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URBAN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING DIVERSE STUDENTS

By

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B.S., University of Louisville, 2008

M.A.T., University of Louisville, 2009

Ed.S., University of Louisville, 2012

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

August 2021

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 28, 2021

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DEDICATION

This journey has taken me far too long. When my sister, Angela Towers, died unexpectedly, I had neither the energy nor the drive to continue this research. With the love and support of my family, my grief has ebbed, and I can continue living closer to how I did before. I dedicate this to her: the kindest person I have ever had the privilege of knowing. I miss you terribly every day.

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I want to thank my family for supporting me through this journey. To my husband, Darren: I greatly appreciate your patience and support as I erratically completed this project. To my daughters, Brett and Mackenzie: thank you for being you and pushing me when I was not progressing. To my son, Christian: thank you for being my companion and keeping my spirits up. To my dad, Larry Geer: I thank you for your constant support and belief in me as an educator. I am sorry you did not live long enough to see me finish this. That is my fault. To my mom, Sue Otos: your strength inspires me every day. To my “step-father,” Steve Allario: I am beyond grateful for how you take care of my mom when she needs it most.

I want to thank Dr. Bradley Carpenter for being the first person to show me how and why to be a White ally. Your teaching, classes, and discussions changed my life. My thanks to two of my elementary school teachers from Sakamoto Elementary School in San Jose, California, Dan Pearson and Claudelle Bonaccinie, both of whom pushed me and realized I was that smart, lazy kid. To a few of my high school teachers from Santa Teresa High School in San Jose, California, Bill Sheehy, James Cope, and Gary Melching: you taught me to work hard, to study hard, and to love learning. I am beyond grateful for my chairpeople, Dr. Shelley Thomas and Dr. W. Kyle Ingle, for sticking with me for much longer than I deserved. A sincere thanks to all of my students, past and present, who inspire me to be the best educator I can be and to try to make education as equitable as possible. I still cannot believe I get paid to work with teenagers every day.

Perhaps my greatest thank you goes to the random salesperson who was trying to sell me something in my new house when my family first moved to Louisville, Kentucky in 2005. He was not the first person we had working on our house who had “advice” on where I should send my children to school. For some reason, this time when he told me I did not want my children around “those kids,” I asked what he meant, knowing full well what he did. His response was along the lines of I should not send my children to certain schools to be around Black students. I asked him to explain himself, and he stammered a futile rebuttal. This event propelled me to finish my undergraduate degree and become a teacher. I vowed then, and have made it my life’s work, to be an advocate for all students, especially the Black children he so disdained and thought I should keep away from my children.

ABSTRACT

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Julie Chancellor

July 28, 2021

Teachers who are mostly White often do not understand their cultural disconnect from their mostly non-White students (Blaisdell, 2016; King, 1991). Having teachers exposed to, and competent with, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012) can help bridge that divide. Since CSP is a relative newcomer to educational pedagogy, this study was designed to discover what CSP traits teachers have and how these traits impact their students. This qualitative case study is comprised of four teachers at one urban high school that has historically been designated as not making adequate progress. These teachers are all White and were identified by their principal as ones who work well with their majority Black student population. Their responses show the degree to which they understand and incorporate CSP practices in their classrooms. From these data, implications for professional development and school practices are discussed.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy; Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy; Whiteness Theory; urban education

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Today's high-stakes climate in public education places pressure on schools to increase student testing performance. This pressure has led educators to search for solutions to insufficient academic achievement. Low student academic performance is particularly challenging in urban schools made up of ethnically diverse student populations, many living below the poverty line (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996). Adding to the testing and school accountability dimension, many teachers in urban schools lack the skills to teach their students effectively due to the cultural difference between teacher and student (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). Nationally, more than 75% of urban public school students are non-White, whereas the majority of people becoming teachers are middle-class White females (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). According to Howard (2003), "The racial and cultural incongruence between teachers and students merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners" (pp. 2-3). As teachers increasingly do not have the same background as their students, both ethnically and economically, considerable work must be done to ensure teachers can reach their diverse student populations, not only for school accountability but also for student academic success. As many White teachers see their non-White students as possessing academic

deficits (Marx & Pennington, 2003) and have more positive viewpoints of their White students (Lipman, 1997), changing these attitudes is a necessity to best serve students of color.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) can be a vessel to bridge the gap between teacher and student (Paris, 2012). As defined by Paris (2012), CSP “seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). Teachers from middle class and mainly monocultural backgrounds often do not realize their biases towards students and their interpretation of reality through their dominant ethnicity cultural lens (Blaisdell, 2016; King, 1991). When teachers are unaware of their biases towards these students through their cultural disconnect, their ability to relate effectively to their students decreases (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Having teacher candidates exposed to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), CSP, and urban students gives them experience with these schools and students (Jacobs, 2019; Murtadha-Watts, 1998). This exposure enables teacher candidates to realize their students are much different from them, thus the past educational experiences of the teacher are not transferrable to the student. Teacher candidates have to understand the differences of their students and self-reflect on their biases to grow as educators (King, 1991; Kitts, 2020). Research shows CRP exposure, practice, and reflection are essential to help teachers embrace the cultural identity of their students and realize the teacher’s experience does not necessarily mirror the experiences of their students (Acquah & Commins, 2015; Howard, 2003).

Since most teacher candidates are often unaware of their biases towards students whose background differ from their own, they must honestly reflect on how their

experiences influence their students, both negatively and positively; and this reflection must include thoughts on the impact ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status has on teaching (Howard, 2003). This deep level of self-reflection can be uncomfortable for many White teachers, especially when race is involved. However, it is essential to determine how a teacher's identity contributes to the achievement of their students whose backgrounds are typically not the same as the teacher (Howard, 2003). Becoming culturally responsive in the classroom is one way to bridge this gap (Esposito & Swain, 2009), and utilizing culturally sustaining practices goes even further to embrace student culture (Paris, 2012). Teachers are usually alone in their classrooms and are the only adult responsible for the education of students during instruction time. The recognition of the importance of this responsibility is imperative. A teacher's background, ethnicity, and culture determine who they are as a person and influence how they interact with their students. A thorough understanding of this is required to reach students effectively. When teachers give students incorrect impressions of their ability, which can come from a cultural disconnect (Sleeter, 2001), this can lower academic success (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Black students in urban schools often receive messages of their academic inability and can internalize this misinformation, which in turn can fulfill the prophecy of academic failure (Esposito & Swain, 2009). Eliminating one negative viewpoint of student academic ability through changing teacher beliefs and behaviors can change the trajectory of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Developing culturally responsive skills can enable teachers to change these negative perceptions of non-White students (Murtadha-Watts, 1998) and thus break the self-fulfilling prophecy. However, this is not an easy path.

Once teachers are in the classroom, most of their university courses are complete. Teachers must teach their students effectively and connect with them on a personal level. One tool to build relationships between student and teacher is CRP, which is a learned skill and does not develop automatically (Gay, 2002; Toppel, 2015), so it is vital to determine the traits teachers possess who engage in culturally responsive and sustaining teaching and to determine how they developed such traits.

New teachers often leave the profession within five years, and one cause of this attrition is teaching diverse students whose cultural differences from the teacher pose many challenges for effective classroom instruction (Norman & Ganser, 2004). High teacher turnover rates impacts students, as it is a factor in school ineffectiveness (Mirra & Rogers, 2020; Waxman & Huang, 1997). Therefore, determining how teachers' culturally responsive, and the more extensive tenet of culturally sustaining skills, manifest in their classrooms can influence student academic performance. This study aimed to determine the practices of in-service teachers who were identified by their principal as those who successfully incorporate CSP in their classrooms and how they acquired these practices to embed these traits in other teachers and classrooms.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the practices of in-service teachers who were identified by their principal as those who successfully incorporate CSP in their classrooms and to analyze how they use these strategies to support student learning. CSP expands on the original tenets of CRP by not merely interacting with students in a culturally responsive manner (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), but instead actively working to sustain the unique cultures of all students (Paris, 2012). A principal in one

high school designated as a priority school by state educational audits identified teacher participants for this study based on her interpretation of their efficacy with students of color. Individual teachers who utilized CRP and CSP with their non-White students were identified and their skills and their acquisition process were analyzed, seeking to benefit the local school district, teachers, and students.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify to support student learning?
2. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify as the most useful in building relationships with diverse students?
3. Do school stakeholders believe there is a need for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in classrooms?

This study, conducted through a lens of Whiteness Theory, aimed to understand the CSP characteristics expert teachers possess and how they are manifested in their classrooms. Using Whiteness Theory allowed interpretation of the data collected to be framed in the reality of White normalcy and the oppression of Blacks in society, especially in education (Owen, 2007). As diversity poses challenges to teachers who do not connect with their students who are different from them, the goal of CRP, and now CSP, is to provide teachers who are both ethnically and economically privileged the opportunity to become culturally conscious (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; King, 1991). This investigation of how expert teachers understand and manifest CSP practices through

the lens of Whiteness theory provided valuable insights into proliferating CSP in more classrooms.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in the context of this study:

Academic success: Ladson-Billings (2014) defined academic success as “the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences” (p. 73).

Cultural competence: Ladson-Billings (2014) defined cultural competence as “the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture” (p. 73).

Culturally responsive teaching: Ladson-Billings (1995) stated, “Culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (p. 483).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP): Ladson-Billings (2014) defined CRP as “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture” (p. 77).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP): Paris (2012) asserted, “CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93).

Priority school: Priority school refers to a school that is failing to make adequate yearly progress in academic indicators according to the state in which it exists.

Sociopolitical consciousness: Ladson-Billings (2014) defined sociopolitical consciousness as “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (p. 73).

Whiteness Theory: According to Owen (2007), Whiteness Theory has three definitive characteristics: Whiteness is the perspective of society, Whiteness is an advantage in society, and Whiteness is normal in society.

Limitations of Study

Several limitations of this study existed. The first was researcher positionality. As an employee in the district of the school studied, the researcher had biases towards practices and problems in instruction. This was addressed by funneling all observations through the theoretical lens of Whiteness Theory outlined in the introduction. Keeping data analysis on the premise of White normalcy in society as oppressive to non-Whites, especially in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997), helped mitigate researcher bias, as the researcher’s experiences have been as a White female. Keeping this reality as the basis of data analysis allowed the researcher to confront this when analyzing each piece of data so that White bias on student experience and educational achievement could stay minimal. The researcher’s identity as a White, middle-class female was also a limitation. I am the type of teacher I want to address. Analyzing CSP through the lens of Whiteness Theory must come with an acknowledgment of the researcher’s ethnic identity.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in the following manner: Chapter I is the introduction, which includes the background, purpose of the study, research questions, data sources, and limitations of the study. Chapter II is the literature review, focusing on Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Theory, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. Chapter III outlines the methodology used, data collection techniques, and coding and analysis of the data. Chapter IV analyzes and discusses the data with emerged themes. Chapter V introduces implications for practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Across the United States, the demographics of teachers do not mirror that of students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). For the 2017-2018 school year, 79% of teachers identified as White, 7% as Black, and 9% as Hispanic. The racial identity of students, however, is vastly different from teachers. In the 2017-2018 school year, 48% of students identified as White, 15% as Black, and 27% as Hispanic. This is a decrease from the 2000-2001 school year in the percentage of White students, down from 61%, a slight change from 17% to 15% Black, and an increase of Hispanic students from 16% to 27%. This racial and cultural disconnect can cause challenges in classrooms when the culture of the teacher does not match that of the student, and the teacher lacks the skills to teach their ethnically diverse students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Shifting from Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) addresses this barrier to success for non-White students as it seeks to not only acknowledge the diverse cultures of each student, but also CSP attempts to sustain them in the classroom (Paris, 2012). CSP has become more popular in education recently since Paris (2012) pointed out the limitations of CRP as not actively preserving the cultures of students. However, focusing on teachers and their knowledge and competency in CSP continues. This study aimed to address the gap in research on CSP practices of teachers in classrooms.

This literature review examines the continuum from culturally responsive to sustaining pedagogy. In doing so, the examination illuminated specific characteristics of each concept, the challenge many White teachers have in engaging in CRP and CSP, and the lack of professional development programs for teachers in CSP. Whiteness Theory (Owen, 2007) is the theoretical lens used to frame the study. By tying together all these areas of research, the importance of determining which traits effective White teachers in CRP/CSP possess and whether the learning experiences of their students are enhanced because of the practice of CRP/CSP in their classrooms adds to the emerging research that exists on teachers and CSP.

Emergence of CRP to Improve Student Learning

Different pedagogical theories address different areas of academic need. These theories exist to help new and experienced teachers comprehend, reflect, and improve their instructional practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014), and thereby improve student academic achievement. These pedagogies, however, cannot remain stagnant. They must change with time to adapt and to address the changing, persistent inequity seen in society (Ladson-Billings, 2014). One area that must be addressed is the academic disparities between White and non-White students. One cause of this difference could be the much lower levels of caring, equity, and engagement in school Black students report than what White students do (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2014). One pedagogical area of research addressing these teaching gaps is Culturally Relevant or Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) as a teaching method “that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity

while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 460).

CRP, developed by Ladson-Billings (1995), explains the need to understand the cultural capacity of students to improve their academic success. CRP has four main goals: a) develop the cultural competence of teachers and students; b) bring the cultural resources of students into the classroom; c) have high academic expectations of and achieve academic success for all students; and d) engage in a social justice framework in the classroom by increasing the sociopolitical consciousness of all students (Gere, Buehler, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009). CSP builds on these goals by including an explicit emphasis on sustaining student culture in classrooms (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and the multi-faceted identities of students as positive additions to their characters (Coppola, Woodard, & Vaughan, 2019). Ladson-Billings (2014), referenced the bridge between CRP and CSP as

a newer, fresher version of culturally relevant pedagogy that meets the needs of this century’s students. In developing this theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), these authors use culturally relevant pedagogy as the place where the ‘beat drops’ and then layer the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity—that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects. (p. 76).

In the current research, CSP includes the tenets found in CRP as explained by Ladson-Billings (2014).

While these goals may appear to be intuitive, many teachers struggle in these areas and thus need assistance with CRP (Fickel & Abbiss, 2019) as evidenced in the underperformance of Black students taught by White teachers (Oates, 2003). Historically in the United States, Black students have received a substandard education. The 1954

Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was supposed to solve these inequities, however often the case has been used to increase the achievement gap between Black and White students (Love, 2004). Many schools and districts used the language of the timeline of desegregation in the decision to keep Black achievement below that of Whites by delaying school integration as long as possible. Ideally meant to give equal rights in education to all students, this case instead may have exacerbated the differences students experienced (Love, 2004). CRP attempts to correct this historic deficiency.

CRP addresses how education centers on middle class, European-American values, and encourages educators to move away from this and incorporate varied teaching practices in their classrooms (Howard, 2003). These goals of recognizing cultural differences, addressing the normative focus on education as White and middle class, and empowering students to see this inequity in school and society (Esposito & Swain, 2009) all may be foreign to White teachers whose past experiences may leave them without these perspectives. Determining which traits effective CRP/CSP White teachers possess and how they acquired them will add much to existing CRP/CSP literature allowing school districts and teacher preparation programs to focus on effective professional development and training so more White teachers can master these skills.

Goals of CRP

CRP, as any educational pedagogy, focuses on the academic achievement of students. As CRP is the foundation for CSP (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), it is important to understand the goals of CRP to grasp the principles of CSP. One goal of CRP is to challenge societal norms for historically marginalized groups and to do this effectively people have to be exposed to how society creates and perpetuates these norms

(Applebaum, 2008). Once identified, the inequities non-White students experience can be addressed. The teaching practices associated with CRP evolve over time and in order to progress, teachers must acknowledge cultural identity is fluid, not static, so pedagogy must evolve as well (Paris & Alim, 2014). When this occurs, non-White student achievement increases (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Indeed, teaching in a CRP classroom will change with time as society's norms and expectations change. Although this can be a difficult challenge for teachers, it is a goal for CRP. New norms in society must translate to new norms in classrooms. Creating opportunities for academic success for students of color can occur when the uniqueness of these students, as compared to White societal norms, is not viewed as a deficit to overcome, rather, as an avenue to develop relationships between students and teachers (Toppel, 2015). CRP is not specific instructional content. According to Toppel (2015), it is "teaching students in ways that respect, promote, and incorporate diverse ways of thinking, learning, and communicating" (p. 559). Although the overall goals of CRP are lofty, they are certainly achievable with teacher training, dedication, and practice.

Characteristics of CRP

Culturally relevant classrooms and teachers have many characteristics in common. Ladson-Billings (2014) defined CRP as "the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture, one would expect the characteristics of CRP to include references to the students' culture" (p. 77). CRP is not merely introducing ethnic texts, celebrating non-White holidays, or having diverse pictures in classrooms, as many teachers believe and practice (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Indeed, teachers who conduct effective CRP in their classrooms are not concerned with

how their students of color measure compared to White, middle-class norms, but instead celebrate the cultural practices of their students (Paris & Alim, 2014). Expert CRP teachers realize White societal norms are not the best indicators of the academic performance of their students and instead utilize the unique cultural capital students naturally possess to promote educational gains. Teachers utilize effective CRP to create opportunities for academic success for their students by acknowledging their challenges and giving them tools to overcome them (Johnson, 2011). This characteristic of not making excuses for lower academic performance, but instead providing students skills to overcome any obstacles they may have for academic success, is typical of teachers practicing CRP. In math classes, for example, using culturally relevant scenarios in problems with students increased engagement and participation by students (Nicol, Archibald, & Baker, 2013). Students spent more class time engaged in the math problems because they could identify with the examples teachers presented.

Classrooms with effective CRP practices address controversial topics such as racism and sexism instead of ignoring them (Gay, 2002). Talking about these sensitive subjects would be difficult at best when positive relationships between teacher and student do not exist. However, to have true CRP in classrooms, students must be empowered to address the lack of equity in school and society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Hence, probably the most significant characteristic of CRP is the mutual respect and relationships between teachers and students (Johnson, 2011). These positive relationships honor the culture of both teacher and student as equal. A team approach towards learning occurs in CRP classrooms. Teachers and students work together to

increase student academic achievement (Gay, 2002). These characteristics of CRP should be evident in all classrooms espousing to follow its tenets.

White Teachers' CRP Deficiencies

White teachers often face numerous challenges teaching diverse students. Few preservice White teachers have a thorough understanding of discrimination and racism (Sleeter, 2001) due to lack of personal experience. As CRT posits, since racism is so ingrained in society as to become normative (Bell, 2002), it is not surprising White, middle-class teachers would have little direct experience with racism. In fact, many believe programs designed to end or mitigate the effects of racism are discriminatory to Whites (Sleeter, 2001). This frame of mind is troubling when trying to reach traditionally underserved populations such as ethnically diverse students. The failure to understand the deficit thinking society traditionally has when comparing White students to non-White students is common for many White teachers. Applebaum (2008) noted, "One of the privileges of being privileged is not to have to notice that privilege" (p. 410). Couple this inability to see racism for the problem it is with the lack of confidence many White teacher candidates have to teach Black students, which decreases even more once they get into the classroom (Sleeter, 2001), it is evident that CRP is needed for the academic achievement of Black students. Exposing White teachers to culturally responsive and sustaining teaching may improve the academic experience for their ethnically diverse students.

CRP Exposure

Teachers who attempt to establish their professional identity are initially influenced by their teacher education courses, which may not include any in CRP, and

once in the classroom, these identities either evolve to embrace their students or solidify into deficit thinking (Lopes & Pereira, 2012). Thus, determining how teachers developed their CRP/CSP skills can lead to improved practices in other classrooms. Creating programs to replicate these skills in additional White teachers who are not currently incorporating them should lead to curbing negative impacts to more Black students. According to Gay (2002), “Teachers need to thoroughly understand existing obstacles to culturally responsive teaching before they can successfully remove them” (p. 108). Only with adequate teacher preparation can teachers develop the skills to remove barriers to student success. Because of the relatively recent research on how teachers acquire their CRP/CSP skills, this study will add much to the existing literature. As White teachers have noted, their experiences with actual students in schools, versus college coursework, shape their practice as educators (Sleeter, 2001). Since CRP does not automatically occur in White teachers, it must be specifically taught to teachers who then must actively and continually incorporate it in their lessons (Gay, 2002). Having a thorough understanding of the skills effective teachers possess, and how they came to possess them, will benefit students individually and the educational community as a whole.

Genuine reflective practice is one way White teachers can overcome their lack of cultural diversity. Research shows the more reflective teachers are about their views on ethnicity and culture, the greater their appreciation for diversity becomes (Gere et al., 2009). While many teachers accurately interpret Black student performance, they often underestimate Black student academic potential. *Potential* is defined as what academic ability the student demonstrates and what is not obvious, and Black student potential is underestimated more often than White student potential (Ferguson, 2003). Such an

underestimation can lead to deficit thinking regarding Black students' performance in comparison to the ability of White students (Love, 2004). By genuinely reflecting on their assumptions regarding Black student academic ability and their own lack of cultural experience, White teachers may minimize the negative outcomes on Black student achievement. It is imperative for White teachers to see the position and viewpoint of others, as understanding this different perspective is essential in developing a CRP teaching style (Gere et al., 2009). Participating in reflective analysis of culture and ethnicity in the classroom can help teachers bridge the differences between their backgrounds and experiences and those of their students.

The need to expose teachers to CRP is critical. Research shows White teachers often have not addressed White dominant culture as the norm and thus fail to understand the need for inclusion of different cultures in the classroom (Warren, 2013). By failing to grasp this basic tenet of CRP, teachers cannot embrace the diversity of their students as strengths worthy of celebration. Conducting CRP research and training on the successes seen in groups of students who have historically not been successful, such as non-White students, gives insight into successful pedagogical practices for all students, including Whites (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Presenting CRP to teachers as beneficial to all students is a necessity. The goal of CRP (as well as federal and state accountability policies) that teachers must understand and embrace is to improve the academic success of all students, regardless of race and background. Teachers also must realize cultural responsiveness is individualized and cannot be generalized to children as a group, so teachers must be familiar with the cultures of all of their students to increase academic engagement (Toppel, 2015). This cultural realization helps teachers build relationships with students

and then places the strengths of their students at the core of their learning, which can be challenging for teachers who are not adept with CRP and whose backgrounds are usually much different than their students' (Toppel, 2015). Addressing the traits CRP teachers possess can lead to the development of training of teachers in CRP, which will benefit their students in ways outside of cultural acknowledgment. Teachers who work effectively with diverse students have an increased ability to see the need for differentiation for all students (Caughlan & Cushman, 2013). CRP training seeks to help teachers reach more of their students and allow them to have greater academic success. Future research should center on the development of CRP/CSP professional development stemming from the discovered traits of effective CRP/CSP teachers.

CRP and Professional Development

Although the literature on CRP is extensive, research that pairs CRP with professional development is emerging. Research supports the need for CRP for several reasons: a) to increase the instructional efficacy of White teachers with their students of color (Gere et al., 2009; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter, 2001); b) to recognize the historical structure of White experience as normative; and c) to see how this structure perpetuates the perception of Black underperformance (Esposito & Swain, 2009; King, 1991; Owen, 2007). Additionally, it is necessary to empower teacher reflection on ethnicity and culture (Howard, 2003; Theoharis, 2007). The change in pedagogy from CRP to CSP, as posed by Paris (2012), shows the trend from understanding student cultural strengths to preserving them in classrooms. Teachers may not know of CSP formally, even when they demonstrate the pedagogy in their

classrooms, however, through directed professional development, they can match the practice with the theory (Brown, Boda, Lemmi, & Monroe, 2019).

Progression from CRP to CSP

Research has evolved to include discussions on the gaps in CRP. In his generative argument for the intentional change in stance and terminology, Paris (2012) questioned if CRP went far enough to protect and sustain the diverse cultures and languages of all students. He expanded on how the current political and social climate still promotes teaching practices that create a monocultural and monolingual society centered around White, middle-class norms, (Paris, 2012). This was not enough for students today. In fact, students of all cultural backgrounds benefit from learning in a culturally sustaining classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), so to move all students forward, CRP must now include CSP. Paris (2012) countered CRP's deficits of not sustaining cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms with his theory of CSP. Student cultural experience is slowly becoming more pervasive in classroom settings. Traditionally, the idea of educational equity focused on getting non-White students to speak, write, and be more like White, middle-class students (Paris & Alim, 2014).

To achieve the goal of inclusiveness of all students and appreciation of their cultures from this starting point, many educational practices evolved. According to Paris (2012), the trajectory of educational practices occurred as follows. First, the goal of deficit-laden perspectives and practices in education was to eradicate traditions and norms of non-White students and replace them with "acceptable" ones from White society. This excluded the experiences of non-White students and was not effective for their academic achievement. Next came difference approaches, which portrayed different

cultures as equal, but still tried nothing to preserve non-White cultures. Although this was an improvement from deficit practices, much progress for non-White students was still needed. Resource pedagogies saw non-White culture as a place to draw strengths, to honor, and to investigate to get non-White students to adopt White societal norms. The goal still was to acclimate non-White students to White societal definitions of normalcy. One answer to these pedagogical approaches that did nothing to celebrate the diversity of students and to use these differences to assist them in academic achievement is CSP. Early CSP research tried to address new teaching techniques to move beyond the longstanding “deficit approaches” (Paris, 2012, p. 93) to teaching non-White students that existed for many decades. CSP seeks to give teachers the skills to assist their diverse students with the ability to achieve academically while honoring their cultural traditions and strengths (Paris, 2012.)

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

Increasing teacher exposure to and competence with CSP can give teachers tools to increase their success with ethnically and economically diverse students. Supporting teachers to understand and appreciate the differences of their students should cause a change in teacher perception of student academic ability. Since teacher perceptions of students impact their academic performance (Jussim & Harber, 2005), minimizing negative perceptions should have a positive influence on diverse students. The creation of CSP stemmed from identified deficiencies in CRP and responses to changes in society. The shifting in demographics in the United States as a whole, and education specifically, from majority White to increasingly non-White caused a need for CSP to encourage equality of opportunities for all students as the traditional White-norm structure is

changing (Paris & Alim, 2014). Traditionally, educators drew upon White and middle-class-centric norms for student achievement, behavior, and culture, but those norms are quickly changing to a non-White majoritarian interpretation. Because of this change, Paris (2012) posited, “Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93).

A goal of CSP is not merely to recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of students, but instead to expand it to all educational practices. The deficit focus of earlier cultural pedagogical practices does not occur in CSP. Instead of focusing on the deficits of students and their educational track, for example, the achievement gap between White and non-White students, it instead centers on the positive cultural practices of non-White peoples (Paris & Alim, 2014). By no longer working from a shortage of academic skills among students, this positive approach embraces and utilizes the strengths of students to gain skills for academic excellence. Paris & Alim (2014) continued with their CSP explanation by showing how CSP allows students to move beyond White norms to face discriminatory practices in society to increase awareness of their occurrences and to enact change. Such a move forward places students as the focal point for changing discriminatory norms and practices historically existing in society. Students must be the change agents. This empowerment of students places CSP in the role of active change agent instead of passively accepting societal inequities. The change of focus on non-White-centered norms as a result of the changing shift of demographics may leave some (mainly White) students’ viewpoints out and create exclusions in classrooms that did not previously exist (Paris & Alim, 2014). CSP does not seek to ignore the culture of Whites.

Their experiences should be equal to all others in the classroom, with none qualifying as the norm.

Research Trends in CSP

Since the emergence of CSP is relatively recent (Paris, 2012), few empirical studies exist utilizing CSP as the focus of research with teachers. Several articles are theoretical (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). For example, Ladson-Billings' (2014) work on CSP acknowledged the deficits Paris exposed about CRP (Paris & Alim, 2014) and embraced the addition of sustaining student culture, not merely responding to it. The majority of studies citing CSP focus their research on CRP and only tangentially refer to Paris' (2012) conceptualization of CSP (Durdin & Truscott, 2013; Nicol et al., 2013; Scott & White, 2013; Warren, 2013). Some emerging research targeted CSP and student assessment (Hanesworth, Bracken, & Elkington, 2019), which can begin to address the cultural biases in many assessments. Other areas of CSP research included literacy (Nash, Panther, & Arce-Boardman, 2018; Woodard, Vaughan, & Machado, 2017) and the arts (Buffington & Bryant, 2019). Because of the continued emergence of empirical CSP research, this study is especially important to education as it aimed to identify the CSP skills teachers may or not manifest in their classrooms and how they came to possess these skills. Exploring teachers and their CSP practices addresses this gap in research.

Theoretical Frameworks

As Paris (2012) introduced his theory of CSP recently, empirical studies on teachers and CSP are lacking or developing. In order to determine how expert teachers manifest CSP skills in their classrooms to benefit their students with their academic

experience and to stay true to the tenets of both CRP and CSP (Ladson-Billings, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), Whiteness Theory via Critical Race Theory are the theoretical frameworks used to guide the design and implementation of this study.

Whiteness Theory

Whiteness Theory is essential in understanding the academic experiences of non-White students through their participation in classrooms with their teachers. According to Bergerson (2003), even though laws exist to provide equal opportunities for all people, non-Whites still “face racism at individual, structural, and institutional levels” (pp. 52-53). This shows how White society discriminates against non-Whites even when the legal system attempts to eradicate this practice. Bergerson (2003) continued with an explanation of Whiteness, emphasizing White as “neutral, and all other colors are considered relative to whiteness” (p. 57). Such normalization of White experience juxtaposes all others as abnormal. Understanding this theory of Whiteness is necessary to disrupt the current racialized social structure still existing today (Owen, 2007). This structure includes social practice, cultural representations, and identity formations as defined by Whiteness (Owen, 2007). After they acknowledge Whiteness Theory, teachers can begin the process of applying this to their pedagogical practices.

According to Owen (2007), Whiteness Theory has several properties. The first is how Whiteness shapes White people’s understanding of self and society. White people see society and their identity through the lens of White norms and experiences. This necessarily deems non-White identity and experience as abnormal. Secondly, Whiteness defines the social position of advantage. White experience provides power to White

people and this places non-Whites in a position of inferiority and subjectivity. Whiteness defines what is normal, and thus what is not White is not normal. Such a premise places people of color in a position of comparison to White norms, and any deviation from Whiteness implies inferiority and separation from society. According to this theory, Whiteness is invisible to Whites but is obvious to non-Whites. White people do not see society as normalizing White characteristics, but non-Whites are acutely cognizant of this. They can see societal normalization of White experience, which translates their knowledge as not normal. Another property of Whiteness Theory is it perpetuates the interests and values of Whites through deeply entrenching them in society. That is, what is good for Whites becomes what society in the United States espouses as best. Lastly, according to Whiteness Theory, Whiteness cannot be separated from the historical violence that empowered it, for example, slavery and genocide. Acknowledging these violent historical events for their contribution to the domination of society by Whites and their norms is essential to using Whiteness Theory to lessen the negative ramifications on students of color. Interestingly, as society becomes increasingly diverse, keeping White, middle-class practices as the definition of *normal* could decrease access to power as a lower percentage of people are actually White and middle class (Paris & Alim, 2014). This shows importance not only to non-Whites but also to Whites to mitigate the effects of Whiteness in society and education. Understanding Whiteness Theory is important, but the literature needs more focus on Whiteness and teachers. One area of research of White teachers shows how they are the problem, not their Black students, especially if they refuse to acknowledge the painful history and experiences of their Black students

(Matias, 2016). The current study provided additional research on teachers and CSP using Whiteness Theory as the theoretical lens.

Many implications exist regarding the lack of understanding of Whiteness Theory for education and students. Many White teachers believe they know all there is to know about racism and often believe they know more than people of color, who actually experience it (Harris, Hayes, & Smith, 2020; Hayes & Juarez, 2009; Matias, 2013). This once again places White teachers in a position of power over their non-White students. These White teachers place their definition of racism as truer than any of their students may provide. This practice may be due to Whites not liking to confront race and racism because, if they do, they will then have to realize their racist behaviors and acknowledge the privilege being White bestows (Bergerson, 2003). Such a lack of understanding can cause serious deficits in classrooms. Many White teachers pity their non-White students based on assumptions of their families and low expectations of academic skills for these students (Marx & Pennington, 2003). When teachers have low expectations for their students, student academic performance often suffers (Jussim et al., 1996). In addition to this negative view of their non-White students, many White teachers see themselves as the perfect person to help their students, which frames their work as an act of charity (Marx & Pennington, 2003). One recommendation is greater exposure of White teachers to Whiteness Theory to limit the negative effects a lack of understanding can have on non-White students. The current study addressed the lack of empirical research on teachers and CSP using Whiteness Theory. The existing literature is mainly theoretical, and will be enhanced with the empirical data this case study will provide.

Teachers do not develop CSP by accident. The first step for a teacher to develop CSP should be to adopt their students' perspectives to develop pedagogical practices (Warren, 2013). This study aimed to determine what this looks like in classrooms of CSP teachers. Teachers must understand the cultures of their students and use this knowledge to develop classroom practices that can best utilize the strengths of each student to achieve academic success. This application of the cultural strengths of children to help them become better students comes with high teacher expectations of all student achievement (Gay, 2002). Teachers cannot accept poor performance in the classroom because they believe circumstances prevent their students from becoming successful. Such deficit thinking should not exist in CRP nor in CSP. Additionally, teachers can foster connections between the influences of society and how they impact classrooms and education for non-White students and empower them to recognize and change these inequities (Durdin & Truscott, 2013). The goal of student as change agent in society shifts the role of the non-White student from a casual participant in the educational process as defined by White society to an active role of changing the definitions of normal. However, many teachers often are not comfortable with allowing students to think critically about the injustices inherent in schools and broader society (Esposito & Swain, 2009). When teachers develop better understandings of CSP, they became more critically reflective of their educational practice as it relates to CSP (Durdin & Truscott, 2013). Such continual questioning of proper representation of students' voices and experiences in classrooms shows the respect for student cultural differences teachers now possess. Although teachers may not have the ability to deviate from the actual content taught in their classrooms due to district and governmental directives, they can modify

the *delivery* of these lessons by using CSP, which will increase student engagement and understanding (Toppel, 2015).

This change in focus from ethnically based content to culturally sustaining lesson delivery is paramount for CSP teachers. The relationships teachers develop with their students by knowing and embracing all of their cultures show they care about each student, and the knowledge teachers gain about the individuality of kids allows them to adapt their educational strategies to meet the needs of each student (Toppel, 2015).

Teachers have the power to help students achieve academic excellence by utilizing CSP. Determining the skills expert CSP teachers possess and how they acquired them is essential to perpetuating CSP in more classrooms to influence more students positively.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Whiteness Theory cannot exist without an analysis of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT centers on three basic premises: a) racism is so pervasive in the structures of society it is almost invisible; b) White experience should not be considered the norm; and c) racism affects education specifically (Bell, 2002; Tate, 1997). Introduced by Bell (2002), expanded upon by Ladson-Billings (1995), and then applied to urban education, this theoretical lens is appropriate when examining how ethnically diverse students perform with their primarily White teachers. As this case study focused on White teachers and their ability to teach their non-White students effectively, analyzing data collected through this lens is essential in order to center the findings on a) the strengths of non-White students; b) how their White teachers teach them effectively while not using

White societal norms as a basis for academic excellence; and c) how these practices advance the educational experience of non-White students.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT addresses the “structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominated racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 25). Since the demographic data show the ethnic disparities of teachers and students exist (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018), identifying areas of inequity towards minority students is necessary for White teachers. Whites cannot use CRT to “understand” the lives of non-Whites (Bergerson, 2003), rather, CRT can provide the tools to determine how academic limitations on students of color stem from White-centered norms of society.

With CRT, much of what is considered reality and normalcy is constructed by society, usually by keeping the minority silenced (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). White teachers must have exposure to this idea so they may respond accordingly in the best interest of their students (Zoch, 2017). Additionally, as the achievement gap focuses on the deficits of Black children and the superiority of White students (Love, 2004), White teachers must hone their perceptions of their Black students through such a lens. White students are set as the benchmark academically (Love, 2004), and they are therefore considered the societal norm for achievement. In order to embrace the diversity of students and the benefits they bring to the classroom, understanding CRT is imperative to change the misconceptions society has placed on the achievement and expectations of White and Black students.

CSP via CRT as Change Agent

A future implication from this research will be to take the characteristics identified in effective CSP teachers and how they came to possess them to inform districts and schools how best to propagate CSP in teachers who either have not been exposed to it or who are reluctant to acknowledge its benefits to students of color. Since one premise of CRT is to enact change and to emancipate groups that historically experience discrimination (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997), this theoretical lens is further proven to be appropriate for this study. Focusing the research solely through a Whiteness Theory lens limits the effectiveness of promoting teachers to empower students to act as change agents for educational policies and programs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the practices of in-service teachers who were identified by their principal as those who successfully incorporate Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) in their classrooms and to analyze how they use these strategies to support student learning. Three research questions guided this study, with the first serving as an overarching driving question, the next delving into the impact on the student experience, and the third addressing stakeholder input:

1. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify to support student learning?
2. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify as the most useful in building relationships with diverse students?
3. Do school stakeholders believe there is a need for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in classrooms?

The purpose of Chapter III is to justify and describe the research methodology for this qualitative case study. In particular, this chapter delineates the research process used to answer the aforementioned research questions. In terms of structure, Chapter III begins by stating and rationalizing the selection of the research design (a qualitative case study) and the limitations of this analytical strategy. Next, the context of the qualitative case study is discussed, as well as the various data sources and the corresponding data

collection procedures used to obtain them. The data analysis process is discussed next, connecting the two theoretical frameworks used in the context of this study. As a scholar-practitioner undertaking research in the school district in which the researcher is employed, the process by which the researcher explored her positionality and relationship with the topic, students, school, and the district in which the study took place is also discussed. Lastly, the strategies by which the researcher ensured the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the discovered findings were explored.

Research Methods and Design: Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study was selected as the most appropriate research method for the current study. This study aimed to determine the CSP traits possessed and the means by which White teachers in an urban high school acquired them. As case studies pursue natural conclusions to learn from in order to apply to other cases or populations (Yin, 2014), this makes the case study consistent with the final goal of the current study: to give the school, district, and educational community information to spread CSP to many more teachers so that student educational achievement can be improved (Gere et al., 2009). Additionally, focusing on individual teachers instead of a school or district-based program allows richer data by a more focused unit of analysis (Yin, 2014) in which common themes can develop across participants.

Case studies are designed to show how particular cases inform about areas of concern (Creswell, 2012b), and as such, this design aligns with answering the research questions. The in-depth analysis afforded by a holistic single-case design study (Yin, 2018) allows a deep exploration of the traits that teachers possess who have been

identified as engaging in CSP practices in their classrooms. This exploration will affect the district studies and education as a whole because after these traits are identified and the way teachers developed them are determined, a replication of the process to spread CSP to many other teachers can commence and thereby impact student academic performance. Case studies are appropriate in educational research, seeking to discover a deep explanation of a condition in educational society, in this case, CSP.

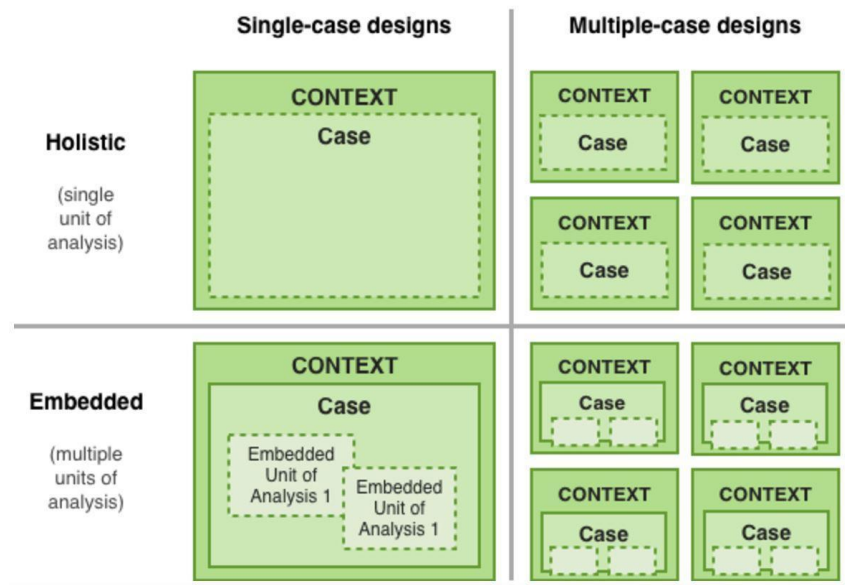


Figure1. Yin's (2018) Typology of Case Study Designs

Case study research has several characteristics that make it unique to other types of qualitative research. This instrumental case study focuses on one issue, CSP, with a specific bounded case to illustrate the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012b). The detailed analysis of a few teachers who possess CSP traits, no more than four to six participants (Creswell, 2012b), allowed the researcher to spend more time with each participant's data. This typical structure of case studies, detailed data collection of several sources seeking to deeply explore a particular case (Creswell, 2012b; Yin, 2014), makes this type of study best suited to the deep level of analysis and understanding warranted to answer

the research questions adequately and with enough detail to benefit the field of education. Creswell's (2012b) configuration of case study research includes this detailed analysis of the case by studying the activity of more than one participant with multiple data sources, which are then coded into developing relevant themes. Interviews were the sole data source, and after all interviews were completed and the transcripts were analyzed, no instances of CSP understanding were found in teachers, and including lesson plans would not reasonably add to any CSP data points.

Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Case Studies

While case study research is a distinctive mode of social science inquiry, there has been some conflation of case studies with *fieldwork* (Yin, 2018). A strength of case studies is that they seek to gain an understanding of complex social phenomena and enable the researcher to retain a holistic and real-world perspective. There are many academic disciplines and practicing professions that do not subscribe to the idea that case study work is only a preliminary mode used in other research methodologies (Yin, 2018). Some in the field of research have expressed concerns regarding the level of rigor due to evidence of poor quality case study research that exists in the research literature (Creswell, 2014). These concerns place the responsibility on the researcher to make sure that appropriate steps are taken to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Several limitations existed with this study. First, since classroom observations did not occur, the participants may have overstated levels of actual CSP proficiency. Second, since the researcher is also a district employee, the participants may not have been fully transparent with their experiences or may have purposely misrepresented their CSP levels

to gain researcher favor. Additionally, since qualitative research case studies analyze a small group of participants, the limited number of participants may leave out many who could add rich data to the study. Because the research questions aimed to determine the traits of CSP teachers and how they use them to benefit students in class, using snowball sampling may not find more CSP teachers if the original ones are found to exhibit few CSP traits in their classrooms. Additionally, the school chosen for this study is relatively small with few White teachers identified by their principal as those who work well with Black students. In fact, all of the identified teachers participated in interviews, which exhausted the participant pool.

Context of Study

The setting for this study was a large, urban school district in the southeastern United States, using one high school that has historically been labeled as persistently low achieving (PLA). This case study took place in a specific location over a defined period of time, which fits with the definition of case study research (Creswell, 2012b; Yin, 2014). This district and school were chosen for several reasons.

First, the school has a diverse student population, a mainly White teacher population, and has struggled to achieve academic gains in the recent past. The teachers were chosen by purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012b; Yin, 2014). Each teacher was interviewed once. The period for data collection was July to September 2019 for three of the participants' interviews and, a few months later in January 2020, for the final teacher interview. The reason for this is that the school year for the majority of the interviews either had not started yet or was just beginning, which allowed teachers to have the time to reflect on their previous experiences with teaching without being fully engrossed in the

school year. The fourth interview took place in January, immediately after winter break, which again allowed the teacher to distance himself from his classroom. In addition, this time period occurred before the main testing season so teachers had more time to participate in the study before the push for test preparation commenced. The four interviews took place in this designated time frame (Creswell, 2012b; Yin, 2014).

Second, this school and district were chosen because of their unique characteristics that could allow the findings to be useful to other districts in the nation. It is large, has a diverse student population that does not mirror its teacher demographics, and has a high number of free/reduced lunch students. Washington County Public Schools¹ (WCPS) is a large urban school district located in the southeastern United States of America and offers a unique context to study teacher CRP/CSP practices with their diverse students. The district has a current enrollment of more than 98,000 students at 72 schools (Redacted, 2020). Its 22 high schools are spread throughout the county. WCPS offers an advanced academic program at all high schools, which is the gifted and talented program academic track; however, advanced programs were not always available to students. High schools were limited in their ability to offer advanced classes, so if a student's nearest high school did not have the program, the student had to decide to attend regardless or transfer to a school where there were accelerated courses. Many students chose the latter option, which caused an inequity of enrollment in gifted students throughout the district's high schools. This inequity may have caused the increasing gap in test scores between schools where advanced program courses were offered and those where they were not. After the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, and the

¹ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the district.

reauthorization and renaming in 2015 to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools and school districts were under increasing pressure to improve test scores to achieve annual yearly progress (AYP), as determined by the legislation.

In addition to the advanced program offerings affecting student assignment to schools, WCPS actively encouraged racially integrated schools. A previous policy of racial integration mandated no less than 15% of Black students at every school and could have no more than 50% of their students in this demographic. This policy was in place until the 2009 Supreme Court ruling in *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*. The Supreme Court ruled race could not be the sole factor in student assignment (*Meredith v. JCPS*, 2009). Thus, WCPS adopted a modified student assignment plan where race, along with parent educational achievement and family income level, would determine assignment.

After this ruling, WCPS allowed all high schools to have advanced programs to attract gifted students in their residential boundaries. Additional modifications were created over subsequent school years, including adding magnet and vocational programs to attract students to more high schools. Even with these measures in place, many schools continued to produce much lower test scores than other schools throughout the district. The testing pattern mirrored the old advanced program maps, where schools with longer-established advanced programs outscored schools with newly developed advanced programs. Because the high school is one of the more recent ones to have an advanced academic program, it offers a unique opportunity to study the effects of CRP/CSP with the White teachers and their mostly non-White students.

A large urban school district in the southeastern United States, WCPS has a history of low student performance and is labeled as a district in need of improvement. WCPS ranked in the 56th percentile of schools in the state for the 2013-2014 school year and improved slightly to the 57th percentile the following year. The district's student population is 36% Black, 42% White, 12% Hispanic, and 8% Asian. Approximately 49% of the students are male and 63% of all students qualify for free or reduced lunch. However, as mentioned previously, teachers do not mirror the students. In fact, 84% of the teachers in the school district self-identify as White, 13% as Black, 1.8% as Hispanic, and 1.3% as Other. Female teachers are at the majority, 74%, (Redacted 2019). The district does not have any formalized universal mentoring programs outside of the previous state-required certification process, nor does it offer CSP training for teachers. The high school studied, Wallace High School, has demographics with higher percentages of students of color than that of the district. Approximately 38% of students at Wallace High School identify as White, 57% as Black, 3% Hispanic, and 2% as Other. The teachers, however, are vastly different from the students, as 76% identify as White, 20% as Black, and less than 1% as Hispanic. This school was chosen for the current study because it has a high non-White student population, a high White teacher population, and it continues to perform below expectations academically.

Nationally, more than 52% of public school students are non-White, whereas the majority of people becoming teachers are middle-class, White females (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). The school of study mirrors this with slightly higher percentages of White students, but students of color are still the majority. According to Howard (2003), "The racial and cultural incongruence between teachers and students

merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners” (pp. 2-3). As teachers often do not have the same ethnic or economic background as their students, considerable work must take place to ensure teachers can reach their diverse student populations, not only for school accountability but also for student academic success. This qualitative study aimed to determine the characteristics teachers identified as practitioners of CSP possess and how they learned these behaviors. Such an understanding of CSP practices and how they came to be will benefit students across the nation by giving districts and schools a blueprint to spread the practice of CSP among other teachers who may not possess these skills yet.

Data Sources

The current study explores several data sources, including survey results, state audit documents, and the school improvement plans of Wallace High School. In order to have multiple forms of data to strengthen the study (Creswell, 2014), several types of document analysis were performed. The analysis of documents is an important component of qualitative case studies (Creswell, 2012a, 2014), and there are numerous reasons to utilize them. Documents enable the researcher to analyze language in-depth; they can be studied at times convenient to the researcher; and documents do not need transcription. However, documents also have some deficiencies, as they may not be well written and thus difficult to analyze; they may be protected and therefore unavailable; and they could be incomplete (Creswell, 2014). As with all data collection in qualitative research, any needed participant permission was obtained and data were recorded directly from the documents (Creswell, 2012a). The three types of documents studied were three

years of Comprehensive School Surveys (CSS), two state audit reports, and two years of the school’s improvement plans. The following table shows which tables in the current study address the research questions.

Table 1

Data Sources Tables

Research Question	Table Addressing
What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify to support student learning?	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify as the most useful in building relationships with diverse students?	2, 3, 4, 6, 7
Do school stakeholders believe there is a need for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in classrooms?	2, 3, 4, 5

The current study drew upon data collected from teacher interviews. Interviews are an integral part of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Yin, 2014). As such, they constituted the majority of data collection for this study. Interviews provide useful information as they are convenient, allow historical information to surface, and the questioning can evolve to uncover as much relevant data as possible (Creswell, 2014). However, interviews are not perfect; they do not occur in the natural setting of the researched phenomenon, the participant may give biased

responses due to wanting to please the researcher or not wanting to portray themselves negatively, and the interviewee may not have strong communication skills (Creswell, 2014). These one-on-one, semi-structured interviews allowed data to be discovered that may have been lost by other methods.

Researcher responsibility for interviews is important to glean accurate representations of participants' experiences. According to Glesne (2011), interviews should take place at locations convenient to the interviewee to maximize their comfort level. They should take place in quiet, appropriate sites, and should be recorded and transcribed with fidelity to preserve their intended content. For the current study, only brief notes were taken during the actual interviews (Creswell, 2012a), which did not add to the data sources, to best focus on any necessary follow-up questions that arose during interviewee's answers. Additionally, the protocol began with easy-to-answer questions to develop trust between the researcher and participants (Glesne, 2011). After the approximately 45-minute time frame, participants were asked about their willingness to take part in a follow-up interview if further information was needed. Each interview was transcribed, word for word (Creswell, 2012a), within three days of the interview. These interviews were then coded with emerged themes both common to all interviews and for those that were unique to one or more responses.

Data Collection

The current qualitative case study featured an analysis of several teachers in Washington County Public School District. As a characteristic of qualitative research, this study used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012a, 2012b; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Yin, 2014) where participants were chosen using specific criteria. Initial

identification of teachers for this study came from the studied high school's principal, who is familiar with CSP and the teachers who practice it. This primary identifier acted as the gatekeeper for this study. The gatekeeper is not only the first contact for pinpointing potential research subjects, but it can be a limitation for the study, as well, if the participants are reluctant or unwilling (Creswell, 2012a, 2012b).

Teachers were introduced to the basic research goals of the study, and if they were interested in participating, they were presented with consent forms. Semi-structured interviews were designed to take place in person at a convenient location for the teacher, however, due to the time constraints of the participants and their physical locations, all interviews took place over the phone and were recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, the chance for needed follow up interviews was also discussed. All data analysis took place in private locations to protect the privacy of the involved participants.

Data were collected through the semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Yin, 2014). By interviewing teachers identified as CSP "experts," a beginning view of the CSP practices of these teachers developed. After determining the common traits of these teachers, further data analysis from interview transcripts took place to see if it could be ascertained as to how they came to possess these traits, and how they believe these traits help them form relationships with their diverse students. All data sources were coded and the codes were grouped by similarity into themes. Additionally, participants in this study were protected by pseudonyms. Identified by Creswell (2012a) as an appropriate qualitative data collection technique, interviews were used to answer the research questions. The interview protocol consisted of 12 questions, and interviews were considerate of the teachers' time, allotting 45

minutes for each session. With permission from the participants, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed (Creswell, 2012a).

After reaching out to the identified teachers through district email in early summer and conducting a preliminary interview, snowball sampling could have ensued if more participants were needed, however, this was not implemented due to the small sample size available for teacher interviews at this school (Creswell, 2012a; Glesne, 2011). The originally identified teachers probably would have participated in several district-offered professional development opportunities on CSP/CRP practices or were active in the school with the principal, who then could recognize their CSP pedagogy. Although these teachers would have been an excellent source for this study, others who may not have experienced as much formal training with CRP/CSP could have added to the richness of the data collected on how they became culturally sustaining educators. During data analysis, it was determined that none of the teachers interviewed were familiar with CSP, so adding teachers to the study who had not received formal training or exposure to CSP was not warranted.

Data Collection Procedures

The school principal identified teachers who were familiar with CSP practices. Each participant, once identified, was approached by the researcher, and asked to participate voluntarily in the study via district email. Using email is the easiest way to contact teachers, as calling teachers at their school location should be avoided to minimize classroom interruptions. A drawback with using email, however, is that teachers receive an enormous amount daily, and thus the email may be overlooked or ignored. To mitigate this potential outcome, the researcher followed up within two days if

there was no response to the original email. This was only needed for one participant. If it were warranted, snowball sampling could have increased the numbers to the four to six participants recommended for case study research as more potential participants could have been identified from the original designated by the principal (Creswell, 2012a). Ultimately, four teachers participated in the study from the original outreach, so snowball sampling was not needed. This school is small and every teacher the principal identified participated in interviews. Using snowball sampling also could have allowed me to interview many more participants if they existed at this school to gain a richer understanding of whether CSP did or did not exist in classrooms and to conduct any follow-up interviews needed once themes developed from initial coding. The original coding showed none of the interviewed teachers were familiar with CSP, and as they were the ones identified by their principal as the most likely to be familiar with it, there was no reasonable expectation that increasing the interview pool would yield different results.

Before interviews commenced, teachers received an informed consent form, which outlined the scope of the study and any potential harm to participants. All personally identifiable information was replaced by pseudonyms, and care was taken to secure all interviews, transcripts, and consent forms in a locked location away from the researcher's place of work.

After the primary identification of potential participants and all consent documentation was signed, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Snowball sampling did not occur, as the data showed teachers were not familiar with CSP and further interviews had no reasonable expectation of different findings. Interviews were

transcribed within three days and coding commenced after the final interview was transcribed. Having the interviews in recent memory, it was important for the researcher to conduct coding as close to the interview as possible. Similar themes developed across interviews, none of which supported teacher familiarity with CSP. Therefore, conducting additional interviews would not have yielded different results.

Five teachers were initially approached as possible participants, with four finishing the study. All final teacher participants were White, as this related directly to the research trajectory of CSP and the cultural disconnect between teacher and student. One of the teachers the principal initially identified was Black, so their information was not included in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research sees study participants as critical partners in the process of the research. The researcher constructed correspondence explaining the purpose and scope of the study for potential informants (See Appendices A and B). Prior to collecting data from the informants, consent forms were distributed.

Data Analysis

Dedoose, an online cross-platform tool for analyzing qualitative data, was used to code data and determine themes. After the codes were determined from all areas of data collection, they were grouped by similarity to develop emergent themes (Creswell, 2012a; Glesne, 2011). As themes developed, it was determined that additional interviews were not warranted, as teachers were not familiar with CSP, and asking more questions on the subject would not have led to more data points on CSP. The interviews, as well as the data analysis, took place over a period of six months.

Analyzing all data sources through Whiteness Theory (Owen, 2007) kept the focus on the experiences of non-White students in a society where their experience is not considered the norm and where White experience is valued, and Critical Race Theory (CRT), which asserts that racism is so prevalent in society it is almost invisible coupled with White experience being the norm (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). These theories also allowed the data analysis to acknowledge the marginalization of non-White society in the United States. The themes that emerged included an emphasis on teacher-student relationships, mutual respect, highly rigorous academic expectations, acknowledging the reality of student experience and societal racism, and teachers reflecting on their biases and practice.

Process for Exploring Researcher Positionality

Milner (2007) provided a useful and oft-cited methodological framework by which a researcher may examine positionality. The framework consisted of four components: a) researching the self; b) researching the self in relation to others; c) engaging in reflection; and d) shifting from self to system (Milner, 2007). Researching the self requires researchers to examine their own racial and cultural experiences and perspectives critically; and researching the self in relation to others demands that researchers explore their own racial and cultural experiences and perspectives with those of others—specifically, those who serve as the informants and context for their research. Reflection requires the researcher to think critically about how the diversity of life experiences may inform how various actors interpret a variety of situations. Finally, shifting from self to system demands that researcher examine their personal perspectives within the larger societal contexts. In so doing, the research seeks to avoid pitfalls that

may affect the findings of a study adversely and how these findings may shape the actions of teachers and administrators within the building or the district as a whole.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research methods used to answer the aforementioned research questions. A discussion of the research methods/design, context of the study, procedures, data collection and analysis, and the positionality of the researcher served to frame the facilitation of the study. Whiteness Theory coupled with Critical Race Theory served as the theoretical frameworks grounding this research as was identified in Chapter II. Chapter IV provides an in-depth analysis of the results and the implementation of research methods and design outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the practices of in-service teachers who were identified by their principal as those who successfully incorporate Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) in their classrooms and to analyze how they used these strategies to support student learning. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify to support student learning?
2. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify as the most useful in building relationships with diverse students?
3. Do school stakeholders believe there is a need for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in classrooms?

This chapter represents the analysis of the qualitative data collected from school surveys, state school audit reports, school improvement plans, and interviews with four teachers selected for their CSP skills, as identified by their principal. Data collection from interviews began in January 2019 of the 2018–2019 school year and concluded in September 2019 of the 2019-2020 school year. The four participants came from one school in the same urban district. This chapter explores researcher positionality in a structured process, drawing upon Milner’s (2007) framework by which researchers

should examine positionality. Milner's (2007) framework consisted of four components: a) researching the self; b) researching the self in relation to others; c) engaging in reflection; and d) shifting from self to system. Each of these components were addressed in this study.

A profile was provided for each of the four teachers interviewed for this study, discussing their gender, age, and cultural identities, educational backgrounds, and teaching assignments at the time of data collection (while maintaining anonymity) to get a sense of who these teachers were. Analysis was then structured around two of the research questions, drawing on representative quotes from the data collected from interviews with the teachers, all while keeping the tenets of Whiteness Theory at the forefront of data analysis and coding.

After the completion of coding individual interviews with teachers, a cross-case analysis of the multiple teacher perspectives was conducted to identify common codes and themes that emerged from the analysis. Cross-case analysis is a crucial part of data interpretation, as it represents the culmination of the research and the point at which the qualitative researcher begins to form a cohesive narrative from the data to "build abstractions across cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). Chapter IV ends with a summary of findings.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to recognize the researcher's position as an educator in the district where the study takes place. As an educator working with students who are considered low achieving in the current system with a climate of high-stakes accountability, the researcher is concerned about educational equity for all students, particularly those in

low-performing schools based on the state's accountability index where the opportunity gap appears to be widening. The motivation for conducting this research was to support teachers and educational leaders who have a powerful impact on student learning and achievement. As an educator who is deeply concerned about equity for all students, the researcher may possess biases towards teachers who self-report this same focus, but for whom there seems to be no actual evidence. Also, as a White, middle-class female, the researcher epitomizes the social and racial disconnect described between teachers and their students in urban environments (Murtadha-Watts, 1998). When researching groups historically marginalized, the acknowledgment of the power structure of the dominant culture must occur and the researcher's inclusion as a member of this power class must be identified. Utilizing Whiteness Theory as the theoretical lens was designed to mitigate the researcher's privilege as a White female and focus the data through the experience of historically marginalized groups while acknowledging the existence of racism in society and education.

According to Milner (2007), three steps should commence to mitigate the impact of researcher positionality. The first is researching the self. Milner (2007) listed several questions research must evaluate, including the racial and cultural heritage of the researcher, experiences the researcher has had with other races, and how these experiences shape the researcher's perceptions. Using Whiteness Theory in the current research, implicit biases were evaluated, and the researcher actively attempted to lessen their blurring of her analysis. Next, Milner (2007) suggested that researchers should research themselves in position to others. This allows the researcher to take in the experiences and history of those being studied. All of the participants in the current study

were White teachers working with mainly Black students, so the researcher was able to use her lens of a White educator through Whiteness Theory to frame participant responses when determining themes. Lastly, Milner (2007) suggested moving from self to the overall system. Whiteness Theory works well with this change as it filters society and the expectations of normalcy through the lens of White identity. The current research was designed to discover how the system can move from individual actions to inclusive systems.

Survey Data Analysis

The current research begins by providing descriptive analyses of survey data collected by the Comprehensive School Survey (CSS) of 2018. Students, faculty, and guardians are surveyed annually at every school in WCPS and the results are made public. Several questions are asked and categorized, with the categories relevant to this study, including a caring environment, school belonging, and overall sense of satisfaction with both the school and district. The reported responses are the percentage of respondents who agree with the question. Overall, in the 2018 responses, all stakeholder groups stated the school had a caring environment, however levels of satisfaction varied, with faculty and guardians reporting higher levels than students. Having a caring environment is an integral part of a culturally responsive classroom (Howard, 2003). Students also reported a lower level of school belonging than both faculty and parents. Typically, Black students report lower levels of belongingness at school than White students (Bottiani et al., 2014), and this is an additional way to improve the cultural responsiveness in classrooms. Lastly, students stated the lowest levels of satisfaction of both the school and district. Having a culturally competent classroom can increase

student satisfaction with their school (Paris, 2012). The following table shows the 2018 CCS results.

Table 2

2018 CCS Results

Construct	Question	Student Response % Agree/Disagree	Faculty Response % Agree/Disagree	Guardian Response % Agree/Disagree
Caring Environment	I believe I can talk with my counselor.	76/24	89/11	74/26
Caring Environment	My school provides a caring and supportive environment for students.	57/43	70/30	74/26
Caring Environment	I feel my teachers really care about me.	70/30	85/15	85/15
School Belonging	I feel like I am part of my school community.	55/45	80/20	70/30
School Belonging	I really like other students in my school.	53/47	91/9	67/33
Overall Satisfaction	I am very satisfied with my district	48/52	75/25	54/46

Overall Satisfaction	I am very satisfied with my school	45/55	69/31	56/44
Overall Satisfaction	I would rather go to this school than any other school	35/65	58/42	77/33

The CSS 2019 results were explored next. The trends were similar to 2018, where faculty and guardians reported a higher level of a caring environment, school belonging, and overall satisfaction than students. Data were slightly improved for students in 2019, however overall satisfaction with the school remained very low, at 39%. The following table shows the results of the 2019 CCS.

Table 3

2019 CCS Results

Construct	Question	Student Response % Agree/Disagree	Faculty Response % Agree/Disagree	Guardian Response % Agree/Disagree
Caring Environment	I believe I can talk with my counselor.	75/25	96/4	89/11
Caring Environment	My school provides a caring and supportive environment for students.	59/41	94/6	89/11
Caring Environment	I feel my teachers really care about me.	76/24	98/2	89/11

School Belonging	I feel like I am part of my school community.	54/46	90/10	73/23
School Belonging	I really like other students in my school.	55/45	100/0	79/21
Overall Satisfaction	I am very satisfied with my district	56/44	85/15	70/30
Overall Satisfaction	I am very satisfied with my school	52/48	92/8	78/22
Overall Satisfaction	I would rather go to this school than any other school	39/61	69/31	77/33

The latest set of CCS results was for 2020. Again, the trends were the same for 2018 to 2019. Students reported lower scores than both faculty and guardians, with the largest disparity being with overall school satisfaction with students having a 53% satisfaction level, faculty a 91% level, and guardians a 70% level. The following table shows the results of the 2020 CCS.

Table 4

2020 CCS Results

Construct	Question	Student Response % Agree/Disagree	Faculty Response % Agree/Disagree	Guardian Response % Agree/Disagree
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Caring	I believe I can	84/16	98/2	91/9
Environment	talk with my counselor.			
Caring	My school	68/32	98/2	83/17
Environment	provides a caring and supportive environment for students.			
Caring	I feel my teachers	80/20	100/0	85/15
Environment	really care about me.			
School	I feel like I am	64/36	87/13	77/23
Belonging	part of my school community.			
School	I really like other	51/49	98/2	80/20
Belonging	students in my school.			
Overall	I am very	57/43	81/19	73/27
Satisfaction	satisfied with my district			
Overall	I am very	53/47	91/9	70/30
Satisfaction	satisfied with my school			
Overall	I would rather go	37/63	65/35	80/20
Satisfaction	to this school than any other school			

Document Analysis

The state audit documents from 2016 and 2018 are the most recent documents available and fit within the timeframe of the current study. Since WHS is categorized as a low-performing school, the state conducts an audit periodically to assess leadership and pedagogical practices. The results are made public with recommendations for the next steps the school should take for improvement. Scores were measured on a four-point scale with seven categories. Besides the digital learning environment, WHS scored lowest in both years in terms of progress monitoring and feedback. The results of the audits are summarized in the following table.

Table 5

Audit Results, 2016 and 2018

Component	2016	2018	Change
Equitable Learning Environment	1.8	2.0	+ 0.2
High Expectations	1.9	1.6	- 0.3
Supportive Learning	2.0	2.0	Even
Active Learning	2.0	1.6	- 0.4
Progress Monitoring and Feedback	1.8	1.5	- 0.3
Well-Managed Learning	1.9	1.7	- 0.2
Digital Learning	1.4	1.2	- 0.2

These scores show WHS did not improve over the two years and was still in a low-performing category. As culturally responsive teaching can improve student achievement, and thereby improve school academic achievement (Johnson, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012), it was assumed there would be reference to increasing its use in the school's improvement plan.

The final documents that were analyzed were two years of school improvement plans, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. The improvement plans changed very little from one year to the next. The most commonly cited strategy for improvement was Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentioned more than 10 times in each plan. Next MAP data were cited as important with more than 10 instances mentioned each year. High yield instructional strategies and professional development (PD) were cited briefly in each plan; however, no specific strategies or PD were cited. Nowhere in either document was CRP or CSP mentioned. In fact, the word *culture* appears only once in the school narrative in the 2020 document only in terms of *school culture*.

Informant Profiles

The following table summarizes the characteristics of the participants.

Table 6

Study Informants

Name	Gender	Subjects taught	Years' experience
AB	Male	Social studies	10
CD	Male	Science	15
EF	Male	Math	20
GH	Female	Digital Media Arts	3.5

AB is a White male social studies teacher who has spent his entire career working in under-performing schools. He is a native of the region, but did not graduate from the school district researched in the current study. He stated it is his career and personal goal to educate students of lower socioeconomic means to give them a better chance at a future.

CD is a White male science teacher. Before teaching in the researched district, he taught at an all-girls, predominately White Catholic school in the same city. He also had a class of all male students who were not experiencing academic success at school and worked with them individually towards their educational goals. Most of these students were Black. Although he lives in a neighboring state, he is satisfied with his workplace and has indicated he has no desire to leave.

EF is a White male math teacher. He previously taught middle school math and business classes in a different county whose population is overwhelmingly White. He currently commutes over an hour to teach at this school. He has no children of his own and considers his students “his kids.”

GH is a White female art and digital media arts teacher. Previously, she taught at a middle and elementary school in the researched district. She spends a large amount of her time forging relationships with families to create support systems for her students.

CSP Practices Used to Support Student Learning

Research Question #1 of this study sought to identify what culturally sustaining pedagogical practices teachers identify to support student learning. Although none of the teachers interviewed were specifically familiar with CSP, they were well-versed in CRP and unknowingly stated tenets of CSP as part of their teaching practices. Specific quotations occur in the cross-case analysis with a summation of student learning and CSP here.

All of the teacher participants presented similar instructional practices consistent with the principles of CSP, including having high expectations for students, adapting their instruction to embrace the culture and experience of students to increase the

relevance of the subject, and empowering students to stay true to themselves in class so they are sustaining their cultural norms as students (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

CSP Practices Used to Build Relationships with Diverse Students

Research Question #2 of this study sought to identify the CSP practices teachers use in building relationships with diverse students. All of the teacher participants used CSP practices, unbeknownst to them, to develop and create relationships with their students and classes as a whole. They made sure students knew they cared about them personally, developed relationships with student and family, encouraged students to retain their cultural diversity and to respect and promote this diversity, and acknowledged and veered away from the embedded White, middle-class norms virulent in education (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Stakeholder Importance for CSP

Research Question #3 of this study sought to determine if school stakeholders, students, teachers, and guardians, indicated a need for CSP in classrooms of the studies school. Each role group indicated varying levels of agreement on the amount of CSP practices observed in the school, however, students had the lowest levels of agreement. State audit documents also indicated the importance of these practices, but there was no mention of them in either school improvement document studied.

Cross-Case Analysis

After transcribing, coding, and analyzing data from the four interviews, five themes emerged with teachers and their practice levels with CSP. These themes can be simply stated as a) relationships; b) respect; c) rigor; d) reality, and e) reflection. All of

the teacher participants gave responses that highlighted their viewpoints and behavior towards their Black students. The following table shows the emergent themes and codes of the current study.

Table 7Emergent Themes and Codes

Theme	Code	Teacher Participant			
		AB	CD	EF	GH
Relationships	Caring			7	
	Consistency		2		2
	Identity	2			3
	Individual attention	4	2	2	2
	Knowing students personally	3		5	5
	Relationships	2	6	9	4
	Safety			2	
	Trust	1	3	2	1
Respect	Defending students		3	2	
	Honesty	5	1	1	
	Learning culture	6	4	2	1
	Mutual respect	3	2	1	1
	Positive view of student	2		1	1
	Respect for students	4		3	
	Student ability	1	4	1	2
Rigor	High expectations	5	6	2	1
	Relevance of content	4	3	1	
Reality	Create success		9	3	2
	Social education	3	2		1
	Understanding student experience	2	6	5	5
Reflection	A-ha moment		1		1
	Chances		1	1	1
	Changing lessons		2		1
	Teacher reflection	8	1	1	1
	Teacher responsibilities	2	5	3	1

Note: Numbers represent the number of responses per code.

Relationships

Teacher-student relationships were cited by all interviewees as important to student academic and emotional achievement. According to Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson (1996), the most important part of a school environment for Black students is their relationships with their teachers. A crucial component of relationships is rapport with both teacher and student and teacher and family. When this rapport exists, student learning occurs (Fullan, 2000).

EF, a White male math teacher, indicated students “deserve somebody who really cares.” This caring for a student increases the level of positive rapport and thus enhances student learning. CD also cited rapport as an important part of his classroom:

Sometimes the simplest message, you know, works and so I think when you have a relationship with a student, and you know what their likes and their interests are, and then you start where are you going to be in 10 years, you know how are we going to get you there? How are we going to get you out of this little block that you're that you've lived in all your life? You know, there is a big world out there, and so to me, I think it goes back to kinda that relationship piece, kinda delving into what they want to do with the rest of their life.

This insight and development of rapport allow CD to show students he is working with them towards their future goals. These goals are not ones he has constructed for himself, but instead are their own and ones he respects and helps them achieve.

GH, a White female digital media arts teacher, cited working with both the student and parent as an integral part of creating positive rapport. She frequently contacts families to help her understand and work effectively with students:

I think speaking with him and speaking to his family too, like having conferences with his father and like kind of learning about his background a little bit more. And then instead of like being punitive, going through like restorative practices with him and conferencing has been a big thing.

Developing this rapport helps students retain their cultural identities in the classroom while moving forward with their academic journeys.

In the CSS, both teachers and students cited *caring* as a vital piece of an effective classroom. According to Howard (2003), students perceive teachers who were not as emotionally or passionately concerned with their learning as teachers who do not care about them. Two teachers interviewed in particular cited caring as one of their pedagogical musts. They both cited this when asked which specific pedagogical practices they used in classes that they believed helps them work well with students. EF stated, “They (students) have to be able to see that you care, uhm, and I think they see that.” Emphasizing his ability to not only care about his students personally, but also to convey this to them, is one piece of his culturally sustaining classroom. He also noted he saw the opposite in one of his colleagues: “I’m thinking about a teacher right now, but is just constantly harping on how bad they are, their attendance, and this and this and this and then this person wonders why the relationship is not there for the kids to at least try to perform for her.” The juxtaposition between his behavior towards students and the other teacher’s is one reason he believed students come to him for assistance in other classes, as well as his own. “I’ve got students who come from me come to me from other classes that they can’t get help in and they’ll come to me and say ‘I need you to sit down here and explain this to me.’ And I say, ‘Okay, I will.’” CD also placed caring as an important part of the relationship-building process with his students “So I think it’s it’s being upfront and honest, uhm, I think that really helps my relationship building with them, uhm and I think it’s showing them that you care, you want them to succeed.” He noted he

wants his students to know he cares about them, their learning, and their success. His path towards this is with honesty to students.

When teachers allow the time to create genuine relationships with their students and classrooms as a whole, a *family*-type atmosphere can develop. Such a classroom environment, where students feel like a family, is one students prefer (Howard, 2003). EF mentioned he brings this to heart and practice: “I just care for them. I’m not able to have kids myself, so all the kids I teach, I kinda taken and think of them as mine.” Students generally prefer this type of classroom where feeling like a family is a trait. When teachers take on the role of parent, it can be especially effective. EF noted:

[I let] them know they can open up to me and talk to me, and seek advice or seek help when needed. And you can actually when they when you allow that to happen, you actually see the students move forward because they know they actually have somebody that’s on their side that’s not fake, and I want to always keep it real.

This type of relationship-building is not easy and takes plenty of time. GH begins this process at the beginning of the school year:

I look at my classroom as a community so it’s kinda one of those things I established early on. We even started doing like a T-chart at the beginning, like navigating the space of how we are going to treat each other . . . like, how they want me as their teacher to treat them, how I want to be treated, how they should treat each other and then when conflicts arise, how we should treat each other, uhm so I think looking through a community lens kind of helps me to establish relationships in a different way.

GH brings the students together as a collective group to establish norms created together and not merely dictated by the teacher. Additionally, she typically invests a large amount of time outside of class time working on the family relationship with her students:

If I have an issue with a student, I’m definitely somebody who’s going to go out and conference with them and try to understand what else is going on even if I don’t agree with the student and there’s a consequence involved. I think articulating the *why* behind the system.

Spending this additional time outside of class with students who are struggling both illuminates the conflict and answers student concerns within the boundaries of the classroom community family with agreed-upon norms and consequences. This enables a sense of consistency for students, not only for ramifications of actions but also for the teacher being there as an educational and emotional leader for students. One teacher, AB, a White male social studies teacher, admitted this was not a strength of his, although he still creates positive relationships with students. “I only gained really deep relationships with students who pursue it with me I don’t I don’t pursue it with students because, quite honestly, I don’t really know how to do it because of kinda the way my brain has always worked.” Even though he may not initiate a close relationship, the relationship can still develop deeply. Research has shown that students often perceive effective teachers as the ones they would most like to have (LaBonty & Danielson, 1988), which can jump-start the relationship before a student is in a particular class.

Classrooms where students feel included and valued are ones where their culture is honored and respected. The level of culturally connected caring created between teacher and student displays the caring that occurs within a cultural context with which the students are familiar (Howard, 2003). Teachers’ understanding and embracing the underlying culture of each student fosters positive relationships. EF pointed this out when thinking about a student’s manner of speech,

You have to find what they’re great at. Uhm sometimes even if it’s just how great they are at giving you a cussing every day. I mean you know they that’s just their way of talking to you. I mean I’m thinking of one right now that if he didn’t give me a cussing every day, I knew something was wrong.

This idea of overlooking more colorful language a student may utilize while recognizing it as part of their culture came up several times in EF's interviews.

I mean, he's very smart when he wants to apply himself. But if he doesn't like you, you might as well look out, because you're going to get a cussing in a bad way. This is the kid that gave me a cussing every day, but it was just the way he was." I mean he would stay with me all day if because he knew I was there for him. This teacher accepted the student's language was a part of him and his culture, and instead of deeming it a negative behavior that needed to be corrected, he took it as one piece of this student's identity and accepted it as a part of him.

In addition to language, food emerged as an important part of student culture.

Two teachers in particular cited food as both an integral part of student culture and a bridge between teacher and student. CD, a White male science teacher, understands food is important to students and a way for teachers to understand them:

The best way to get to know a kid is, "What do you like to eat? Why do you know where does it come from? Who makes it? What's granny put in it?" You know, because everybody has a favorite recipe, you know so just getting to know their culture and background, uhm you know it really will open up their academic world because then they know you care. And once they know you care, they will work really, really, really hard for you.

Such a realization of teachers' recognition of their food, culture, and student identity as meaningful/essential to relationships allows teachers to convey to students they see and understand them, and they care about them as people. CD realized that this translates into *trust* between teacher and student and increases student academic performance. This focus on food even creates opportunities for consistent, positive interactions between teacher and student. CD continued,

So, but every day he comes in and gets a bowl, and gets a fork; he takes the bowl out, and in another classroom, he makes his noodles, he eats his noodles, he washes out the bowl, and he brings it back, and puts it in the same place. Third period. And you can set your watch to when this is going to happen.

CD believed the student knew the teacher would be there for him, and that he was satisfying a need of the student. Incorporating this important part of student culture into school environments sustains student identity. EF understands the importance of food to students, as well: “I got to where I would bring him food, uhm; that’s one way I won him over. Our kids are hungry. They were even wanting to fix their food and I had a microwave and said, ‘okay, fix it here, and eat it in my room while you’re here’ and that’s it.” This one-on-one time with students in a caring environment helping them meet their needs cultivates a positive relationship between student and teacher, acknowledging student culture and preserving it. EF also noted,

If a child feels like they can be themselves, they are going to feel safe. Uhm, and if they feel safe, then academics will come. But if you try to suppress who they are, uhm you might as well say that you aren’t going to get anything academically out of the child.

EF acknowledged the importance of student individuality and how respecting that can lead to better academic outcomes.

Black students report one negative experience in schools is a lack of a sense of belongingness. Black students report much lower levels of caring, equity, and engagement in schools than White students (Bottiani et al., 2014). This was also reflected in the multiple years of the WHS’s CSS student responses. Teachers who demonstrate CSP create classrooms and relationships where Black students have a caring environment with high standards for performance. EF exemplified this idea in several ways. For example, he noted that when students need corrections, “I’ll be there for them, even if

they are in the wrong. They know they are going to be corrected, but it's just you have to meet the kid where they are." This acknowledgment of expectations for students, coupled with structure, can cause higher levels of engagement in classrooms. Students receive caring messages from teachers in their attitudes towards them and expectations for performance. EF continues, "I tell them failure is not an option for me. And we are going to do whatever it takes to get them to pass." He said that his dedication to their success is communicated to students and that he does not make excuses for their struggles. Rather, he informs students of his dedication to work together for student success. He also mentioned that he realizes each student has characteristics teachers must find within themselves. It is not the sole responsibility of students to communicate to the teacher their strengths and wants. Teachers must take this step to show they genuinely care about their students. EF said, "There are some kids that are uh they're all great in their own way. You have to find what makes them good." This responsibility on the teacher allows the student to be themselves and to trust the teacher cares enough to find what they are good at, to find the positives in their personalities and cultures. EF noted that he values his relationships with his students and works to convey his caring for them: "Build the positive and let them know they can open up to me and talk to me and seek advice or seek help when needed." In creating positive relationships and effective communication with students, EF actively attempts to erase the low levels of caring Black students experience in schools (Bottiani et al., 2014). A specific example with one of EF's students illustrates this. He said, "If he liked you, you kinda had a chance, so it's constantly . . . trying to figure out you just build the relationship and after they see that you care . . . they will fall into place. It takes time, it doesn't happen overnight, so it sure

isn't going to be fixed overnight." This acknowledgment of the purposeful work in building positive and caring relationships with students as an important factor in his pedagogy is illustrative of a culturally sustaining classroom and teacher.

In a culturally sustaining classroom, goals for instruction and inclusion look different than in a more common classroom. The goals of teaching and learning are not to see how closely students of color measure up to White, middle-class norms, but instead to celebrate the cultural practices of Black students (Paris & Alim, 2014). When asked about the pedagogical practices he utilizes to preserve student identity, AB responded, "I don't require them to have as much of a filter on what they say as some other teachers might. Uhm, I don't get offended." He noted that he allows the individuality of the student to shine and not to be offended by language, which may not be considered the norm in a school. He went on to elaborate how he gets students to utilize their experiences and emotions to interact more fully with the content to create change: "I am fairly adept at getting a student uhm, who's angry at life, to channel that anger at not not anything like just like historical situations that that led to that, to get to see injustice just in his own life but in other people's lives." AB seemed to use student culture and experiences to understand the historical reasons behind their anger and to channel this for understanding. Using student experience and their own reality to connect with the content bypasses White normative standards and allows students to interact with the content by way of their reality. These types of interactions between teacher and student create levels of trust. CD mentioned that he also uses this trust to work with students and school rules, not to gain student blind compliance, but instead to reach an understanding and a place of

mutual trust. The student he feeds in his classroom has reached this level with CD outside of the classroom environment:

And, you know, for him, and I like in the hallways, if I ask him to take off his hood or take out his earbuds, he looks at me and says, “okay” and he does it. You know, so we’ve kinda had that meeting place of what is relevant to that. Uhm he needs to eat; I need him to learn; I need him to not act like a fool when he is around me in the hallway. You know, so it’s kinda that meeting point.

In this example, CD did not expect blind adherence to arbitrary rules, but instead created a relationship based on the student, his needs, and culture, in order to gain the trust between them to enforce school rules. In fact, CD noted that he responded to instances in class routinely where he knowingly did not follow school rules and where he told students he would take any blame that may arise from these decisions.

When teachers recognize student individuality and culture and bring this into their classrooms as student strengths, a more inclusive environment is created, which allows students to be themselves and not try to meld into White, middle-class norms. Not all teachers, however, embrace this idea. GH recognized this deficit in one of her colleagues:

Like even at a meeting the other day, I had a... colleague say, “Oh well, I don’t see color,” but the fact is that like the students see color when they see me as a White female, and if as a White male, so if you’re saying you don’t see the color in the identity of that student, you’re missing a part of their strength, but also their identity.

GH recognized the flaws of not acknowledging and embracing student identity as a relationship builder between teacher and student. Relationships between teacher and student must be built and then the strengths of the student must be at the core of their learning. This can be challenging for teachers, such as the one GH mentioned, because teachers must understand students whose background is usually much different than their own (Toppel, 2015). GH noted that she follows this premise in her classroom with her

students: “I think understanding him as a person instead of making assumptions, so uhm, going through strength-based practice and then also uhm through the lens of him being an individual, not making assumptions about him.” She said that she built a relationship with this student and then placed his strengths as the basis of her understanding of him. GH referred to strength-based relationships regarding another student, as well:

I think relationship building and then like praising or focusing in on the strengths and the adaptability to this program like I have him again this year and he has not been not missed I think he’s missed my class once, which is tremendous because, I mean, it was probably, I don’t know, there were weeks when it was over three times a week that I would hardly see him. So, when I saw him, I made sure to like focus on the positives and re-directing the behavior as a strength.

This deliberate focus on student strength allowed her to help this particular student to be more successful the second year she had him in class. The deepening of their relationship and her focus on student strengths shows her strength as a White teacher with a Black student. CD also noted that he uses individual student strength to move student academic success, citing a specific situation where he used the student’s strength of accountability and drive to help when he was in trouble at school:

[I told my student] that neither one of us can screw this up, if you get in-school suspension on those days and you know it’s there, ask ask the in-school suspension person to pick up the phone. I’ll either come get you or I’ll come in there and we’ll sit and we’ll get it done. Deal?” He was like, “Yeah, that’s a deal.” We shook hands on it and I said, “Now if we both screw this up, you’re going to suffer, so you have to be as proactive as I am to make this happen.”

He showed the student respect by placing himself as an equal with the student for accountability, yet placed the responsibility with the student, understanding this was a strength of his. This White teacher did not infantilize his Black student, but instead used his strengths to overcome a challenge for learning. CD continued, saying that he finds ways to develop student strengths outside of the classroom, as well:

I was kinda hanging out there and a young man walks over and he goes, “Hey, how do you do this chess?” And I look at him and I’m like, “Man, you have to teach me.” And he looks at me and he goes, “Are you kidding me? This is the one thing you don’t know.” I said, “I haven’t played chess in 25 years.” He goes, “Why is it you know everything else, but you don’t know this?” I said, “I don’t know. You go learn; you’re gonna teach me, and we are going to start playing soon.” You know, so I think when you admit not admit I think when you’re truthful with them about your limits, they will take that and they will become the expert on doing something.

CD recognized the ability of this student to learn a new skill and was vulnerable enough with his deficits to empower this young man to seek and become an expert at a new skill. Again, this White teacher placing the strengths of his Black students as the focus of their learning is a difficult skill for White teachers to develop, but it is found in culturally sustaining classrooms.

Having a well-developed, culturally inclusive classroom can be a challenge for White teachers to create with their Black students (Acquah & Commins, 2015). The basis for this culturally focused classroom is the mutual respect between teacher and student, with the relationships between the two as the foundation (Johnson, 2011). AB cited this as important when teaching his students about history: “I can’t stand up in front of a class and convince a student that I’m going to be the one that tells them the truth because they’re probably not listening to me but if I don’t have the relationship built already.” He knows these relationships between White teacher and mostly Black students is the most important part of academic success for his students. He noted that he devises deliberate practices to help him create and nurture relationships with his students: “I achieve relationships through one-on-one conversations I have with students. And so I have to design my lessons so that the students are doing a lot on their own so that I can walk around not only to help, but to engage students in conversations.” The act of developing

lessons so he can foster positive relationships with his students is an indicator of his classroom being culturally sustaining. EF also mentioned that he places value on the relationships he has as a White teacher with his mainly Black students. “I want to get to know who they are, uhm try to get to know their background and what their interests are, uhm how they learn, and then move forward from that.” He realizes the relationships must be there for learning to occur. He noted that he values his relationships with students and strives “to just always be there when they need me.” Additionally, GH took a deliberative path in recognizing her identity and how that influences the relationships she has with her students. She asserts that this self-awareness has helped her form positive relationships with her students:

When you dismiss the specific issues of racism, and the constructions of racism and the bias that our society has, and that even you have growing up, I think you can't really fully relate. And then also just like, being fully aware of like your identity and who you are, and how you might come across, and like become honest with the students about like, “Yeah I understand. I'm a White female who has this background. I'm not gonna hold that from you, but I'm also gonna share who I am to an extent.” So, I think I think it makes people uncomfortable. I think that's a big issue.

GH knows she must come to terms with her identity and bias and express these fully to students so their relationships can be made on trust and understanding. She cited a pivotal moment as a catalyst to this thinking:

I remember an exercise when I was in grad school that was just where I had to write a paper through where like my how I identify like going through that exercise was very powerful, uhm just seeing like breaking down like as a White female, what are my privileges, what are my disadvantages, and I think I was able to cause me to get more empathy maybe, uhm and I think starting, but I don't know, it's so hard.

This self-awakening of her Whiteness allowed her to acknowledge her identity is different than that of her students and to recognize her privilege. She based this on

creating honest and deep relationships with her mainly Black student with a White teacher. She integrated into her classroom the “emphasis on the individual, so it’s not like making an assumption based on the physical makeup of a person.” She mentioned that she sees the differences between herself and her students, but works tirelessly not to let these or any biases she has interfere in positive relationships with her students. This is, indeed, the foundation of a culturally sustaining classroom (Johnson, 2011).

The development of these positive and honest relationships with students can translate to better instruction. Teachers who demonstrate they care is key in CSP because teachers can use what they learn about students to change their instruction for increased student engagement (Toppel, 2015). EF noted that he models this practice in his math classes:

I have a firm belief if you can understand the basic concepts behind something, you can focus and move it to something higher, move it forward. If you’re just taught the higher-order and want to bring it in reverse, this student struggled in that area, but if he understood, you know, the basic concepts, he would take it and apply it. And uhm he if he knew you were there for him, you know relationship building.

EF noted that he realizes he must modify the traditional teaching structure to meet the needs of this individual student. Knowing this will strengthen their relationship by adapting his instruction models CSP principles. Moreover, GH started to develop her classroom as a community after she had more time with students and experienced the benefits of this practice:

Being at the school for multiple years and having enough students to have had me, uhm having that school community and having students I have the benefit of having the students for multiple years and so I think that all comes down to like a positive relationship. She has evolved her classroom over time after benefitting from having

students in class for several years. GH noted that she makes this community-building a foundation from the start:

Single most effective tool? Honestly, I think uh community building. I think if you don't have a relationship with the population I work with, and they all don't understand that you are going to work with them as individuals, it's very hard going where with they'll just shut down. And I think another thing is like consistency.

She cited community building as the most effective tool for student achievement and has changed her classroom focus to this so students can be comfortable and succeed. CD cited a less traditional approach towards modifying instruction based on individual student relationships:

You probably don't ever want to be in my classroom the first three days of the semester because it is utter chaos, and I'm okay with that. I uh chaos can be fun because it kinda you know you get students wait a minute here you know we're kinda working, but he's not saying anything. He's kinda letting us do our own thing. I want to see where they are socially and academically, so the first three days I'm I'm not the real pressure person, you know. And then, you know, once I kinda get a feel for where they are, then I can systematically kinda put them where I want them and then, you know, it's a lot it's a lot easier to do if that makes sense.

CD allows the students to be themselves entirely and uses his observations on their strengths to drive the instruction and structure for the remainder of the course. He also mentioned that has modified his instructional week to give students chances to increase their success or to move forward if they are already experiencing it:

Friday, they come in, they pick up their work for the week, we check notebooks, they have their grade sheets, they're looking at their zeros, uhm and I color code everything because that way I can get it to them more efficiently, they take their work, they go sit down, uhm if they're caught up, they get extra little projects. You know, we we've got a ton of plants in the room that need constant attention, so if you're caught up you know you're going to work with the plants. And for some reason, that is a huge privilege.

He creates easy opportunities for students to be successful by making access to the curriculum easy. Also, he has created experiences students crave to reward ones who are caught up. This solves many challenges, as students have the time and ease to learn what they have missed, and they also have incentives already created for them to stay caught up before Friday.

These various means of creating, developing, and maintaining positive relationships from White teachers to Black students were all cited with importance. The White teacher participants acted on varying levels of deliberation to create these relationships, and they all realized such relationships were critical for student success.

Respect

A second theme that emerged from teacher interviews was *respect*. This idea of respect manifested itself in several forms, from teachers respecting students, to mutual respect between teachers and students, to teachers defending students from perceived slights to teachers having positive views of their Black students. Respect is another characteristic of a culturally sustaining classroom. When respect is not present from a teacher to a student, the student is often harmed. Many Black students in urban schools are constantly told they do not measure up to standards, which they can then internalize and thus fulfill this prophecy (Esposito & Swain, 2009). Two of the teachers interviewed showed they hold their students to high standards and believe in their academic ability. For example, EF confronted a former colleague when the colleague spoke negatively about EF's choice to move from a rural, predominately White school to an urban one with a majority of Black students.

Other people you know when I told other people I was moving I was going to quit teaching in (a rural county) and went to (an urban high school) they were, "Well,

those are bad kids”; “Those are gang kids”; they are this, this, and this, and I was like, “You know what, don’t talk bad about them.”

Having this positive view of his students and defending them to his peers shows the respect EF has for his students as both learners and people. When teachers outwardly defend their students, especially with student knowledge, students hear their validation, and they do not hear that they are not meeting a societal definition of student standard.

Additionally, CD relayed an instance about one of his students where he took the blame himself for a situation so the student would not be in trouble. CD made sure the student knew he took the blame, but was protecting the student:

In fact, he came he came in today and said, “Listen, we aren’t allowed to call it this, but it’s Noodles Time.” I said, “Did you get in trouble?” He goes, “I kinda sorta didn’t get in trouble, but they always wonder where I am at this time and they always find me in here . . . so, did you get in trouble?” I said, “I didn’t get in trouble. I just told them I let you do it if they want to yell at somebody, they need to yell at me.”

This circumstance had a twofold impact on the student. CD acknowledged the cultural needs of the student, to be fed, and showed the student he would defend him to others when needed. This student experienced his teacher lifting him up instead of tearing him down. CD also showed his respect for students by recognizing the intelligence of his student that was often overlooked by other adults: “You’d never know how really truly bright he was, what a leader he was, but man he he was smart, he is smart.” This obvious admiration from teacher to student conveys the respect CD has for his students and conveys his belief that this student can be and is successful.

Several negative opinions of Black students exist in the educational system. Teachers who are culturally sustaining should have the skills to have fewer of these opinions. Unfortunately, one such opinion is that Black students are academically inferior

to White students because of biology or environment, parenting, and culture (Love, 2004). Even teachers who demonstrate many culturally sustaining traits may have some of these biases. EF said, “Now and they’re I think one of the things our school struggles with is they are not they don’t understand how to appreciate a safe environment because the ones we have some of them come from such negative and uhm environments. They just don’t understand how how they can function.” EF attempted to bridge the unsafe environments some students live in with reasons why they may have more challenges in school. This type of deficit thinking does not focus on student strengths, but instead places the blame for an outcome on exterior forces students cannot control or overcome. AB realized some of his colleagues share this type of thinking, but he noted that he can see past the student’s challenges and work to help the student to excel.

I’ve had several students who did not uh who did not uhm excel. Like, like other other teachers had lots of problems with them and thought like that the kid was too disrespectful to even be taught or but they didn’t want to be there and stuff like that where at and then and then for me he’s he’s one of my best students.

Being able to see students for their strengths and not blame their struggles on inevitable outside forces shows that AB used student experience and culture to create a successful learning experience for that student. The deficit thinking of Black students failing to perform up to the ability of White students (Love, 2004) as a fault of the Black student can be overcome with a teacher who is culturally sustaining. The respect CD has for his students and their intellectual ability is clear when he stated, “For the most part, they are extremely bright.” The majority of his students are Black, and he did not provide negative views on their intelligence and ability. AB mused on his previous teaching experience coupled with his current school and realized, “In general, the two schools that I taught at, uh students on the whole, uh they want to learn.” He moved past any thoughts of Black

student disinterest in school as an excuse for underperformance compared to White students. He realized not all his fellow teachers shared the same views, however:

I think it sounds like a no-brainer but uh like I I think that, I think that especially in the schools that I teach at, I think that a lot of people don't don't they either give up on them or they don't try in the first place. Or, like I'm not sure, but like I mean I have like every student I have always tells me that I'm the only one that teaches them anything.

He understands not all teachers have faith in their Black students, and that teachers can abandon their faith in their students both personally and academically, which in turn can cause these students to fulfill this prophecy (Esposito & Swain, 2009).

All of the teacher participants in this study worked against the common acceptance of White normalcy in society as a contributor to the structure and justification for the racialized social order in the United States (Owen, 2007). They respect their Black students and their individuality and culture to view them past societal norms of Whiteness. EF shared that his role as a teacher is to be an advocate for his students and their cultures: "We have to be an advocate for our students, and we have to know our students . . . sometimes they need us to go to bat for them; they need us to fight for them to keep their culture." He understands his role is to help his students achieve their individual and cultural potential, not to mold them into the view society deems as the norm. GH noted that her Black students bring traits outside of the typical norm for a student, but they are still positive and an area of strength for the student. For example, she spoke about a particularly boisterous student:

He's loud, which I think is a strength because it's hilarious. He's hilarious and like, he articulates it, but I think some people will be like, "Oh he's just like not compliant because he's being loud," when in actuality that's just him. But it's not like the traditional like he's not really a student that's going to sit and listen to your lectures all the time.

What some teachers view as a deficit, she views as a positive. She has moved her thinking and teaching along past accepting White normalcy as the norm and what is desired, which is what is observed in culturally sustaining classrooms. CD demonstrated his journey towards CSP and culture in his classroom when he discussed how he learns about and embraces the differences between White normative culture and that of his Black students:

I used to find it extremely disrespectful, you know, when you're talking to a student, if they didn't look you in the eye. Well, another teacher said, "Hey, you know, I didn't realize this isn't a sign of disrespect in some houses. You look Mom in the eye, she's going to hit you twice as hard." Oh, that's a big one, you know. Didn't realize that before. So, you know, sometimes what we take as disrespect is them actually being respectful. You know, so I think being aware of your situation

Teachers learning this reality of their students shows the cultural capacity of others may be transferred. Teachers can and should use each other as resources. This change from viewing his personal White normalcy as the truth for all people to one where he understands different cultures have different norms which need to be known and understood puts CD on the path towards being more fully culturally sustaining.

This change to CSP is one where pedagogies saw non-White culture as a place to draw strengths, honor, and investigate to get to societal norms (Paris, 2012). Such a change to include non-White norms to develop societal norms, and thus classroom and educational norms, create the respect for individuality and culture Black students have lacked for far too long. GH realized this in her classroom, however she noted that she still worries it does not translate to society at large:

They have so many good strengths like if they take that behavior out in a different lens or a different context like I don't know I worry about that so like if they can learn how to advocate for themselves so like being more aware of their strengths, to be able to articulate them, I think that would be a really good thing.

Allowing and cultivating the advocacy stance for students where they can embrace and display their culture both inside and outside the classroom is one of the goals of CSP (Gere et al., 2009).

CRP, which is the precursor to CSP, and thus encompasses its premises (Coppola et al., 2019), has several goals, including a) developing the cultural competence of both teachers and students; b) bringing cultural resources into classrooms; c) having high academic expectations for all students; and d) incorporating a social justice agenda in classrooms (Gere et al., 2009), where CSP has a greater emphasis on the social justice and advocacy components (Paris, 2012). Teachers must acknowledge and understand their biases in order to teach their non-White students effectively (Ferguson, 2003). GH noted that she sees this importance in herself and the lack of it in some of her peers:

I don't know if it's like an upbringing thing, or just honestly sometimes there's like a savior complex too, and some of my peers where they almost talk like they're on a different level. Not that I'm on the same level as my students, but like I do understand like I am bringing forward stereotypes to them, uhm so I think that any exercise where you could be open and willing to like have empathy through a different lens but then really being self-aware, uhm and being comfortable with that because it's uncomfortable to a lot of people.

GH understands the message teachers send to their students with their identity and biases and also knows not all White teachers are at the realization point. The difficult conversations and activities must occur to benefit Black students. EF reflected on these themes multiple times, as he knows the significance of exposure to different cultures to all students so they can understand and respect others: "We have to do as much as we can do to maybe teach other students in the classroom about other cultures, so they are exposed." This also translates to what teachers must do to grow. EF further noted, "We have to be open to know ourselves and our biases and world views and the world views

of different cultures and see how they interact.” The personal journey towards uncovering and understanding biases moves teachers further along the CSP continuum.

Respect for students is demonstrated in other ways, as well. Teachers who respect their students and their cultures enough to find a way to bring their culture into the classroom are practicing forms of CRP and CSP. Cultural responsiveness is not teaching particular content, instead, it is “teaching students in ways that respect, promote, and incorporate diverse ways of thinking, learning, and communicating” (Toppel, 2015 p. 559.) CD noted that he is interested in discovering the student and what they bring to the classroom and society: “What are kids good at? And once you kinda figure out where they’re good at, that’s your starting point.” Instead of determining for himself where students should be and developing his curriculum around his decisions, he finds the point where the students are, who they are, and works from there. Such an action as considering each student individually demonstrates that his classroom is culturally sustaining. EF mentioned that he discovers ways to bring diverse thinking into his math classes. These are opportunities that he sees in students’ everyday lives.

Every time you turn the news on, there is there’s a killing. There’s more ways and better ways to fight back than just constantly one side against the other and I think that’s going to come back to building relationships and respect you know. People are going to have to take and say, “Okay, this is what I see, and this is what I see, and now where can we work together to progress.”

EF noted that he sees the violence many students experience in their communities, understands it exists, and tries to forge changes in his class students can translate to their outside-of-school lives. He said that he also understands adults are often responsible for when a situation goes poorly in class. Instead of merely believing the teacher’s perspective and motives are the only ones that matter, he said he realizes that, “if you ask,

don't be upset if they tell you in their way what the deal is. Uhm, if you're going, I am a firm believer if you are man or woman enough to ask, be man or woman enough to take the answer that you get." Adults need to respect the way their interactions with students progress by understanding the student culture. Allowing these non-traditional interactions enables teachers to create opportunities for different ways to think and interact in class. When teachers appreciate and celebrate the differences in their students from their actions and background, they can see the greatness in the student through unfiltered eyes. EF discussed one student in particular:

He had so many strikes and is really like when you talk to him he's a leader and, uhm I don't know just very, very proficient in the material and keeps a sketchbook like you would never imagine that he's like so dedicated to his sketching just by looking at him on the outside or even how he behaves with his peer sometimes.

By encouraging differences in students and recognizing any of their own personal bias and privilege, teachers can develop a better understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness and strengths of their students. Having an effective CSP classroom means teachers must build off the tenets of CRP to embrace and communicate controversial topics to and with their students, such as racism and sexism (Gay, 2002), and empower students to take an activist stance against them in order to institute change (Paris, 2012). Teachers who are deliberate in this endeavor create a more culturally sustaining environment for students in class. EF noted that he works on respect for diversity immediately when school begins. "Number one is respect. I try to build respect for diversity from day one. Uhm, you know, respect yourself and respect others because if you can't respect others, you can't respect yourself either." The understanding that students must learn how to respect the different people and cultures in class to build a

respectful setting takes work, but EF believes it is essential. Also, identifying their racial and cultural identity that others may see as negative, but is actually a strength, encourages these central themes of racism to become embedded in the class culture and curriculum.

EF talked about one student regarding this topic:

I think part of it is because he's very strong-willed and opinionated. He's also very much willing to like I don't know like, he's confident enough within himself to kind of say say what he's feeling, like, what he believes in. And then I think I also honestly a lot of people will just see him as a Black male and I think there's a huge stigma against that, and a lot of assumptions.

Allowing students to have a safe space to express their racial and cultural identity in a non-judgmental manner makes the class as a whole one where non-traditional expressions of culture and identity are encouraged, which actively moves to sustain a student's culture against the White norms of most educational systems.

A common mantra given to teachers of students of color who are in a low-performing school is not to love them to death. While this sounds well-intentioned, it stresses to teachers they must hold students to high standards no matter how dire their circumstances, as this is the best way for them to experience academic success. In other words, teachers must approach their students in an empowering way and not view them as victims (Esposito & Swain, 2009). This can come in several ways. EF said he develops positive relationships with his students built on trust, where they know he is there for them academically and personally: "Build the positive and let them know they can open up to me, and talk to me, and seek advice or seek help when needed." His rationale for this is if students know he genuinely cares for them and their progress, they will be comfortable enough to seek assistance when they need it. He asserted he is not willing to make the curriculum easier for them, but instead wants them to work as a team towards

student learning. He said he strives to create strong individuals who have opportunities to be themselves in their education. When asked how important it was to allow students to act as individuals, he responded,

They're extremely important because if a child feels like they can be themselves they are going to feel safe. Uhm, and if they feel safe, then academics will come. But if you try to suppress who they are, uhm you might as well say that you aren't going to get anything academically out of the child.

EF said that he does not want to make learning easier for students but instead wants to bring out their individual traits and strengths to learn the content. On occasion, teachers may admit that they have not empowered their students as much as they later believe they should have. AB reflected on two of his Black students, who were going to college the next school year, and their desire for more challenging assignments:

They were asking to do essays they wanted to do essays they wanted and like you know all these kids; they've been told for better or worse that they can go to college and a lot of them want to go to college whether it's more for more social thing or sports or whatever, but they are just woefully unprepared to go to college, which is why they don't stay and so like you know I am I'm constantly saying, man, I got I say I'm holding them to a higher standard and they feel like I'm holding them to a higher standard than everybody else. But I'm not really holding them to a high enough standard—any of them—and and so I need to do better.

This realization and desire to do more for his students so they can achieve their desired success causes AB to reevaluate his teaching practices to benefit future students. CD noted that he incorporates empowerment in class with feedback and redirection. He does not shy away from giving what might be considered negative feedback, but he works to balance this with more positives so students are receptive to the redirection. Some teachers may avoid negative feedback to minimize the chance of a confrontation, but CD said he realizes these interactions are still important. He ensures they are not the dominant contact he has with his students, however:

You know you you you've got students that kinda attention is attention, and it doesn't matter to the student if it's negative or positive. But if I can give you positive attention, and know what you're good at, when it comes time for negative it's quick and it's easy and we can kinda you know move on. and you're gonna you know get those students will try to try a bit harder.

Such a balance keeps accountability in play, but allows the positive relationship to be the cornerstone of their contacts. CD also noted that he makes sure to express to students his desire that they succeed. "You know so I think it's it's being upfront and honest uhm I think that really helps my relationship building with them, uhm and I think it's showing them that you care, you want them to succeed. You're going to put them in a place of success." This desire for student success (without infantilizing them or their ability) places the teacher-student relationship in a position of respect and trust.

Perhaps the most important aspect of respect between teacher and student is the ability to work together as a team for student learning. When teachers and students work together as an equal team to increase academic achievement, students generally prosper. AB cited *honesty* with his students as a main success strategy for a culturally sustaining classroom. He said he strives to develop respect from his students for their benefit. "I mean it's like an employee/employer relationship. You're going to work harder for someone that you respect." He understands this respect students have for him is not for his ego, but instead to encourage students to work harder to learn. With this respect they have for him, he returns with his dedication. He noted that he approaches his interactions with them through honesty: "I think that, especially after time I have an easy time kind of gaining students' trust because of my honesty." He utilizes this trust and honesty for student advancement. "If a kid likes you, they're generally going to try harder and then they're going to excel. Cause that's them having that kind of motivation." Both parties,

teacher and student, work together from positions of trust and caring to further student achievement. Moreover, GH recognized the ability in one of her Black male students others may not have:

He came into my program, I teach a graphic design program; I teach some Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop Illustrator—and he came into the program a year late. I would say within, I don't know, a month or something, he like excelled at the program beyond the average person. I mean, *above* and beyond. Like was doing stuff that people in the program weren't even capable of. Uhm, and so he's so inquisitive and able to like be self-driven when he puts his mind to it.

Instead of deciding the student could not succeed because of coming to class behind, GH worked together with him, and he excelled. Even when teachers cite student academic ability as a driving force behind their ultimate success in class, the collaboration between teacher and student ultimately drives this forward. CD spoke about a student he received in class after the start of school, who was previously incarcerated, had little prior academic success, and ultimately made the honor roll at the end of the semester:

Yeah so you know I got him in September and and and you know we worked and worked and worked and worked, and when he was absent, it was, “Alright let's go,” and so it was really working with him accountability uhm to be in school because he's bright. The team-driven structure of these teachers with their students in class worked towards student success. The respect the teachers and students had for each other, the high standards they both held for the student, and working as equal players in the students' education allowed the student to flourish without giving up their true identities and cultures.

Rigor

The third theme that emerged from teacher interviews was rigor. *Rigor* is a term often cited in teacher preparation courses and continued professional development, but is

one that is mostly misunderstood even though it has great importance in a culturally sustaining classroom. Early research into CSP attempted to address new teaching techniques to move beyond the “deficit approaches” to teaching non-White students for many decades (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Using Black experience as a positive rather than a negative in teaching validates the culture of Black students, and taking into consideration the interests of students in the curriculum to increase student engagement with the content creates a more rigorous classroom. CD mentioned he uses student interest in his biology class to both encourage students to complete classwork and to further interest them in the content:

And for some reason, that is a huge privilege. You know to be the one that that takes the cellophane wrap off the plant and checks them and waters them and puts some more cellophane back on it and checks for holes and looks for condensation that’s a big to-do for them.

Students know to complete these tasks on Friday, they have to be caught up on their work and must have mastered the standards. This student motivation for extra responsibilities parallels course content and furthers both interest and comprehension but within a lens of student interest. CD also noted that he designs larger projects with student interest in mind. His work with Black male students who have had academic challenges in the past gives him time to learn about and work closely with them as individuals: “I got 11 males uh in a class and that none of them were on grade level.” Knowing their lack of prior academic successes in high school, he said that he used their interests to better engage with the content:

We gotta do some things outside, we uh we landscaped, we uh we made planters with some spray paint you know the vegetable cans they use in the cafeteria, we painted and sanded science tables and then added tile and grout. And uh you know when you when you work really that close to a group of males for a while, you kinda get a sense of where they are.

CD uses his knowledge of each student and creates opportunities for the successful processing of the content. This increased buy-in from students adds to a more rigorous learning experience. Critical Race Theory in education seeks to determine how the limits on students of color stem from societal norms, generally based on the White experience (Tate, 1997). CD's use of student experience and interest aligns with his grade level curriculum standards and helps bridge this gap between White norms and the Black student experience. He framed student success through his experience with these students:

Part of it is you know I don't think I think we get so caught up anymore in test scores, you know, uh how much did we learn that sometimes as adults we go, you know what, this school's test scores aren't very good. Well, I would challenge any adult to go back and take some of those same tests, to prepare for some of those same standardized tests, and see how well they did today.

The idea of standardized tests being racially biased against Black students is not new (Rosales & Walker, 2021), and CD understands this reality for his students. Creating lessons and projects allow student success aligns with both their interests and content standards and creates opportunities for student progression and greater connection with the course. Such an ability for teachers to use the students' cultural strengths to help them become better students by having high academic expectations is a factor in a culturally responsive classroom (Gay, 2002). It is also a staple in a culturally sustaining classroom by expanding the curriculum from White-dominated lessons to ones that celebrate the cultures of all students (Paris, 2012). This starts deliberately with forming the relationship with students and moving to higher rigor. CD noted,

When sometimes the simplest message you know works, and so I think when you have a relationship with a student and you know what their likes and their interests are, and then you start where are you going to be in 10 years, you know

how are we going to get you there? How are we going to get you out of this little block that you're that you've lived in all your life? You know there is a big world out there and so to me, I think it goes back to kinda that relationship piece kinda delving into what they want to do with the rest of their life.

CD said he channels what he knows about them, their interests and strengths, to higher-level instruction. "When you find their strength, you know they can do better than you you know they'll work extra hard to really show you up, on a project, and I love that. You know, show me up, please! Use your strength to do that." Providing coursework that enables a student to outperform their teacher shows students they can be successful in the content. GH also uses rigor in her classroom to improve student learning experiences. She said she works as a team with students with the difficult and unfamiliar to make sure they can succeed.

Then also understanding that it's a high-expectations community, so the stuff we are learning is challenging, and they will be frustrating, but knowing like that there is a high expectation they're committed to it as well so I think they understand that I expect a lot of them but I'm also going to be restarting each day with them.

GH's willingness to keep high standards for learning coupled with her willingness to work with students to move forward helps create an educational environment of high expectations, increased rigor, and one that is culturally sustaining.

One way teachers can undermine student achievement is by not acknowledging student potential. When teachers underestimate this potential, they tend to set goals that are too low for students, and are low rigor (Ferguson, 2003). The teacher participants in this study exhibit culturally sustaining characteristics and do not engage in this behavior towards students. When reflecting on the challenge level of work AB gave to his classes, he stated, "I asked them if it is too much and they all said, 'no, we should've been doing that the whole time.'" He thought about the rigor level in his class, raised it, and then

consulted with the students about whether it was too much for them. He then changed his expectations of his students, they agreed with his adaptation, and the students rose to the higher rigor level. Teachers who try to set challenging goals for their students must reflect and change rigor levels as needed. AB seemed to understand this. “And then on the other hand I’m like I thinking at the end of the day, I’m always like I could have pushed the students harder. I could’ve done better.” This push towards academic success moves Black students forward and can lead to an increase in student achievement. In his social studies classes, AB said he does this in different ways. He makes sure his class is academically challenging and helps students reach those new heights. He said, “I hold them to a higher standard and I I help them to see that they can reach that standard.”

When asked about his most successful pedagogical tool, he showed how he works with students to move toward the high level of rigor he establishes in class. He also said he helps them achieve great levels of success by creating an atmosphere for activism for students: “I think that activism and I think that in some ways like helping kids channel that is kinda what I was talking about like channeling that anger.” AB works with his students to take their anger towards societal norms and historical events and move it to an act of change. This embodies a culturally sustaining classroom. Such a belief in Black students to be both academically and socially successful utilizing student interest and strength with high rigor was summed up by CD: “And so what I kinda found is and this is really to me at the end of the day it was pretty simple. When you have high expectations for students, they will meet those expectations.”

Moving towards a culturally sustaining classroom is a daunting task and one that requires enormous amounts of planning. Starting at the foundational CRP level, even

though teachers may not be able to deviate from content, teachers can modify their practice to use CSP by changing lesson delivery, which increases student engagement (Toppel, 2015). Doing so would allow teachers to continue teaching their required standards, but present these standards in a culturally sustaining manner. Teachers would then move their classrooms from exhibiting traits of CRP to becoming more wholly a CSP classroom. Along with several previous examples of CD's practice, he noted that he brings students to the content through his observations of their interests. "Sometimes if they are playing music, I'm like, okay, where does that music come from? And you know we'll get into a discussion about music and we will tie it back to science." If a teacher can appropriately link modern music to biology, this integration moves his class and pedagogy further along the CSP journey. AB cited several examples from his teaching where he leverages culturally relevant content with his students.

There's no way to make you know a lesson on the Red Riots in France you know specifically relevant to every single student, but when you look at it as a whole, like the whole curriculum so like you know like if you're reading the British Enlightenment, you can't put an African-American in there you know but if you in your whole curriculum, you know you talk about Frederick Douglass and show how remember, that's how we talked about that; that's natural rights and the Enlightenment and then like, on the whole, they feel like like the class is culturally relevant. I think I understand culturally relevant pedagogy is being not just one class cultural like one class period or lesson being culturally relevant, but like the entire curriculum, the entire class itself, US History.

AB's acknowledgment of a historical event far removed from Black student experience can still be framed for importance in his students' lives. He embeds CRP and CSP throughout his entire class, so it is not an individual piece but rather the culture of the classroom. "I think it's more about what you're teaching them and it's not just a one-day thing." Teachers in general, however, must still do more to become culturally sustaining. Even teachers who have shown these traits fail to do enough, as there is little

acknowledgement of social justice, racist polities and laws, and inequities in their communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). A big step towards this came from EF: “You know tell me what your interests are, or uhm if I can build the content around something you are interested in, then we’ll do that, you know. I’m not scared to be to be a member of your world.” If more teachers made this pledge to be part of their students’ world, CSP could be the norm.

Reality

The fourth R emerging in interviews is *reality*. This reality includes both the reality for teachers and for students. The reason reality is so important to teachers and students is historically, education has expected non-White students to conform to White societal norms, which makes mastering academics challenging for Black students who are forced to learn in a non-natural setting (Gay, 2002). Teachers must learn about this reality so they can enact change to benefit their students of color. This can be accomplished through CSP. “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). This definition was amended slightly two years after it was established. The goal of CSP became “to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 88). When teachers create opportunities for students to add diversity to the classroom by retaining their cultural and educational strengths, they are practicing CSP. CD noted that he encourages students to develop personal versions of superior work, even allowing them to deviate from and create their exemplars.

So if you compare mine to the rubric, it's an A. If you're in the same boat, work with me here. If you're an artist and you can do better, please do, so I can hang it up on the wall. Follow your rubric, and make it better than mine. And every year, you know, you'll have kids do that. They get to be an individual. So when you find their strength, you know they can do better than you. You know they'll work extra hard to really show you up, on a project, and I love that you know show me up please, use your strength to do that.

Not only allowing but also inspiring students to outperform their teacher and to create new norms for classroom excellence helps to validate and preserve the culture of all students. This is especially important for Black students and other students of color as the demographics of the United States and thus classrooms are changing (Paris & Alim, 2014).

One of the biases White teachers have towards their Black students is the inability or unwillingness for teachers to see and respect Black achievement and potential. White teachers tend to underestimate the lack of student potential, however, they do recognize Black student performance (Ferguson, 2003). This causes the full potential of Black students not to be actualized. *Full potential* is defined as demonstrated potential, plus latent potential, with latent potential underestimated in Black students more than White students (Ferguson, 2003). When teachers recognize this inequality, they can move towards eradicating this difference. According to CD, "I don't know that they've through their own devices and through other devices have ever truly had to the chance to show what they can do." CD said that he notices that his Black students have not had the opportunities to express their academic strengths, and therefore they have not been able to demonstrate their full potential. He noted that he realizes they need to focus on education successfully because "that's their ticket to bigger and better things." At times, this can be a struggle for White teachers. To have a culturally responsive and

sustaining classroom, teachers must have “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 77).

Acknowledging student challenges is often the first step towards cultural inclusion in classrooms. GH said she began this journey with one of her students.

Okay, so one student is an African American male. He has a high, uhm truancy I guess, on and off, especially last year. He missed a lot of school and even skipped my class a lot, but he also was working another job and he was moving in between family, like he wasn't living with his family and kind of navigating that space.

She began with a non-judgmental statement of one of her students. She recognized he was experiencing challenges outside of school that were impacting his ability to learn. Instead of falling into the practice, many White teachers do of feeling sorry for their non-White students, based on assumptions of their families and low expectations of academic skills (Marx & Pennington, 2003), she worked actively with his family to help him succeed.

I think speaking with him and speaking to his family too, like having conferences with his father and like kind of learning about his background a little bit more. And then instead of like being punitive, going through like restorative practices with him and conferencing has been a big thing.

This student progressed extremely fast in her challenging course despite the fact he came to the classroom a year behind other students for this content. Keeping high standards for his performance, while not feeling sorry for him and making excuses for his lack of progress, and by working with both him and his family, allowed reality to become obvious to both teacher and student. Not all strengths are those society has deemed based on White norms, and realizing this and working through it does indeed enable Black students to flourish.

Focusing success through the lens of White norms creates more problems for Black students than may be obvious at first glance. Critical Race Theory (CRT) posits that much of reality is socially constructed, most often by silencing subordinated people, whereby giving voice to these subordinated people interrupts the power of the dominant race group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In education, this is especially problematic as it chills the experiences and validity of Black students. Teachers realize part of their role is not only to deliver content, but also to expose students to societal norms, and this has to occur carefully. For Black students to navigate White norms of society, to accept ones they deem worthy but to reject ones they do not, they must see these norms for what they are: the unofficial rules of society. CD asserted, “I don’t think we teach kids basic you know norms of society anymore. I don’t think we teach them how to do the little things, the pleasantries the you know the how to communicate, because we don’t test on that stuff.” It is unclear if CD agrees with these norms, accepts them as White constructed, or merely wants students to fit in better in society. Unfortunately, this is a task that may be more necessary with Black students. If Black students spend the majority of their time in Black neighborhoods and Black social situations, how can they learn to balance their personal culture with the expectations of a society that still does not accept them for who they are?

Whiteness theory also addresses this when it stipulates society is based on Whiteness as the norm all others have to conform to (Owen, 2007). AB also noted that he believes his role as a teacher includes this teaching of societal norms. “I do have to I have a secondary role of just teaching kids how to uh to interact with other people, how to interact with themselves, and uh uhm navigate every part of society.” If students learn

these norms in an environment where they are respected for their individuality and culture, perhaps they can develop the skills to push back against racist policies and practices so common today. These student culture norm differences should not be viewed as deficits to be overcome, but as a venue to craft relationships with students (Toppel, 2015). Teachers knowing the reality of this idea, coupled with focusing on the reality of their students, can help mitigate any damage these situations can cause to Black students. CD reflected on this idea when thinking about the label society has placed on his school and thus on the students who attend it. “You know, I think there are you know when you get to certain places I think there are a lot of labels and I think over a period of time students believe those labels.” Acknowledging this reality and communicating it to students can combat some of the damage these blindly-accepted norms can cause. To challenge these societal norms for marginalized groups, people must be exposed to how society creates and perpetuates these norms (Applebaum, 2008). Teachers including in their reality and the reality of their students the unfairness of these norms enables students to develop the means to counter and recreate them. Teachers must push back against the current political and societal climate that promotes teaching practices that create a monocultural and monolingual society centered around White, middle-class norms (Paris, 2012). GH said she does this with her acceptance of all student experiences and how she views student experience and behavior from a strength perspective.

They’re hilarious. They’re very fun, uhm but they bring a lot of stuff with them. A lot of them are dealing with trauma, and then other issues beyond trauma. I have some students dealing with severe like depression issues, uhm eating disorders. And so, kind of a wide spectrum. And then I have students who are also like you know pretty typical teenagers.

GH sees the strengths in her students, recognizes their challenges, and moves on from there.

For a classroom and teacher to become more culturally sustaining, the teacher must understand the connection of societal influences to the classroom (Durden & Truscott, 2013). Realizing students may need more from their teachers than merely content is one example of this. GH stated she is “also preparing for their emotional needs , uhm and providing structures that maybe aren’t in their lives.” She understands this reality and attempts to provide the resources for her students to succeed. Effectively utilizing CSP forces students to move beyond White norms to face discriminatory practices and increase awareness to enact change (Paris & Alim, 2014). Raising the sociopolitical consciousness, “the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge, and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems” (Owen, 2007, p. 73) can be accomplished in many ways. GH said that she uses modeling for her students as one of these means: “I can understand students advocating for themselves is definitely a struggle. I think that and just modeling ways to like approach it in a way they can empower them.” Instead of telling students how they should become advocates for their culture, she incorporates in her practice examples of how she is an advocate, so students see it in action. She said, “if they can learn how to advocate for themselves so like being more aware of their strengths, to be able to articulate them, I think that would be a really good thing.”

Knowing the path students must take to incorporate their culture in their classrooms, and to have it accepted as also normal by society, takes planning and a new version of reality for teachers. Teachers who can navigate this use effective pedagogy to

create opportunities for academic success for their students acknowledge their challenges, but give them tools to overcome these challenges (Johnson, 2011). When students can experience academic success within their personal cultural norms, they can become more comfortable with the normalization of their experiences and recreate the definition of normal success. AB reflected on a student of his who experienced great success in his class, but not in other teachers' classes:

Well because there's this student, in particular, had he had a lot of challenges to uh you know outside his home life and his his social life outside of school, and made it so that he you know he had to overcome obstacles in his in and reactions that he built his own obstacles and so he had a lot of attitude; he had a lot a lot of issues, uhm he had a lot of anger honestly. Uhm and he had a lot of issues kind of controlling himself.

AB knew the challenges of the student, did not ignore or make excuses for him, and found ways for him to be successful. He did not make things easier for this student, but instead helped him navigate his reality and flourish because of it. CD also said he has ways to work with students and their cultural norms for achievement: "I think it's it's being upfront and honest uhm I think that really helps my relationship building with them, uhm and I think it's showing them that you care, you want them to succeed." He models trust, honesty, and caring to his students, without judging them by the White norms he has experienced. He knows by doing this, "you're going to put them in a place of success." Working with students, their experience, and their culture instead of forcing them to comply with White societal norms empowers Black students to succeed on their own terms.

CSP helps focus on the positives of Black culture and struggles to narrow the perceived achievement gap between White and Black students. Traditionally, the achievement gap focuses on the deficits of Black students and the superiority of White

students, which are rooted in White supremacy while perpetuating this belief (Love, 2004). Instead of coming from a deficit lens, CD said he creates success opportunities for his students so their perception of their academic reality can be altered. “Because you give them some success first and then that stuff you know that they’re not very good at, that little bit harder material, they’ll work a lot harder to get.” He knows their reality and finds genuine ways to modify it slowly so their schooling experience changes. He does not measure them against White performance, but instead crafts and directs their experience to one of success and achievement. This keeps Black students sheltered from negative stereotypes regarding their academics. When students are aware of these stereotypes about them, and when the stereotype is about their ability, students can fear performing at a lower level to corroborate that stereotype (Ferguson, 2003). He makes sure to avoid these stereotypes through success for students. He said he realizes, “it’s you know I think if we don’t provide young people opportunities to be good at what they are good at, we kinda lost them in the system.” His creation of success opportunities despite White academic norms keeps students moving forward instead of perpetuating achievement gap explanations. His level of CRP moves past how many White teachers may behave negatively toward students who perform higher than their expectations (Jussim & Harber, 2005). He emboldens students to outperform expectations.

Moving towards a more CSP classroom could include not merely finding what students are good at, but also using cultural strengths to push their learning further. GH also bypasses stereotypes and challenges for students and changes these to strength behaviors and norms. She said she has one excellent student who did not show up for class several times per week. She remarked, for who “I don’t know there were weeks

when it was over three times a week that I would hardly see him. So, when I saw him, I made sure to like focus on the positives and re-directing the behavior as a strength or like using his leadership in the classroom.” She took what White educational norms would deem as a negative (missing class for circumstances he experienced outside of school) and instead gave him power over his strengths to overcome these obstacles. His reality was forever altered.

CSP not only changes the reality of Black students in school, but also changes the experience of White students. Increased opportunities for multicultural education benefits White students and non-White students alike, as it is linked to power in the United States and other global communities (Paris & Alim, 2014). Giving White students access to the experiences of Black students allows them a greater understanding of the increasingly non-White world. Their reality must include Black culture and reality for White students to be successful outside of their White-dominated society. GH iterated her understanding of creating an equitable reality in her classes for her students: “I try to have a fair and equitable classroom, and equitable in the sense that like not everyone’s going to be treated the same, because they all have different things going on, so maybe knowing where they are.” Modeling true equity and not equality can increase the reality of both Black and White students to one more closely resembles the changing demographics of schools and national and global society.

Reflection

The final theme emerging from teacher interviews was *reflection*. Teacher self-reflection is an integral part of becoming culturally sustaining. This tenet is identified as a foundation in CRP and does not automatically occur in teachers; rather, it is a learned

skill (Gay, 2002). Teachers must have the capacity to reflect on their pedagogy, biases, and relationships with students to best serve students of color. Changing teaching practice to sustain the cultures of each student requires teachers to look at their Whiteness and how this can be a barrier to sustaining the cultures of their students. As the teaching profession becomes more homogeneous and teachers are tasked with educating an increasingly heterogeneous student body, reflections on racial and cultural differences are essential (Howard, 2003). When White teachers work with Black and other students of color, appreciation for the diversity they bring into the classroom is strongly predicted by the teacher capacity for reflective thinking (Gere et al., 2009). All of the White teachers interviewed in the current study expressed traits of self-reflection towards their teaching and beliefs. They realized they must not only educate themselves about their students' cultures and histories, but they also must create opportunities to incorporate them in classes. They must see through their Whiteness to provide students opportunities to experience educational success through cultural strengths.

Teaching practices can either remain stagnant or morph over time. To address the changing and persistent inequity in society and education, teaching pedagogies must adapt to best address and change these inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Teachers working with diverse students increase their ability to see needs for differentiation for their students (Caughlan & Cushman, 2013). CD said he changes the way he teaches and grades his students in order to adapt to his population and their needs. "Each year, you know as a teacher, you just take your lesson plans and you tweak them and make them more relevant you make them a little better." Instead of keeping the same lessons that may have worked at his previous school with mostly White catholic females, he looks at

what he has taught and changes his lessons to increase relevance with his students. He admitted that when he started teaching at this diverse school, he was unfamiliar with cultural pedagogy. However, as a reflective teacher, he researched the topic and adjusted his teaching accordingly. “I really kinda started just looking up biology and cultural pedagogy and I kinda putting two and two together, and kinda kicked out some old stuff that I had at ...you could get kinda away with and kinda just add a couple things to tweak it a little bit and kinda make it better.” CD soon realized with his exposure to this new pedagogical theory that the lessons he relied on for his White females would not be the best for his mostly Black students, and he changed to best suit student needs. This introduction to cultural pedagogy shows how the existence of these theories, and teachers interacting with them, must occur to help new and experienced teachers to comprehend, reflect, and improve their practice (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Additionally, instead of becoming stuck on the idea of students having the sole responsibility for keeping up with any missing or misunderstood work, CD developed structures for students to be successful by providing the means and the time to finish any missing assignments or to move on to fun and relevant activities of they were caught up.

So Friday they come in, they pick up their work for the week, we check notebooks, they have their grade sheets, they’re looking at their zeros, uhm and I color code everything because that way I can get it to them more efficiently, they take their work, they go sit down, uhm if they’re caught up they get extra little projects.

CD’s realization of the needs of his students caused him to change how he taught topics, how he responded to student struggles, and how to make the content more relevant to students. He has a saying for himself, “Keep it simple, Stupid,” when he starts

overcomplicating lessons and outcomes. He takes a lesson from his college experience and uses it with his students.

Like he (his professor) got a national award for this. Because his grad students did so well on I want to say it's their MCATS, the graduate school test at the end, no that's biochem that's way above my head. However, you know it went back to you know what they all said he made things so easy and it was the coloring. And I'm like okay so wait a minute here we are going to take a basic premise, coloring but we are going to do it, right, and we are going to learn from what we are doing. I'm was like wow that's pretty simple, we can do this.

This type of self-reflection allows students more opportunities for success. To benefit students of color in education, these practices must acknowledge cultural identity is fluid, not static, so the practices must also evolve (Paris & Alim, 2014).

GH changed the whole class lecture style many teachers embrace because she realized it was not working with her students:

I think being flexible and then I also like adaptive, the activities is another way to like reach to the students. Whole group instruction is very, very challenging with the population I work with. So, uhm, so finding tools to navigate the space t's not necessarily whole group is another thing in the practice that I've learned.

She works with her students by allowing them to sustain their strengths and educational norms while adapting her teaching style to fit their needs. This enables students to retain their culture in the classroom and not change to mirror the White common classroom norm (Owen, 2007) more closely.

In addition to pedagogical reflection, teachers must reflect on their identities and how they impact student learning. Teachers must critically and honestly consider how their positionality influences students, either positively or negatively, and this critical reflection should include how race, culture, and socioeconomic status shapes their thinking, learning, and understanding of the world (Durdin & Truscott, 2013; Howard, 2003). GH discussed this specifically:

Even like how you identify, so like I identify as White female, uhm so so my students identify as Black female, some identify as African-American male, and so like understanding identity and like that person's culture and identity you can't make an assumption on it, uhm because you don't know where they're coming from.

GH understands her identity is central to who she is and understanding the identities of her students allows her to better serve their educational needs. When teachers struggle with their identities, they either adapt to the conditions around them or they adapt the conditions to their ideals (Lopes & Pereira, 2012). GH said,

I remember an exercise when I was in grad school that was just where I had to write a paper through where like my how I identify like going through that exercise was very powerful, uhm just seeing like breaking down, like, as a White female, what are my privileges? What are my disadvantages? And I think I was able to cause me to get more empathy, maybe.

GH's realization of her Whiteness as a condition of privilege caused her to see the experiences of her students, to gain empathy for their journeys, and to change her pedagogy to best serve them. Many Whites do not like to confront race and racism because they have to see their racist behaviors and to acknowledge White privilege (Bergerson, 2003). GH embraces the opportunity to do so, however. Many White teachers believe they know everything or more about racism and race than people of color (Hayes & Juarez, 2009), and as GH moves past this, it places her on a more culturally sustaining path for her students. Even the roles of teachers change when working with students who are different from them, both culturally and ethnically. GH expanded on her role as an educator:

Because of my environment I am in, I feel like I'm part social worker or mentor and then also deliver a curriculum but I'm also developing. Uhm, so I'd say in my position is kind of passing my knowledge on to like the next generation while also preparing for their emotional needs uhm and providing structures that maybe aren't there in their lives. Uhm, I don't know, it's so hard because you think that like teaching is one thing, but it's totally something different.

GH has changed her perception of her role as a teacher to meet the needs of her students, not to make them change to her original expectations of teaching. She demonstrates where teachers with a better-developed understanding of the premises of CSP were more critically reflective of their practice as related to CSP (Durden & Truscott, 2013). This reflection on identity to become more embedded in cultural pedagogy enables teachers to see how who they are contributes to the underachievement of students who are not like them (Howard, 2003). Such self-reflection allows them to change lessons and expectations to align with their Black students' cultures more closely.

White teachers must also reflect on the progress and experiences of their students. Teachers who demonstrate CSP continually question if their students' voices and experiences are respected in the classroom (Durden & Truscott, 2013). AB indicated that he sees this as a literal need. "I have to design my lessons so that the students are doing a lot on their own, so that I can walk around, not only to help but to engage students in conversations." He listens to his students individually and can assess if they are understanding the content and are fully engaged with it. He asserted that he knows this practice leads to student respect and their understanding of his genuineness. "Students believe me and uh they I think they feel respected by me." His one-on-one interactions with students help develop this type of relationship. After he establishes this two-way respect with knowing how they are in class, he makes sure they feel represented in the material. AB noted,

I'm thinking like so I'm writing a paper for a graduate class on the Indian boarding schools, like that would not be culturally sustaining. It's trying to stamp out a culture, and so you've got in the modern sense, you've got a kid who is you know from the streets or whatever, uhm and you're like, no that's not how you, shouldn't express yourself that way, express yourself this way or uhm, you know,

that experience that that thing that you do doesn't have doesn't have value in this conversation I guess like doesn't attach things so in order to sustain it you have to empower it so I guess you have to give a kid a chance to talk about those things.

AB's self-reflection and learning about other cultures allow him to translate this to his students so their voices and cultures are honored in his classroom and content. AB has moved beyond the idea of access and equity as focusing on getting non-White students to speak, write, and be more like White, middle-class students (Paris & Alim, 2014).

Teachers must reflect on their own perspectives and those of their students.

Teachers who work in lower socioeconomic level schools can be socialized to see themselves as having low efficacy, see their students as deficient, and see teaching as merely test preparation, not true and deep learning (Gere et al., 2009). Teachers can see this in their peers who may not be as effective as they are with their Black and other students of color. CD explained, "Really, I don't think it matters what school you're in, I think you have to have a passion to want to work with younger people, and I think sometimes when we lack that passion or we think that another school is better." His passion to work with Black students moves him past this deficit thinking pattern teachers can develop in lower socioeconomic schools. To become a culturally sustaining teacher, teachers should first adopt student perspectives to develop their pedagogical practices (Warren, 2013). As a social studies teacher, AB provided a non-example of this idea.

I guess, a non-example I guess would be like if your if your English teacher is teaching poetry and somebody says music poetry is like you know whatever I'll listen to you know X pop star that poetry you know for the teacher to be no, that's not, that's crap, like that wouldn't sustain their culture.

AB's understanding of not recognizing student perspective and also dismissing it as invalid does not lend to a culturally sustaining classroom. This acknowledgment of student perspective and the granting of importance to student likes and experiences must

be a pillar of a CSP classroom. White teachers must see others as they are; understanding their perspectives is critical in the development of a CSP teaching style (Gere et al., 2009). EF shared that he adjusts his role as a teacher to fill the myriad of needs his students bring to him:

It's not just giving out information, I mean there's I mean we're it, we're a counselor, we are a peacemaker, we we have so much stuff we gotta do before we can even teach, I mean, you know I I consider myself partially a parent uhm while they're with me because we see those students what six hours a day, if not more, and there's just so much that we have to do for them.

EF sees the perspective of his students and adapts to them holistically, bringing what they need to succeed that is much more than math instruction. He expands his role to one of an advocate for students when they need him. EF said, "We have to be an advocate for our students, and we have to know our students, so we have to sometimes—they need us to go to bat for them, they need us to fight for them uhm to keep their culture." This realization and value of student perspective allow teachers to bring CSP to every student in the classrooms.

Reflection on racism and how it permeates society and classrooms is an indicator of a culturally sustaining teacher. Racism is so ingrained in society and structures as to be almost invisible, and racism affects every aspect of education (Bell, 2002).

Understanding and accepting this as a reality allows teachers to deliberately move students to a more activist relationship with their communities and society. AB noted,

The goal is that uh the kids will uh feel more connected to their community and to their country, to their world, each other uhm. Through learning this content, a better understanding of how the world works together so they... in it and affect positive change, whether that's after graduation or whatever. In doing that, I do have to I have a secondary role of just teaching kids how to uh to interact with other people, how to interact with themselves, and uh uhm navigate every part of society.

AB creates his classroom content in such a manner so that students can work successfully in society by understanding the inner workings of it. He helps them develop their relationships with their communities and ensures they become a part of society on their terms—and not by adapting to the White social structure. This understanding and implementation of the Whiteness Theory is imperative to disrupt the current racialized social structure that exists today (Owen, 2007).

The five tenets of a culturally sustaining classroom (relationships, respect, rigor, reality, and reflection) align with what it means to practice CSP for students. The teacher participants showed varied levels of CSP practices and understanding. By determining which traits are prevalent with these White teachers in their predominately Black classrooms, methods of developing CSP with other White teachers can progress deliberately for the benefit of all students.

Summary

Overall, the purpose of this study was to determine the CSP traits teachers may have and how their practices benefit their students. Although the teacher participants of this study did indeed possess traits of CSP, none were familiar with the actual term or its tenets. Because of this, once CSP traits are identified in effective teachers, what policies or programs could be created and implemented to increase the effectiveness of teachers by giving them the skills to make cultural connections with their students? Since schools want teachers to enact CSP to reach a more diverse group of students, and many teachers do not know how to do this, developing these programs should increase teacher efficacy with their increasingly diverse students. Any future areas of research should focus on the development of such programs and any potential effects these programs would have on

student academic performance, teacher perceptions of their students, and overall job satisfaction of White, urban teachers.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the practices of in-service teachers who were identified by their principal as those who successfully incorporate Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) in their classrooms and to analyze how they use these strategies to support student learning. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify to support student learning?
2. What culturally sustaining pedagogical practices do teachers identify as the most useful in building relationships with diverse students?
3. Do school stakeholders believe there is a need for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in classrooms?

This chapter summarizes the findings to the research questions and then discusses implications of these findings for practice, policy, and future research, respectively with regards to the five themes from interview data: a) relationships; b) respect; c) rigor; d) reality; and e) reflection.

After the themes of relationships, respect, rigor, reality, and reflection emerged from teacher interviews, it was evident that teachers uniformly cite having positive and genuine relationships with their students as the most important factor in their classrooms.

Each teacher gave examples of how they get to know their students. The themes in Chapter IV were ordered from most commonly found in teacher interviews to least often cited, with reflection being last. Every area, however, was deemed important and had several instances of evidence from teachers directly.

Additionally, stakeholders overwhelmingly cited the need for various tenets of CSP to exist in classrooms. To proliferate CSP with more teachers, these five themes can be emphasized at different professional development opportunities. Moreover, giving teachers exposure to Whiteness Theory could assist White teachers in analyzing their place in society to better understand how different it is from the position of their Black students. White educators can never fully empathize with the experiences of their Black students, however, acknowledging the differences should give these educators greater skills to provide a more holistic educational experience for their students of color. Having clear language can help reluctant teachers create a more concise framework around which to focus. Even these teachers, who are identified as being positive with their students of color, could benefit from a more structured presentation of CSP to fully embrace its principles and thereby increase equity in their classrooms.

Since almost a decade has passed since the conception of CSP (Paris, 2012) as an enhancement to CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995), it was assumed that culturally competent teachers not only know the term *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*, but also have instituted its tenets in their classrooms. Although all teachers indicated understanding and using CRP, none interviewed had heard of CSP. The teachers, when given the definition of CSP, all indicated they did indeed use some CSP practices in classrooms. This lack of knowledge of CSP shows schools and districts must do a better job of exposing, training,

and supporting teachers to incorporate CSP in their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2014) admitted it was time to add to the important work of CRP. WHS school and the WCPS district, in particular, should incorporate CSP in their professional development plans to better serve their students. School stakeholders cited their desire to have CSP principles practiced in classrooms, however, the school did not respond accordingly as shown in their CSIP. Recent research showed the benefits of incorporating CSP in classrooms (Buffington & Bryant, 2019; Coppola et al., 2019; Fickel & Abbiss, 2019; Hanesworth et al., 2019; Kitts, 2020; Le & Matias, 2019; Nash et al., 2018; Shaw, 2020; Woodard et al., 2017; Zoch, 2017). This would neither be an unreasonable nor unachievable goal for most schools and districts, as they already expose teachers to CRP. Adding CSP should have minimal impact on budgets or professional development programs.

Implications for Practice

The main implication for practice is the need to educate teachers better on CSP and Whiteness. Even White teachers identified by their principal as effective with their Black students had no direct knowledge of CSP. Although they may have intuitively exhibited some of the components of CSP in their classrooms, they did so without knowing the tenets of CSP. Components such as encouraging student activism in sustaining their cultures in classrooms may be particularly foreign to White teachers, as they do not have these challenges since they themselves are a part of White normative society, and have not experienced the social isolation familiar to many Black students as outlined by Whiteness Theory (Owen, 2007). The teacher participants were familiar with and demonstrated traits of CRP, and perhaps if all teachers were deliberately exposed to CSP, especially White teachers, those who are not as comfortable and effective with their

Black students would begin to improve their efficacy with them. Moreover, consistently using CSP in classes enables students to learn how to recognize and rise up against racism and racist policies prevalent in White society at large (Zoch, 2017) by becoming activists for change through skills they learned in their CSP classroom.

After teachers are exposed to Whiteness Theory and CSP and understand the expansion from CRP, they can implement the sustaining and advocacy tenets into their daily classrooms (Paris, 2012). As a scholar of CSP, the researcher has expanded her own interactions with students to include sustaining student culture in school policies and instructional outcomes. The researcher has also filtered perceptions of students through Whiteness Theory to try to mitigate the effects of White societal norms on Black students. Student behavior expectations also are now viewed through the CSP lens and Whiteness Theory to reflect on student behavior and school expectations and norms. Once students experience CSP as the normal classroom practice, they can be better prepared to take their increased cultural validation as one that is essential and advocate for greater societal recognition of cultural normativity not being solely White.

With exposure to and understanding of CSP, teachers can improve their relationships with their Black students. Every teacher interviewed cited positive relationships with their Black students as integral to student academic success. Moving from CRP to CSP would allow teachers to embrace the cultural identities and realities of their students more fully. This would demonstrate to their students that they care, and they will treat them as the worthy individuals they are, and not as society deems students should be. The typical teacher-student relationship can expand to one where students see their teachers as active participants in the sustaining of students' cultures. This in turn

would lead to students advocating for their culture to be acknowledged, respected, and sustained, both inside and outside of the classroom. With the teacher as a facilitator in this journey via their positive relationships with their Black students, these students could then experience their lives more closely to how their White peers do, with all cultures being deemed *normal* instead of White normalcy as the status quo (Owen, 2007).

Respect between teacher and student can also be increased with greater teacher exposure to CSP and Whiteness Theory. As CSP is not deficit-focused on non-White cultures but instead has positive views of the cultures of non-White people (Paris, 2012), the respect teachers have for their Black students can only increase as CSP practices are increasingly utilized in classrooms. The researcher acknowledges the importance of considering differences in the cultures between herself and her Black students, and this understanding helps her see them for what they are, greatness and beauty in different forms. Black students, with whom the researcher has little in common in terms of background or cultural structure, are nonetheless deserving of respect. It is crucial to work diligently to make sure students see this from their teachers as their understanding of CSP and Whiteness Theory deepens. Offering teachers greater CSP exposure can change the traditional respect relationship with teacher and student to one more embracing of student culture and individuality as a strength instead of a problem to be molded to adhere to White societal norms (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Owen, 2007; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Mitigating the deficit thinking about the Black students and seeing their cultures as ones that deserve to be sustained, allows teachers to have higher expectations for these students. They can be seen as individuals with unique cultures, backgrounds, and

personalities, all of which create a wealth of strengths for these students to succeed. As a result of CSP practice and study, the researcher does not view Black students as facing insurmountable challenges, but instead there is an understanding that their uniqueness and experience will allow them to prosper on their own terms, not on the terms of White society. It is important to communicate and act to the best of the teacher's abilities in such a manner that students know that teachers want them to stay true to themselves and not try to fit into White societal norms. Something as simple as this from teachers can enable Black students to focus on academics instead of ensuring they are behaving in a manner their teacher finds acceptable. White teachers, however, must be willing to understand and address their roles in society as White members and to realize the differences between this experience and that of their Black students. This does not mean students should misbehave, but instead shows how when teachers change their opinions of acceptable student behavior to include different cultural norms, this can free up space for a student not to switch their culture to predominately White norms. Instead, they can focus that energy on learning.

As a White educator, the researcher filters every decision she makes and every interaction she has with Black students through Whiteness Theory (Owen, 2007). This helps check biases and to see if any expectations of the student and situation are clouded by White normalcy. Exposing teachers to Whiteness Theory and CSP can allow them to do the same. After teachers understand and validate the differences in their culture and that of their students, they can realize they both are valuable to each person. The reality of White normalcy, once acknowledged and understood, can enable teachers to move towards a more culturally sustaining classroom as they should embrace the differences

between societal norms and student culture as valuable and worthy of saving and growing.

Although reflection was the least cited theme from the teacher interviews, it has the most potential for CSP in practice. White teachers first must understand and reflect on their Whiteness, how this puts them in a position of power in society and education (Owen, 2007), and then reflect continually on how their actions perpetuate White supremacy. As teachers understand the tenets of CSP and Whiteness, they can actively change their pedagogy to a CSP classroom. Teacher reflection must become an integral component of daily interactions with students, lesson planning, and classroom management. Reflecting on thoughts, plans, and actions, while keeping Whiteness as the lens and CSP as the core goal, can improve the educational experience of all Black students. This area is the highest recommendation for changes in educator practice. Educators must reflect constantly to minimize the damage White normalcy has on Black students. This must be an active component of the educational routine.

White teachers will continue to teach Black students. Adding CSP to their toolbox by way of Whiteness Theory should only benefit their practice and their students. The surprise findings, from a high minority population school in a large urban school district, that teachers did not know what CSP was, further illustrate how important it is to incorporate it into their practices. These specific teachers were chosen for this study by their principal as those who worked very effectively with their Black students. Imagine how much better they could serve their students if CSP was presented to them by their school and district. Imagine further that they understood their Whiteness and how that

can impact their expectations. Then picture how much more CSP could impact White teachers who are not as capable educators of their Black students as they could be.

Some teachers begin their careers without completing a traditional teacher preparation program, and they may have merely a degree in the content they are about to teach with no formal education classes. For these alternative certification teachers, CSP is especially important to have embedded in schools and districts to assist these teachers with their diverse student body. These teachers may have no experience interacting with Black students, as such schools and districts must have CSP practices in their school with multiple teachers so they can learn on the job. If multiple teachers in a school building have CSP classrooms, there would be multiple sources of reference as support. Additionally, when schools and districts offer professional development on CSP, these inexperienced teachers could broaden their pedagogical skills through actual work.

When schools have teachers who are using CSP effectively, they become a resource for other teachers in their building and throughout their district. The knowledge and expertise of these master teachers can be utilized in several ways. First, such master teachers could serve as mentors to new teachers in their schools, providing advice, modeling, and feedback to help spread CSP knowledge to new teachers. Second, these master teachers could lead professional development sessions within their schools. When teachers have a relationship with the individual conducting these sessions, they can follow-up as needed more easily. Typically, when outside agencies deliver professional development, it is challenging for any conversations or questions to occur after the session ends. Third, master CSP teachers can serve as ambassadors in their schools for CSP to collaborate with teachers who may be reluctant to incorporate it in their own

classrooms. This reluctance can stem from not believing it is important or not knowing where to start. When a resource exists locally, teachers tend to use it.

School districts that are located near to college-level teacher education programs should form partnerships with these institutions. The schools and districts know the challenges they face with staffing, retention, and the needs of their students. A close working relationship between the two would allow greater potential for teacher success as their specific coursework would be influenced by the needs of the schools and districts in which they would soon be employed. A district with high numbers of Black students and mostly White teachers could work with university and training programs to offer more intensive CSP exposure so new teachers would know the basics and put this knowledge into practice immediately.

Implications for Policy

Regarding policy, this study showed that school districts and teacher preparation programs must add CSP to their CRP offerings. Whiteness Theory also must be introduced in such a manner that will open teachers' minds. White educators need not feel guilty about being White and the privilege it brings, but instead, they must acknowledge this reality and work through it to better serve their students. The teachers in this study were well-versed in CRP, and most had evidence of some CSP practices in their classes, but as they were identified as ones who were effective with their students of color, one can only wonder what the practice looks like with teachers deemed *ineffective* with their Black students. Providing teachings and professional development in both CRP and CSP can provide teachers with an ever-expansive toolbox to better reach their students of color.

White teachers do not always have the skills to create positive relationships with their Black students. They can view their students as vastly different from them, and as they students through their White identity lens, they can believe their students' cultures are inferior and they should adapt closer to White societal norms (Owen, 2007).

Providing both pre-service and in-service teachers exposure to and support with CSP can show teachers the strengths of different student cultures and how these cultures must be sustained rather than subdued. This relationship-building now framed with CSP ideas, would be very different and much more supportive of Black students. Without proper experience with CSP and with no plans from schools or districts to provide this training to teachers, teachers will never know the benefits of CSP for their students, or they will be left to research CSP on their own. Providing specific education and training for CSP is the first step to creating actual positive relationships between White teachers and Black students.

Once teachers understand CSP, they can move towards respecting non-White cultures as ones of strength and honor (Paris, 2012) instead of cultures that must be changed to resemble White normalcy more closely (Owen, 2007). Respecting a culture that is different from their own should lead to greater respect for students as individuals, reflective of their culture, and not students who need to change. It is easy to imagine classrooms where this respect manifests itself by empowering students to understand their culture as just as normative as the dominant White culture and worthy and deserving of equal acceptance and proliferation. If schools and districts would provide a blueprint for teachers to learn CSP, give them the support needed to incorporate it effectively, and help them model CSP tenets for all of their students, White normative power structures

could finally be blended with Black culture to create an educational system that respects the differences of all students and gives them the autonomy to stay themselves.

With school- or district-level training for CSP, increased rigor should follow. All teachers interviewed cited highly rigorous instruction as paramount to the academic success of their Black students. When teachers have their lessons culturally relevant and also culturally sustaining, moving from a deficit outlook of Black students towards a strength-based one (Paris, 2012) leads to higher expectations for student academic success. Having more exposure to CSP enables teachers to build on their more positive relationships, increase levels of respect, and create an educational environment where Black students are valued for their academic ability. Simply put, their culture is used as a gateway to success rather than a barrier. Teachers could see scenarios where the cultural strengths Black students have can be embraced to help them learn differently. Understanding and respecting the culture and individuality of Black students can give teachers more insights into how these students can learn at high levels rather than expect Black students to experience educational success solely by way of White normative expectations.

Living in a White normative society can make it difficult to see how Whiteness is actually considered the norm, since it is so ingrained in society as the standard (Owen, 2007). Teachers have to be exposed to, and accept the reality of, White normalcy and supremacy. This can be a difficult subject for many White teachers, as feelings of guilt or denial are common when exploring Whiteness. Understanding this reality, both for White teachers and Black students, is the first step in CSP. CSP aims to disrupt this White norm and amplify and sustain cultural variety (Paris, 2012). This acceptance of current reality,

and the desire to change it to reflect cultural diversity, should be introduced to teachers by school- or district-wide programs. Not all White teachers will believe these tenets, but many will after they are exposed to them. Ultimately, this will benefit all students. Black students could finally be accepted as whole human beings who do not need to change, and White students can learn how to navigate an increasingly diverse society (Paris & Alim, 2014).

Schools and school districts should develop programs to expose teachers to and support them with embedding the principles of CSP consistently. This could be a daunting task if the racial consciousness of the school or district is not developed. However, creating strategic and well-structured plans to have CSP as the blueprint for the instructional environment can benefit teachers and students alike.

For alternative certification teachers without formal training in education, it is essential to have well-created programs and resources to support teachers with CSP. Schools and districts must expect teachers to use these skills with their students so they feel more connected and accepted in their classrooms. Creating policies to not only expect CSP to be universal, but also to provide support via books and articles, professional development, and mentor master teachers, will help all teachers serve their Black students more effectively.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should focus on two areas. First, teachers who are not comfortable or willing to work with their students of color outside of White educational norms must be observed to see if they practice CRP or CSP at all in their classes. If they do not, which is a logical assumption, they should partake in professional development on CSP

with exposure to Whiteness Theory, and then be measured periodically to determine if their practice improves. This would allow programs to be created that could differentiate the individual teacher's need to move forward to a better CSP classroom. Professional development should consist of exposure to and an emphasis on the importance of CSP via Whiteness Theory and how it positively impacts the educational experience and outcomes for all students. Combinations of reading, observations of master CSP teachers, and student-led panels highlighting their positive and negative experiences in the classrooms of White teachers would give these teachers the foundation to mold their teaching practice to best fit their students' needs. Second, teachers who have effective CSP practice and teachers who are not utilizing CSP should be studied in classrooms to determine if students have different levels of realization of the oppressiveness of White society towards Black people, and how students respond to this knowledge. Black student academic achievement should be studied in these two types of classrooms to determine if different levels of success exist.

EPILOGUE

July 30, 2021: After completing this project, Critical Race Theory (CRT) became a focal point in the news. People who were unfamiliar with this theory began erroneously stating it was taught in K-12 schools and that it was a program designed to make White people feel guilt and shame about being White. School board meetings across the country were overrun with angry protestors and speakers were demanding their schools and districts not indoctrinate their White children through CRT. Upon first hearing these arguments, it was assumed that this outrage would subside when the public learned what the theory was actually about. As this study indicated, CRT centers on three basic premises: a) racism is so pervasive in the structures of society it is almost invisible; b) White experience should not be considered the norm; and c) racism affects education specifically (Bell, 2002; Tate, 1997). Keeping this in mind, schools and educators should be prepared to respond to the public when these concerns arise.

Public concern about CRT in schools is not based on current educational reality. Talking points involve assertions such as *CRT is used to make White children believe they are racist* and *White people should feel guilty about their alleged privilege*. Unfortunately, these thoughts have spread into different parts of equity education, including Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), racial equity, and even trauma-informed care of students. Many parent groups throughout the United States are pushing for laws to be passed in state legislatures banning any type of this teaching. As CRP and CSP are researched-based programs

proven to best serve not only Black students, but also White ones, (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), educators must continue to move towards greater equity in schools. The researcher has personally witnessed school districts and state educational boards toning down the language in course syllabi to ensure there is no reference to CRT in order to appease these misinformed persons. This is move backward for all students.

As CRP and CSP have extensive scholarly, peer-reviewed articles citing the benefit of these pedagogies, school and educators must cite the research when responding to the hyperbolic claims of those outside of the education field who seek to regulate it. Schools and districts should inform their parent and community stakeholders of what CRT in education actually entails, the benefits CRP and CSP provides to all students, and the history of educational racism that has long maligned the academic achievement of our Black students, especially. Educators cannot allow the progress made in incorporating CRP and CSP in classrooms across the United States to move backward. They must take a stance, educate the public so they can filter through the misinformation, and continue to be advocates for all students.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Participant Recruitment Letter:

Dear _____,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Julie Chancellor, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Human Resources at the University of Louisville. I am writing because I am conducting a study on what skills teachers may or not possess in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, how they use these skills in their classrooms, and how they acquired their skills. Current research on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is extensive, however little exists with Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. This topic has become increasingly important as more schools have student populations that do not mirror their teachers. For example, many urban schools have a higher percentage of students of color than is reflected in their teachers.

The primary goal of my study is to discover what culturally sustaining pedagogical traits teachers may or may not have, how they use these to reach their diverse students, and how they acquired these skills. I am in need of teachers to interview and who would be willing to submit lesson plans for analysis. As I value teacher time, your participation will require an approximately 45-minute interview which can take place at a location of your choosing. My goal is to conduct the interview in November 2018. In addition to this preliminary interview, a follow up one may be needed if you are available.

Your voice is of considerable importance to the study. By participating, you would help the education field determine if teachers are practicing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, determine how they use these skills in classes, and how they acquired these skills. Long term, these data could help drive policy and professional development to expand these skills to more teachers. If you have any questions, please contact me at julie.chancellor@jefferson.kyschools.us.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Julie Chancellor
Doctoral Candidate
University of Louisville

Dr. Shelley Thomas
Principal Investigator
Shelley.thomas@louisville.edu

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Teacher Culturally Sustaining Pedagogical Skills

Subject Informed Consent Document

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: How do Teachers Come to Possess Their CSP Skills?

Principal Investigator name & phone number: Shelley Thomas, 502.852.8090

Investigator(s) name & phone number: Julie Chancellor

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Urban, public high school

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: 559.978.0008

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Dr. Shelley Thomas, Associate Professor, and Julie Chancellor, Doctoral Candidate. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Leadership, Foundations, and Human Resource Education. The study will take place at an urban, public high school. Approximately 7–10 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study determine what culturally sustaining pedagogical skills, if any, teachers possess, how they use them in their classrooms to benefit students, and how they acquired them.

Procedures to be followed

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will concern the culturally sustaining skills you may or not possess and how you acquired them. The interview will be digitally recorded with permission from the participant, although without an audio recording of the interview, participation in the study cannot commence

In addition to the interview, participants will submit lesson plan examples and teacher reflective journals for analysis.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks, although there may be unforeseen risks.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include the participant having an opportunity for reflection on their philosophy of teaching as they express their thoughts and perspectives on culturally sustaining pedagogy. Participation will benefit society by contributing to our understanding of this topic through qualitative research. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office. Government agencies, such as:
 - Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Only I will be listening to and transcribing the recording of the interview. Your identity will be protected when quoting from our interview by your name and title having a pseudonym with none of your identifiable information existing. You will have complete anonymity, and, I will make every effort to protect your privacy. I will not use your name in any presentation or in any other publications. Any information that lets me know who you are will be recorded with a code number. During the study the key that tells me which code number goes with your information will be kept in a locked drawer. When the study is finished, I will destroy this key.

Conflict of Interest

Please ask the investigator how the institution and the investigator will benefit by your participation in the study.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the investigator, Julie Chancellor, at 559.978.0008. You may also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Shelley Thomas, at 502.852.8090.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) 502.852.5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

Signature of Subject/Legal Representative

Date Signed

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form
(if other than the Investigator)

Date Signed

Signature of Subject/Legal Representative
For audio recording of interview

Date Signed

Signature of Investigator

Date Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS

PHONE NUMBERS

Shelley Thomas

502.852.8090

Julie Chancellor

559.978.0008

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CSP Interview Protocol

1. Please state your name and how long you have been teaching.
2. Where and what classes have you taught?
3. Describe your job as a teacher.
4. Describe the students in your classes.
5. Describe how you think other people would describe your students.
6. Describe for me a student you taught that most people thought would not be successful and who was.
7. Why you think others doubted their ability to be successful?
8. What in your pedagogical practice helped this student succeed?
9. How would you describe your relationships with your students?
10. What deliberate steps do you take to establish relationships with your students?
11. What practices do you engage in during class to allow students to feel like individuals and retain their identities?
12. How important do you think they are to foster academic achievement in classrooms? Please explain.
13. What do you think is your single most effective tool in getting students to be academically successful?
14. Are you familiar with the term culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy? What does it mean to you?
15. Are you familiar with the term culturally sustaining teaching/pedagogy? What does it mean to you?
16. Culturally sustaining pedagogy adds to CRT the component of an activist stance against a monocultural society. What does this mean to you?
17. What do you think of when you hear culturally relevant pedagogy versus culturally sustaining pedagogy which has the additional component of empowerment to action?

CURRICULUM VITA

NAME: Julie Chancellor
ADDRESS 3100 Galway Lane
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DOB: San Jose, California- July 20, 1968

EDUCATION

& TRAINING: B.S., Political Science
University of Louisville
2008

M.A.T., Secondary Social Studies Education
University of Louisville
2009

Ed.S, Educational Administration with a concentration in
Supervision
University of Louisville, 2012