a place where I could regularly express my reflections and understandings throughout this study. I later coded my thoughts, feelings, and reflections to see patterns in my own understanding of the collected data. My collection of reflective memos that summarized the data and documented any understandings and misgivings throughout the study helped me in future iterations of data collection.

Data Analysis

I collected a variety of data from various sources during these cycles. These sources included but were not limited to meeting notes, CLE notes, anchor charts, photographs, and interview transcripts. The data collected included all the activities described in the previous

section. The data were organized in a codebook so that analysis could occur. The codebook was vital to data collection and essentially left breadcrumbs, which led the way to the finding. According to Saldaña (2016), the first PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One coding were inductive open coding. I was engrossed in the data throughout the first two cycles, analyzing and interpreting it to find codes and emergent patterns. The coding procedure changed from inductive, open coding to a deductive approach during PAR Cycle Two. I recognized themes and patterns that emerged throughout all cycles, leading to the finding. As the data strengthened the emergent categories and themes into a conclusive finding during this final coding cycle, high-level codes were renamed and modified into second-level codes (Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed the data set in the three PAR Cycles and intersected those data with categories from PAR Cycle One and emergent themes from PAR Cycle Two to determine the final finding. As the codebook evolved over the three cycles, I became more adept and specific about the coding for data from the three cycles of inquiry, and it came to represent my finding (see Appendix F). I recorded all the work from this inductive and deductive coding procedure in the codebook and then analyzed it for frequencies. I describe the study's findings in the next section and go into greater detail regarding the categories and supporting evidence that supports them.

To get at the final findings, I analyzed this data from PAR Cycle Two and additional data sets, intersecting them with PAR Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One data. Initially, this study examined ways to collaboratively integrate CRP and practice within our school setting. As the study progressed, we gathered evidence that displayed the possible hindrances and barriers to adequately implementing these practices within our context.

As the three cycles of analysis progressed, I could code the data from the three cycles of inquiry more precisely to indicate one major finding: staff's surface level of cultural relationship

with CRP. This finding resulted from many iterations of coding that derived from the various activities, data collection, and analysis carried out over three PAR Cycles by the CPR team.

Next, I present the finding supported with categories for each.

Findings

At the start of this study, the focus was to create a CPR team who would be the forerunners of transitioning our school to being the example of cultural responsiveness. My overarching question was, *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive practices within the school setting?* Going into this study, I knew that my vision was lofty based on my experiences with staff understanding. What I did not consider was how our current context shifted. Between Covid and the current political context (critical race theory discussions, LGBTQ+ support) in our region, staff and students' beliefs have shifted more than I realized. As we began to meet, work on activities, and gather feedback from other staff members, I noticed that I needed to go back to the basics and get everyone on the same page of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. As we collaborated on the essential elements or foundations of CRP, new understandings began to emerge for me, the lead researcher, and the teachers in the school.

Figure 8 illustrates our finding of surface culture as described by Hammond (2015). The reasons for how and why we existed in these frames without intention are indicated throughout the figure. The finding is represented in the top circle in the center. The categories are within the two circles connected to the center circle. Two categories represent how we resided within the surface and shallow with CRP, and the other two indicate why we engaged with CRP in this way. This finding and subsequential categories potentially cause barriers that inhibit effective culturally responsive practices within our context.

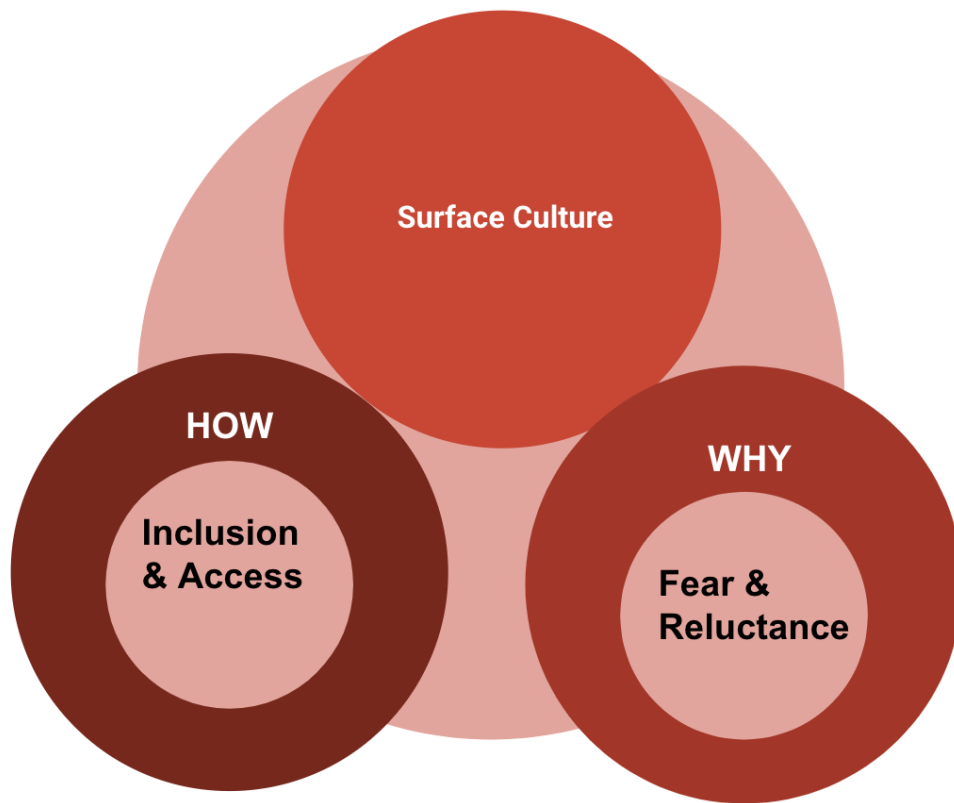


Figure 8. Finding: Surface culture.

Table 15 displays the findings and categories aggregated from the multiple activities and experiences throughout the research process. The frequency of the pattern of categories in this study is included in the table. The staff described how they thought about culturally responsive pedagogy through inclusion and access. I believe the reasons why there were limited surface interactions with CRP was due to fear and reluctance. The remainder of this section will include further discussion on the finding in detail.

Scratching the Surface with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

In our work, the educators at my school have common goals and ideals in their commitment to students. There is an overall sense of care, empathy, and wanting to listen and be there for the students we serve. The staff uses words that show they want to build relationships with students, want a positive culture, and show that they want students to be successful. The CPR group has made it evident that we sometimes do not ask the right questions to ensure that we are maintaining a positive culture and fostering relationships with students in a sustainable way. Some of the activities we completed together supported teachers to reconsider how they begin the year. They now want to be sure enough time is spent on setting the foundation for the empathy and family environment they want to embrace. When asked what the barriers to forming deeper relationships with students, teachers provided responses such as students' preconceived notions of school, rules, parent views, and finding a balance between being their teacher and their friend.

The staff speaks of having a belief in wanting high expectations for students. They share that they want students to reach their full potential and engage in rigor and productive struggle. Figure 9 shows teachers' responses to what prohibits them from engaging in more activities of productive struggle with students in their classrooms. Their response included not wanting to

Table 15

Findings, Categories, Definitions, and Frequency

Findings	Categories	Definition of Category	Frequency
Scratching the Surface with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Inclusion	Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging or place within a given setting.	140
	Access	Teachers work to make content accessible in a way that students understand.	84
	Fear	Teachers are afraid of reactions from parents and students.	66
	Reluctance	The absence or hesitation of digging deeper into a situation or content.	143

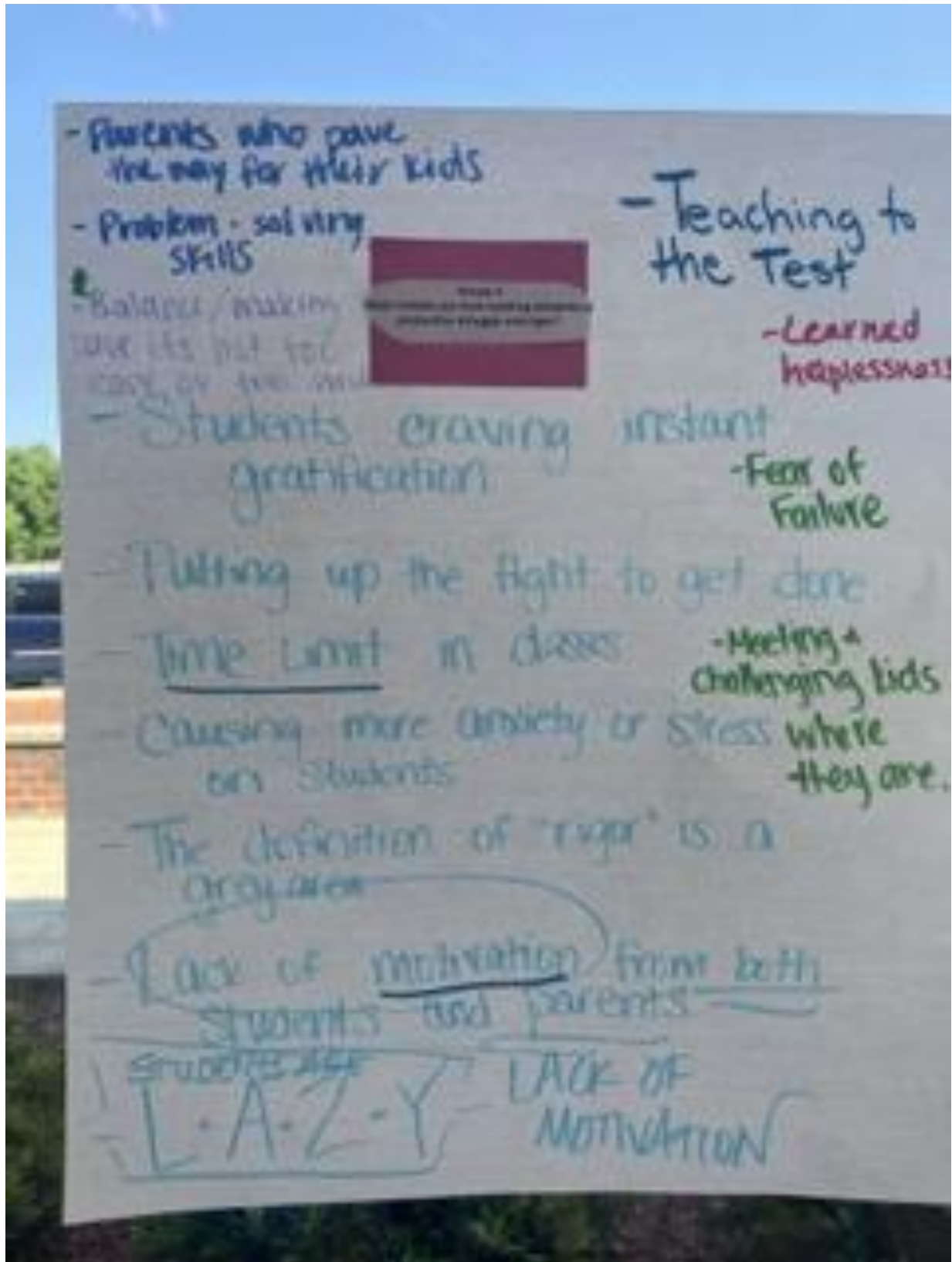


Figure 9. Staff responses during the CLE.

fight with learned helplessness, students craving instant gratification, lack of motivation from students and parents, fear of failure, and causing stress and anxiety on students. The commitments that staff make for the school year show that they want to hold students accountable and responsible for what they produce in the classroom. I am grateful that this is what the staff would like to do for students. However, the practice of this consistently varies between grade level and teacher. There is a culture and belief system of care based on commitments and what people value. These are all essential things I would want from an educator. However, what is absent is consistent intentionality of recognizing and acknowledging culture or difference. Cultural conversations, literature, and beliefs are taboo topics. Despite this observation, staff, for the most part, will do exactly what is asked of them. For example, in one of my reflective memos, I discussed a change in staff's behavior around hearing the "N" word on campus. Prior to the directive, teachers avoided interacting with students who made the comments or the student on the receiving end. Teachers were told that words of that nature would no longer be tolerated and that any incidents should be reported. Immediately after, in compliance, the number of reports of this behavior doubled. This example shows that teachers will follow a rule or comply with what they are told. The interaction is surface in that it's not innate to address a situation of this nature, but we will do what we are told. As briefed in Chapter 2 Hammond (2015) describes three levels of culture: surface, shallow, and deep. Surface culture addresses low emotional vibrations in that it addresses the music, food, dress, and holidays of a culture. Shallow culture has a stronger emotional vibration that focuses on the unspoken rules of a culture and social interactions. We establish and understand proper behaviors, trust, and acknowledge cultural values. Deep culture builds on how we grow to understand new information, world views, theories, and spirituality. Understanding that everyone can have the

same experience but different reactions to it based on our culture. Through this study, we have learned that we have shifted from surface to shallow culture with the goal of residing in deep culture. We understand that there is more work to be done to get there.

During our CLE, there was only one instance where a difference was mentioned regarding accepting LGBTQ+ students. Acknowledgment and validation of students who are different caused some reluctance with staff. Throughout this study, we found that students want more from their relationships with teachers. A CPR member shared something a student shared during a survey, saying “I think that more teachers should get to know the students better because the two teachers who have gotten to know me are my favorite.” In the student survey, students shared what more they wanted from their teachers.

As a result of this study, new awareness brought to staff has allowed the CPR members to initiate and sustain different activities on campus. For example, CPR members discussed the importance of our positive reinforcement in the feather system so that more teachers are recognizing students positively. In addition, a spotlight on students was employed on campus to highlight what students were engaged in during and after school to continue learning about the students they serve.

Within the school, staff members value relationships with students. However, how we interact with students, families, cultures, and differences appears surface. The relationships are surface because we do not appear to be truly getting to know and understand students, their families, or their backgrounds and beliefs. Relationships appear on a surface level and operate as quid pro quo interactions; relationships between students and staff mean that something is expected in return when a task is done. For example, if I attend a student’s basketball game, they know I’m interested in them and will, in turn, participate in my class. A student example would

be if I am obedient in class, the teacher will give me a good grade. As the CPR team examined student, staff, and familial relationships, they noticed that engagement was more prevalent in inclusion and access. Table 16 discusses how we engage in surface culture relationships with inclusion and access.

Fear and reluctance are why we have a surface culture relationship with CRP. The current political climate in the United States has impacted the state of North Carolina, which has impacted our school. In a time where several political stances impact the educational field, many people are not careful about what they say and do around impressionable children. This, in turn, impacts the baggage students come to school with. Students repeat what they hear and engage in behaviors like what they see portrayed at home with their families. Our school has some families of very conservative views with limited opportunities for open-mindedness. Due to students' varying backgrounds and beliefs, our staff participates in avoiding controversial topics and discussions. This avoidance is due to reluctance to dig deep to know and understand students and families. Fear and reluctance to dig deeper indicate why we remain at the surface level of culture. Table 17 indicates where fear and reluctance were present within the research. In this study, the underlying current of this era, where there are debates on critical race theory, LGBTQ+ rights, and more, has caused fear and reluctance to engage in the work and acknowledgment of race, equity, and CRP.

In the remainder of the finding section, I first describe the categories based on the data on how staff relationships with CRP may be labeled surface as defined by Hammond (2015). Two categories include inclusion and access and explain that these categories represent how staff describe their interactions with culturally responsive pedagogy. I then discuss the categories of

Table 16

PAR Pre-Cycle, Cycle One, and Cycle Two: Inclusion and Access

Categories	Definition of Category	Frequency
Inclusion	Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging or place within a given setting.	140
Access	Teachers work to make content accessible in a way that students understand.	84

Table 17

PAR Pre-Cycle, One, and Two: Fear and Reluctance

Findings	Categories	Definition of Category	Frequency
Why	Fear	Teachers are afraid of reactions from parents and students.	66
	Reluctance	The absence or hesitation of digging deeper into a situation or content.	143

fear and reluctance, which I believe are why our interactions remain on the surface. I provide a table for the how and why as I describe each section.

Inclusion

Inclusivity is one of the ways to create an environment that fosters CRP for all students. In this study, I define inclusion as the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging or place within a given setting. Teachers talked about inclusion when discussing holidays, including names in content, and topics related to gender. The staff shared that students with different holiday beliefs should not be excluded from activities. Teachers feel that alternate opportunities should be created for those students to participate. One teacher stated:

My student did not have the same holiday beliefs as most of her classmates; therefore, I created a different celebration so all students could be included. The student felt included, and this change allowed a greater relationship between the students and me.

Another teacher shared:

Several of my students do not celebrate birthdays. It certainly wasn't fair to exclude these students from any activities and events. I began to brainstorm with my team. As a result, each month we have created a monthly gratitude day where students can celebrate each other and the teachers for accomplishments and appreciations they have for one another.

As a collective, these statements represented the sentiments of other teachers and staff when discussing inclusivity regarding acknowledging students varying beliefs of holidays and celebrations.

Teachers and staff discussed including student's names in tests, passages, and projects to be inclusive. Staff also felt that if teachers included student interests in the type of books and

articles they read or included their favorite sport in math problems, they were being inclusive. One CPR member made this statement, “Students should see themselves represented by putting their names in tests or the activities they enjoy included in various tasks and tests.” Staff felt that if students saw their names included and their interests brought into the classrooms, students would pay more attention to the class content, and as a result, achievement would increase. Another CPR member shared, “I study students’ beginning of the year inventory to find ideas to include within my classrooms so that students feel that I am including them in my lesson plans and activities.” The above quotes represent how CPR members and staff referred to ways to include students within their content areas. Staff believing that students would respond, react, or engage more with the content, simply because their names or interests are included.

Gender was another way that staff members discussed and referred to inclusivity. Gender was mentioned multiple times in discussion with staff members. Staff believed that students’ gender identities should be considered when forming classes, playing games, and organizing sport’s teams. “In order to properly create a class, we have to be sure our girl, boy ratio is equal.” “To play games in our classrooms, we separate teams into boys versus girls. This way everyone is included.” Both statements were common among staff when discussing gender regarding students. In a traditional educational setting, these statements would be the norm. However, as the climate in schools is evolving, reconsiderations to these statements should occur.

Although staff feels that students are being included, a student survey response shared with the CPR group stated, “I think that teachers should have known students better and watch when people don't feel included.” The account from students indicates that there is more work to be done to get to know students to build capacity for inclusion. Despite teachers feeling that they are creating inclusive environments, students indicated a different experience. During the CPR

team's analysis, staff and students' perspectives were not similar, indicating that teachers did not fully understand how students were feeling. In a survey created by the CPR team, teachers' responses indicated that they modeled how to respect other cultures and perspectives 83% of the time, whereas students felt that this teaching and modeling was demonstrated at 32%. In addition, 70% of staff members responded that students felt important and valued at school, but 57% of the students agreed with this statement. The discrepancies within the beliefs of students and staff forced the team to create a plan to work on ways the culture can be shifted to serve and include all students. At no time did teachers discuss race or equity unless the discussion facilitator intentionally named these topics. As a result of the evidence collected during our activities, team members are now seeking intentional ways to bring race and equity into the conversation so that awareness and progress can occur.

The CPR members note that being inclusive in our environment is limited and does not go beyond holidays, including names and activities, or gender. Based on this learning, the CPR team recognized that we are often surface in our inclusive practices and demonstrate minimal inclusion practices according to Tredway et al. (2019) framework:

- 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.

Staff members recognized that they needed to change and brainstormed ways to include all students within the school. One example included staff members creating a system in which every student is known by at least one staff member in the building. Staff members selected students and had the task of getting to know something about them that did not relate to school before coming to the next staff meeting. The goal was that every student would engage in positive personal interactions with staff members weekly. We wanted this first step to open the door to other opportunities for inclusivity. The CPR members felt that staff could consider building upon the information gathered during the personal interaction to go beyond the surface with students and families. To be fully inclusive, teachers needed to be more intentional about relationships with students and families; in the key area of empathy, teachers were making progress on their dispositions. However, they needed to be more intentional about addressing culturally responsive practices and knowing them and becoming more comfortable with conversations about race before they could be more fully present with students.

Inclusion was not the only way staff have a predominantly surface relationship with CRP. Access is another way that staff showed how they could interact with cultural responsiveness. In the next section, I define access and provide examples of how staff uses opportunities for access to get to know students and families. In the next section, I detail another way that staff were

engaged in surface relationships with cultural responsiveness in the ways they provided access to students.

Access

Access for all students is imperative for meeting the educational needs of the students in the school. In this study, I am defining access as making content accessible to students in ways they can understand. CPR members tended to discuss access in terms of differentiation of content, materials, and accommodations. Staff at the school work hard to make the content accessible to students. Teachers and staff were vocal about access and doing so through differentiation. One teacher stated:

When lesson planning or creating test, I must cater my content and assessments so that they are attainable to students. I must be intentional about leveling the playing field so that all students will receive content on their level and in return be able to be assess on the level of their potential. Providing access forces, me to make sure that no child is left behind.

This statement was similar to other statements that staff members were expressing. Staff spend time creating lesson plans to support below, on, and above grade level students. The idea is to make sure that no matter where the students may fall on the continuum, that they can still master the standards required by the state, just catered to their needs.

Students having the materials they need to succeed are important to making sure students have access to the content being taught. Staff make sure that if students need print materials, they are provided. If a student performs better on computer applications, they are provided. Should students need before and after-school tutoring, there is a plan to make that happen. “No matter what students need, we should always have a plan in place to be sure all materials are accessible

to them.” Our school utilizes area resources and parent donations to obtain any needs for the school and students. The generous donations of our school community make accessibility to materials for our students possible.

When considering lesson for my students, I make sure that I have all the necessary materials to be for them to be successful. If they need manipulatives, calculators, the opportunity to draw the math problems, multiple choice versus short answer, I am sure to provide these items for them.

Staff believe that that there should be limited barriers for students having accessible materials because of the provisions made.

Lastly, teachers discussed access when discussing accommodations that students received in relation to content and assessments. A CPR member represented staff consensus, “Instruction does not look the same for every student. You must accommodate a variety of needs and make the lesson accessible to all students.” Accommodations allow access for students in the same manner as differentiation does. It removes any barriers that may exist and prevent students from being able to demonstrate their mastery of any potential content or assignment. Students utilized accommodations such as teacher copied notes, separate settings for testing to limit distractions, read aloud, chunking assignments, read aloud to self, dictate to scribe, and many others that address any educational needs they may have. “I am able to take the limits off my students when I allow accommodations that will make the information, I am teaching more accessible.”

Teachers agree with this statement and work to be sure that those who need the accommodations are the ones who receive them.

Although many students needed accommodations, access became more complicated during the COVID era. As a result, the school issued grace, meaning that because of access

issues, students had more latitude in completing assignments as some could not fully access technology. However, grace became a standard for not creating high expectations. The barrier reached a point when neither students nor parents were willing for them to be challenged in the classroom. The amount of grace and access allotted became a detriment to student learning. The CPR members were concerned and discussed avoiding enabling our students by modifying and accommodating so much that students do not engage in productive struggle. We are currently working with teachers and staff on ways to combat this newfound issue.

When discussing access during this study, conversations regarding additional barriers surfaced. One of the obstacles students and teachers are facing is parental support for students. Without parent support, some programs put in place cannot thrive, and students cannot gain access to what they need to reach their full potential. During the discussions, a member stated that if the work were not done at school, it would not get done because the parent did not value education nor support the school. This assumption was addressed by several members on staff as CPR team members considered students' home lives. This open discussion assisted with this teacher's awareness of some of our student's experiences. Not only did the member later rescind the statement, but she began to find ways to support the student at school while simultaneously getting to know this student and their family. We will continue to work with our staff to consider all perspectives when generalizing and stereotyping students and parents. However, I also noticed that, during our analysis, at no time while discussing accessibility were race, students' familial backgrounds, and differences, nor was equity discussed or examined. As we continued in our work throughout this study, conversations began to shift to consider these concepts, but we are at the beginning stages of these conversations.

Having our current interactions with students through inclusion and access are keeping us at a surface level in our culturally responsive work. What I am noticing is we are not going deeper. We are only scratching the surface of who our students are and the variety of root cause issues affecting their sense of belonging and equitable access to learning. We typically focus on their hobbies, extra-curricular activities, and their favorite sport to get to know them. We must engage in deeper conversations throughout the year to learn the many different stories of the students we serve. While engaging in this work, I noticed that the access and inclusion conversations began to shift. Staff begin to have deeper reflective conversations around culturally responsive pedagogy. We were making small improvements from the surface level of culture to the shallow level as defined by Hammond (2015). Next, I explain possible reasons why staff we have remained in the surface levels of culture. This study found that fear and reluctance are indicators of why teachers continue in the surface understanding of culture.

Fear

Fear is a recurring theme when exploring the why behind the levels of cultural understanding that teachers have with implementing CRP. Teachers and staff discussed having a fear of student and parent reactions, fear of doing something wrong and losing their jobs, and fear of failure. Based on the learning in this study, fear seems to be an inherent presence in our school's culture.

After working with teachers and staff, several commonalities spoke to the fear on campus of how parents of our students will respond to different approaches. Many staff have witnessed parents rallying together and starting a revolt against staff for something they disagreed with. In the past, parents would attend board meetings and share why they were disgruntled. During this time, parents seemed to be persuasive and received board members' support. Students reported

that their parents got a teacher fired or disciplined. Fast-forward to the present; with different leadership and staff, parents do not have as much power.

Parents are vocal when situations are not going their way and use social media to bash the school, staff, parent, or even student they deem in the wrong. “Social media sites used to be a place for fun, but now I avoid the school pages for fear that my colleagues are being mistreated and misrepresented.” Being blasted on social media has created much anxiety among many staff members. For example, one teacher mistakenly miscommunicated the amount of time students would have to work on an in-class assignment. The student went home to tell their parent. Instead of the parent reaching out to the teacher, the parent immediately went to social media to complain to anyone who would read and respond. This began a full-blown character attack on the teacher that lasted a full weekend. This teacher was a teacher of color and one new to our campus. There was no grace or understanding given to the teacher. This simple mistake led to a campaign on the parents’ private social media groups rallying together to get the teacher reprimanded or fired. In turn students began treat the teacher with disrespect because they knew they had support of their parents. As a result, they alter how they would typically handle a situation for fear of being the next media story. This behavior from parents increased since we returned to school from Covid virtual experience. “We have given so much grace to our families that we feel students and parents lack the respect for the work we put in for their children.” Not only are parents very vocal, but students are rebelling because they know the response they will get from parents. For example, one student said to a teacher of color, “My father stated I don’t need to learn this Dominican Republic math. We don’t use this math in America.” When the school contacted the parent, the parent supported this statement. Other comments included, “All these boys want to do is be girls,” an insensitive comment from a parent said directly to the

administration to support their child being derogatory to others. “I am scared of having to fight with parents, so if it is something I can ignore, I will.” These sentiments were shared multiple times throughout this study during CLEs, interviews, and surveys. Based on staff comments and experiences, it is understandable why teachers fear their interactions with some students and parents. Each reported case is handled individually with the families involved, and we have worked to equip teachers to respond to such situations. However, it does not erase the ever-present fear.

Staff who have been at the school for a long time have witnessed various levels of leadership transitions, with some of those experiences creating a sense of fear. In the past, some leaders led through intimidation, which has impacted some staff. Fear of not doing enough for students or doing something wrong remains in the heart of some of the staff. “What frightens me most is that if we do or say the wrong thing to the wrong student at the wrong time, we fear public scrutiny or losing our jobs.” This fear creates avoidance of discussing or addressing race. In fact, when a situation involving race arises, staff have a history of avoiding or immediately sending the case to someone else to solve instead of dealing with it head-on.

The fear that is evoked among staff has been difficult to break. Veteran staff will sometimes share their experience with new staff, and the fear cycle sometimes continues. To combat this, I support teachers who may be dealing with situations with parents so that they are not meeting with them alone. We instituted a practice in which teachers meet as teams with parents. One teacher shared, “I need my job, I don’t want to go against a parent even if I know what I am doing is the right thing for the child.” Multiple times within this study, staff have shared not wanting to interact negatively with parents. In times like these, I step in to offer assistance, gather evidence, and mentor that teacher and team in the next steps. I work to

empower my teachers in what is right. I strive never to leave them alone to deal with situations that may be difficult to handle alone.

Another fear is a fear of failure. Throughout the study, teachers expressed feelings of inadequacy that relate to achievement data, which led to teachers' lack of assurance about their teaching methods. Before the COVID era, our school state results were more favorable than the post-Covid data. Teachers questioned themselves due to reviewing and disseminating the data from the state. Staff members discussed how state testing requirements impact how we engage and interact on campus. During a CLE, one staff member shared, "The fear of failure brings me much discomfort." Several staff members agreed with this teacher's thoughts. They wanted to do what's right for students and for the school. They do not want to do anything wrong. Some staff members asked, "Am I good enough?" After hearing this question, we took time as a staff to practice affirmations and reassurances that everyone in the room was good enough and well-equipped to be successful.

I can relate to the staff's feelings of fear while on campus. There have been many times when I have faced fear of the parents and fear for my job. I have found it challenging to have difficult conversations at school as a leader of color on campus. In one reflective memo, I recounted my experience on campus with a staff member who did not understand that her behaviors were offensive to students of color. The teacher would make comments about "Those students." I had to explain to her that I was one of the students she was referring to. Is that how she felt about me? I wrote about interactions with teachers being called racist in the classroom. Even after discussing how the actions could be perceived as racist, the teacher took no accountability and felt I was now accusing her. I want the staff to feel comfortable enough to speak with me. However, the difficulty I have engaging in these conversations with them

sometimes presents very different outlooks and experiences on the happenings on the campus. My experiences differ from most of my staff, so they sometimes have difficulty seeing things from my perspective. When speaking with a staff of color, their views are similar to mine. Several have come to express their gratitude during this study when difficult conversations emerge and need to be unpacked for all to understand. These experiences indicate that I, too, have walked around in fear on campus. Along with fear, reluctance is another reason why we have surface understanding with CRP.

Reluctance

The CPR members recognized reluctance to acknowledge race, ethnicity, religion, political views, and other differences “I don’t see color.” This four-word sentence is frequently stated at the school. Every time I hear this, I respond, “If you don’t see color, you don’t see me.” This reluctance is so engrained that students have difficulty honoring others for who they are. When a teacher put up a sticker to indicate a safe space for students in the LGBTQ+ community, a CPR member reported hearing, “Why is this allowed?” indicating that this group of students did not need a safe space. Other staff members asked the same question and supported parents who wanted to rally against all students having safe spaces.

Within this setting, most students are from white, conservative Christian backgrounds, and anyone who does not fit in that box stands out as different. While teachers teach tolerance during advisory periods to instill the skills necessary for students to be receptive to others, students seem to lack tolerance for others who are new, different, or those who have different beliefs and values.

In dealing with adult interactions, I have witnessed situations with staff when interviewing candidates for jobs. I discuss in my reflective memo an experience during the hiring

process that indicated biases. Some staff unintentionally do not consider candidates who do not look like the rest of the staff. If a person is adorned with tattoos, nose rings, and colorful hair, it has been stated that they do not fit. However, in general, the conversations about these experiences have been avoided. If the conversation is brought up, there is normally some excuse for why something offensive or insensitive was said, and we move on.

The reluctance to deal with CRP is not only evident with staff but with students too. When I mentioned to another administrator on campus how the spirit weekday of “Karens vs. Sharons” impacted students of color, the leader did not take ownership but instead went to the teacher in charge and said that the students wanted it. The student population is roughly 80% white, and the minority students did not feel safe mentioning the issue. Instead of this being addressed, the spirit day remained, and those students who were upset about it chose not to come to school that day. “Why is everyone silent about this? Is it not important for students to be at school? Students should not have to stay home because of insensitivity.” Parents of color have reached out to share concerns to no avail, as the conversation has been avoided so as not to cause conflict. Historically, conversations around race have been avoided. Reluctance and fear have driven the responses and reactions of those on campus. Staff stated, “I fear for my job. If I say the wrong thing or teach a controversial topic, I don’t want to deal with public scrutiny, even if it is for one week.” The open conversations with staff members made them vulnerable to sharing these instances that have impacted them in these ways. The school is a good school with outside forces that seem to hinder them from the greatness that lies within. In Chapter 6, I will share my suggestions of what can be done to move this school from good to great and strip the outside forces from having any influence on the campus. Despite the time, effort and willingness of our

staff, there is more work to be done to meet the needs of all students and families. There are also areas where there is a disconnect between what we say and do.

During our CLE, when asking staff about their commitments, and responding to our photo voice activity, at no time did anyone mention the identity of students. Commitments shared included “Be compassionate and caring even when it is hard. Love deep. Reaffirmations for their confidence in the content and themselves. Greet every student at the door by name.” No one mentioned or discussed students’ culture, background, race, or ethnicity. Our staff did not acknowledge the differences in how students are seen, heard, validated, or acknowledged. We never attempted to go down the path of equity. The commitments that teachers shared were all attributes that I would want in a culturally responsive teacher, yet they were void of that culture. Why is it that we don’t address the differences in the room? Is it that there is such a minority that we avoid the conversation? Are we uncomfortable with how the topic might make others feel?

There is an innate silence, or unspoken words rule prevalent on campus regarding race and equity. The rule took place within our CPR decisions as well. Our CPR group worked through Hammond’s (2015) work at the beginning of this journey. The group decided to go with another text when asked how we would like to engage our staff in this work and practice instead of sticking with the Hammond (2015) text. The text focused on productive struggle, building students who can excel in this current climate and building relationships, among other topics. *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don’t Teach Survival Skills the Kids Need* (Wagner, 2008) was chosen, as one of the members had utilized this text in her master’s classes. The team reviewed the text and felt that this text might spark the minds of teachers and what they are doing in practice and how they can change that to serve students better. The text provided great survival skills that teach students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.

However, the text was void of culture, identity, background, and ethnicity. The text seemed an easy transition to cover some of the same information included in Hammond (2015) but did not challenge or spark conversations regarding our awareness of the differences within our students' ethnicities and backgrounds. This text felt safe and devoid of controversy and the difficult conversations that needed to occur. While reading various chapters, teachers were provided with reading guides with questions they responded to that demonstrated their understanding. No response that was written or verbalized addressed culture or equity.

I wonder why we avoid what's directly in front of us. As our demographics change, how will we effectively serve students if we don't make strides to know their stories and backgrounds? During the PAR Pre-Cycle, professional development on implicit bias was presented by someone outside our school. Figure 10 is a photograph from this meeting. The session lasted an hour, and no follow-up or discussion would impact our instruction, environment, or practice. The way the session was presented was another example of avoiding the work needed in this setting. We use code-switching to make everyone comfortable instead of engaging in tough conversations that can bring about change.

My context feels difficult in this work as I feel uncomfortable having some in-depth discussions with members of the group and school community. As an African American female working in a space where I am the minority, I feel I must be cautious with some of the language I use to continue to engage my participants. Knowing this, I have become one who takes a pause and realizes that even the smallest amount of awareness is better than no movement.



Figure 10. Professional development on implicit bias.

Conclusion

After conducting a Pre-Cycle, two PAR cycles, and an in-depth analysis, I determined the finding. Despite our quest to build and foster student relationships that led to equitable access to classroom curriculum and instruction, our relationship with CRP is to a large degree surface in nature. When examining how to enact our individual and collective goals with culturally responsive pedagogy, we identified inclusion and access ways in which we describe our interaction with curriculum and practices. However, as a group, we tended to make decisions based on fear and were reluctant to change. Teachers want students to feel included and have access to the curriculum, and they differentiate instruction to reach all levels of learning. They teachers wanted students to be successful and could articulate the need to form strong relationships with students to build the relational trust necessary for a successful classroom. Yet, they formed somewhat superficial relationships that most often did not result in deeper connections and conversations necessary to establish relational trust in the classroom. They addressed their desired goal of cultural responsiveness as a checklist of responsibilities instead of a deeper organizational change. Staff feared that they did not have the freedom to embrace CRP because of the responses or reactions of others, particularly parents. As a school, we operate in the spirit of reluctance to engage in difficult conversations and learning. We work to make others feel good rather than engaging in difficult conversations directly. This occurs when practices that are embedded within the environment dominate the school culture without regard to the need to change them to meet the needs of all those within the building – particularly minoritized students and staff (Khalifa, 2018). Creating an environment in which every student is a part of the family and issues are being addressed without pause has the potential of creating a safe, nurturing space

for students; we have taken the first steps, but we need to continue this work if we are to achieve our ultimate goals for student inclusion and access.

At the beginning of this work, I felt that my staff would have more awareness of CRP and the curriculum and practices we needed to adjust. Shortly after, I realized that we were starting from the basics and beginning with awareness of what was happening on our campus. We first had to acknowledge where we were as a school and begin to make incremental progress toward growth in understanding and awareness. We are making incremental steps from surface culture to shallow culture despite the fear and reluctance that may be present. As a result of the foundational work, teachers are becoming more aware and open to engaging more in the work. During a follow-up of the final CLE, teachers commented, "The conversations were great. It was enlightening to know that some of my coworkers have the same struggles that I have, and we can work together to work through some of the barriers." Several staff members shared a similar sentiment. I looked forward to the continued incremental progress we will make. In the concluding chapter, I analyze the finding in light of the existing literature. Additionally, I discuss how these findings can be applied to research, practice, and policy. I discuss how this work has influenced my growth as a leader.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I sought to examine how teachers and leaders could work together to build capacity for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) in classrooms. As a result, I discovered that we had considerably more work to do in this area than originally thought. I found that we engage with students through surface culture relationships to address inclusion and access due to fear and reluctance. I designed and facilitated the PAR process based on this theory of action: *If teachers are supported in increasing their capacity as culturally responsive educators by examining beliefs and practices, then they can implement and integrate culturally responsive practices in their classrooms to benefit all students.* In an attempt to reach our goal, there was a continual process of building and fostering relational trust, examining beliefs and understandings of CRP, and conversations with CPR members. Additionally, we participated in Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) to consider all voices on our staff. As a result, we uncovered some root causes of our inability to be a fully inclusive and culturally responsive school; taking on the work of cultural responsiveness is a complex issue that requires intentional work. This dissertation exemplifies why many similar schools remain at the minimally inclusive level of implementing culturally responsive practices (Tredway et al., 2019).

The context of the PAR study was a public charter school in eastern North Carolina. The school seeks to meet the academic needs of the students in attendance. The teachers in the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group sought to build a greater understanding and foundation for CRP with a common goal, hoping to shift the practices within the school to benefit all students. The study consisted of three PAR cycles over two school years. The original CPR team consisted of an instructional coach, two science teachers, two math teachers, and me as the lead research

practitioner. Over time the team shifted to having two science teachers, the instructional coach and me. In Table 18, I provide an overview of key PAR activities that gave guidance to our team regarding the building capacity for CRP within our school. During the study I conducted CPR meetings to build our knowledge, foster relational trust, and plan ways we would like to work to shift the understanding and mindset of our colleagues. I interviewed the CPR members to understand their backgrounds, stories, and understanding of equity and CRP. I conducted CLEs to engage the staff in this work. After completing each CLE, the CPR team would work together to gather the collective data and discuss the next steps.

As a result of our work in this study we wanted teachers and leaders to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for implementing CRP. In turn we then wanted them to begin to shift their practices to foster this environment. We began by understanding the relationships we have with students and how we build on them to get to know the students on a deeper level and to ensure that our practices align with supporting students based on what we know about them. Although we did not achieve end goal, we began to recognize how we could take incremental steps toward the ultimate goal. In this chapter, I share the findings connected to the research questions and related supporting literature. I then share insights gained and the implications for practice, policy, and research. I close the chapter with a personal reflection on my leadership learning throughout the research study.

Discussion

During this study, we focused on building capacity for cultural responsiveness within our school setting. As such, this PAR study set out to answer the following question: *How do leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for culturally responsive practices within the school setting?* Data collection strategies were established for a set of sub-questions:

Table 18

Participatory Action Research Cycles

Research Cycle	Time Period	Activities
PAR Pre-Cycle	October 2021-April 2022	CPR Team Meetings Interviews Reflective Memos
PAR Cycle One	August -November 2022	CPR Team Meetings Interview Reflective Memos CLEs
PAR Cycle Two	January – May 2023	CPR Team Meeting Reflective Memos CLE Member Checks

- To what extent do teachers and leaders develop common understandings for culturally responsive practices?
- To what extent do educators integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices to support equitable student participation?
- To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

In analyzing PAR results to relate the results to the extant literature, I examined both additional sources and those from the original literature review. I present research-based findings regarding the first two PAR research sub-questions. I address the final leadership sub-question in the leadership development section of this chapter.

Developing Common Understanding

The CPR team sought to answer the sub-question: *To what extent do teachers and leaders develop common understandings for culturally responsive practices?* As a result, we realized that although we began to build common understandings, we needed to go deeper. We completed a book study with the CPR team with Hammond's (2015) *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* during the study. The knowledge gleaned from this text made those on the CPR team aware of some concepts they had never considered in the classroom. After completing the CPR book study, the team directed staff to complete a book study on Wagner's (2008) *Global Achievement Gap (GAP)*, which focused on seven survival skills that students need to be successful in the classroom and globally for the future. We discovered the level of importance of relationships. We maintain surface relationships with students with a need to go deeper. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that relationship-building and interaction with students' communities and home lives are a part of culturally responsive teaching. We did find that we were hesitant to

discuss culture, backgrounds, and beliefs. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a) states, “Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). We need to embrace this vehicle for learning to engage and teach all students. Additionally, to shift from surface to shallow to deep culture, we need to focus on our growth and development with culturally responsive pedagogy. We have to move from the observable elements of fruit a tree bears to the root system of the tree (Hammond, 2015).

Relationship building is pertinent to a common understanding of CRP. A teacher’s ability to know, learn, understand, and build relational trust with students is imperative to the culturally responsive teacher. To create this environment, teachers must take the time to get to know students and families through the stories they tell about their history and backgrounds. To develop relational trust, teachers must be prepared to make time to listen (Safir & Dugan, 2021). Teachers are consumed with their many responsibilities but being intentional about building relational trust can have a lasting impact on the school environment. In Hammond’s (2015) definition of culturally responsive teaching, she includes that to create a safe space for learning, teachers must recognize the value of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection with the students. As a result of the finding that we largely remain in the surface level of culture, we needed to expand our intentionality in creating connections with students. Additionally, we must create the time and space within our school schedules and classroom structure for students to discuss, share, and embrace one another's cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs. During these opportunities, we needed to teach our students to be inclusive of everyone despite their differences. Teaching students to be inclusive also teaches them to validate and affirm each other. Culturally responsive teaching is validating in that teachers make learning relevant and teaches to and through students' strengths (Gay, 2010).

As we continue to grow in building common understandings relevant to culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy, we must find ways to integrate these concepts into our curriculum and practice. Next, I discuss our attempt to integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices within our context throughout the study.

Integration of Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Practices

Geneva Gay (2010) states that CRT is validating and affirming because:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and one another's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 37)

What better way to integrate culturally responsive practices than all the above indicators in Gay's (2010) work? Each subject area within the school standards and curricula can be addressed using the above practices within our context. During this study, we began to engage the CPR team and staff with the knowledge and actions to integrate CRP that would impact and be effective for all students.

We engaged our school staff in the GAP book study when considering the sub-question:

To what extent do educators integrate culturally responsive curriculum and practices to support

equitable student participation? The text provided seven survival skills for our students to succeed globally. The text also challenged our teachers to consider the practices they were implementing in their classrooms and throughout the school. After each chapter, there was reflection via guided reading questions during face-to-face and virtual sessions. After completing the book, we conducted a CLE to really dig deep into the context and intentionally penetrate our practices that needed to be reviewed. Despite the work done during the book study, book talks, and virtual sessions, some barriers prohibited a speedy progression. Based on prior experience, teachers feared repercussions and backlash in addressing areas of CRP. Although we did not move at the expected speed, movement was still made. Teachers were having open discussions and taking in the perspectives and experiences of others. We are becoming aware and thinking more intentionally about the next steps. To me, that's progress.

A community of learners should be encouraged and collaborative instead of in competition and focused on individual achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Creating practices that support the class will empower those who struggle to rise to the challenge. Students are taught to work together and learn collaboratively from each other. Students, in turn, take ownership of their learning. Towards the end of the study, teachers began having conversations about ways that students could take more ownership of their learning and be a vital part of the learning process. Empowering students to make decisions, create problems, and find solutions allows them to participate in every step of their educational programming. In a study conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995b) with eight teachers, while doing observations, recordings, and discussions, Billings noted that teachers with culturally responsive pedagogical practices encourage academic success, and cultural competence, must help students to recognize, understand, and critique social inequities (p. 476). As a result, Ladson-Billings (1995b) resolved

three possible propositions of the educators within the study having the conceptions of self and others, knowledge, and a manner of structuring social relations by culturally relevant teachers has an impact on the success, competence, and ability to critique inequities. In each of these propositions, Ladson-Billings (1995b) provided attributes that she noted within the culturally responsive teachers. In brief, here are a few examples of what teachers do:

- Believing that all students were capable of academic success
- Saw their pedagogy as art-unpredictable
- Maintain fluid student-teacher relationships
- Develop a community of learners
- Encourage collaboration
- Passionate about knowledge and learning
- Teachers scaffold to facilitate learning. (pp. 478-481)

These actions indicate a few of the practices that we are encouraging our staff to engage in as a result of what was indicated in our study. The research supports the need for these action steps to take place.

During the three iterative cycles of inquiry, the CPR group worked collaboratively within their Community of Practice (CoP) to build an understanding of the work before us and collectively bring their expertise and knowledge of the field to the study. The CPR team was empowered through our work because I understood that to make changes with adults, they must have autonomy in making decisions about their improvement (Drago-Severson, 2012; Knowles, 1980). As a result of this study, we were able to conclude that we have more work to do to build a culturally responsive environment. We were able to recognize our current state and begin to plan for what needs to happen. The awareness of where we are is vital to our growth as a school.

The absorption of knowledge by individuals during the learning process results in them joining a long-lasting community of practice. While learning collectively, learning was defined as situated in a particular community and defined by that context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Trust and collaboration with colleagues were very important within this study. Trust allowed for uncomfortable conversations and thoughts to be shared in a safe space. Additionally, trust within this CoP allowed participants to learn about each other, create commitments, embrace vulnerability, reflect, and engage in feedback (Aguilar, 2016; Edwards-Groves et al., 2016; Louis et al., 2010).

As the lead researcher, at times throughout this study, I felt we were not going anywhere, that no movement had been made, and we were not going to complete the study. We learned that while trying to build capacity that we must understand everyone's beliefs, understanding, and drive for this work. Irby (2021) shared that understanding that the process of building capacity for CRP and racial improvement is complex was vital. I had to remember this whenever I considered that the speed of the shift was limited or halted. Within our study we have found that we struggle to engage in deeper cultural work due to fear and reluctance. Irby (2021) states:

Teachers refuse to break their scripts to become co-learners with students. Administrator fears parental backlash. Teachers resist content that affirms Black and Brown people, refuse to partner with community members who are racially and ethnically dissimilar (if they even know them), and fear delivering content to students on topics that make them feel vulnerable. This does not have to be the case. (p. 37)

The above statement has been the case with the school in this study. We have experienced stasis due to outside factors limiting our growth as a school to embrace all students adequately.

As a result of this study, we noticed that teacher engagement was limited to surface interactions. The surface nature that CRP is built on with students and families is not sustainable to address the needs of all students. Having limited interactions with students through inclusion and access are keeping us at a surface level in our culturally responsive work. We are not going deeper. We want to get out of this state and move forward. We want to continue focusing on our incremental improvements and move from surface to shallow to deep culture (Hammond, 2015). Following Jim Collins' (2001) Good to Great principles can assist in making the shift to meet the needs of all students. Collins (2001) shares that under the right conditions, the problems of commitment, alignment, motivation, and change melt away. He believes you must have the right people in the right seats on the bus. The right people are your most important asset. Additionally, you must confront brutal facts but never lose faith that change can occur—using our current reality to confront the facts and maintain unwavering faith that you can prevail over what's in front of you. All these principles are necessary to move us forward in shifting our relationships from surface to shallow.

Framework for Change

As a result of this study, I pose consideration for a framework for change regarding the process of making a shift for cultural responsiveness within a school setting. My framework would be centered around incrementalism. Being a goal-oriented, task-driven leader during this PAR experience, I was upset that we were not moving the needle fast enough to evoke change within our setting. I questioned myself, the action steps that were in place, and the validity of our study because it seemed to move at a snail's pace. I felt that if we were meeting, having discussions, and completing book studies that the CPR members would quickly apply the learning. They would in turn take the learnings and spread to their colleagues and we would

make a quick and easy shift to greatness. Embracing the reading of Gawande's (2017) *Tell Me Where it Hurts* article, I began reconsidering what I thought was best for sustainable change. Gawande (2017) likened the work of surgeons to primary care physicians and provided arguments for which is the better for patients. In the stories provided, it was discussed those who do not have quick fixes but rather have more familiar relationships with patients and the medical situation can provide more careful care and approach to address a medical situation. Such is the same with the case of our study. Gawande (2017) states:

Success, therefore, is not about the episodic, momentary victories, though they do play a role. It is about the longer view of incremental steps that produce sustained progress.

That, such clinicians argue, is what making a difference really looks like. In fact, it is what making a difference looks like in a range of endeavors. (p. 44)

Gawande's view on the gradual small steps of progress have a greater impact on change is what I experienced throughout this study. The small accomplishments will hopefully continue to build and transform the foundation of effective cultural responsiveness within the school environment. The framework for change will force us to acknowledge small victories or wins. Considering how things have been done and the engrained practices present, it will take time to make shifts to impact all students. Over time, we will have reached every staff member and built an understanding of what cultural responsiveness looks and feels like in our buildings.

There is work to be done on multiple levels to make sure that we are addressing the needs of every student and family that enters our classrooms. Gaining awareness of staff in the buildings and utilizing them to identify and solve problems are imperative. Again, none of these solutions will occur overnight. Gawande (2017) believes:

Incrementalists nonetheless want us to take a longer view. They want us to believe that they can recognize problems before they happen and that, with steady, iterative effort over the years, they can reduce, delay, or eliminate them. Yet incrementalists also want us to accept that they will never be able to fully anticipate or prevent all problem. (p. 45)

Even if it takes years to get all on board, it will be worth it for each student in the building to learn and meet every need. We just have to keep examining our practices and curriculum, utilizing protocols to have the discussions needed to identify needs and make continual improvements.

As we focus on total school improvement, I would like to pose a framework for change utilizing Irby's (2021) race-conscious improvement cycle. Our school attempts to focus on total school improvement in academics, attendance, behavior, and social-emotional needs. Total school improvement also includes the collaborative leadership process of this cycle that makes any patterns of racism visible. To combat any practices and behaviors that move us from surface to shallow culture, I believe this inquiry cycle would set us on the trajectory of making the school environment better for all. Figure 11 shows the race-conscious inquiry cycle. As with other inquiry cycles, this process helps identify the problem, create a plan to address, create or dispel any practices that apply, adjust any policies, and monitor this adjustment through analysis and repeat as necessary. Utilizing a team of collaborators to work through this process for the betterment of the school is a must. The educators on the team can help with problem identification, data collection, interpretation, and creating solutions for the school. Should staff need assistance with what actions to implement for improvement, they can utilize Irby's (2021) circle of racial equity actions (see Figure 12). The improvement cycle and the equity actions will guide us as we make small, incremental steps toward growth and improvement for every student

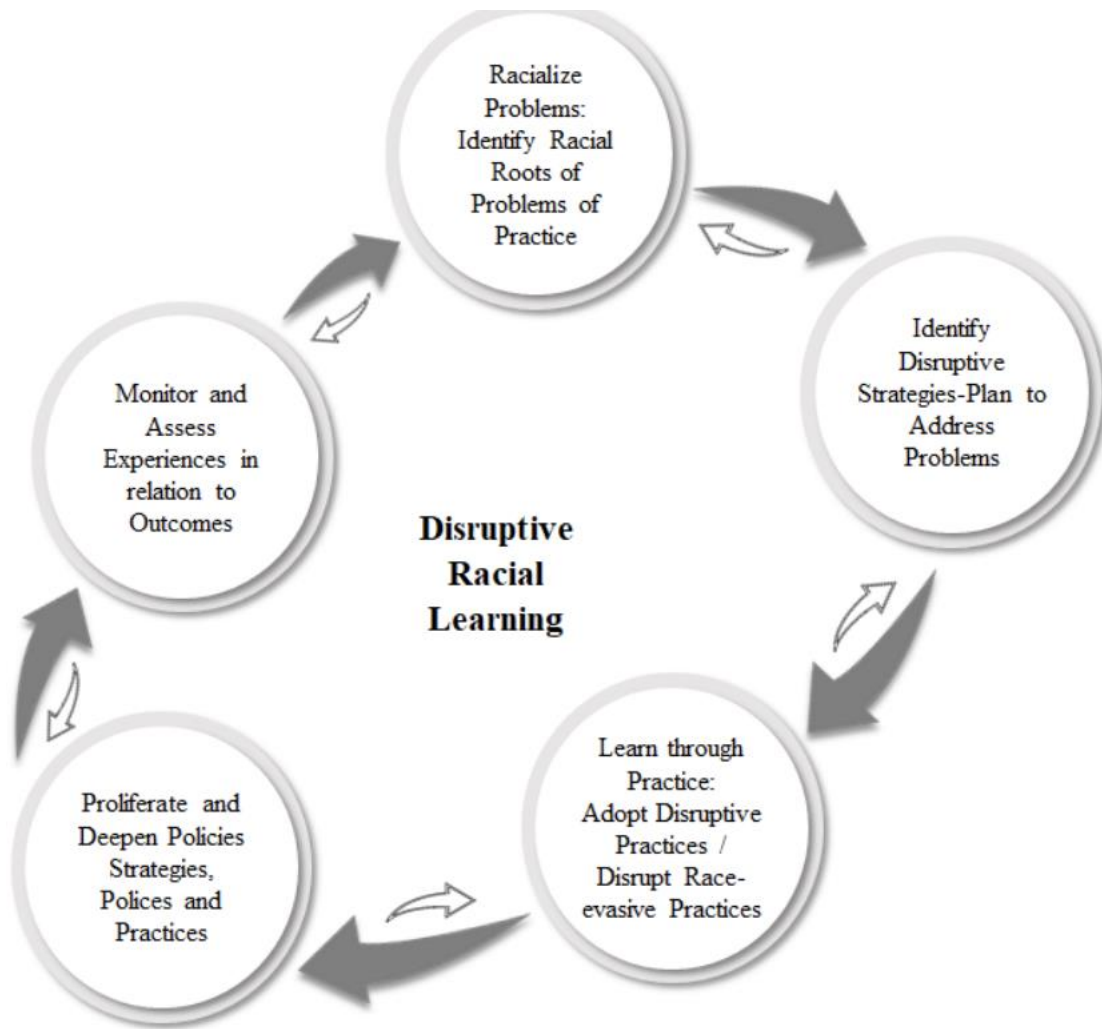


Figure 11. Race-conscious improvement cycle.

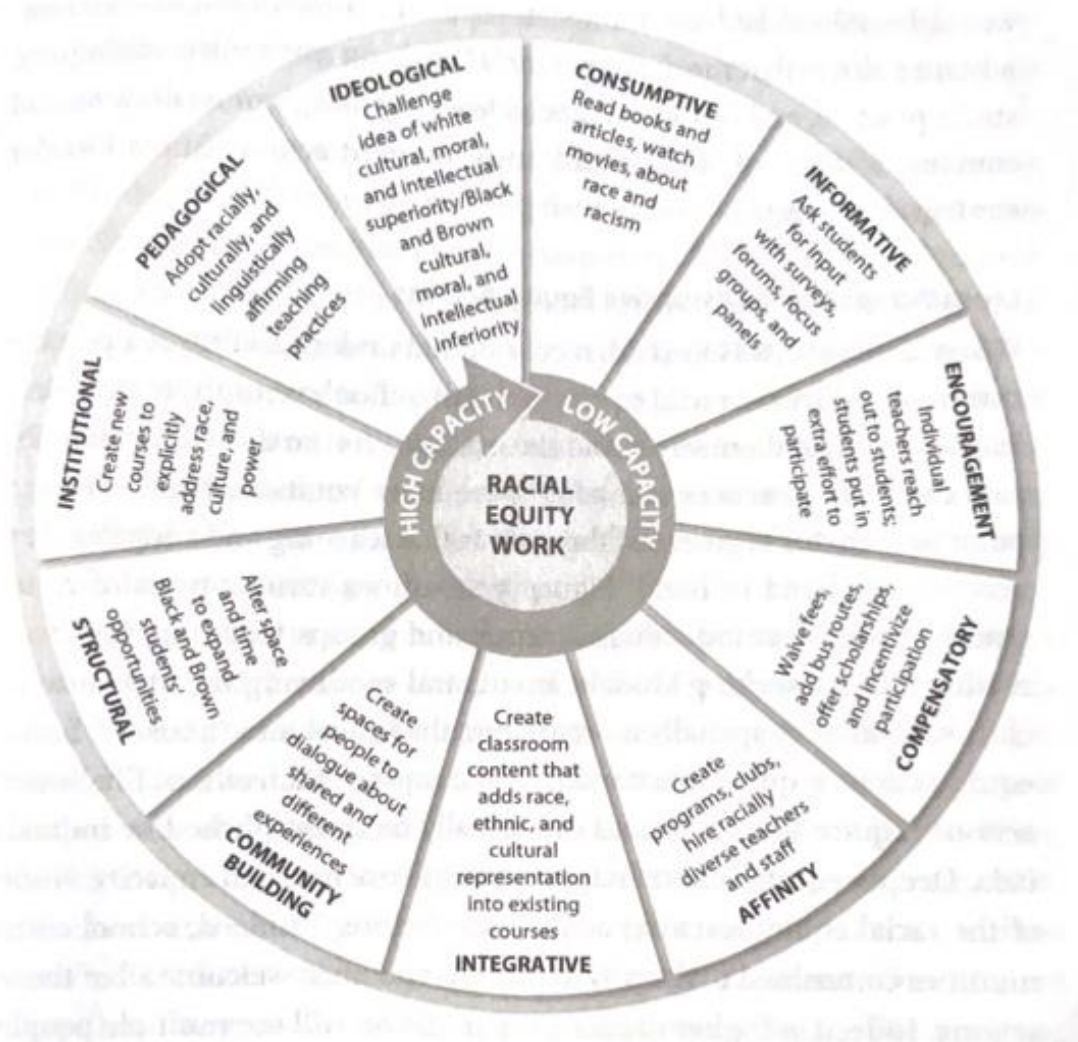


Figure 12. Circle of racial equity actions.

who enters the campus. Utilizing this cycle and actions will guide us to fully immerse in Hammond's (2015) culture tree, as shown in Figure 13. The ultimate goal is to be engaged in deep culture. However, we must embody and learn this level's attributes to succeed.

Implications

The PAR study centered around building the capacity for leaders and teachers to create a culturally responsive environment. In this section, I detail recommendations for practice and policy, as well as research implications of the study's findings to build and expand research.

Practice

Based on this study, two recommendations I have for practice are the use of protocols and the incorporation of CLEs to practice. This PAR study utilized CLE protocols that allowed the opportunity for reflection, discussion, and collaboration among staff. The CLEs employed axioms that assisted with the processes needed to support this methodology adequately. Utilizing solutions and working with those closest to the work is an axiom that relies heavily on all stakeholders within the context. Protocols to engage the staff, families, and students to support the school environment allow those who will benefit from any school improvements to have space to identify problems and take part in the solutions through the PDSA cycle of inquiry. "We should utilize this protocol when making future decisions for students and staff." The transfer of protocols was acknowledged and practiced with teachers and staff when engaging in other situations throughout campus.

CRP discussions and practices were absent in our school setting. This PAR study began the opportunities for open dialogue regarding ways to meet the needs of all students who enter the building. During the study, staff were forced to self-examine their biases, beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors. In addition, staff were encouraged to consider how they build relationships with

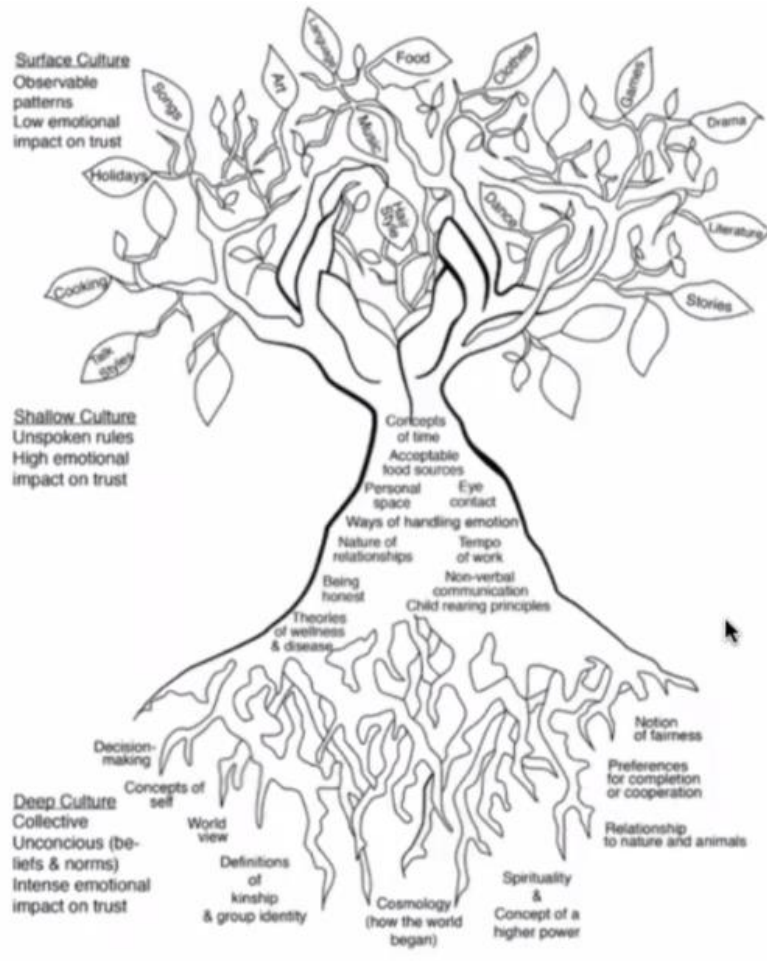


Figure 13. Culture tree.

students and their families. After building relationships with them, the next step for growth would be to utilize the information they learned about students to further assist them in their growth as students and individuals. One example shared with the CPR team was the use of journey lines. CPR members completed journey lines and later did the same with their students. The impact of this simple task left an impression on teachers. They realized that there was so much to learn from students in a non-invasive way. CLEs are another example of a practice that was utilized during this study. CLEs allowed for many voices to be included in the conversation. The environment was non-threatening and allowed for each participant to be engaged in their thoughts as well as the thoughts of others. These opportunities also allowed all staff to listen to others' perspectives. Teachers commented on the benefits of addressing difficult issues in a safe environment and felt that the CLE provided that space.

Considering the context, I would offer that the molding and hiring culturally responsive educators is imperative. Adequate professional development, CLE protocols, and discussions will keep ongoing conversations and reflections of practice within the school alive. Walkthrough and observation protocols should be adequately established to gather data supporting or refuting a cultural responsiveness shift. The school needs to seek out culturally responsive applicants in various capacities. Knowing that teachers and staff see, validate, and affirm all students is vital to the school environment. All students should see school as a safe space to receive their academic and social-emotional support. The openness of the school leader will be the guiding force in cultivating an environment suitable for students. The school leader has to be aware of the temperature of their building. They must assess the school environment to attain the level of readiness the school is to build a capacity to teach and make changes related to CRP.

The findings in this study suggest the need to evolve from a surface understanding with CRP to a shallow level. The hope is that with work we would eventually dive into the deep level of culture. I believe that CRP should not be something a school does but rather who they are at the core. CRP should be at the essence of every rule, practice, and curriculum within the school setting. This evolution will allow the school to progress from good to great. To begin the transformation, we can work on building relationships with families before any misgivings or miscommunications. Having open conversations with families that are not contentious will begin to foster the relational trust needed to build a foundation with them. The foundation of trust built with families will allow for the opportunity to interact with families on more difficult issues. In turn, parents will trust that you are operating in their child's best interest, and limit their questioning of the content delivered to their children. Ongoing professional learning around CRP and teaching is needed within the school. The continuation of CLEs and the initiation of evidence-based walkthroughs are integral to this transformation.

Local schools and districts would benefit from establishing Communities of Practice (CoP) within their schools. Effective CoP would give space and opportunities to include teachers, staff, and additional stakeholders in total school or district improvement. Communities of practice would engage teachers and staff in protocols such as CLEs to allow collaboration, discussion, and action steps to shift practices. Knowledge of CLE axioms and protocols would be beneficial to use within local schools and districts to build on processes for total school improvement.

Policy

We are navigating a difficult time in education with book banning and school boards being given even more control of the content being taught. While it will be difficult in some

states, I believe that CRP should be part of teacher and leadership training. We must have state and national policies that ensure that CRP is part of the learning of those entering our school systems.

Relationship building is essential to the educational sector in its current climate. Culturally responsive teaching and practices should be included in educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education. Teachers tend to behave and do what they have experienced. With this in mind, educator preparation programs and school districts must include culturally responsive pedagogical practices and learning within their programming and induction processes. Employing these practices will make CRP a part of who teachers are without hesitation. The student experience would shift to one where each student felt they were being seen, heard, affirmed, and validated. An environment where students have all these needs met would allow them to learn and reach achievement levels that exceed their potential because of their feeling of safety.

In turn, state and national policies should consider scaling down or streamlining the emphasis on high-stakes testing to devote more time to CRP for educators, students, and families. The types of questions, diction used, and content are often inequitable to those students who have not had a variety of experiences. Hence, they are already at a disadvantage to other students. Due to the stress placed on these tests, educators cannot spend a significant amount of time building the type of classroom community that will immerse the school environment with an understanding of one another's culture and personal experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs. Finding a balance between testing and knowing students and families would aid in a well-rounded school culture.

Additionally, how state legislature handles education needs to be adjusted. The North Carolina legislature has a significant impact on what is done in schools. However, are the decisions being made in the best interest of students or a ploy for those seeking seats in political offices? Many decisions made regarding education are being decided due to pressure from the public at school board meetings, on virtual platforms against state board meetings, and in written petitions. Ultimately, those in office need current educators as advisors for what should happen and need to consider every child and scenario when making decisions that will impact all schools and districts. Utilizing those who work within the education sector to identify problems and solutions could give more understanding and merit to the decisions that affect the many students and staff in the field. Decisions should not be driven by political stances but by the needs and concerns of those in the counties, districts, and schools served.

Research

More research should be conducted on navigating white institutional spaces as a female minority leader. There has been preliminary research on the reverse, but not much has been done when the leader is a female person of color. A recent study introduced an identity development framework for black women's professional identity in the workplace (Hammonds et al., 2023). This framework provides ideas for ways districts can support uplifting the identity of black female professionals and improving wellness. Professional learning on professional identity development would be vital to the growth of principals in the field. Many different experiences as a person of color in these spaces require support, mental wellness, and acknowledgment that can be addressed. In a study done by Mosley et al. (1980), they found that black administrators are unseen:

They are isolated, and their academic opportunities are limited by barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or competency. They have no models, no mentors, and little psychological support. There is no one with whom to share experiences or with whom to identify. The Black female administrator must create herself without model or precedent. She is an alien in a promised land, obscure, unwelcome, and unwanted. (pp. 306-307)

Additionally, support for principals of color would require dismantling discriminatory systems in every level of society. Awareness of the need for this professional learning is the first step to understanding the need and tools needed to succeed in these spaces.

Research on the nuances of female leadership needs to be explored further for district and state leadership. There is still a hierarchy when there is a female in leadership versus a male in leadership within schools. Research can be conducted on how this has transcended over time. Add another layer to the research regarding female leaders of color to gain additional insight into the ways the role of the principal has changed and how parents and students respond, respect, and interact with female leadership. Since respect for educators has shifted, it would be interesting to read studies comparing how different generations have valued different leadership roles and styles within the school setting. Listening to the feedback of students, staff, and parents, along with observations of the modern-day leader compared to the traditional leader, would definitely garner intriguing conversation on the role's beliefs, values, and attributes.

Limitations

This small PAR study initially involved four math and science teachers, one instructional coach, and one leader. Over the course of this study, two teachers left their positions at the school and the instructional coach took on another leadership role. The COVID pandemic had a

widespread effect, so the findings of this study should be viewed in the context of the pandemic. The unexpected change in delivery of instruction, scheduling of classes, and availability of the team limited some of the experiences we hoped to engage in during the study.

I was the direct supervisor of the participants I worked with to complete this study. Due to the positional nature of our relationship, I did not want to pressure the candidates to participate but understood that their involvement was completely voluntary. Because I was their supervisor and evaluator, participants who volunteered for this process were given a consent form to sign, attesting that I did not force them to participate. They were also informed in the consent form that there would be no consequences should they decide to withdraw their consent and leave the CPR team.

Leadership Development

As part of the research process, I wanted to answer the change in my leadership development question: *To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?* In this process, I faced and came to terms with some realities that had become normal. I realized that I had learned how to function and go about my daily occupation despite the context in which I worked. Like children who knew how to “do school,” I realized that I knew how to work around the nuances of the school environment. In this section, I will discuss the evolution of my leadership, my struggle with my identity within this context, and acknowledge the incremental progress of this study.

I believe that I have had several evolutions of myself throughout this study. I have changed in some ways, I think, some in how I respond to others, and some in how I approach my daily work. I have had to become more vulnerable and humble. I had to look into the mirror and examine myself several times throughout this process. I had to acknowledge my thoughts and

feelings and be sure they were aligned properly before attempting to lead this work with others. Strategic self-reflection assisted me in the changing of my leadership throughout this study. Culturally Responsive School Leaders (CSRL) research suggests that the ability of educational leaders to critically self-reflect about their biases and their practice is crucial (Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2010). Leaning into this work forced me to face and acknowledge any judgments and biases, release them, and get to work for each student who enters my building.

Additionally, I had to learn that even little progress is still progress. I like things to happen with excellence quickly. That did not happen in this study. Many other factors impacted the progression of this study to the point where I felt there was no new learning at times. However, the reflections of my CPR members and comments of others let me know that they were taking in the activities and at least thinking about ways to adjust their practices. During this study I had to learn to celebrate the small wins and accomplishments that we made. When I acknowledge the successes, I can give myself the motivation to continue this work.

One area of struggle for me as a leader was dealing with my identity as a black female leader in a white space. In this space, there are times when color blindness is present. In a time and state where critical race theory discussions are being debated, acknowledgment of all cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds are being questioned and people should be able to enter a room for who they are. However, I do not feel I have that liberty. As a leader, I would fail students if I did not recognize or tap into their individual culture, values, and beliefs (Khalifa et al., 2016). In this context, I sometimes didn't have the safety and security to feel that was being done for me. Therefore, I internally struggled throughout this experience. I believed in the work and knew it was needed. It wasn't there for my oldest son, but I hope the progress that was made will continue so that my youngest son's experience will be different. I believe more research

needs to be done on black female leaders in predominantly white spaces. We've progressed and people in this space feel like they accomplished something. But as a person of color in this space, it doesn't feel like enough has been done. I'm not sure there was a deep commitment, and I feel torn. We are moving in the right direction but have barely scratched the surface. We are not going deep enough to make the traction needed for growth.

Coming into this work, I knew that talking about culturally responsive work would be challenging. Despite knowing this I realized that I myself had lost a little of my own identity in this space as a way of operating as Black female leader in a white space. The deep reflection and efforts to truly push staff to think about culturally responsive teaching heightened my awareness of my own identity in this school and where we actually were in our journey as a school community to talk frankly about issues of race.

Upon entering the beautiful campus, people immediately consider this a place of success. To the outsider, the grounds are kept, the buildings are nice, and great learning must be taking place. I agree that the environment is phenomenal for some students and staff. Others have had different experiences while working to meet the needs of students. Those with different backgrounds and experiences interrupt the status quo of what is considered the norm in this environment. People of color who interact and work in ways that are contrary to others are sometimes frowned upon or looked to be different because they do things that don't fit the norm. A possibly unintentional undercurrent is felt on this campus by those of color who will acknowledge it.

Therefore, it is difficult as a black female to dig into the nature of many of the conversations as designed by this PAR study; certainly, more difficult than I expected at the beginning of this project. I have been constantly judged by the white staff and the people of color

here. I am not a white male or female, so I don't fit, or I don't behave brown enough for people of color. When I began this role, I was one of two people of color. I have hired the most people of color of any leader on this campus. However, I get the most pushback on this campus as well. In my experience, I feel like I have been misunderstood by most. I have previously been known on campus as the mean one, and if you make me upset, you are next to be fired. When, in fact, I just have a standard of excellence that I expect all to uphold. If you are coachable, you will have no issue rising to excellence. Those who have allowed this coaching have learned that rising to the standard is not hard but requires work.

I have been so uncomfortable with this content that we have chosen a text that focuses on the global achievement gap, and the learning that all students need to succeed that does not contain words of alarm such as equity, cultural responsiveness, or racism. This honestly could be just my experience, whereas others seem to see nothing wrong with the environment and the different students' experiences.

My context is difficult in this work as I feel uncomfortable having some in-depth discussions with the group and school community members. As an African American female working in a space where I am the minority, I feel I have to be cautious with the language I use to continue to engage my participants. Knowing this, I have become one with taking a pause and realizing that even the smallest amount of awareness is better than no movement.

Throughout this study, I have learned that those who view their experiences the same way as I have are thankful for the conversations and topics brought to light during this study. I have received several comments from people of color who have thanked me for bringing up the concept of race or other perspectives and experiences because they were uncomfortable doing so.

I have had to ask myself how I expected them to feel comfortable when I myself have had difficulty.

I am naturally a person who is very task-oriented and solution-driven. If you set a goal, you should have action steps to complete that task as quickly, effectively, and sufficiently as possible. I also believe that anything is possible. What I am not accustomed to is when things do not go as swiftly as I had planned. I am not accustomed to second-guessing my completion process or struggling with my thoughts while reaching a goal. I learned throughout this study that instead of being focused on “all or nothing,” I had to be willing to accept “all or something.” I had to learn that even the smallest amount of progress is better than no progress. Incremental change is better than no change. I had to learn to accept that even if I couldn’t see concrete evidence, to learn to accept that belief systems, reflections, awareness, and shifting thoughts were taking place. The evidence of those would emerge through conversations and open dialogue and discussions. If I could get them to think differently, we would build on the acting differently within their practice.

This research study made me deeply reflect on my leadership and identity. I think I learned to be numb to some of the systems I was working against to change. Focusing on culturally responsive teaching made me reflect on my feelings about how I feel in this space and how far, as a school, we still needed to go. Initially, I became very frustrated and felt even more isolated in my leadership work, but over time, I began to see that the way I have to break down some of these systemic barriers was through practices like the CLEs to get our team to reflect on their own practices. Progress is moving slower than I envisioned, but the equity work continually pushes everyone to understand themselves to better understand our students. I think this work, in many ways, has made me feel more frustrated, but it has also made me see my identity as

essential to supporting change here. My ability to code-switch and give voice to what others are feeling are assets that are burdens I should not hold but allow us to move forward.

Conclusion

I began this study on a speedy race to shift the culture of our school in ways that would immediately impact students and learning on campus. I desired to build a student experience that was not the same as my son's, where he did not feel seen, heard, validated, or acknowledged. I thought that with haste, we could onboard systems and processes to see and feel this change immediately. I learned that we must first build the foundation for students and staff to make this change happen.

The overarching question of how leaders and teachers work together to build capacity for CRP in a school setting is at the beginning of being answered. We found that we must move from a surface level with CRP to eventually end up in a deep cultural level with CRP. Moving from surface to shallow and eventually deep requires us to intentionally create and foster relationships with our students and families. We must refrain from completing tasks with students as checkboxes but immerse our environment in decision-making and practices with students at the center of every decision for total school improvement.

While I am no longer in the same role, I remain in this workspace and am working in a different capacity that will indirectly impact students through the curriculum we are building to support all students. I am continually working to build relational trust on the K-12 spectrum to begin the conversations, protocols, and practices that I was fearful of engaging in prior to this research experience. The EdD experience has challenged me in ways that I am forever grateful for that has pushed me to move beyond where I started and given me the courage to capture and utilize my voice to shift the room upon entering.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



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

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Virginia Gilchrist](#)
CC: [Matthew Militello](#)
Date: 10/11/2021
Re: [UMCIRB 21-001649](#)
Seeking to Belong

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 10/10/2021. 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
Classroom Observation Protocol(0.01)	Additional Items
CLE Consent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Community Learning Exchange Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
CPR Consent Form(0.01)	Consent Forms
Interview Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Post Observation Protocol(0.01)	Additional Items
Recruitment Letter(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Seeking to Belong: Infusing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
The CALL Survey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

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

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

APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE



Completion Date 04-Jan-2021
Expiration Date 04-Jan-2024
Record ID 40170562

This is to certify that:

Virginia Gilchrist Jacobs

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Research

(Curriculum Group)

Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

East Carolina University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0a0dfe9f-fccd-49a0-9e7b-e99ed037b5f0-40170562

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM: CPR GROUP ADULTS



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: Seeking to Belong: A PAR Project Striving to Infuse Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Classrooms

Principal Investigator: Virginia G. Jacobs

Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership

Address: 900 Camlin Street, Ahoskie, NC 27910

Telephone #: 252-332-9046

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 research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) is to work to build the capacity of teacher to create cultural responsiveness in STEM classrooms. You are being invited to take part in this research because of the role you have within the school setting and would make a great volunteer. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn together as a team of co-practitioners how we can foster and infuse cultural responsiveness in our classrooms.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one five participants for the collaborative team and one of 36 total participants.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in the 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 East Wake Academy (EWA) focused on the middle academy in the conference room or designated classroom, approximately fifteen times during the study.

The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is fifteen hours over the next fourteen months.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following: you may be asked to participate in an interview, classroom observations, and attend community learning exchanges during the study. The interviews, survey and community learning exchanges may be recorded in addition to handwritten notes by the research team members. Recordings will be coded with anonymous identifiers and deleted immediately after coding. In addition, all survey responses are anonymous. All the interview questions will focus on your experience, thoughts, and beliefs around cultural responsiveness within our school environment.

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?

Only the lead researcher will know that you are part of this research and unique identifiers will be used so that names are not associated with the research participant and data.

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 through the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after 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 at 919-698-1401 (days, between 7:30 am and 4:00 pm or email gilchristv02@students.ecu.edu).

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

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

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

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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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 the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Virginia G. Jacobs	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX D: SCHOOL OR DISTRICT PERMISSION



EAST WAKE ACADEMY

NC Public School of Choice

June 30, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

East Wake Academy 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 East Wake Academy and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to use conduct your dissertation study titled, "Seeking to Belong: A PAR Project Striving to Infuse Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Classrooms" with participants in our schools. We also give permission to utilize the following spaces at East Wake Academy to collect data and conduct interviews for his dissertation project: grade level meetings, principal professional learning, site visits, classroom observations, conference rooms and all facilities, etc.

The project meets all of our school/district guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for Mrs. Virginia Jacobs to conduct his study and his project will not interfere with any functions of East Wake Academy. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and East Wake Academy:

- 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,

Mr. Stephen Gay

Superintendent, East Wake Academy

APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Individual Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Virginia Jacobs and my study is participatory action research (PAR) study. I, with a team of co-practitioner researchers (CPR), will examine the extent to which leaders and teacher work together to build the capacity for staff to create a culturally responsive pedagogical environment in their classrooms. This study will be used to inform decisions for the entire school.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the interview data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion. After the coding is complete, I will delete all recordings.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and beliefs on culturally responsive pedagogy and experiences or lack thereof in our school environment.
- The interview will last approximately one hour.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:

“This is Virginia Jacobs, interviewing _____ on _____ for the cultural responsive pedagogy problem of practice study.

First Round:

1. In what capacity have you heard the term culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)?
2. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?
3. How did you learn about culturally responsive pedagogy?
4. Do you integrate culturally responsive pedagogy in your classroom? If so, how?
5. How comfortable are you with teaching through a culturally responsive lens?

Second Round:

1. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?
2. Do you integrate culturally responsive pedagogy in your classroom? If so, how?
3. How comfortable are you with teaching through a culturally responsive lens?
4. What are some ways we can infuse cultural responsiveness in our school environment?

APPENDIX F: EXCERPTS FROM CODEBOOK

Be compassionate and caring even when it is hard. Love Deep	empathy	love when it's hard	Relationships-inclusion
Reaffirmations for their confidence in the content and themselves.	affirmation	confidence	Relationships-inclu...
Greet every student at the door by name.	action-greet	greet by name	Relationships-inclu...
I commit to being a positive force in students' lives and fostering a learning environment they can thrive in.	positivity	positive environment for thriving	Relationships-access
Build meaningful relationships	action-relationship	meaningful relationships	Relationships-inclu...
To be quick to listen and slow to anger.	empathy	listen and slow to anger	Fear Of Parents an...
I will always be a listening ear and safe space for my babies!	empathy	safe space and listening	Relationships-inclu...
Inspire students to love themselves.	inspiration	love themselves	Relationships-inclu...
Intentional conversations and consistent student check ins.	conversations-relationship	consistent checkins	Relationships-inclu...
Call the students by name and let them know they are seen and known.	students seen	call by name-known	Relationships-inclu...
I want each student to have a sense of belonging and love of learning.	belonging	love of learning	Relationships-inclu...
Be more intentional in catching students being good and highlighting those actions with them.	intentionality-highlighting positives	catching students being good	Relationships-inclu...
I will commit to trying to have positive interactions with students each day.	positive interactions	daily interactions with students	Relationships-access
Seek to understand the why and help students move forward.	understand the why	help students move forward	Relationships-access
To be an encouragement to all those around me-keep it real, but keep it positive.	encouragement;positive	keep it real and positive	Relationships-inclu...
Do not make anyone feel small or "less than".	not feel less than	no one feeling small	Fear Of Leadership
Focus on the "why" behind student behaviors. *a whole person approach	understand the why	whole person approach	Relationships-access
To make them laugh	humor	laughter	Relationships-inclu...
Ask about a student's day and actually care how they answer.	empathy	care how students answer	Relationships-inclu...
Incorporate creativity and collaboration	practice	creativity and collaboration	Relationships-access
Ask students about their day and practice active listening. Model good communication skills.	empathy communication	active listening	Relationships-inclu...
Don't assume...kisten and reflect- smile more	listen and reflect	smile more	Relationships-inclu...
Show students that I care about them, I listen to them and I want them to succeed	empathy-listen	show you care and want success	Relationships-inclu...
Encourage individuality; smile everyday	individuality	smile everyday	Relationships-inclu...
Focus on positive interactions with hard students and situations	positive interactions	hard situations and students find the positive	Fear Of Parents an...
Make sure everyone is loved in school and out of school!	love	everyone loved in and out of school	Relationships-inclu...
Give positive and regular feedback	positivity	regular feedback	Relationships-access
more fun things when doing work instead of just writing			
Bring back the paper infractions.			
they should give out more eagle feathers			relationship-access
Stop wasting your time yelling at kids when you know there not gonna listen and just teach			reluctance
All students should be treated fairly because there times when people treat other diffently			Relationship-inclusion
My personal opinon is that some teachers have favorites.			Relationship-inclusion
All students need to be treated the same.			Relationship-inclusion
people need to be treated equal no favorites.			Relationship-inclusion
often if the victim fights back they are the bully but that's not how it is.			
My suggestion is letting past due dates further so that students have more days to finish their work and then if they still don't have the assignment done then let them redo the assignment and have them have the same amount of days to complete it			reluctance
I believe teachers shouldn't be biased toward loud students and not punish them for interrupting, especially when it is very repetitive among those students. Not to mention, as far as I've seen with other girls and following the dress code, the rules for skirts are broken most frequently. I won't mention any names, but I have seen plenty of girls who wear their skirts so high, that when they lean over you can see their rear; which I believe breaks the fingertip length rule for skirts. I think this would be fine if these girls would wear shorts under their skirts like the dress code specifies, but every girl I've seen that does this, doesn't follow that rule either. But I don't say anything, because I am afraid of getting a nasty comment. This is exactly why I think they get away with it, is because nobody says anything.			fear of students and ...
I would say that children who do good things and are positive get less attention and rewards than children who disobey. All i want is for those few good children is to get recognized fairly.			relationship-access
treat boys and girls = and fairly			Relationship-inclusion
If a student has a 504 plan, all teachers that have them have to read it.			relationship-access
Need to hand of feathers more.			relationship-access
You shouldn't be getting infractions for the smallest problems.			reluctance
i feel like if you are repetitively having to say something to the same student you should just give them their consequences instead of wasting everyone else's class time yelling at them.			fear of students and ...

strong emotional reactions	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
entitlement	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
interacting with staff who are parents	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
we are never enough	Reluctance ▼
lack of consideration	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
Just the elective teachers	Reluctance ▼
Fairness	Reluctance ▼
Thirst for the tea	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
	▼
	▼
	▼
What's our fear about addressing some of these barriers/complications when our background doesn't match?	▼
Over-stepping	Reluctance ▼
causing offense	Reluctance ▼
backlash	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
comfort	Reluctance ▼
acceptance	Reluctance ▼
entitlement	Fear of Parents and Students ▼
coming off as entitled	Reluctance ▼
professional interactions	Reluctance ▼
why bother?	Reluctance ▼
relationships	Reluctance ▼
lack of relationships	Reluctance ▼
trustworthiness	Reluctance ▼
	▼

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE CPR MEETING AGENDA

East Wake Middle Academy

Our vision is to create a stimulating, safe, and successful developmentally appropriate learning environment where academic achievement exceeds state standards through the cooperative involvement of students, parents, community, and staff.

Attendees:

“Imagine a school environment where all students are represented, acknowledged, and engaged while getting all of their academic behavioral and social-emotional needs met”

	OUTCOMES	AGREEMENTS
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share Personal Narratives 2. Discuss Hammond’s CRT & Brain (Ch. 2 &3) 3. Share responses to how we know each other (from the previous session). 4. Choose Observation Tool 5. Schedule Next Meeting and Next Steps 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start and end on time. 2. All members are attentive, focused, and contributing. 3. Seek to understand and avoid making assumptions.
	02/28/2022	
2 min	Welcome and Check in/Celebrations Welcome the group and check in on everyone. Participants can share celebrations if they choose.	Jacobs
3 min	Dynamic Mindfulness <i>Mindful Breathing</i>	Jacobs
15 min	Personal Narrative In this work we want to find ways to build relationships with each other and our students. . <i>What is your definition of relationship or what do we mean by relationship? What does it mean to be in a relationship with someone? When you think about a relationship you value, what does that look like?</i> <i>FollowUp: How can we create that in our context with kids? What would that mean for teacher interactions with kids?</i>	Group
20 min	CRT & Brain Debrief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resonated with you in chapters 2 & 3? • Key Topics: Culture, individual and collectivism, the brain • What brain rule resonates for you? 	Sharing and Discussion

15 mins	<p style="text-align: center;">Trees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Discussion</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Draw a photo of a tree and think about the deeper levels of how we know each other. We naturally think of culture on a surface level. When were times people knew you on the surface? What were some ways that they could have explored you on a deeper level.</i></p>	Group
5 mins	<p style="text-align: center;">Observation Tool</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Observations for this project will begin next quarter. Which observation tool would you like me to use that will provide us insight on how we can more effectively engage and serve our students?</i></p>	Group

Next Meeting Date
March 18th? April 4th?

Preparation for the Next Meeting

Skim Chapters 4 of CRT & Brain

Try the following two activities with your students before the next meeting

1. *Journey Line Prompt: Who have been key teachers in your math & science educational experience? Pick one of these people and tell why that person was really important.*
2. *Who is someone that is important in your life? What do they do to make you feel safe? What do they do to make you feel valued?*

APPENDIX H: LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

PROJECT I⁴ PROTOCOL LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL Learning Walk and Talk

Note: All protocols have multiple origins. The strength of a protocol is in the ability of facilitators or planners to adjust/revise for use in your context. <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/free-resources/protocols/a-z> is a good source of multiple protocols for school, district, community and organizational use.

The learning walk and talk “pedagogy” is obvious on the surface, but the process deepens with the “doing”. A learning walk offers an opportunity to practice the art of what Freire terms PRAXIS: reflection for action. s

The physical act of partners in a side-by-side conversation instead of face to face often changes the way persons relate. It becomes a process for actively practicing our talk about dialogue as a process for naming (the nommo) and transforming our reality. In other words, we walk our talk and talk while we walk in new ways.

In addition, it offers something we rarely do in meetings – exercise and fresh air – so breathing in a different way to rethink. That process by itself freshens our perspectives, sharpens our thinking, and adds a way of learning from others not often considered as vital in our busy schedules.

You may need to adjust or accommodate partners with disabilities or those who prefer or need to sit and talk.

Process: Offer GUIDING QUESTION that helps the learning talk pair engage in a conversation. The question is generated by what happens in the meeting up to that point.

Grouping: Preferably PAIRS (can be trios, but seems to work better in pairs).

APPENDIX I: SMALL VOICE PERSONAL NARRATIVE

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL Personal Narrative This Is Not a Small Voice

Sonia Sanchez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JxMXZVafKk> (Sonia Sanchez talking about learning to become a poet.)

This is not a small voice
you hear this is a large voice coming out of these cities. This is the voice of LaTanya.
Kadesha. Shaniqua. This
is the voice of Antoine.
Darryl. Shaquille.
Running over waters
navigating the hallways
of our schools spilling out
on the corners of our cities and no epitaphs spill out of their river mouths.

This is not a small love
you hear this is a large
love, a passion for kissing learning
on its face.
This is a love that crowns the feet with hands
that nourishes, conceives, feels the water sails
mends the children,
folds them inside our history where they toast more than the flesh
where they suck the bones of the alphabet
and spit out closed vowels.

This is a love colored with iron and lace. This is a love initialed Black Genius.

This is not a small voice you hear.

1

While the poem speaks mainly to African American young people, you can substitute any student's name for the person in the poem.

Think of a young person whose story you carry with you, who has touched you in a special way, whose voice is not a small voice inside your head whenever you need encouragement or a reminder of why you are who you are doing what you do.

What is it about the young person that stays with you and motivates you to do work on behalf of all young people?

Discuss this with your EC-NIC group. Put that young person's name on your poster. When you are finished, turn back to the group; each person will call the young person's name into the space. All will answer PRESENTE.

2

APPENDIX J: CONSENT FORM: CLE GROUP ADULTS



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: Seeking to Belong: A PAR Project Striving to Infuse Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Classrooms

Principal Investigator: Virginia G. Jacobs
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership
Address: 900 Camlin Street, Ahoskie, NC 27910
Telephone #: 252-332-9046
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: 252-328-6131

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

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

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) is to work to build the capacity of teacher to create cultural responsiveness in STEM classrooms. You are being invited to take part in this research because of the role you have within the school setting and would make a great volunteer. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn together as a team of co-practitioners how we can foster and infuse cultural responsiveness in our classrooms.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of thirty-six people total participants.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in the 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 East Wake Academy (EWA) focused on the middle academy. You will need to come to the commons area, Spirit Hall, approximately two times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is four hours over the next fourteen months.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following: you may be asked to participate in an interview and attend community learning exchanges during the study. The interviews and community learning exchanges may be recorded in addition to handwritten notes by the research team members. All the interview questions will focus on your experience, thoughts, and beliefs around cultural responsiveness within our school environment.

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

We do not 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 do not know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any professional or 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?

Only the lead researcher will know that you are part of this research and unique identifiers will be used so that names are not associated with the research participant and data.

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 through the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after 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 at 919-698-1401 (days, between 7:30 am and 4:00 pm or email gilchristv02@students.ecu.edu).

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

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

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

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

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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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
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Virginia G. Jacobs	Signature	Date
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**APPENDIX K: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT: COMMUNITY LEARNING
EXCHANGE PROTOCOL**

Protocol for 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. CLEs will be recorded and deleted immediately after coding.

Participants will include the Co-Practitioner Researchers who sign consent forms and other members of the school or district community. All information will be collected, analyzed, and reported in aggregate form without attributing responses to any individual. All responses will be anonymous, and no names will be attached to individual written or visual responses.

Date of CLE: Fall 2021/Spring 2022/Fall 2022
--

Number of Participants: 36

Purpose of CLE: The purpose of the Community Learning Exchange is to catch a glimpse of what culturally responsive pedagogy means to the teachers in our school and how they infuse CRP in our school environment.
--

Questions for Data Collection:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?2. How do you implement culturally responsive practices in your classroom?3. In what ways do you integrate cultural responsiveness into your curriculum?4. How do you build relationships with students?5. In what ways could we infuse cultural responsiveness into our school environment? |
|--|

