CHANGING LANES OR A NEW DIRECTION?: A MINI-ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRICT-WIDE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

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Culturally responsive practice (CRP) is a popular approach educators utilize to improve the gaps in achievement and discipline within U.S. schools. Current research provides insight into singular experiences of both school leaders and teachers working individually to enact CRP (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Although this research indicates pathways to access CRP in individual schools and classrooms, it is important to consider how CRP is adopted and promoted at the school district level. The purpose of this study is to explore how educators in one public school district envisioned culturally responsive practices and how culturally responsive district-wide initiatives informed their practice.

This mini-ethnographic case study was guided by organizational learning theory, which serves as a lens to assess the school district organization as a whole and the actions of individuals. Participants included individuals who represented district and school leadership and classroom teachers. Findings from this study demonstrate how participants' lack of a shared vision about CRP goals and initiatives led to misunderstanding of both the CRP concept and its prioritization within the district. By focusing on organizational practices, findings from this research also uncovered a new model for family and community involvement to foster CRP in a school district.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Rodolfo & Grace Castillo, who helped me to understand the importance of education at an early age. Without their love and support, I could not have completed this research. Their strength continues to be an inspiration.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The high school auditorium was filled with three quarters of the teaching staff. We sat anxiously awaiting for the training to begin. The maroon curtains hung sharply on the stage and provided a backdrop for the administrator from the district office who was speaking to us. As part of a new district initiative and in response to local litigation concerning English as a Second Language (ESL) students, school district leaders mandated teacher professional development sessions for all teachers in the district to address the issues. The leader of the session provided attendees with particular strategies or best practices to use in classrooms with ESL students. I remember sitting among the group, quickly scribbling notes. As a new teacher, I felt I needed all of the strategies I could obtain to become a competent teacher. However, there was no discussion or time to share with my colleagues who had varying levels of interest in the topic. After the hour and a half session, we were released, and I walked over to my classroom in the next building armed with a notebook of strategies. Honestly, I don't remember if I used any of them. I never discussed them with the other English teachers or talked with my principal about the best way to implement the new strategies in my classroom. I received credit for attending the professional development training and imagined a check mark next to the list of items that I needed to complete in order to remain in good standing as a teacher. This particular item was complete, and soon I was on to the next.

The launch of district-wide initiatives and the corresponding professional development described above was a common experience in my beginning years of teaching. Often-isolated trainings directed by the district office had little effect on my teaching practices. It is not that the objectives of the professional developments were unimportant; learning new skills and approaches for improving the educational experiences of diverse groups of students is essential.

However, the reasons for not implementing the strategies included lack of motivation, of clarity, and of time to implement new strategies. Although my experience took place 20 years ago, there are certain factors that remain consistent in the profession of teaching. First, student demographics continue to shift and change, making it necessary for teachers and school leaders to better understand the academic and social needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Second, school administrators will create district-wide policies that require training and implementation at all levels. Finally, both administrators and teachers need support to understand and implement district-led initiatives that require teacher participation, whether in the form of attempting new strategies in the classroom or implementing new policy and practice within their schools. It is imperative for the research community to assist educators in understanding educational practices that benefit diverse groups of students who are historically underserved within larger school communities.

Problem Statement

Research indicates educators in the United States are attempting to enact culturally responsive practices as a way to address achievement and discipline gaps that exist in schools (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Paris & Alim, 2017). Yet, it remains unclear how a school district entity promotes and adopts culturally responsive practices (CRP) across schools in a given district. In this study, I seek to understand how a school district becomes culturally responsive. How do school leaders in one district implement and support a vision for CRP? How do teachers receive the message and strive to implement CRP in their classrooms? Current research contributes insight into singular experiences of both school leaders and teachers working individually to enact CRP (Castagno, 2012; Gay, 2010; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Nieto, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017; Young, 2010). For instance, in

case studies of individual teachers, researchers found that providing students access to critical multicultural history, materials, and references increased student interest, engagement, and achievement (Brown, 2010; Farinde-Wu, Glover, & Williams, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Stowe, 2017). When reviewing the work on leadership, there is a body of literature that advocates the importance of equity in culturally responsive leadership and provides frameworks to researchers and practitioners engaging in the study, instruction, and practice of culturally responsive school leadership (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008; Minkos et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2009). However, there is no single formula to create culturally responsive schools and districts, and new studies are needed to consider CRP intervention at the district level. The goal of this study is to explore how individuals, as part of a public school district initiative, understand and pursue a goal of becoming culturally responsive in both leadership and classroom practices.

Background and Context

Public school districts in the United States find it necessary to respond with CRP due to a shift in the student population over the past two decades. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provided some recent data regarding the racial and ethnic demographics of public schools in the United States. The overall percentage of White school-age children (ages 5-17) was 62% in 2000 but decreased to 53% by 2013. The percentage of Black school-age children also decreased slightly from 15% to 14%, during the same period. However, the percentage of Hispanic school-age children increased from 16% to 24%, and the percentage of Asian children increased from 3% to 5%. There was also a small increase in the number of children who were of two or more races (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). The increase in the

racial/ethnic diversity of students is greater than the slight increase in the diversity of teachers in the United States, with the percentage of teachers of color currently less than the percentage of students of color (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Although there have been small gains in the percentage of teachers of color, the teaching force remains mostly White and female (Feistritzer, 2011). Culturally responsive practices are one strategy many schools are utilizing to close academic and achievement gaps among racially diverse students.

Achievement and discipline gaps serve as motivation for school districts to incorporate culturally responsive practices and pedagogies (Cazden & Leggett, 1976; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Carter and Welner (2013) depicted academic achievement gaps between Black and Latinx students and their White counterparts as *opportunity gaps* to emphasize the lack of opportunity available to students of color and students facing poverty and to reframe discussion in terms of creating more opportunities for all students to achieve. When viewing the reading achievement for students in the twelfth grade, the opportunity gap between White and Black students was actually larger in 2013 (30 points) than in 1992 (24 points) (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). The example is only one among many released in the NCES report and reminds educators that much work must be done in this area to improve the schooling experiences for Black and Latinx students. However, the gap is not only present in academic achievement but in student discipline as well. There are particular indicators, such as suspension, expulsion, and retention in grade level, that are associated with negative outcomes in school. Black students remain the most highly suspended population among school-age children (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). As part of an effort to mitigate both academic and discipline gaps for students

of color, culturally responsive pedagogies became an avenue for achieving more equitable schooling practices.

Culturally responsive practices emerged as an approach to alleviate achievement and discipline gaps, but implementation of CRP has been met with various obstacles. The intent of CRP was to create an environment that was not only inclusive of students' cultural backgrounds but also provided students with a path to build strong cultural identities (Bartolome, 1994; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b). A new framework was needed to view cultural diversity as an asset that enhanced student learning rather than an obstacle to overcome in educational practices (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Lindsey, 2009). Over time, CRP evolved with practice and new considerations such as multilingualism (Paris & Alim, 2014), and an overreliance on cultural references and materials (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Scherff & Spector, 2011; Young, 2010) was challenged to frame CRP in more inclusive ways. Research indicated that implementing CRP posed challenges for educators. For example, teachers were not ready to face their own cultural biases or the systemic issues of racism present within education (Lopez, 2011; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008; Scherff & Spector, 2011; Young, 2010). Also, culturally relevant teaching is neither a program nor a set of practices that is easily implemented into the classroom, making it ambiguous for many educators. Another factor that impedes educators' use of CRP is the standardization of curriculum, where both teachers and administrators feel constrained by test-driven accountability measures that leave no room for support in learning and applying new strategies such as CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). Teachers face many challenges when attempting to apply CRP within their classrooms, and similarly, school leaders face their own challenges.

Leadership is key to creating a strong and supportive community (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Gregory et al., 2010). School leaders must contend with setting the stage for a supportive environment in order for teachers to enact culturally responsive pedagogies in their classrooms. However, like teachers, school leaders must also confront their own positionality, cultural biases, and issues of systemic racism when attempting to implement CRP (Fujimoto, Garcia, Medina, & Perez, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014). Research highlighted school leadership practices that enhance the setting for culturally relevant teaching, such as critical self-reflection and supporting and developing teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey, 2009). Professional development is one avenue to enhance teachers' knowledge of CRP. Yet, developing structures of support may be difficult with competing initiatives and limited resources. However, there is evidence that some school leaders are successfully implementing CRP into their schools and providing support for teachers to do the same (Bustamante et al., 2009; Goldring & Sims, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2009).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this case study is to explore one school district, or entity, as defined by Goldring and Sims (2005) as a group of individuals who possess a shared culture, goals, and objectives under one organizational structure. This entity is comprised of educators engaging in the act of becoming more culturally responsive in their work with Black and Latinx[1] students due to the limited opportunities these students receive, as evidenced by gaps in achievement and discipline. It is anticipated that with a better understanding of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies, educators can engage in practices and pedagogies that will lead to improving the

[1] I purposefully include *Latinx* as a gender-neutral term to disrupt traditional notions of inclusivity and the gender binary (Salinas & Lozano, 2017)

experiences of Black and Latinx students, where those students' achievement data will improve and the instances of disciplinary actions against them will decrease. This study will include the voices of the superintendent, building-level principals, and classroom teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the process and experience of engaging in culturally responsive work at different levels within the district.

Research Questions

In order to shed light on how culturally responsive practices inform the work in a school district, the following research questions are explored:

1) How do school leaders and teachers envision culturally responsive practices?
2) How do school leaders and teachers understand culturally responsive district-wide initiatives as informing their practice?
3) How does a school district utilize organizational practices to achieve CRP goals?

Rationale and Significance

Ladson-Billings (2006) reminded educational researchers of the *education debt* owed to communities of color. The debt has yet to be paid, and classroom demographics continue to shift to include more students of color, which makes it imperative for school leaders and teachers to engage in practices that are culturally responsive, relative, and sustaining to their students as one way to reduce the educational disparities for communities of color. It is increasingly essential to develop students to be global citizens in order to be part of a multicultural and multilingual society (Banks, 2004). Teachers play a crucial role in student success and need continued support for their development of culturally responsive practices. With teacher support and development in mind, it is critical to understand how school leaders promote, support, and practice culturally responsive leadership. Moreover, it is essential to understand how an entire school district takes

up the endeavor to become more culturally responsive in their practices working with diverse groups of students. My study has both research and practical implications for understanding the process of school improvement.

There are also theoretical implications of this study. Although the literature provides insight into teachers' culturally responsive teaching, it is still unclear how school leaders influence teachers' implementation of the practice. There are few studies that investigate culturally responsive teaching from the vantage point of school district leadership, including both school leaders and teachers (Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Turner, 2015). Shedding light on how school leaders understand, promote, support, and develop teachers in culturally responsive practices could lead to the development of new theories for school leadership and school improvement practices.

Within this study, I provide insights to facilitate leadership practices to improve schooling experiences for diverse groups of students. School leaders are necessary to inspire and support teachers to engage in culturally relevant practices as a way to achieve positive academic and disciplinary outcomes. Culturally relevant practices have the potential to empower both educators and students toward positive change.

My beliefs align with critical race theorists as I consider racism as endemic within schools (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While there are still cases of overt racism toward students of color (Hardie & Tyson, 2013), educational racism is most apparent through structural and systemic avenues that are masked as neutral and colorblind approaches to education (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Buras, 2013; Leonardo & Grubb, 2014). I acknowledge that both overt and subversive systems of racism are in play in this school district; however, my focus was on the organizational structures as understood by the participants that

fostered their learning of CRP. It is my hope that by utilizing an organizational lens to understand participants' experiences, knowledge of those organizational practices that advanced CRP can also address issues of racism and colorblind ideology. Although I did not apply a theoretical or conceptual framework that specifically highlighted factors of race, I understand that it is still a consideration within the study.

Conceptual Framework

I draw on two bodies of literature that inform the conceptual framework for my study. Culturally relevant pedagogy and organizational learning theory have practical and theoretical perspectives concerning how a school district strives toward a goal of implementing culturally relevant practices (see Figure 1.1) in an effort to close access and opportunity gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013). In the following section, I review each body of literature that is critical in understanding the conceptual framework. Each body of literature operates as a lens to understand how one school district implements changes to become culturally responsive.

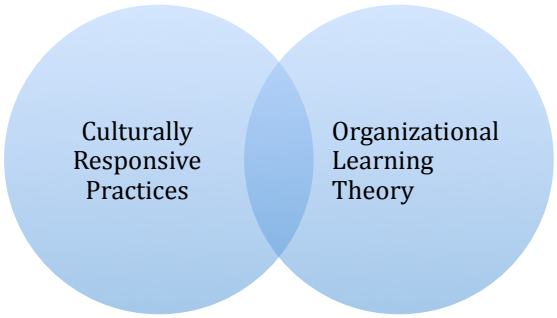

Figure 1.1. **Conceptual Framework**

Note. The Venn diagram represents the intersecting areas of research and theory that provide the conceptual framework for this study. Each circle represents a lens to understand how a school district entity works toward achieving culturally responsive goals: Culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b) and Organizational Learning Theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999)

Culturally Responsive and/or Relevant Practice

To understand how a school district undertakes a goal of implementing CRP, it is important to outline the characteristics that delineate CRP qualities. The terms *culturally responsive* (Gay, 2010) and *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings, 2009b) have different origins but similar principles. For the purposes of this study, I will use both terms as descriptors of other concepts, such as pedagogy, practice, and teaching. Ladson-Billings (2009b) states, "Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20). Culturally responsive teaching also empowers educators intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by providing a compelling approach to educating students in a diverse world. Gay (2010) called for making students' home culture explicit in educational practices by "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). Student home culture as an essential component to student learning is present within the various conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogies.

Ladson-Billings (2009b) described three major tenets to frame CRP. The first tenet, academic achievement, indicated the academic success resulting from pedagogies that allow students to demonstrate learning. By drawing on students' home cultures, educators can utilize an important mechanism to close achievement gaps and assist students in thriving in school. There is an important connection between culture and student learning, and evidence shows that cultural practices shape thinking processes, which are important tools for learning both in and out of school (Nieto, 1996). Student home culture is critical to recognize through both curriculum and teacher practices, but students should also acquire knowledge of a broader

system of culture. The second major tenet of CRP is cultural competence. Students should have an opportunity to learn about and appreciate their own culture, but they should also acquire knowledge of broader systems of culture. The final tenet, sociopolitical consciousness, is the practice of connecting learning principles beyond the classroom to real and global issues. Culturally relevant pedagogy is an important avenue to engage both educators and students in critically examining social justice issues inherent in schooling practices and considering broader issues within communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In essence, school leaders and teachers in a CRP community must be cognizant of and concerned about the students and families within the communities they serve. By consciously working to understand the assets as well as challenges within the community, educators can develop critical curriculum, lessons, strategies and communication that will serve their students more effectively. Culturally responsive practice is "based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (Gay, 2010, p. 29).

Implementation of CRP is equally important to assess. First, culturally relevant educators create caring environments and see themselves as part of a community where all students can be successful (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Milner, 2011). Rather than rely on top-down, hierarchical relationships in pedagogy, the educator is a facilitator who values the knowledge students bring to the classroom, where collaboration is also highly valued and all students' voices are heard (Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Additionally, educators should engage in practices to hold students to high standards of excellence that consider individuality and student diversity. Furthermore, educators should participate in reflective practices to become more self-aware; they

should dialogue with colleagues to continue to reflect on practice as well as challenge cultural and academic assumptions about their students (Gay, 2010).

Culturally responsive pedagogy serves as a crucial lens to view the practices of a school district that aspires to become more adept in the practices that will improve student achievement and discipline gaps. Although there is not a list of standards for successfully implementing CRP, the above review aids in understanding factors that can lead to CRP and ultimately improve student achievement. The proposed study will use this concept to unearth the practices that a school district promotes and engages in an effort to become culturally responsive.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning contributes a lens for assessing an organization and its change over time (Fauske & Raybould, 2005). The operation of a school district in a quest to become more culturally responsive is a goal for the entire entity, beyond a sole individual's attainment (Johnson & Fauske, 2005). Organizational theorists argue that organizational learning should be utilized more often in educational research. "The numerous activities witnessed in educational organizations – leading, teaching, learning, counseling, coaching, etc. – take place in an organizational context. One cannot discuss these activities without considering the context in which they occur" (Johnson & Fauske, 2005, p. 6). Organizational learning supports the examination of the systems that encourage the collective learning of both adults and students (Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2006). The school district is a setting for social interaction, and organizational theory provides a context for understanding the interaction.

School systems are a practical domain in which to view multiple structural links that connect the individual classroom to the school (Johnson & Fauske, 2005) and the individual schools to the overall district in an effort to understand the opportunity for change to meet a

shared goal. Organizational learning theory provides an avenue to view the organization as a whole, as well as the actions of individuals. Argyris and Schon (1978) posited that individuals in our culture are socialized through theories of action. They proposed two theories of action: 1) espoused theory, which is what people say or intend, and 2) theories in use, which is what people do. These two theories are helpful in thinking about what routines and practices express the knowledge of an organization (theories in action) or the assumptions and beliefs the organization carries (espoused theories) (Collinson et al., 2006). Each of these theories provides valuable insight into the school district organization as they attempt to institutionalize culturally relevant practices throughout the district. These theories provide a path to better understand how the school district intends to become culturally responsive by examining the alignment of the espoused goals with the actual practice of CRP, along with the strategies they undertake to meet the goals.

Crosson, Lane, and White (1999) also provided a fitting description to contemplate organizational changes implemented by the school district to achieve a new goal of CRP. They defined organizational learning as "a principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of an enterprise" (p. 522). After synthesizing organizational learning literature, Crosson et al. (1999) developed a useful framework to aid in understanding an organization's renewal. They presented four key premises for the 4I framework of organizational learning:

1) There is tension between assimilating new learning with what has already been learned
2) There are multiple levels to organizational learning: individual, group, and organization
3) The three levels are connected by intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization
4) Cognition affects action as well as the reverse

Intuition is individual learning, or essentially the recognition of patterns or similarities and differences. Interpretation takes place as individuals develop insights about the learning in particular to what it means in their context. Language plays a key role, as new terms evolve into meaning and context. Integration involves new approaches and problem solving to implement new learning. Last, institutionalization is when learning is embedded in the system; it is not dependent on individuals or groups. The 4I framework provides important implications for this study because it highlights the tensions of new learning at multiple levels. As Crossan and Berdrow (2003) explained, "Intuiting and interpreting occur at the individual level; interpreting and integrating happen at the group level; and integrating and institutionalizing take place at the organizational level" (p. 1090).

The concept and goal of CRP was new for many educators in the school district; even those individuals with prior knowledge needed to reassess their previous notions of CRP to align with the school district's new vision and goals to become culturally responsive. As organizational learning applies to my study, there may be tensions with the practice of implementing CRP to explore. I must assess the role of individuals as well as the group overall to determine how they interpret a CRP vision and institutionalize the goals. How does the institution promote learning CRP strategies and support continued development throughout the district? The 4I framework was a useful reference to develop interview protocols and analyze data to interpret the organizational structures in place to obtain CRP goals. The next chapter provides a review of the literature for culturally responsive concepts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A search of the research for culturally responsive pedagogy brings forth a vast amount of literature on the topic. Much of the ensuing literature developed across two major areas. The first area encompasses literature that further extends or challenges the concepts and theoretical underpinnings of culturally responsive pedagogy. The second area of research is grounded in the experiences of educators who attempt to enact culturally responsive pedagogies. The research questions posed for this study focus on two primary areas of scholarship in CRP: leadership practices to promote CRP and teacher perceptions and implementation. For the purpose of this study, I provide a synopsis of the literature most closely aligned to my topic. First, I review and offer insight into the critiques on CRP. Second, I discuss literature that examines the practice of CRP in the classroom. Last, I examine research that focuses specifically on leadership practices in CRP.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogies: Extensions and Critiques

Culturally responsive pedagogy is extensively cited and often serves as a popular approach and model for working with diverse students. Tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b) have been extended and activated as a source for teachers across the country. Although the principles are widely operationalized through praxis at various school levels, it remains important to continue to consider and critique the concept.

One consideration for critique is the way in which culture, as part of CRP, has been conceptualized in practice. Critical examinations of race have often been left out of the concept of culture. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) conducted a literature review employing tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000) as a framework to emphasize educators' awareness of race and ethnicity as a pathway to create an equitable

learning environment and successfully engage in culturally relevant pedagogies. They highlighted shifting population demographics and the achievement gap between White students and other racial and ethnic minorities as a reason to implement culturally relevant pedagogy in school classrooms. After reviewing the work of prominent scholars (Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009b; Sleeter & Grant, 1999) who contributed to the field of culturally responsive pedagogies, the authors developed a conceptual framework to understand and study CRP. They established five overall themes for the conceptual framework from their extensive review: identity and achievement, equity and excellence, developmental appropriateness, teaching the whole child, and student-teacher relationships. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper's (2011) synthesis of the literature into the five themes extended the concept of CRP with their decision to use CRT as a thread to further emphasize and connect race as a vital part of CRP. The themes provided a clearer concept of not only what it means to be culturally responsive in practice but also how researchers determine CRP in their research.

Ladson-Billings (2014) also contested practitioners' conceptions of culture. She felt that her scholarship must push past previous conceptions of her work on CRP:

> Despite the apparent popularity of culturally relevant pedagogy, I have grown increasingly dissatisfied with what seems to be a static conception of what it means to be culturally relevant. Many practitioners, and those who claim to translate research to practice, seem stuck in very limited and superficial notions of culture. Thus, the fluidity and variety within cultural groups has regularly been lost in discussions and implementations of culturally relevant pedagogy. (p. 77)

If education practitioners must take on new ideas and conceptions of culture, it is necessary to move past static notions of racial and ethnic groups with monolithic ideals. In today's

increasingly electronic and global society, access to information provides entrance to a quickly fluctuating and malleable perception of culture. Deliberations of culture will be necessary as educators enact pedagogies to further the achievement of students of color.

In reconsidering her original notion of culturally relevant teaching, detailed in the previous chapter, Ladson-Billings (2014) reflected on the way her work was considered, interpreted, and complicated by those who enacted her concept of CRP. In Ladson-Billings' (2014) remix of culturally relevant pedagogy, she lamented that teachers "rarely pushed students to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have direct impact on their lives and communities" (p. 78). Critical views of knowledge are essential elements for culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Yet, this resource remains untapped as teachers lack either the knowledge or skill to effectively implement the critique of knowledge into their pedagogies.

In their recent work, Paris and Alim (2014) offered a "loving critique" of asset pedagogies such as Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant teaching. Paris and Alim urged an evolution of asset pedagogies to include cultural pluralism as well as the interplay of youth identity and cultural practice. They advanced Paris's (2012) original concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP):

> The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, has as its

> explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. (Paris, 2012, p. 95)

Although multilingualism and multiculturalism may be implied through culturally responsive pedagogy, Paris examined the problem of when we do make them explicit to theory and practice. Paris and Alim (2014) pointed to shifting demographics in U.S. classrooms that evidence multilingual and multicultural students of color. As society's majority population shifts from white to people of color, the power structures may also shift, and previous assumptions of white, middle-class values and practices as access to the dominant culture may cease to apply.

The above critiques require attention as researchers and practitioners move toward enacting CRP in their research and pedagogy. The concept of culture cannot be left to merely cultural referents in the classroom. Critical examinations of race must be included as part of a concept of culture when aiming to enact culturally responsive practices. However, we must continue to dialogue, discuss and question concepts such as culture and cultural knowledge; these notions must be coupled with ideas of access to an ever-changing society that is multicultural and multilingual.

CRP in the Classroom

The implementation of CRP is challenging for teachers as evidenced by the research (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Nam, Roehrig, Kern, & Reynolds, 2013; Scherff & Spector, 2011). Often, it is difficult for practitioners to apply theory to practice. The following studies highlight some of the complications with implementing CRP.

One example is Young's (2010) combined critical case study with action research, which was a study with both teachers and administrators who collaboratively conceptualized and implemented culturally relevant pedagogy within classrooms. One issue that Young encountered

was the confusion over clearly defining culturally relevant pedagogy. However, Young's (2010) study revealed three findings when observing teachers' attempt to enact culturally relevant pedagogies: there were "deep structural issues related to teacher's cultural bias, the nature of racism in school settings, and the lack of support to adequately implement theories into practice" (p. 248). The teachers experienced frustration with a lack of time for planning and felt pressure over meeting the requirements of the school curriculum. Participants were also skeptical as to the effectiveness of culturally relevant teaching and whether students in elementary school were capable of dealing with certain issues. In the study's conclusion, Young determined that it was necessary to raise the race consciousness of educators in order to implement culturally relevant pedagogies. Similar complications for implementing CRP can be found in Lopez's (2011) collaborative action research study, where a participant had to confront her own fears to implement lessons that dealt directly with issues of race. Lopez concluded:

> Culturally relevant pedagogy cannot be reduced to a list or strategies and takes time. Teachers must be supported to look for new ways and multiple entry points to enact these principles and must be encouraged to research and document their experience, success, failures and tensions. It is in the classroom practices of teachers that we will find answers. (p. 91).

Increasing the difficulty of implementing CRP in the classroom is the standardization of curriculum and tests (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). For example, Sleeter (2012) argued that neoliberal reforms exclude teacher professional development, as well as consideration of context, culture, and race, in lieu of student mastery of test taking. Teachers feel constrained by curriculum and pressure for their students to show results on standardized exams (Crocco & Costigan, 2006). These constraints can leave teachers feeling as though they

have little room to engage in new pedagogies such as CRP, or they trivialize the pedagogy by reducing it to cultural celebrations (Sleeter, 2012).

Yet, not all of the research paints a bleak picture of the realization of CRP in classrooms. Milner (2014) featured research where he felt the teacher successfully implemented CRP in a middle school social studies classroom. Milner found that Ms. Shaw was able to "empower her students to develop sociopolitical consciousness" (p. 9). She accomplished CRP by (1) building relationships with students, (2) assisting her students in thinking about broader purposes for their actions, and (3) centering race and community. There are positive implications for what Milner described as "purposeful teaching" in Ms. Shaw's classroom, and this study can provide meaningful discussion about the different ways teachers enact CRP. Social studies classrooms may seem like an obvious avenue to implement CRP, but there is evidence that these practices are taking place in science classrooms as well.

As a response to the call for more research on CRP in science teaching, Laughter and Adams (2012) presented findings from their research where they teamed up as researcher (Laughter) and classroom teacher (Adams) to complete the study. After Adams developed a unit with Laughter's assistance, they analyzed the unit and class participation for tenets of CRP. This study provided critical information that is valuable for researchers and practitioners. First, it negated the idea that science is an unbiased content area that does not warrant the use of CRP. Second, it gave a concrete example of how to use CRP in a science classroom, for which there is clearly a need. Analyzing the lesson against the tenets of CRP is a worthwhile endeavor as researchers and practitioners continue to contemplate characteristics of CRP in the classroom, and this example can pave the way for more types of analysis of actual lessons and the participation of students.

Student reception to CRP is also an area to consider in the research. Although this is a gap within the research, there are some studies that elevate student voices. In order to gain a better understanding of students' perceptions of CRP, Howard (2001) conducted a study with African American elementary school students. Foremost, the students explicitly described caring as an important attribute of their teachers. Second, the students mentioned the importance of the feeling of community or home in the classroom. Finally, students mentioned the need for learning to be fun. The study indicated the importance of relationships in the classroom from the student perspective and underscored the importance of establishing community as a primary tenet of CRP.

Most studies in the area of CRP engage in qualitative methods, but Byrd (2016) provided rare insight through a quantitative study on student perspectives of CRP. A group of 315 students in 6th to 12th grade was sampled from across the United States. Byrd found that the promotion of cultural competence was positively associated with academic outcomes. Byrd stated, "Of the two culturally relevant teaching measures, perceptions that teachers used constructivist methods were related to interest in school, greater feelings of belonging, and other group orientation" (p. 6). Byrd also found that both cultural socialization and critical consciousness socialization measures were positively connected to identity exploration and commitment. This study holds important implications for CRP as a way to show the influence of CRP on student expectations and outcomes to improve achievement.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

School leadership is an important component needed to establish culturally responsive school policies and procedures. Leadership is critical during change at both the overall district level and the school level (Fullan, 2003). Leadership requires actions and decisions that affect all

the stakeholders involved, and working toward new goals requires building capacity for new strategies. In order to incorporate new strategies, school leaders must foster environments that are conducive to change (Blase, 1987; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; MacBeath, 1998). Blase and Blase (2000) revealed that teachers described strong leadership from their school leaders as practices that included promoting professional growth and talking with teachers about improvement. The authors stated, "Generally speaking, principals who are attempting to develop as effective instructional leaders should work to integrate reflection and growth to build a school culture of individual and shared, critical examination for instructional improvement" (p. 138). Although school leadership is a broad topic that encompasses a range of research, for the purpose of this study, I will limit the scope of research to culturally responsive school leadership. The following sections will provide an overview of the literature in this area.

School leaders who seek to practice cultural responsiveness must embrace cultural similarities and differences, as well as develop an appreciation for those cultures (Singh, 1996). However, in order to be effective, principals must build teacher capacity and develop a collective commitment to culturally responsive values to work with diverse students (Andersen & Ottesen, 2011; Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive school leadership is demonstrated when school leaders influence others to work to understand how to respond to the educational needs of diverse groups of students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Singleton, 2006).

It is critical for school leaders to possess knowledge of culturally responsive practices, but they must also challenge teachers about their personal views of culture and cultural diversity. Villegas and Lucas (2002) promoted a strategy to challenge teachers' notions and actions by encouraging self-reflection and critical analysis as a way to promote sociocultural consciousness. If teachers are not challenged, they may use their biases against certain groups of students, rather

than turn their focus to strengths (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). In order to improve teaching and learning, educators must engage in critical reflection (Dewey, 1933).

School leaders also need the opportunity and support to critically reflect on their practice (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). As principals make decisions about policy, teacher and student support, and organizational practice, they must reflect on the culturally responsive strategies in each of these areas. Critical reflection is an essential practice for school leaders to create and foster strong, safe and inclusive school communities that are culturally responsive.

Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) published a comprehensive review of the literature on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Their synthesis of the literature, focused on school-level administrators, provides a helpful framework to examine the research on this topic. They identified four strands of CRSL from the literature: critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts. Critical self-awareness, identified in earlier literature, suggests the need for culturally responsive school leaders to have an awareness of their own values and beliefs and dispositions for serving children of color as well as intersections of race and class. Any organization or leader who wants to address issues of racism must first address their own issues of racism (Su, 2007). Although Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that critical awareness can be developed, it is a necessary component that will serve as the foundation for school leaders' practices within the school. The strands Khalifa et al. (2016) identified serve as areas to consider for understanding how school leaders implement practices and support for CRP goals. It is important to uncover how school leaders understand district-wide goals regarding CRP and the organizational practices to support these goals, extending the work from a broad organizational level of a district to the school and community.

In a practitioner's brief, Richards, Brown, and Ford (2007) specified another framework to consider CRP and school leadership. They outlined three areas that educational systems must address to ensure culturally responsive schools. First, school leaders must consider how the organization of the school relates to diversity. For example, how inclusive is the environment for families of various backgrounds and needs? Second, the school institution must examine policy and procedures and how they impact diverse students in the school community. The third area referred to community involvement, where the school must find ways to foster community involvement to include diverse families. In this area, schools should promote involvement rather than waiting for parents to seek opportunities to become involved.

Yet, barriers are another factor school leadership must understand to promote and sustain culturally responsive practice. For instance, Horsford, Grossland, and Gunn (2011) stated:

> Efforts to demonstrate and engage culturally relevant leadership in schools will face challenge and resistance from those who prefer to keep things the way they are. Educational leaders must therefore become familiar not only with the guiding principles, continuum, and essential elements of cultural proficiency but also the obstacles and resistance they will face as they seek to dismantle oppression and reveal privilege and entitlement within their respective organizations (p. 598).

One barrier to confront is the presence of institutional discrimination or racial tensions associated with cultural differences within the organization (Davis, Galinsky, & Schopler, 1995). Also, organizational learning must be considered as leaders encounter the tensions of implementing new practices within the school. Leaders must be conscious not only of culturally responsive practice, but also of the barriers to address, in order to be effective leaders.

Gaps in the Literature

There are gaps present in the literature reviewed for this study. Although there is a growing number of studies in both the areas of culturally responsive teaching and school leadership, there are few that provide insight into school district initiatives in CRP work. Most of the culturally responsive literature reviewed in this chapter provided insight into classroom practices and leadership strategies. Despite extensive reviews, such as Khalifa's et al. (2016) meta-analysis on school leadership, much of the literature focuses on building-level leadership that is unable to postulate about district-level leadership and organizational practices across schools in one district. The gap in the literature provides an opportunity to conduct a study with a school district promoting CRP goals throughout all the schools under its leadership. Research on culturally responsive practices that provides an account for district leadership and organizational strategies relevant to reaching CRP in a school district can narrow the gap in this area. Furthermore, understanding how teachers make sense of district initiatives to become more culturally responsive is an area worth pursuing. More research is needed on how school district systems envision and pursues a common goal of culturally responsive practice.

Summary

The bodies of literature on culturally responsive critiques and classroom practices are important to understand the context in which my study takes place. The concept and praxis of CRP is not a new educational initiative. It is critical to understand how CRP has been previously imagined in other contexts as I consider the ways it emerges in the research context of my study. The literature illustrates a path to compare CRP at different levels within the school district. The body of literature on school leadership details particular components to consider when analyzing culturally responsive practices. School leaders must possess knowledge of CRP but must also

understand how to promote and support practices in their schools. Each body of literature is essential to create a foundation to pursue a new study on CRP. The next chapter describes the qualitative methods utilized in this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to understand broadly how a school district attempts to become culturally responsive as an entity with multiple school sites. More specifically, I wanted to understand both how school leaders and teachers envision CRP and how they utilize organizational practices in pursuit of becoming culturally responsive. I embarked on this research with a specific school district, where I had established a relationship with the leadership. Subsequently, my prior knowledge of the district informed me that they were engaged in practices to become more culturally responsive through multiple paths for leadership and teachers.

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative research design guiding this study, specifically an ethnographic case study approach. Next, I provide a brief synopsis of the research context and participants, the types of data collected, and an overview of the data analysis. Last, I consider the expansion of my researcher positionality and the way in which I hesitantly became a participant observer during this study.

Qualitative Research Design

I conducted a qualitative case study (Yin, 2003) to explore how one school district attempted to impart culturally responsive practices. Qualitative research methodology permitted an inductive approach and allowed for the focus on specific situations and people (Maxwell, 2013). The following research questions served as a guide for my study:

1) How do school leaders and teachers envision culturally responsive practices?
2) How do school leaders and teachers understand culturally responsive district-wide initiatives as informing their practice?
3) How does a school district utilize organizational practices to achieve CRP goals?

A qualitative research approach allowed me to emphasize the ways school leaders and teachers envisioned CRP and understood it as part of their practice. Through qualitative methods, I unearthed and interpreted school leaders' and teachers' experiences regarding CRP within the complexities of a sociocultural system, the school district, over the last year. There were key aspects of a qualitative strategy that were necessary for this study. Creswell (2009) listed five important features of qualitative research: (a) developing an understanding of the natural setting or context, (b) being an active participant in gathering data, (c) gathering multiple sources of data, (d) practicing an inductive approach, and (e) allowing for flexibility in the research design.

Mini-Ethnographic Case Study

I employed a case study approach because it is most aligned with my qualitative study. A case study explores "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13). Merriam (1998) portrayed case studies as ideal for educational inquiries; she described the following:

> A case study design is employed to gain an in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19).

This study aligned well with Merriam's description because I sought to better understand how members of a particular school district understood and engaged in culturally responsive practices. In this study, the phenomenon is one school district's approach to incorporate and engage culturally responsive practices throughout the district. The case study is bounded by intentionally focusing on a single case of one school district. Even though I interviewed and

observed participants at different school sites, they remain part of one entity or organizational structure that encompasses a group with shared culture, objectives, and goals (Goldring & Sims, 2005).

Ethnography is derived from the field of anthropology and is particularly helpful when attempting to understand an organization's behavior by learning about the beliefs and attitudes on a macro level within a group (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). A mini-ethnography, or a focused ethnography, is employed to concentrate on a narrow area of inquiry (Fusch et al., 2017; White, 2009). Also, mini-ethnographies often take place during shorter time spans than traditional ethnographies do (Alfonso, Nickelson, & Cohen, 2012; White, 2009). The decision to merge two designs "uses data collection methods from both designs yet bounds the research in time and space" (Fusch et al., 2017, p. 926). Through previous work in the school district, further described in Chapter 4, I came to know the beliefs of individuals within the district and understand the overall changing phenomena as the leadership in the district attempted to put culturally responsive initiatives in place. The previous work and relationships I formed lent themselves to ethnographic methods as I navigated multiple research data collection methods, such as interviews and direct observation, which later shifted to participant observation.

Data Collection

Waterville Public Schools[2] (WPS) served as the site for this case study. The preK-12, urban school district is located in the Midwest and is comprised of approximately 3,600 students. A more in-depth description of the context and the participants are provided in Chapter 4.

Recruitment and Selection. One important way qualitative methods differ from quantitative methods is through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The term purposeful

[2] Waterville Public Schools (WPS) is a pseudonym.

sampling refers to the deliberate selection of particular people or settings in order to gain information relevant to the research questions or goals of the study (Maxwell, 2013). Choosing WPS as the site for this case study is deliberate because of their strategic goal to become more culturally responsive.

The first participant for the study was the superintendent. As the leader of the entire district, it was necessary to include the person who is instrumental in creating the vision and strategic goals for the district. I interviewed him to gain a better understanding of the CRP goals of the district and the plan set in place to achieve them (see Appendix C). Also, the superintendent serves as the gatekeeper, or the individual who approves research to occur and allows access to the setting and possible participants (Creswell, 2009). The next step was to secure school leaders or principals to participate in the study. One criterion for selecting principals was that they have been employed with the district for the last four years. Their employment history in the district is relevant because it is important that they were employed by the district during the equity audit in 2014. If they were employed at that time, they most likely experienced the new initiatives motivated by the findings from the equity audit. However, this criterion was not in place for the high school principal. One reason for the exception is that I felt it was imperative to include the high school principal because a majority of students in the district attend or will attend the high school. Another reason is the largest numbers of teachers work at the high school, and it is important to obtain the perspective of the school leaders who must guide them through new initiatives to become culturally responsive.

After reviewing individual school data, I sent recruitment emails to four K-7 principals and the high school principal (see Appendix A for recruitment email). The high school principal and two K-7 principals responded. I had individual meetings with each of them to discuss my

study. After interviews with the superintendent and one principal, data emerged about a team that was working on issues of equity throughout the district. I was referred to the facilitator of the group, who was also a school leader, and I sent the recruitment letter to secure representation for the study. Once I secured school leaders' participation, I attempted to recruit teachers at the same sites where the principals resided.

Recruiting teachers to be a part of the study proved more difficult than I anticipated. There were similar recruitment criteria for teachers, in that teachers must have worked in the district for the last four years. My initial goal was to recruit six teachers, two from each school site where the school leaders were also participants. First, I attempted to review data and reach out to particular teachers based on their grade level or subject area. When this was not successful, I attempted to recruit teachers by asking principals for recommendations, but that was only successful in three cases where teachers responded to my recruitment email (see Appendix A). At that point, I developed a half sheet flyer and attached copies to a box of candy outlining brief points of expectations of participation and placed them in teacher mailboxes. I gained one more participant with this strategy. After realizing I would have to change my proposed structure of participants for the study, I decided to retain the goal of six participants but to reach out to other schools where the principals were not part of the study. I set a goal to obtain three participants from the high school and three participants from K-7 schools. When all other efforts proved unsuccessful, I engaged in chain referral sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). I requested that one of the school leaders send an introductory email to two teachers who might be interested in participating in the study. This method proved successful, and I was able to gain the final two participants in the study. Once I established contact, I sent them the recruitment letter and met with them to talk about their interest in the study; they both agreed to participate.

Interviews. Interviews function as a vehicle to understand the experience of others, as well as how people make sense of their experiences (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2006). As an entity, WPS is comprised of various participants functioning within different areas of influence but working toward the same goal. I interviewed school leaders and teachers in this district twice during the study. Each interview was semi-structured; I had a guide of questions/issues to be explored but I was flexible based on participants' responses (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). The interviews served as the main path to explore their perceptions of CRP and how they understood the organizational practices regarding CRP. The first interview determined their insights about their understanding of CRP and their plans to implement their goals (see Appendices D & E). The second interview protocol was developed after the first interview and observations and became individualized for each participant. I inquired about particular instances in teachers' classrooms or about events that took place in the district. Although there are seven schools in the district, it was necessary to determine anchor points, or as Dyson and Gineshi (2005) defined, "Certain people, or key informants, whom researchers talk with in order to get varied angles on what's going on relative to some phenomenon" (p. 50). In this case, the phenomenon was the work that school leaders and teachers envisioned and engaged in to meet CRP goals. I interviewed the high school principal, two principals from K-7 schools, and the director of the college preparatory program (n=4); this gave me three different angles from which to view the work. The principals or school leaders interpret the vision set by the superintendent, make local school goals, and present them to teachers. School leaders provide the tone and support in each of their schools. Similarly, I interviewed three teachers from the high school and three teachers from three other schools in the district (n=6). Teachers have the greatest influence on the students in their classrooms and carry out the goals of the district through the practices in their

classrooms. It is imperative to understand their view of CRP district-wide goals and how those goals affect their classroom practice.

Observations

Stake (2005) stated, "Observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case" (p. 60). In order to gain a complete picture of the case, I conducted two observations in the classrooms of each teacher who was part of the study. Although I had developed an observation protocol using elements from culturally responsive literature to determine the aspects of the observation, I found it to be limiting. I switched to taking highly descriptive field notes (Merriam, 2002) where I would record classroom interactions, my focus ranging from a narrow angle with specific interactions with teacher and students to a wider angle observing the entire space. Often, the observations assisted me in generating questions for the second interview. Each observation lasted a minimum of 60 minutes.

Document Analysis

In order to conduct an in-depth case study, I gathered documents to create a full picture. Documents serve to fill gaps of information and generate questions, and they can also create new directions for research (Glesne, 2011; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). The documents I reviewed included the WPS district strategic plan, professional development materials, mission statements, newspaper articles, and classroom materials. Document analysis can fill important gaps, but Yin (2003) warned that the researcher must not readily accept the documents as accurate or unbiased. For example, agendas may record a plan, but it is necessary to determine how the agenda was actually carried out. The objective was to collect documents that helped to generate a full picture of WPS's activities and achievements related to CRP, and they served as a guide during my interviews and observations.

As I reviewed and analyzed documents, I observed ways CRP is portrayed as part of an overall goal for the district. Specifically, what language is used to present the vision and goals of the district? I also wanted to understand how the organization communicated goals to individuals. In summary, I analyzed documents with an organizational learning lens (Argyris & Schön, 1978) to understand how vision and goals are communicated, more specifically for elements of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2009b).

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis happened simultaneously throughout this study. Documents were collected and coded, in some cases before interviews began. All documents and interview data were uploaded into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, to assist in the process of coding data and sorting by code to understand emerging themes. All data, including interviews and documents, were coded for emerging themes. Initial codes, or etic codes, were developed and guided by the literature as well as my interview and observation protocols, in order to engage in structural coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2009). First, I generated codes that that aligned with tenets of CRP. A few examples include codes for community involvement, family communication, student engagement, and sociopolitical consciousness. I also created codes to capture organizational learning; for example, I coded for personal goals, district-wide goals, building goals, engagement in goals, and professional learning toward stated goals. I wanted to understand how goals are expressed versus how goals are enacted (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

I realized I needed to allow for the flexibility of emergent (emic) codes based on information that was revealed in the interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. During this process, I added several codes. Coding for trauma became an important addition to

the codes that I had not anticipated at the outset of my study. Yet, through interviews, it became clear that it was an important element to review more closely during analysis.

During the research process, I composed analytic memos (Miles et al., 2014) as a way to make sense of and continually engage in the data analysis and finding of themes. The memos also became an important tool for me to make sense of my own participation in the study. They served as not only documentation of my changing role but as a way for me to make sense of my experience juxtaposed with the perspectives of school leaders and teachers. In the memos, I raised questions, determined next steps for the study, connected observations to interviews and documents, and advanced emerging themes.

Changing My Role as Researcher

When I set out to complete the dissertation study, I did not see myself as a direct participant in the work of WPS. Although I had been previously connected to WPS during an equity audit, when I participated with a team from the nearby university to interview administrators, teachers, students, and parents, I still viewed myself as an outsider to the community. Unlike the staff, I had not had to implement the recommendations of the equity audit, nor had I seen myself as playing a role in their improvement. As I began my study and started to appear on school campuses, at professional development sessions, or school events, some within the school community recognized me. I was often greeted with expressions of familiarity, or people would say "Do I know you from somewhere?" I would explain that I had been part of the equity audit team or assisted with professional development sessions, and then heads would nod in acknowledgement.

After several interviews, people suggested I find out more about the Collective for Equity (CFE) because "they were doing the culturally responsive work." First, I reached out to some of

the members and asked them to be participants in my study. I wanted to learn more about the work and thought it would be interesting to hear a perspective from people who were working on CRP outside of the classroom yet hoped to impact the progress of culturally responsive work in the district. While writing field notes and memos at one of my favorite coffee shops in Waterville, I noticed a flyer for an event called "My Story." It was an invitation to listen to community members' stories, but it also invited individuals to share their own stories. Coincidentally, the event was sponsored by the CFE, so I marked it on my calendar and made a mental note to bring my notebook to the event.

I attended the event and listened to the stories shared by adults of all ages as well as young people. I had previously met the organizer of the CFE, and she invited me to attend the monthly meeting. At this point, I was struggling for participants in my study, and she thought this might be a good place for me to find people who were willing to talk about their experiences. After I was introduced to the group at my first meeting, I awkwardly explained some details about my study, hoping to get more participants to join. The organizer graciously welcomed me to continue to join them in future meetings. I smiled, nodded, and wrote the dates in my calendar. Even though I was interested, I had no intention of doing anything more than observe. However, it became more difficult to sit silently while others did the work. Soon, I found myself participating in discussions, speaking at board meetings as a part of the CFE, leading structured conversations, and providing a research brief on ethnic studies. Before I realized it, I had tweaked my methodological approach. It was not a conscious decision, and I did not have the foresight to plan my participant observation. However, it was a role change that forced me to rethink my positionality, my role in the work of schools, reciprocity, and my future exit from WPS.

Double Dutch Methodology: Reframing my Role as a Participant Observer

Even though I did not consider participant observation in my original inception of this study, Green's (2014) Double Dutch Methodology (DDM) provided a framework for me to reflect on and analyze my participation with CFE as part of my dissertation research. There are three major components to DDM: "exploring researcher positionality, establishing theoretical standpoints, and developing an ability to engage in a contextually stylized and improvisational method of participant observation" (p. 158). Double Dutch Methodology emphasized the tensions of being a participant who must jump in and out of a particular context while playing various roles. Although it was not my intention to become a participating group member in CFE, I found myself taking on more roles and responsibility throughout my participation. Sometimes I willingly volunteered for duties, and other times I hesitantly took on roles by happenstance. My hesitation to participate made me question my positionality as researcher.

Researcher Positionality. I did not arrive to WPS as a neutral observer. My previous work with the equity audit team helped to form a vision of WPS as a district struggling with a colorblind ideology where students of color and their families were underserved. My own experience as a classroom teacher and administrator also played a role in my view of teaching ideologies, and I also understood the pressure to meet district-led priorities and goals. As a classroom teacher, I valued relationships with my students and set high expectations for them, but I cannot say that I embodied culturally responsive practices all the time. I believe I had elements of CRP in my pedagogy, but I did not have the knowledge to fully understand some of the choices I made around curriculum and practice. How could I balance remembering my own shortcomings as a teacher and administrator with what I had learned in my doctoral studies about CRP? More importantly, how would I balance this viewpoint when interacting with my

participants as researcher, but also as a new community member? These questions all created tension I navigated throughout this process. There were also other aspects of my identity that I felt I needed to negotiate in this space.

As all my participants identify as White, I found myself in a precarious position as a Latina doctoral student entering WPS. First, as can happen in predominantly White spaces, I did not want to be viewed as "the voice" for the Latinx families in the district. Although I share a broad ethnic identity with the majority of the student population in WPS, Latinx includes a range of nationalities, cultural practices, and language. I do not claim to understand the background and intricacies of the people this particular community, and this view is best articulated by the community members themselves. Second, my ethnic identity and Spanish surname may have shaped the ways in which participants responded to my interview questions about culturally responsive initiatives and classrooms. The ethnic identity that I share with a majority of their students could be an impetus for participants to omit certain feelings, experiences, or interactions regarding students and families who identify as Latinx as a way to show themselves in a more positive light.

Finally, as a researcher from a well-known university, I was positioned as an "expert" in education in general. This sentiment was problematic and became heightened when my participation became a signal of "expert approval" from a Latina scholar and educator. During a group proposal to the school board to adopt an ethnic studies course, I was highly aware of my presence as the only person of color in the room. Because I had helped to prepare parts of the proposal, my presence was a signal of approval and more importantly, the approval of someone who looked very much like a majority of students in the district. Although it was not my

intention to signal a blanket approval, my very presence was co-opted for that purpose. These tensions highlighted the need for strong theoretical frameworks in my work.

Theoretical Standpoints. I took up theoretical frameworks that allowed me to better understand not only participants' views of CRP, but also to better understand how an entire school district utilized organizational structures to become more culturally responsive as an entity. I felt strongly that understanding organizational practices could lead to the development of theories and practices to help support CRP in schools and districts. However, when I was called upon to become a participating member of the CFE, I was brought back to the idea of reciprocity and my own engagement and responsibility to the community I was working with in this research.

During my doctoral program, I encountered the work of Duncan Andrade (2006), who described the concept of *cariño*, or authentic caring, as a part of educational research. Although I was intimately familiar with the term from my family and friends growing up, it was the first time I had heard it as part of an academic concept. He contended that schools need a research methodology that facilitates reciprocal relationships, "leading to deeper commitments for researchers to the school's and community's welfare" (p. 454). In my own work, I consider a cariño methodology that calls for reciprocity. The idea of reciprocity in research is a matter of consideration for all of those who engage in qualitative research. Glazer (1982) defined reciprocity as "the exchange of favors or commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community" (p. 50). Zigo (2001) believed that participants should be able to identify worthwhile, specific benefits from the researcher's participation. I imagined that reciprocity for WPS would be a professional development that I designed or working with individual teachers on CRP. Despite having my own ideas of what reciprocity might look like in

this context, I was called upon to participate in ways that the community felt was most beneficial to them.

Engaging in the Context. It is important to understand my role, as I chose to enter the context as a participant observer. Green (2014) aptly characterized the process through her metaphor of double dutch in the following way:

> As a participant observer, I am 'jumping' into the phenomenon of something existing, an ongoing slice of reality. The double dutch game is that reality box, the phenomenon that I have decided to put myself in the middle of, and all of a sudden I realize I cannot just stand outside the action. Instead I am part of the action and have to decide when and how to jump into what at times is a frenzy of activity. (p. 157)

My phenomenon was the CFE, and I realized I could not simply attend meetings and observe the process. I found myself holding back comments during discussions at meetings. It came to a point where I had to make a decision to become a full participant or remain on the sidelines, never jumping into the work. Not only was I called on by members, but I knew that I needed to provide whatever service this community felt was necessary, whether that was engaging in discussions, leading community meetings, or providing research on various topics.

In my role as a CFE member, I was asked by the group to lead a discussion on enlisting and engaging more community members to be a part of the CFE. I led a discussion using National School Reform Faculty's *Barriers or Bridges: A Matter of Perspective and Attitude* protocol. In this activity, I asked participants to list barriers and bridges to working with community and families in WPS. Participants wrote their responses on brown paper bags. On one side, they listed ways that WPS invites families and community to be a part of the work, and

on the other side, they listed barriers that WPS might have in place that prohibits family and community participation. Then participants built a structure with barriers on one side (Figure 3.1) and bridges on the other side (Figure 3.2). Depending on one's viewpoint, the figure could be seen as a wall or barrier, or it could be seen as a bridge to extend offers to join the community.

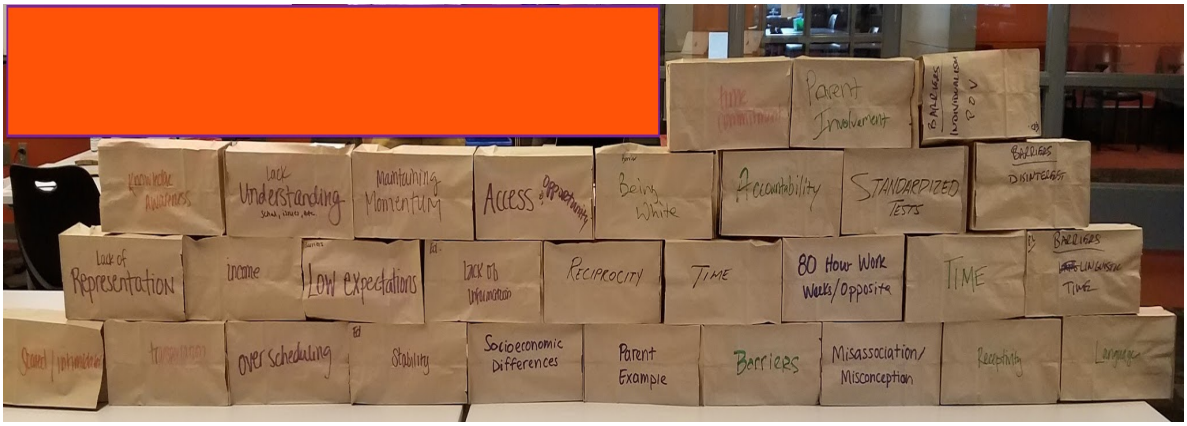

Figure 3.1. **Barriers to Bridges Activity: Barriers Side**

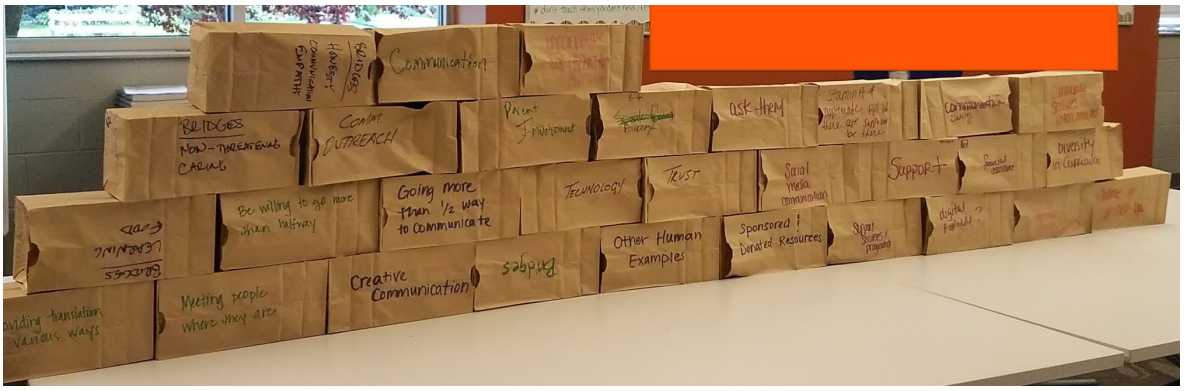

Figure 3.2. **Barriers to Bridges Activity: Bridges Side**

As we looked at the side that listed barriers and again considered the overarching question of how we invite parents and community into the work of schools, I invited participants to share their thoughts about what they had written. Some themes that emerged were more definite, such as time and language. Lack of time stood out to the group with the understanding that many

families and community members work and may not be able to reschedule or take time off to participate. Another theme that emerged was language, as the group recognized that there are not enough people who are fluent in the various languages of families, which can make even general communication difficult. But another issue regarding language that emerged was the way educators talk about school often using "educator speak," referring to teachers and administrators sometimes using language or terms that families and communities are unfamiliar with or do not understand.

Other barriers that participants listed were more abstract, such as "maintaining momentum." This phrase was described as the inability of WPS to maintain community and family involvement. For example, there may be an event that families and communities rally around, but WPS is unable to sustain the same level of involvement or interest for other activities, such as the CFE. Lack of information or knowledge was also listed as a barrier, where families do not have enough information about expectations for their involvement. The phrase "Being White" also appeared on one of the bricks, which referred to the fact that a majority of the school administrators and teachers are White. This fact may be a barrier as families and community members do not see others who share their racial or ethnic identity and may feel as though their views are not welcome or wanted.

I chose this particular activity for CFE because it required participants to provide solutions to bridge the gap of family and community involvement. On this side of the structure, there were tangible solutions, such as providing transportation, translators, and donated resources; however, there seemed to be more philosophical phrases on the bricks. There were phrases such as "meeting people where they are," "be willing to go more than halfway," and "honesty, communication, empathy." These types of phrases showed that many of the

participants felt that a bridge could be extended using a philosophical framework provided by educators who exhibited understanding and caring attitudes toward the community from which they serve and are asking to participate. Participants were questioning their own assumptions and attitudes about why there were not higher rates of participation in school events that were not related to sports, performance or competition. They also realized that while they were able to quickly point out the barriers to participation, it was much more difficult to come up with bridges.

Serving as a leader and facilitator of this activity highlighted my challenges with jumping in and out of the context as CFE member and researcher. During this time, I was still conducting my research. I had interviewed several members in the CFE, conducted observations in their classrooms, and had begun to schedule the second round of interviews. As a researcher, I was essentially an observer who listened to responses and wrote down phrases and observations in a notebook. As a CFE member, I was primarily a participant who more readily shared thoughts, opinions, and vulnerabilities. Ultimately, I also had to make private thoughts public when I felt words or actions did not align with the mission of the CFE. In particular, during this activity, some discussion arose that I determined was problematic. One of the participants felt that lack of family participation was due to the fact that parents "don't care" or are "not interested" in the education of their children. This was one of those pivotal moments for me when I had to decide how I would participate in this space. Did I challenge the participant about their deficit perspective of families or did I let it go because I was not a "real" member of this community? I told the CFE member of my concern with portraying families in this way. What evidence did we have that this was true? Do we know the reasons why families "don't show up?" Have we even asked them? Other members also commented that it is important that we assume best intentions

from families and questioned what it means to hold negative assumptions about families. As a group, we continued to trouble the narrative that "families don't care" and came to the conclusion that if we operate under that assumption, then we were powerless to create bridges. Also, that type of assumption left all of the responsibility on families and did not require schools to self-assess their systems or actions. The discussion continued on to other barriers, and then we moved on to bridges.

Paris (2011) reminded me about forming relationships in the communities in which we work. He emphasized, "Genuine relationships and moments of inspiration are fostered in authentic participation in activities that matter to the participants" (p. 144). My participation in leading this activity for the CFE helped to form more genuine relationships with the other members in this space. In all honesty, it was one of the few times I felt authentic in my actions, as I am sometimes uncomfortable in my research position. It felt natural to facilitate this conversation, and I also believed I was fulfilling a need at their request. At the close of our conversation about barriers and bridges, we knocked down the wall we had created. We did it together as a symbol of breaking down walls that aim to separate us (Figure 3.4). I feel I also let down a wall that day and allowed myself to jump into the messiness of researcher, participant, and community member.

***Figure 3.4*. Barriers to Bridges Activity: Bring Down the Wall**

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH CONTEXT & PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a profile of the research context by providing a synopsis of the community of Waterville, Waterville Public Schools (WPS), and the educators who participated in my study. Waterville, a city situated in the Midwest, provides the backdrop for the administrators and teachers who shared their perspectives about their work in this particular community. I include statistical data for both Waterville demographics and WPS demographics to show the contrast between the population of the city and the school district. It is not my intention to present this context through mere statistics, but rather to illustrate the gaps that exist between the broader community and the school district. I also incorporate participant profiles in order to exemplify a diversity of roles within WPS and the broad range of perspectives from the individuals who provide voice about their goals and work in the community.

City of Waterville Demographics

The population of Waterville is approximately 33,000 (US Census Bureau, 2018), with the number of residents under the age of 18 at roughly 10,300 (NCES, 2018). Waterville's overall population has almost doubled since the 1990s when the community had about 17,000 residents (US Census Bureau, 2018). The higher education options in the area include eleven colleges and universities located within a 30-mile radius of Waterville. The median income is $50,528 and a 16.5% poverty rate, compared to national averages of $59,039 and 12.7% (US Census Bureau, 2018). The U.S. Labor Department Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) showed the unemployment rate at 3.5%, which is below the national average. The racial and ethnic demographics for the city of Waterville are displayed in Figure 4.1. There are three school districts located within the city of Waterville, including WPS and two others.

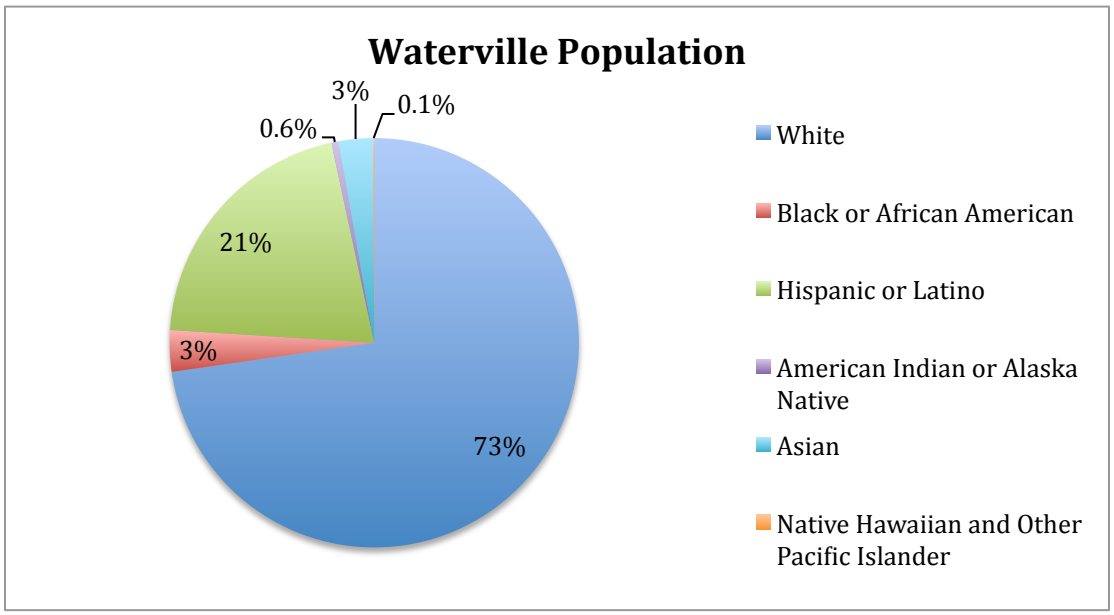

Figure 4.1. **Racial and Ethnic Percentages for the City of Waterville**

Waterville Public Schools District

Waterville Public Schools (WPS) is home to approximately 3,600 students and serves grades PK-12. The school district is comprised of seven schools: one early childhood center, four K-7 schools, one high school (grades 8-12), and one alternative credit recovery school (grades 8-12). However, WPS student enrollment continues to decline, as more students are choosing to attend schools outside of WPS. As a result, WPS experienced several school closings; in 2000, they had 15 buildings, but now students occupy only eight buildings (one of the eight buildings includes an early college program). This change is not due to a decrease in city population. The statistics above show that Waterville's population continues to increase steadily.

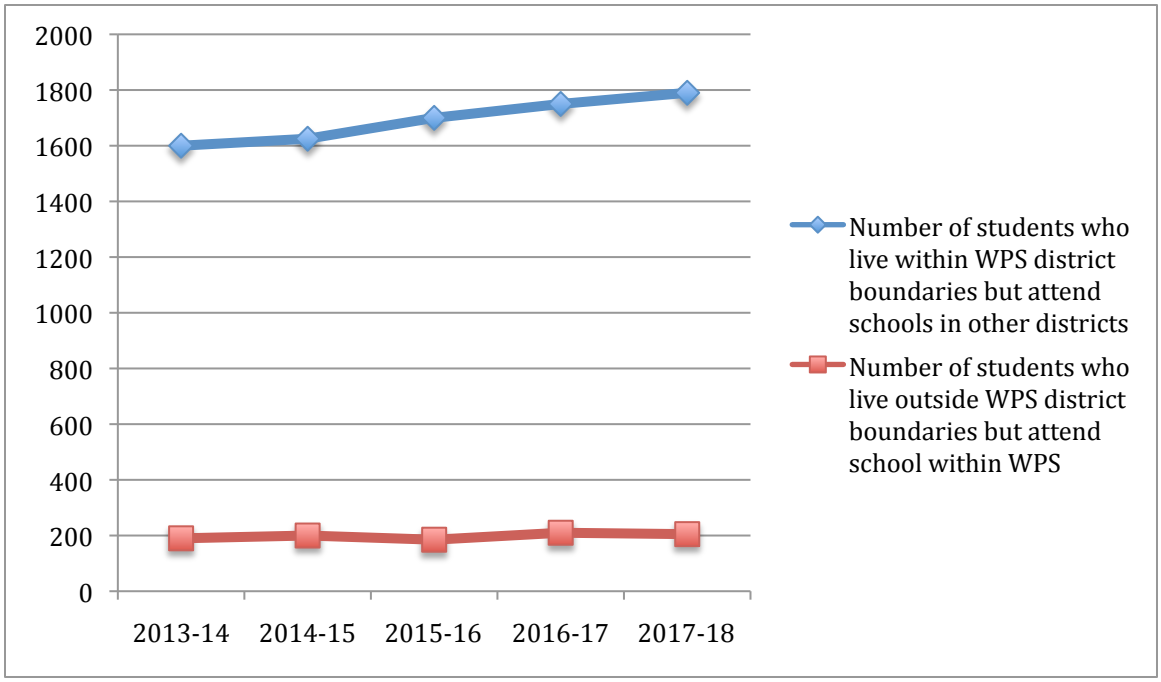

Figure 4.2. **Student Enrollment in Waterville Public Schools**

Figure 4.2 shows the number of students who live in the WPS district but choose to attend schools outside of WPS. The numbers encompass students who leave WPS to attend private schools, charter schools, and neighboring school districts. The graph represents how many students choose to exercise a school of choice option and attend a school outside of WPS or attend WPS from outside the district. The number of students who leave the district has been steadily rising over the last five years, which has an economic impact for WPS. Close to 2,000 students choose to attend schools outside of WPS, meaning the education funds follow them to their new districts and/or schools. White student enrollment has declined at WPS. The racial and ethnic student demographics for WPS are displayed in Figure 4.3. White students comprise 49% of school-age children living in the district, yet they make up only 37% of the population in WPS. Also, poverty rates for students have increased. Seventy percent of students in WPS are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

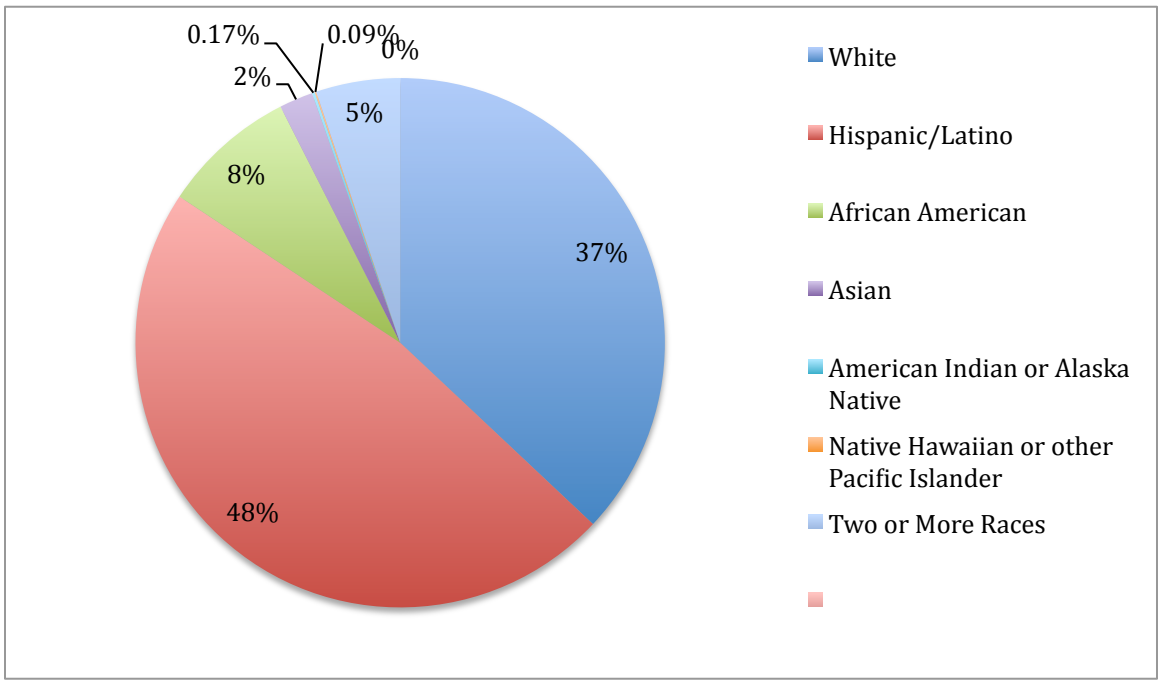

Figure 4.3. **Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Students in WPS**

The racial and ethnic demographics for teachers and administrators are displayed in Figure 4.4. Like many school districts and schools across the United States, the majority of teachers identify as White, juxtaposed with students who are racially and ethnically diverse. The United States Department of Education (2016) described a disparity in the racial diversity of the U.S. teacher workforce, where 82% of public school teachers were White. Although the ethnic diversity of the student population in WPS has changed over the last 20 years to become a majority of Latinx students, the race and ethnicity of the educators has largely stayed the same and remains majority White.

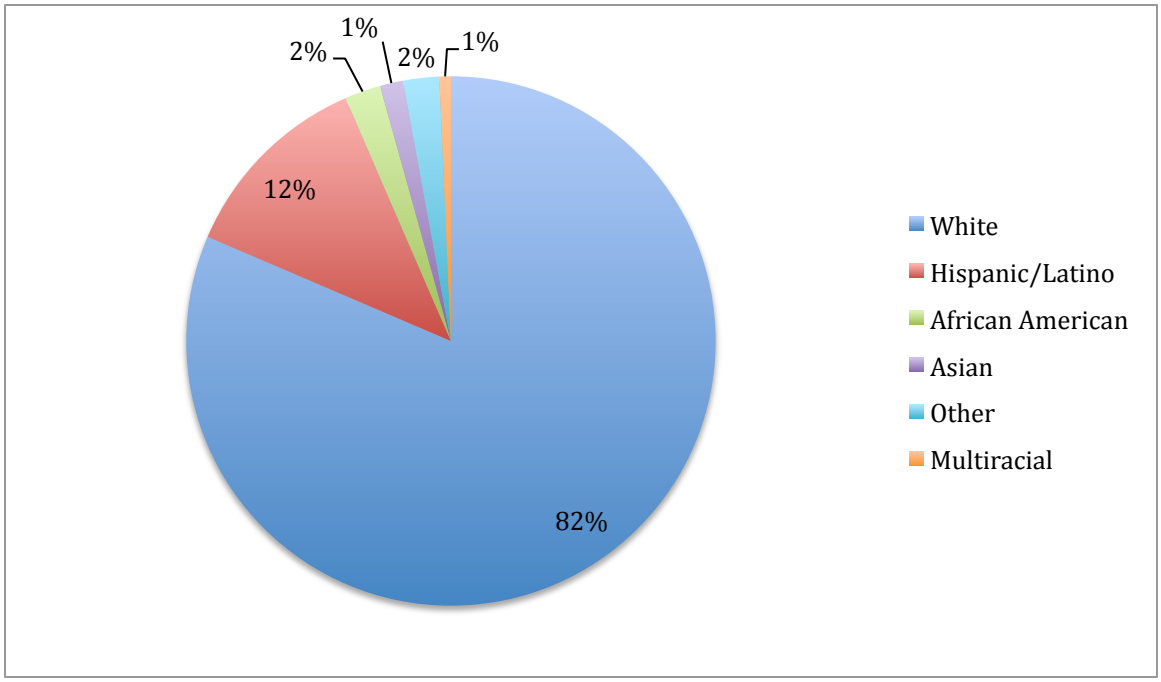

Figure 4.4. **Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Teachers in WPS**

Academic and Discipline Disparities

Prior to this study, I was part of an equity audit research team commissioned by the superintendent of the school district. The purpose of the equity audit was to investigate factors that contributed to the academic achievement and discipline inequities in WPS. The school district was labeled as a focus district, or one noted to have an achievement gap in at least 30% of student achievement scores. There were two alarming trends in the district data. First, there was a growing gap in academic outcomes between White students and Black and Latinx students. For example, White students consistently outnumbered Black and Latinx students in Advanced Placement courses in the high school while maintaining a lower percentage of students in special education courses (see Table 4.1).

Race/Ethnicity	Advanced Placement (%)	Honors Classes (%)	Special Education (%)
White	74	70	30
Latino	19	20	48
Black	1	4	19
Asian	6	6	3

Table 4.1. **Percentage of WPS Students in Specialized Courses 2013-2014**

Black and Latinx students comprised the largest percentage of students who did not pass courses or were held back a grade. However, gaps in achievement were not the only concerning data for the school district.

The second cause for concern was that Waterville Public Schools also showed evidence of a discipline gap. For instance, there was a disproportionate number of Black and Latinx students suspended or expelled from WPS. Black and Latinx students also received the largest percentage of discipline referrals when compared to their White peers (see Figure 4.5).

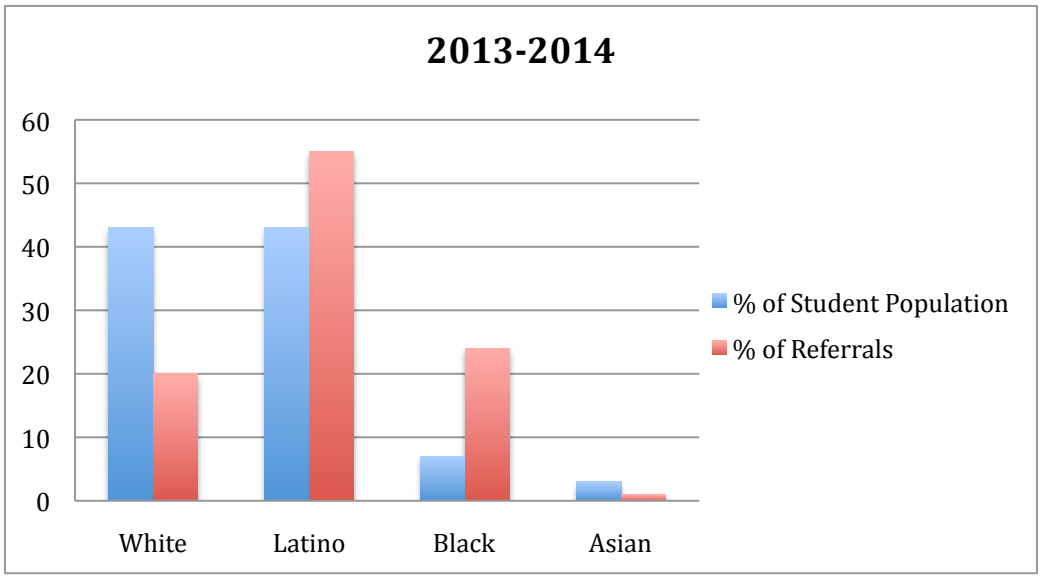

Figure 4.5. **WPS Student Discipline Referrals by Race and Ethnicity**

Equity Audit

The leadership within WPS recognized the precarious situation and the need to consider these gaps in achievement and discipline through a broader and more rigorous lens. As a first step to become culturally responsive, the superintendent and leadership team requested an equity audit to understand what factors the staff, students, and parents attributed to the inequities. The research team amassed a sizeable amount of quantitative and qualitative data across WPS. For instance, we conducted 79 teacher interviews, 16 administrator interviews, and six school board member interviews, as well as student focus groups with 168 student participants and parent focus groups with 10 parent participants. Once the data was collected and analyzed, the team made several recommendations to WPS to guide the leaders in the district to engage more equity-minded practices.

I purposefully selected this school district for my study because of the superintendent's plan to include CRP as part of the professional development for all schools in the district. Waterville Public Schools was in the process of implementing new strategies to become more culturally responsive. They had already taken the first step by commissioning the equity audit. As a result, the leadership team created a new strategic plan, and the superintendent initiated professional development on culturally responsive pedagogies (see Figure 4.6).

***Figure 4.6*. Timeline: Development of WPS Priorities**

Strategic Plan

As discussed in Chapter 1, culturally responsive practices were prioritized and embedded within district-wide initiatives. This section illustrates how WPS designated culturally responsive goals and objectives for the overall district. The intention of presenting the strategic plan in this section is to depict how leadership in the school district envisioned and designated cultural responsiveness as part of their long-term goal setting. It is important to understand how these goals were presented to stakeholders through the strategic plan, a public document, with the intent to build a broader capacity to make WPS a more equitable environment for all students.

The focus on culturally responsive practice as part of a district-wide focus became evident within the strategic plan. The 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for WPS was crafted to address the "institutional and instructional focus areas" (WPS Strategic Plan, 2015) necessary to meet the needs of a diverse student population in the district. The school board and administration established "areas of focus" that were identified from the equity audit described in Chapter 4. The strategic plan outlined five areas of focus for the district: Academics/Programs, Communication, Culture, Financial Stability, and Infrastructure. Three of the areas tied directly to attaining culturally responsive practices: Academics/Programs, Communication, and Culture.

First, the strategic plan detailed a goal titled "Academics/Program Goal" that described providing students with evidence-based curriculum and incorporating the use of technologies. At first glance, it did not seem to align with CRP. A closer look revealed that the objective was written specifically for the goal named "closing the achievement gap". The gaps in achievement are directly related to the academic outcomes presented earlier between White students and Black and Latinx students within the district.

> Waterville Public Schools will address and work toward the incremental closure of the achievement gap. This will be measured by local and state measurements based upon student learning objectives that are aligned to the [State] Standards; to achieve equity and excellence for ALL students regardless of class, culture, or community. (p. 6)

Setting a goal that directly addresses the achievement inequities between White students and Students of Color is a culturally responsive step, but the accountability aspect only addressed state standards and measurements. This measurement did not include perspectives from the students and families who will be directly affected by these outcomes.

The second area was titled "Communication Goal" and stated, "Waterville Public Schools will promote open communication and the inclusion of diverse perspectives to sustain, strengthen and enrich our learning community" (p. 5). The communication goal became clearer through the objective and expected outcomes provided in the document. The goal identified celebrating diversity in the school community; it also stated the need to engage stakeholders (students, staff, families, and community partners) to "cultivate culturally relevant programs." Finally, the third area in the strategic plan specifically identified the "Culture Goal" to promote equity through "the creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, treatment, opportunities, and outcomes for all" (p. 7). The last two areas in the strategic plan were related to the maintenance of the infrastructure, financial stability, and responsible use of taxpayer monies.

Strategic planning is a reasonable place to begin change within an organization (Marion, 2002). In short, strategic planning is a means to establishing the future of an organization through long-term goals and an established approach to reaching them (L.

Bell, 2002). In fact, the goals and objectives should drive the resource allocation and funding into the appropriate requests and needs in order to accomplish the goals (Owings & Kaplan, 2012). Of course, there are other factors that drive these decisions, but the objectives and goals should remain the core beliefs and guiding principles of the decision-making process. Waterville Public Schools specified cultural responsiveness in various ways in their stated goals. In an overview of successful school leadership literature, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) cited the importance of "building vision and setting direction" (p. 30) as a key element of leadership, building motivation, and clarifying objectives for an organization. Naming cultural responsiveness through stated goals and objectives in the strategic plan is one way to set the vision for the community of school leaders and teachers in WPS. In an effort to attain these goals and build capacity, the superintendent scheduled four district-wide professional development sessions to occur during the 2015-2016 academic school year for teachers, staff and school leaders as they learned about CRP. A further development in the timeline will be discussed in Chapter 6, where the district leadership initiated new professional development goals for trauma-informed practices as a path toward meeting strategic goals. A focus on trauma-informed communities became a central goal for WPS.

Participants

The educators who participated in this study are portrayed in Figure 4.6. My goal was to provide perspectives from both the administrative and teacher vantage points about the culturally responsive initiatives in WPS. I also wanted to gain perspectives from different school sites within the district. Figure 4.6 displays the different types of administrators and teachers who are represented in this study.

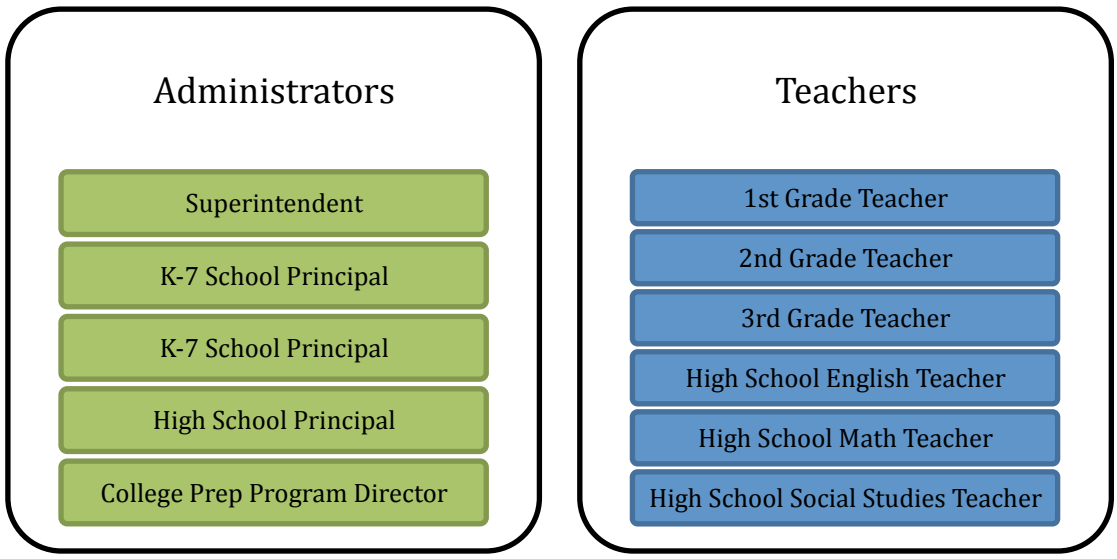

***Figure 4.7*. Representation of Participants**

Participant Profiles

Five administrators and six teachers comprised the individual views for this study. The information in this section was excerpted from demographic questionnaires completed by the participants. In an effort to honor the individual expressions of the participants, all identifying terms for race, ethnicity and gender are presented with the exact terms that they chose to describe themselves. Following a brief description of demographic information, I have presented a quote from each educator. The quote is a summation from each person's response to questions regarding individual roles and personal goals for their work in WPS.

Adam. Adam is the superintendent of WPS. He identifies as a White male and has worked in WPS for 17 years, with the last nine years in the role of superintendent. Adam's previous leadership roles included counselor, elementary school principal, and assistant superintendent.

> I see myself as a continual learner and share my learning with others whenever I can model that. It's a continuous process of learning for me and being able to

> share that information out. If you were to have asked me five years ago [if] we were going to have a hot topic session on how to support lesbian, gay, transgender, and questioning students, and bisexual students in our district, I would've said, "You're out of your mind." But the fact that we are, and that people are coming, and to be able to do that in a non-threatening way, and to be able to say, "And here's the data what our kids are telling us." So we have to be able to respond to this, to this data if we're really about equity. I think the more data that we can use, helps to substantiate, and it helps you to navigate a little bit differently through that conflict of individual value versus organizational value. We can agree to disagree what our personal beliefs may be but here's how it's impacting our students, here's how it's impacting our staff, and it would be irresponsible of us not to take the time to look at that… Modeling the use of data.

Michelle. Michelle is principal of a K-7 school where she has been principal for the last six years. She identifies as a White female. Her role as principal in WPS is her first leadership role, but she has worked as an educator for the past 22 years.

> As far as role, there's many different hats, you know, that we play. And obviously one of the biggest ones is teacher evaluation. Analyzing data, that's a big piece, making sure that kids are growing. All the things that go with being a principal. To be that instructional leader for the staff, because if you have teachers who are teaching with fidelity, they are using their data, they're assessing their kids, then you're gonna have students who are growing. You're gonna have students who are engaged, students who are happy. So my goal is always to focus on the educational instructional piece. It goes from teacher down to the student. And the

other piece is to make this climate and culture a very welcoming, safe, fun place. Very open, where all kids feel loved and they all feel safe.

John. John is principal of a second K-7 school in WPS. He identifies as a White/Caucasian male. His previous school leadership experience included middle school assistant principal and middle school athletic director. John has worked in WPS for his entire 29-year career as an educator. He has spent the last eight years as principal in his current school.

> My goals are for our kids to have a great learning experience, to grow as learners – cause they're all at different stages, and all at different levels. I want them to love learning. I want them to continue on with their learning from here to the high school and beyond, if that works for them. For staff, I want them to challenge our kids, challenge themselves in doing things different to try to help the different needs that our kids have every day. I want to be there to support them when they need support. I want to look at this school as a school they'd wanna send their kids to…My goal is to make this a place where people want to be, and feel safe, and learn, and enjoy themselves, and learn life skills they can they can take with them throughout. I have to remind teachers all the time, "You might not see it, you might struggle with this kid all year," and the next year a little bit that teacher does too, and then the next year all of a sudden it starts to turn a corner. By the time they're leaving, maybe they've figured it out. You have to keep plugging away with the beliefs and values that we set for the kids and you hope and pray that someday they get it. And more times than not they do, thank goodness. But, like I tell them [teachers], sometimes you won't see the fruits of your labor. So understand that and be okay with that.

Heather. Heather is the principal of Waterville High School. She identifies as a Caucasian female. Heather is relatively new to WPS and had only served as WHS principal for one year at the time of this study. However, she has eight years of previous experience serving as a high school principal for two other schools. Overall, Heather has 20 years of experience in education. Previously, she was a high school history and French teacher as well as an assistant principal and dean of students.

> Whether I'm dealing with a student in getting them to graduate, or trying to administer a test, or enrollment, I have to be pretty knowledgeable about state law and guidelines. Apply the rules that are given to me. Having said that, I like being in a building because unlike people who sometimes work at the administration building, I still work with kids and teachers and parents. There is a very unpredictable element to what I do and in spite of all those rules I just mentioned. There are a lot of things that need to be done on the fly and you need to have some flexible people skills and I really enjoy that part of it, too. A broad goal, I would say, it'd be to make better decisions based on data. Coaching teachers to enjoy their work and be good at their jobs so that they can be the best they can be for their students.

Stefanie. Stefanie is the director of the college prep program. She identifies as a White female. She spent 11 years as an educator but is somewhat new to WPS. She moved to the area from the Southwest and has been in WPS for the last three years as a director.

> I'd always sort of been just personally and professionally passionate about social justice, through education in particular, and when I heard the work that that was happening in the district I was like, "Alright, I need to be here." I noticed through

> those series of events that there was a lot of capacity and energy and eagerness and a willingness to dive in um, and tackle and grapple with these really tough issues. I really wanted to model equity within the work to say, this is not my vision, this is our vision…We talk about equity, we talk about diversity, inclusion stuff like that, but what does it mean really from, like, a systemic and an institutional perspective? On the one hand, we can celebrate as a district how diverse we are, and yet that doesn't mean that there's justice…Have you seen that picture you know to see over the fence, kind of a thing? So equality is like, every[one] gets a box. And equity is like the short kid gets a couple extra boxes than the tall kid because he can already see. And what I've been thinking lately is, but there's still that fence there.

Erica. Erica is a first grade teacher at a K-7 school. Erica identifies as a Caucasian female. She has taught at her current school for the last three years. Erica has been an educator for 36 years and worked in WPS for the last 24 years. Her previous roles throughout her education career included second grade teacher, summer school teacher, breakfast/lunch supervisor, district curriculum instruction team member, and grade level chair.

> My role is to get to know young children. The first thing is to build a sense of community, get to know them, help them to know each other, get to know me, and as we develop that community, then we begin to learn. I'm responsible for teaching the first grade standard core curriculum, and I would say my biggest role is to give them a love of reading and to help them become readers by the end of the year. But I also teach reading, writing, math, and I try to integrate science and social studies. We do a lot with social skills and character traits as well. I think the

last couple years, one of the goals is I really wanna build that sense of efficacy, that sense of "I can do it" that it comes from within. They're valued by me, they're valued by their family, they're valued by each other. Not because of anything that they do but just as part of being a human being.

Charles. Charles is a social studies teacher at Waterville High School and has been a teacher there the last four years. He identifies as a White male. Charles has been an educator for 10 years with the last eight in WPS. His previous roles in WPS included dean of students and alternative education co-director.

I define my role with students at the beginning of the year. I try and get across the point that my goal isn't to be their history teacher. I'm going to try and be their success teacher. And so everything that we're doing in here, including all the soft skills we work on. Intentionally doing certain projects different ways. They're designed to help you be successful as a person in society, as a student, you know? And we're gonna do that through history.

Libby. Libby is an elementary school teacher in a K-7 school, where she teaches third grade. She identifies as a Caucasian female. She has been an educator in WPS for 22 years, and served as a teacher for 20 of those years. Libby has spent the last eight years at her current school. Her previous roles within WPS schools included work as an at-risk teacher and substitute teacher.

My personal goal as a teacher is to help the students, academically but also to be better people and to be a productive citizen in society. To help each child reach their highest potential whether it be social skills, academics is just a given, but I want them to be the best person that they can be. I want to see them succeed in

whatever area that they have a passion for. So, whether that's on the basketball court [or] in the swimming pool. I want to see them succeed and I want to see them have a desire within them and have goals to be able to reach.

Nancy. Nancy is an English teacher at Waterville High School. She identifies as a Caucasian female. She has taught at Waterville High School for her entire 21-year career as a teacher. Her previous roles in the educational field included varsity cheer coach, JV girls soccer coach, National Honor Society Advisor, scholarship committee member, and parent.

My daily goals are to love on my students in ways that they might not always feel, either in the hallways or at home. Instruct them and guide them through our curriculum and make them applicable. Give them reason to want to learn it and to own it and to take it with them elsewhere. Some of the classes that I teach particularly lend itself to that conversation. The theme of the course is, "You may not be interested in war, but war may be interested in you," and when you realize or recognize what war has come to you in your life, something that you never perhaps wanted: the divorce of your parents, the fear of your illegal parents being deported, your body image, your own health. Whatever it maybe be, big or small, whatever war has come to you, when you realize it or recognize it, what are you gonna do about it? How do you fight back? How do you respond? And we start the conversation in a more literal sense…And so the literature that we read, the guest speakers that I bring in, all revolve around that theme and what I want so desperately is for my kids to recognize these connections in life, in literature and bring it with them.

Matt. Matt is a math teacher at Waterville High School. Matt identifies as a White male. He has spent a majority of his career in WPS. He has been a teacher for 15 years, with his last 14 years working in WPS. He has taught at Waterville High School for the last seven years. His previous roles included curriculum lead.

> My whole niche is that I fool kids into thinking math is fun. I want them to look back on my class and remember me as the cool teacher but also remember I made them work hard. I want the kids to want to work hard for me. I build relationships. I did my master's thesis on it: the closer I am to the students, the harder they'll work for me. I walk around and check homework four days a week and on those days I pick and choose six or seven kids I'm going to make sure I have a one on one interaction with. Even if it's, "Hey, you did real good here," or "Hey, you know what, you messed up here. Let's take a look at this a minute." "Nice work right here. A lot of people didn't have that." So just one minor sentence and sometimes it's not even about math…Personal connections with the kid so by the end of the week, I've contacted every single kid at least once.

Diane. Diane is a second grade teacher at a K-7 school. She identifies as a White female. She has been an educator for 32 years, residing in WPS for the last 30 years. Although she had taught in the district for a long time, this was her first year at her current school. Her previous roles included district continuous leadership team member and school improvement team member.

> My role as a teacher has changed so much over the last few years. My role is to help children realize their potential because over the last, I would say five years, especially in [Waterville], family dynamics have changed a lot. We have a lot of

students that come from homes that are families living in a poverty situation, struggling with many different things, so a lot of the times, I feel like my role as a teacher is to really be that encourager have children realize their potential. Also, my role at school, I take it very seriously, and that's why I'm struggling lately is because I really want every student to leave at the end of the day happy and just feeling good about their day at school. We're not there yet this year, so that's something that's been weighing on me. Another role is to stay on top of my practice and to educate myself and fix things that aren't working and be that problem solver within my classroom, with behavior management as well as with curriculum.

CHAPTER 5: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE VISIONS

Introduction

The Waterville School Board and leadership team chose to include broad goals for the district that reflected culturally responsive practices (CRP) in the Waterville Public Schools Strategic Plan (2015-2020). In an effort to become more culturally responsive, all school leaders and teachers took part in a series of professional development sessions on culturally responsive practices. This chapter draws upon participant[3] responses that define, describe, and envision CRP within schools and classrooms. In order to address the research question, *How do school leaders and teachers envision culturally responsive practices?*, I wanted to understand how participants envisioned and applied CRP in their own work. In this chapter, I briefly describe the tenets for CRP that I used to analyze participants' understanding and vision of CRP in their district, schools, and classrooms. Next, I discuss three major findings from the interviews. They are organized in the following themes: curricular changes, pedagogical changes, and culture party. Each theme is elucidated through subthemes that are depicted in the graphic organizer in Figure 5.1.

[3] The pseudonyms in this chapter are different than the ones provided in Chapter 3, Methods. In order to provide another level of anonymity for participants, they were given a second gender-neutral pseudonym; the pronoun, "they" will be used for every participant in order to make gender unidentifiable. The only identifying information that will be provided will indicate whether they are a part of leadership or a classroom teacher.

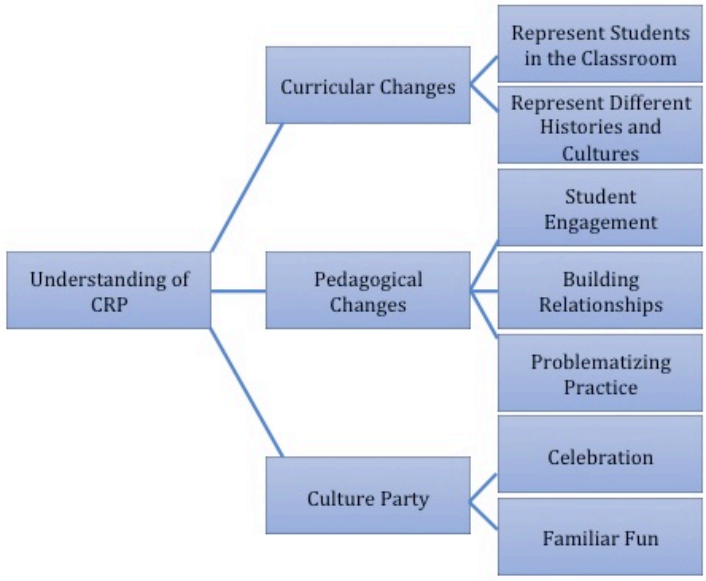

Figure 5.1. **Representation of Themes for Culturally Responsible Visions**

Culturally Responsive Practice

For the purpose of this study, the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy comes primarily from the work of Ladson-Billings (2009b) and Gay (2010). In this section, I review the framing of cultural responsiveness. First, Gay (2010) provided an expansive definition of cultural responsive pedagogy as a multidimensional practice that includes "curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments" (p. 33). In this description of CRP, curriculum, context, and practice are all considerations for understanding cultural responsiveness. Both Ladson-Billings and Gay wrote more specifically about how students' home culture must be part of curriculum and teaching practice.

Within CRP, students' home culture must be made explicit in educational practices where students can demonstrate cultural knowledge, referents, and experiences (Gay, 2010). It should be an essential part of their learning. Cultural competence posits that students have the opportunity to learn about and appreciate their own culture within the curriculum. By extension,

cultural learning should be connected between community, national, and global identities (Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Additionally, educators who enact CRP possess a belief that all students can achieve success, and they work to ensure it happens.

Students should experience academic achievement through pedagogies that allow them to demonstrate learning. Teachers develop a community of learners where knowledge is shared and relationships are fluid (Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Students should also have opportunities to develop "intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning" (p. 20) through cultural resources. Furthermore, teachers should view themselves as learning professionals in reciprocal relationships with the community who assist students in giving back to their community. This a brief description of a broad range of principles that make up the concept of CRP; there is a more expansive description in Chapter 2.

Curricular Changes

Given the shifting racial and ethnic student diversity of WPS, I wanted to know what types of changes school leaders and teachers imagined were necessary to become more culturally responsive in their individual practices. Many discussed the necessity to make changes to the curriculum in an effort to better represent the various cultures of the students. Kelly, a classroom teacher, viewed curricular changes as a way to represent students' cultural identities in the classroom as well as expose students to different cultural histories and perspectives. They defined CRP by placing emphasis on curriculum and the importance of teaching about individual student cultures to all students. Kelly provided an example about a specific student to illustrate why it is necessary to include more cultural texts in the curriculum that represents all students.

> I had a student years ago who was from Iraq. He was a refugee. And we totally embraced that. He knew not a lick of English when he came here and I knew no Arabic, but we learned from each other. I tried to learn a new word from him each week, you know I mean? When he found his name on a book we celebrated that – I think that our district is trying to do more of that but I feel like we have a little ways to go and I think part of that is just, how to embrace that without being all or none.

In the quote above, Kelly is displaying *validating and affirming* (Gay, 2010) attitudes about their student's ethnic identity. Through our conversation, Kelly described the difficulty in having limited texts and materials that were representative of all students. The celebration they described became clearer when Kelly detailed other examples about using books in the classroom to begin conversations with students about cultural practices and connections to home culture. In this sense, the celebration of acknowledging the representation in a book allowed Kelly to "build bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Nevertheless, Kelly acknowledged that improvements needed to be made throughout the district with regard to access to culturally relevant materials. Kelly also described the idea of "all or none," indicating tension between traditional curricular choices that are not culturally diverse and more culturally relevant ones.

Even though Kelly struggled with the idea of balancing the curriculum, they also expressed the need to make other cultural viewpoints known to all students. Their outlook is similar to others in WPS. Kelly gave the following explanation:

> I feel like what we, whatever ethnic background that my students have, we have a responsibility to teach others about that. I feel like we have a responsibility to

> reflect that to some degree in our curriculum, in the books that we provide in our library, in our classroom...I feel like it's not all or one…We're a melting pot in in the United States and I feel like that is one area that we all need to learn from each other, you know?

Kelly framed the significance to make curricular changes as a "responsibility" both to reflect the students in the classroom but also for others to learn about the students' culture. This idea frames a commitment to broader perspectives in the classroom. However, the example of a melting pot is troubling because it brings to mind the blending of cultures to create one, which is the antithesis of CRP. Yet, Kelly continued to elaborate about the importance of bringing other perspectives into the classroom through various texts, such as different cultural versions of the Cinderella story.

Kelly described curriculum as an avenue to showcase various perspectives, which they felt was an important aspect of teaching.

> A true educator has to go beyond just their own perspective and I think it's important for me to help other students to see there's different perspectives. We do that in fairy tales, you know? We talk about Cinderella, and what do we know? Walt Disney's version. That's all we know…Now they've written some other books that said seriously Cinderella is so annoying. And this is from the stepmother and stepsisters' perspective. I feel like that's the same thing we have to do – open up our minds to see what other perspectives are out there and to be tolerant of those views and not be so quick to judge. There's the Egyptian Cinderella. There's the Persian Cinderella. There is the Ojibwa Cinderella. There's so many different perspectives.

Although Kelly was adamant about bringing diverse perspectives into the classroom, centering the Cinderella story is centering whiteness (Matias & Newlove, 2017). Cinderella is the standard by which all other perspectives and "other" Cinderella stories are judged. Kelly failed to question whether Cinderella should remain a part of the curriculum, but instead they determined adding additional cultural stories would be an acceptable course of action. While my conversation with Kelly is an extended example, this perspective was shared by others.

Another example where CRP was defined in terms of curriculum came through my interview with Parker, a classroom teacher. Parker expressed the importance of diversifying curriculum for better cultural representation.

> I think it [CRP] also means that we need to make sure our curriculum is accessible to all and that it demonstrates or represents our cross-cultural population here. So for example in the English world, it would mean reading more than just William Shakespeare, right? It might even mean reading material that is hard to swallow, is hard to read. But it is a representation of the history of the world, a history of people and cultures.

Parker also described a need for more diverse curricular material that truly represents the various cultural student identities in WPS. They emphasized the obligation to move beyond Shakespeare, who represents the Western Canon, or the standard of whiteness within U.S. education. Consequently, Parker noted that curricular changes would include material that caused discomfort, or in other words, curriculum that included representation beyond "dead white men." However, similar to Kelly, Parker also asserted that it will be a difficult task to devote any course to being culturally responsive "all of the time."

> I don't think that any class could do a thorough job of doing this all well. Unfortunately, right? I mean given all the parameters that are already given to use based on common core or Mesa curriculum. It would be really hard to devote an entire class to making sure that all things were addressed—cultural responsiveness intentionally every minute of instruction time. I hope we do. At least as a teacher, you know, at least constantly being aware. I just don't know necessarily how the curriculum can live up to that in every way.

Parker's claims illuminate their idea of CRP as rooted in concepts of curriculum and representation of students in the classroom and different cultures. This viewpoint does not allow for a broader understanding of CRP that includes pedagogy and student achievement. To say that CRP cannot be accomplished in every minute of a classroom is to misunderstand CRP to be only about curricular choices. Parker also alluded to possible resistance from other teachers, students, or parents about curriculum with alternative historical viewpoints that do not depict white people in a positive light. However, not all participants defined CRP as solely related to curriculum. Some educators saw CRP in terms of pedagogy.

Pedagogical Changes

A second theme that emerged from individuals' conceptions of CRP was the idea that cultural responsiveness is about the art and practice of teaching. For the purpose of elaborating on participants' overall interpretation of pedagogy, I framed pedagogy as:

> The interactions between teacher, pupils, the learning environment and tasks. This definition incorporates the taught curriculum, the hidden curriculum and teaching method used by the teacher as well as her planning. The focus on interaction is a conscious one, and the broad scope of the definition is one that allows for the

> inclusion of the relationship between teacher and pupil, the interactions among pupils, the teaching style of the teacher (which may vary with subject and setting) the cognitive style of the pupil and the selection and presentation of the material. (Gipps, 1996, p. 2)

Even though Gipps' notion of pedagogy includes aspects of curriculum, I distinguish curriculum as a separate theme in the earlier section. In this portrayal of pedagogy, I focus on the descriptions of interactions, relationships, and teaching styles that occurred during the interviews. I describe the theme of pedagogical changes through three subthemes: student engagement, building relationships, and improving practices.

Student Engagement. Jordan's explanation of CRP delved into pedagogy that emphasized student achievement through student engagement. When asked to describe CRP, Jordan offered the following:

> [I want] to provide elements of student voice and choice, different ways to demonstrate understanding through oral or written communication means…An emphasis on exploring problems that are real world as much as possible, relevant to students' lives, connected to their interests, based on their feedback and not just what we assume their interest might be. There's a real emphasis on extending learning outside of the building. Incorporating community resources as often as possible, or as manageable, and really a focus on authentic audiences.

Jordan's description is aligned with CRP concepts. More specifically, Jordan described the importance of connecting to outside knowledge in the community. Ladson-Billings (2009b) asserted the importance of students exploring their own interests but also making connections to their wider communities. Jordan underscored the importance of engaging students by providing

them with choices regarding both curriculum and assessment, showing that Jordan did not prioritize a particular kind of assessment. The continued explanation shows Jordan's belief about student engagement:

> I think it's those pieces that we see produce higher levels of student engagement for all students, and ultimately that's how you might know your culturally responsive pedagogies would be effective because you would see higher levels of student engagement.

With "those pieces," Jordan referred to the elements they described above regarding student voice, choice, and different types of assessment. Further, Jordan equated high levels of student engagement directly with "effective" CRP. In fact, Jordan connected grading and assessment as a way to embody CRP.

> I think we have some grading practices that lend themselves to higher levels of mastery. Students have an opportunity to request for extensions on project deadlines. And all of these are within parameters that teachers assign and establish within their classrooms. In some [classrooms] they're able to re-present a piece of work if it's not to their best, things like that, so I think that helps to break down some barriers.

Jordan's attention to student engagement exemplified the importance they placed on both student behavior (enlisting voice to make choices) and student achievement (successfully demonstrating learning through varied assessments). Their expansive view of student engagement is aligned with CRP tenets that emphasize multiple paths to demonstrate knowledge (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2010; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009b). The importance Jordan placed on "real world problems" and community connections bridge the sociopolitical

awareness that Ladson-Billings (2009) describes as requisite for CRP.

The incorporation of project-based learning was another pedagogical decision intended to achieve student engagement. Project-based learning is a student-driven approach where teachers facilitate student learning that is focused on student choice (S. Bell, 2010; Hung, Jonassen, & Liu, 2008). Knowledge is constructed by individuals, but it is also socially constructed from interactions within the group where teachers support the process of students engaged in their own learning (Tan, Van der Molen, & Schmidt, 2016) Casey detailed how they had shifted their own practice to a more project-based approach.

> The idea is to try and build skills that relate with people but also capitalize on their talents. So one of the things [to be] culturally responsive is I never try and have only one way to achieve the project goals.

Casey's latest lesson was an example of how culturally responsive practices go beyond curriculum, but it provided various ways for students to engage in the curriculum. Throughout a classroom observation, students were engaged in creating short videos about assigned topics. The classroom was buzzing with student chatter as groups looked up information about their topics and created plans for the videos. During our interview, Casey depicted what the next steps would entail because this is a lesson they had implemented in the past. In the upcoming days, students would go out across campus to film their videos. In a project such as this, Casey felt it allowed more options for students to explore their talents and interests. It also gave them the freedom and flexibility to determine the best options to create their group videos.

I thought it was a bold move to allow students to go across the school campus to make their films, considering classroom doors locked automatically, which indicated a restricted environment. However, Casey did not let this fact deter them from implementing this particular

strategy. When I asked about administrative support to enact this kind of lesson, Casey responded:

> I've had administrators that have supported what I have been doing in the classroom...When I've asked, "Can I leave the classroom and go outside for this? We're gonna be all around the building. Do you trust that I have built enough community and procedures that we can go and do that and be responsible?"

Casey envisioned CRP as a pedagogical practice that pushes boundaries and expectations to engage students in curriculum. Despite the fact that Casey literally sent their students outside the classroom, Casey was confident that students were engaged and that they have built strong relationships with students who have clear expectations in order to complete the assignment outside of the classroom. Ultimately, enacting CRP required thoughtful classroom procedures and community building so that students were aware of the expectations and standards. It was not a coincidence that students were prepared to engage in the work. Casey described the importance of building relationships with students to create a strong community.

Building Relationships. Establishing personal connections with students surfaced as an important aspect of CRP. Although leadership team members and teachers define building relationships in nuanced ways, essentially they see relationships as fundamental to achieving cultural responsiveness. Casey provided the following thoughts about how perspectives are important to fostering relationships.

> I think it is understanding that we have shared experiences with unique perspectives. So, some things that might be universal experiences, we may take for granted as being perceived the exact same way, with everybody…[I]n a

> district such as us which we're blessed to have such a diverse background of race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, how do we understand that those differences aren't just something to be like, "Oh okay, we're different," but how do we celebrate those things and come together to create a larger culture out of that? Rather than just separate pockets. Rather than, "Oh, we're tolerant"…I guess culturally responsive to me means, we're never thinking that my perspective is the only perspective that dominates a situation.

Similar to Kelly, Casey delineated CRP as a need for different perspectives. The difference between the two definitions is understanding CRP as curriculum as opposed to understanding CRP as practice. Casey stated that CRP is what makes them an "effective teacher." Casey continued to talk about why perspectives and perceptions are important to their teaching practice. Teachers must be careful to consider student perspectives because although a teacher may perceive a behavior or action in one way, students may perceive it very differently. This mismatch can lead to classroom management and discipline issues that have negative effects for students (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007).

The idea of different perspectives came up for another teacher, Bailey, who discussed CRP as the practice of being "sensitive" to differences in students and communities.

> I think it's just being sensitive, that what makes us the same and what makes us different as people. What our background in our family, and our family history going way back, and the community that we live in, the neighborhood that we live in…Because of these things, they have different values, different belief systems, [and] different social structures. So mine is just being, acknowledging that we're the same in a lot of ways but in some ways, we're different, and how to celebrate

that and say it's okay, and to get to know each other.

Bailey acknowledged that celebrating differences is key to building classroom communities where students form relationships with the teacher and each other. Those participants who play a leadership role also provide similar descriptions about personal practice and perspective in working with students and families. Here, Sam defined what CRP means to their practice.

> Really working hard to not make assumptions about students or parents, regardless of the situation. I would say that's it in a broad brush term; that's what we do. Whether it's how we react to a meeting when someone arrives late, or when we can't get a hold of them because a phone number's not working, and really working hard to not make assumptions about the why and just dealing with the what.

Sam brought up the danger of making personal assumptions about students and families. To Sam, it was important not to make assumptions, especially negative assumptions, because it was a way to deal directly with problems and work together to solve them. Assumptions can lead to misunderstandings. As a result, it is also a way to build positive relationships with students and families within WPS because educators have worked together with families toward solving an issue instead of becoming lost on incorrect assumptions.

Another way that participants talk about relationships is evident in the way they work to build relationships with students in their classrooms. Creating a positive classroom culture is part of Taylor's idea of CRP. Taylor explained CRP in the following way:

> I try to create a culture in my classroom [where] it's not just my room, it's our room. I've got this thing on the board over here where—I make it worth homework point[s] or a homework assignment to bring in a picture of you.

> Something that says you…and I make the kid tell me, "Why this picture?" So some kids bring in like, football picture, baseball picture, basketball picture. Some kids bring in a picture of them with their dog. Some kids bring in a picture of them as a child. It's all over the gamut.

Taylor elaborated on the idea of a shared classroom space that belongs to everyone, including students. I viewed the display of pictures during one of my visits to the classroom; they were placed in a prominent space in the front of the room. Taylor continued to describe the importance of building relationships with students and the benefits of those relationships:

> To create a safe place. They don't want to skip my class even if they're skipping other classes. They wanna come here because [I] might tell a cool story today or there's always something going on that I try to keep them up on and try to mix it. In terms of culturally responsive for race ethnicity, I tell the students, "I don't look at you as one race or another, you know. You might identify as that but I look at you all as my students."

Taylor explained the importance of building relationships with their students, but this is coupled with a colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Even though Taylor recognized the importance of race and ethnicity to their students, they still felt that the role of student was the most important aspect of their classroom. This was a surprising viewpoint, especially noting that the colorblind ideology that teachers espoused during the equity audit was an issue that WPS was working to overcome. Choi (2008) discussed the difficulty of unlearning colorblind ideology for pre-service teachers because of their own socialization in K-12 education, and Taylor's comment supported Choi's point. Taylor

reinforced this perspective with their students, socializing them with a colorblind ideology in both explicit and subtle ways. Taylor's ideas about "students being students" is also an indication that teachers need more professional development and opportunities to revisit and connect to CRP. Improving practices was also a theme that emerged when exploring ideas of CRP with both school leaders and teachers at WPS.

Problematizing Practices. Another subtheme that emerged under pedagogical practices was the idea that CRP is a process that needs continued refinement. It is necessary to revisit CRP and problematize practices to understand if they actually align with CRP concepts in order to discuss development in this area. Dale is part of the leadership team and described ways they incorporate culturally responsive practices in personal work; they explained that one avenue is to continually learn about, share, and model CRP for others. One aspect that Dale felt they have improved on is to be able to call out practices that are not culturally responsive.

> I think part of culturally responsive work is to be able to, when you hear or see things that aren't culturally responsive, to name it and to help individuals understand why that may not be so. Five years ago, I was still learning what it was. I might name it in a presentation but when I saw something happening, I may not name it and then hold that person or group accountable. I'm now doing more of that because I feel as though I have the confidence to engage and have some of that conversation, um, and to know how to approach it differently without having individuals get defensive in that. To invite people, "Share with me why you, why you think or feel that way. Tell me what leads you to draw that, that conclusion. Have you ever thought about it from this perspective or not?" And to let them do more of the talking and me do more of the talking and then

> find an entry point to have individuals to, to consider shaping our hearts and minds are all shaped by our experiences so to have individuals consider what does that mean in my mind and what does that mean in my heart?

Dale's explanation showed that they felt there is personal growth possible in CRP, not just in understanding CRP, but also in the ability to learn and implement strategies to discuss practices that are antithetical to CRP. The idea of "shaping hearts and minds" demonstrated that Dale felt a change of mindset is necessary in the work of CRP. It is sometimes necessary to have difficult conversations about practices that do not align with the principles of CRP.

Similarly, Sam raised a point about bringing attention to practices and pedagogies that are not culturally responsive.

> I think being extra vigilant and making sure we're not putting blinders on. Really seeing what's going on and being unafraid of having a conversation about it. I'm really proud of the staff here because I think I see them doing that with each other more than I've ever seen in [places] where I've worked. By and large the people who work here wanna work here and wanna work with a diverse population.

Sam affirmed the need to be honest about where growth is needed in regards to CRP, but they also affirmed the importance of being honest about observations that show practices that are antithetical to CRP. It requires direct action to confront difficult issues. Yet Sam seemed hopeful about the situation and noted that staff members were willing to address issues with each other. Sam also emphasized the importance of staff attitudes, in that they have to want to engage in this kind of work with students.

Along the same lines, Casey believed that WPS has progressed as an entity to become more culturally responsive to the students. Casey admitted that there are still a few staff members

who are set in a particular belief structure that may not align with CRP but that was “a very small minority.” The issue of teachers not following culturally responsive practices has more to do with lack of knowledge than a lack of will to implement CRP. Casey articulated the following on the issue:

> How do we get the staff member that is willing and wanting but doesn't feel able to [or] knowledgeable enough or supported or whatever, right to their needs? I think what the district has been trying to do is offering a lot of immersive trainings and staff members have taken part in that. No, summertime and stuff like that, but the more knowledge you can have, and the more self-knowledge you can have, I think any time we talk equity and inclusion and we talk systems and biases within a system. I think the more knowledge you have of it, the more effective you can be. You have to know yourself first and so those explorations are really important to where, even if a teacher really feels passionate about the data that comes back from maybe our equity audit. If they don't have an understanding of self and system, they may try a lot to get it done but they may end up just feeling frustrated because they're not seeing those results the same way or feeling the support. I think the collaborative model of trying to get teachers working together is a huge part of that, because it's trying to build support networks.

I questioned them further to understand whether this was current practice.

> It's what I think should happen, I think what is trying to happen. Whether it's happening, the jury's out yet. We've inherited the culture with teachers that have been in the district a long time of insular and insulated teaching, to where we'll

> talk about things with each other but if I were to walk in during my planning to a random teacher and say, hey, I'd just like to observe, that's not something that's common or welcomed necessarily. Some might, but there's a hesitation there because we're not a truly collaborative environment yet, where we realize I'm not out to get you, I'm out to learn from you. Maybe I have something that you could learn from me too. I think when you get to that point, you can have teachers that are introspective enough to where they can realize, where do I fit into this solution. That's where I see that collaboration coming in and as a barrier for.

Casey spoke to the lack of organizational structures in place that allow teachers to continue their learning of CRP. Voluntary professional development sessions were offered on a variety of topics such as immigration issues, but this is not the most effective way to provide continued development and learning of CRP. Casey also discussed the need for the staff culture to shift to one that is more open and collaborative. Although both leadership and teachers expressed needs for continued staff development, there are not many institutional opportunities to continue learning about CRP.

Culture Party

The title for this theme came directly from a conversation with one of the teachers. When conferring about aspects of cultural responsiveness, Casey talked about the need to get past the "culture party" perspective of CRP. Through our discussion, I realized Casey was describing the practice of culture fairs, where different countries and cultures are represented through presentations on various aspects, such as language, dress, and food. These usually last for a short period of time, sometimes no longer than a week. Half of the teacher participants described a culture party as a way to achieve CRP. For them, it was a familiar way to incorporate culture into

schools.

Val mourned the days when individual schools had cultural celebrations in WPS. This activity no longer occurs, but Val felt it was a missing piece that could add to cultural responsiveness in the district.

> Cultural[ly] responsive, for me as a teacher …is just so huge because I don't even know the number of cultures and ethnicities that are represented in our school at this time, but that was one thing at the beginning of the year. The first week of school, I just looked around my classroom, and I thought, "Wow. One of our parent days or evenings should be a time where families come and bring their favorite food," because I have such a diverse group, culturally. What does it mean to me? I guess, to me it means trying to learn about where students come from, their families, and how that can have such a huge effect on what they do or don't do at school and how to be respectful of that.

For Val, these types of practices are a way to get to know families and to discover their origins, customs, and values. But I challenge how much Val can really learn about the families of their students at this type of event. It may be that this desire for culture party activities has more to do with a lack of knowledge about practices to become culturally responsive. Val was not the only teacher who views cultural celebrations as a missing event in WPS.

Bailey also recognized that WPS no longer has the same types of cultural celebrations that used to be part of a past tradition. There was a feeling that celebration is important, and Bailey discussed cultural events that had been a part of in their work at previous programs.

> [T]he parents would bring in food from their culture, we'd have potlucks, we'd have talent shows. I haven't really seen anything like that. In Waterville, they did

> that years ago…that was kind of a tradition, that they would celebrate their diversity by doing that. I still think we could do that. I know that's not, it still does mean a lot. It means a lot to the parents, I think.

Bailey also desires a familiar practice to celebrate culture. Both descriptions, from Bailey and Val, sounded quite similar to Casey's previous explanation of "culture party." It may be that cultural celebrations are often perceived to be fun and uncontroversial ways to celebrate culture. It is not that these celebrations are negative, but it becomes a problem when one event becomes the only way to bring culture into schools. Also, these celebrations do not accomplish the goals that either Val or Bailey described in our conversations. Can a person really learn all that is needed to know about families' cultural values in an afternoon? Or even a week? Cultural days are not the only conception of celebrations. Another teacher, Kelly, portrayed it in a slightly different way.

> I feel like we have a higher Hispanic population than others, but that's not the only population that's out there. We do some festivals. Our staff would do some things like Cinco de Mayo and we'd have gatherings and things like that and I'm not saying we are biased, but I think more opening up to assemblies or guest speakers or here's a list of people from different cultural backgrounds that are willing to do a skype interview with your classroom…Our site supervisors try to do a couple of things by saying, "Hey, did you know today was Mexico's Independence Day? Today was Taiwan's." Just different things that like say it's not just American history.

Kelly described a nuanced culture party, where recognition can take varied forms—an announcement about the cultural or historical significance about a day, a guest speaker, or a

school-wide assembly. Recognition is not a day of celebration, but rather a quick addition to acknowledge various cultural backgrounds. In this description of cultural recognition, it remains a separate part of the curriculum and pedagogy. Often, these types of practices are cursory extensions and not thoughtful culturally relevant pedagogy, but rather, they are "hollow activities" that do not address structural inequalities (Nieto, 2000; Nieto & McDonogh, 2011).

Discussion

The school leaders and teachers in WPS lack a shared vision of CRP. The educators in this study view CRP with different approaches, and struggles remain with the successful implementation of CRP in classrooms. Sleeter (2012) noted that parents, teachers, and education leaders must be educated about what CRP looks like in the classroom. It is evident here that the WPS community needs continued education and training to develop deeper understandings about CRP concepts but also to explicate a vision of what CRP looks like in their schools and individual classrooms. What would it look like if school leaders and teachers were implementing CRP in their work? And more importantly, how would students know that the educators in their schools were implementing CRP? How would the students describe their educational experiences? School leaders and teachers must consider these questions collectively to create a broader vision and strategies to implement CRP.

Ladson-Billings (2014) reflected on the ways CRP has been misappropriated with ineffective conceptions of culture and insufficient practices in the ways educators take up the concept of culture in the classroom. Unfortunately, misappropriation was evident through those participants who view CRP as mainly a curricular change. They are misunderstanding CRP to be solely about curriculum. Educational researchers Ladson-Billings (2009b) and Gay (2010) both referred to the importance of validating students' culture through curriculum as well as providing

access for students to learn about their own cultures. However, culturally relevant curriculum is only a small part of culturally responsive ideology. Moreover, it is insufficient to view gaining cultural knowledge solely through curricular texts, but too often that has been the case with CRP (Sleeter, 2012).

Connecting CRP mainly to curriculum is the reimaging of cultural celebrations or "culture party." Adding a few cultural texts to the curriculum or the classroom library is the new way to celebrate culture and validate students' racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Culturally responsive practice is limited through isolated curricular changes. Also, there are other social identities that fail to be recognized in the discourse by the educators. How do gender, gender identity, immigrant status, language priority, and socioeconomic status play a role in this view of CRP? Those participants who came to understand CRP through curricular choices misconstrue fundamental aspects of CRP.

The questions remains, how do teachers come to understand CRP as a multidimensional approach that considers curriculum, context, strategies, and student engagement through a cultural lens? Although leadership within WPS may have set culturally responsive goals as part of the strategic plan, they have not developed the organizational structures to continue the learning at the individual, group, or organizational levels. There has been no continued training in WPS on CRP concepts. Referring back to the 4I framework of Crosson et al. (1999), the structures, systems, procedures, routines, and strategies are important to consider in the cognitive process of individuals. Without systems in place for individuals to process information, come to understand new terms, or develop insights about information for their contexts, integration of new concepts in practice is unlikely to occur. As individuals experience tension between new learning about CRP with their previous beliefs about pedagogies, there is no mechanism or space

to continue the development of strategies for practice. There are educators in WPS who strongly grasp CRP concepts as a part of their practice. Yet there is no system for peers to collaborate, share understandings, or dialogue about strategy in order to make adjustments to understanding and practice of CRP. The organizational learning of WPS must be supported through systems that permit educators to continue to gain knowledge by interacting within the community through various experiences and tasks that support continued growth in CRP (Collinson et al., 2006; Crossan & Berdrow, 2003).

There is a disconnect between the vision and goals leaders in WPS set for CRP and the actual practice, highlighting the tension between espoused theories and theories in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Waterville Public Schools espoused culturally responsive goals in their strategic plan but have not provided systemic support to help school leaders and teachers continue to integrate CRP into their practice. The lack of understanding regarding CRP concepts and implementation demonstrates a need for additional professional development. Without organizational structures in place to support learning and practice, members of WPS will fail to integrate CRP as part of individual practice, meaning the district will not reach the institutional level of all members operating under CRP concepts.

Conclusion

There is no clear vision for CRP in WPS. School leaders and teachers picture culturally responsive work differently in their individual practice. Although some understand CRP as multifaceted, others hold a static viewpoint about the concept. With no sustained structure to help individuals revisit CRP and develop broader understandings, it will be impossible for WPS to institute a clear vision for CRP within the community.

CHAPTER 6: TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the district-wide initiatives implemented in Waterville Public Schools (WPS) over a three-year period as well as the perceptions of school leaders and teachers about how culturally responsive practices (CRP) were prioritized within their work. I seek to answer the following research question: *How do school leaders and teachers understand culturally responsive district-wide initiatives as informing their practice?* First, I describe the shift in priorities for WPS, moving from CRP toward trauma-informed practices. The purpose of structuring the chapter in this way is to provide background of how WPS prioritized culturally responsive goals for the district and then shifted strategies to include trauma. I believe it is essential to build a narrative about the practices WPS engaged in the district before considering the themes that emerged from leadership team members and teachers about how the shift to trauma affected their view of CRP as a priority in their work. I discuss two major themes that emerged in the study. One theme illustrated how WPS members understood CRP and trauma to be competing initiatives, and the other theme showed members who viewed the initiatives as integrated toward a larger goal of equity. Each main theme is explained through several subthemes and quotations that best portray the meaning captured by participants in this study. Finally, I discuss the implications the themes have for WPS as well as the broader impact for school districts attempting to initiate culturally responsive practices.

Trauma-A New Initiative

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the focus of professional development included a new area, trauma. The timeline shown in Figure 6.1 depicts the progression of initiatives from the equity audit up to the inclusion of trauma. Culturally responsive

practices were embedded into the strategic plan, and then all school leaders and teachers attended professional development sessions on culturally responsive practices. Beginning with the 2016 academic school year, trauma became one of the initiatives of focus in professional learning. Although other initiatives also emerged, such as literacy, I will focus on trauma because it was the most prevalent in the responses I received from both school leaders and teachers.

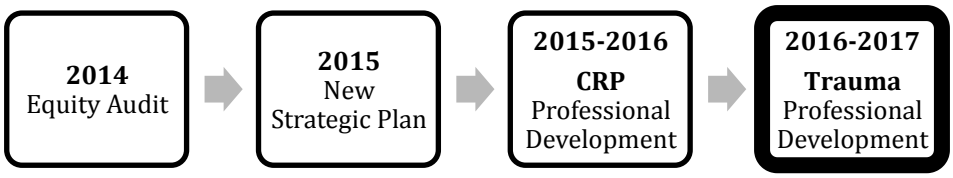

***Figure 6.1*. Timeline: Development of WPS Priorities with Trauma**

Dale, a member of the leadership team, described the change in priorities from CRP to trauma:

> I think we've now switched from the racial lens of looking at things, using the suspension, expulsion data just to look at that and obviously achievement gaps. Now we're spending a lot of time from a cultural standpoint related to trauma. How do you create trauma-informed communities and understand those experiences that impact kids?

In our interview, Dale portrayed some of the risk factors Waterville schools face, such as mental illness and incarcerated parents. According to the 2017 Waterville Community Health Needs Assessment, negative social indicators affect an individual's overall health, including adverse childhood experiences (ACE). The assessment reported that 18% of households in Waterville County included someone with a mental illness, as opposed to 16% for the national average.

Additionally, 8% of households reported an incarcerated person, in comparison to the national average of 6%. These factors were the impetus for prioritizing trauma in WPS.

It is not surprising that WPS chose to focus on trauma as part of their district-wide initiatives. The implementation of *trauma-informed* approaches in schools are growing throughout the country (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos, 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Phifer & Hull, 2016). The term *trauma* has a broad range of meanings and is dependent upon context. There are various forms and types of trauma. Broadly, trauma is the result of an event or circumstance and has long-term adverse impacts on mental and physical health (National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, 2016). The American Psychological Association (2008) reported, "In community samples, more than two thirds of children report experiencing a traumatic event by age 16." Traumatic events include sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence, community and school violence, and other acts and experiences that threaten injury, whether physical or emotional (American Psychological Association, 2008; Martin et al., 2017; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Organizational Strategies to Build Capacity

Following the change in priority, the school district contracted a psychologist to work with school leaders and teaching staff in the entire district to create what Dale referred to above as "trauma-informed communities." Participants received two district-wide professional development sessions to better understand what trauma is, how it impacts the brain, and specific strategies for "children who are from trauma." Dale described the organizational strategy to ensure the work continued throughout each of the schools:

> We are following that [trauma training] up now with what's called reflective seminars. So, that's kind of like a mini grad class. So, we identified individuals to

> become leaders across the district who are going through two times a month for two-hour sessions, or sixteen sessions. They are doing a book study and then it's kind of from a clinical perspective, so as we study all these different strategies and understand the impact on brain, identify one or two students in your classroom, that you're going to specifically work and utilize these strategies, and the idea is to equip this group of teacher leaders to then become leaders within their buildings to be able to share these practices.

Dale depicted the strategy as a way to build "core critical capacity." The first group to participate was comprised of individual representatives from each grade level in K-5 during the first semester, and then a representative group from grades 6-12 was integrated during the second semester of the school year. In this example, Dale provided leadership roles and a mechanism for support that includes continued sessions with an opportunity to practice in the classroom. Drago-Severson (2009) described the importance of *providing leadership roles,* where individuals are not merely given leadership tasks but are provided with support and challenges by another mentor leader. By building critical capacity, Dale was also sharing leadership roles with teachers.

Another organizational strategy that Dale planned to incorporate is a book study to continue professional development on trauma for the entire district using the book *Help for Billy: A Beyond Consequences Approach to Helping Challenging Children in the Classroom* (Forbes, 2012). Heather Forbes, the book's author, described the book as a pragmatic guide with specific strategies for educators to employ in the classroom to work with traumatized children. A resource that provides practical information and examples would meet teachers' requests for more strategies to use within their day-to-day practices in the classroom. At the time of this

study, detailed plans for the specifics of this process were unavailable. However, it is critical that Dale consider their expectations for learning from this book study, opportunities for dialogue and reflection, and accountability and sustainability from this type of professional development practice.

It is not clear how the previous initiatives were connected to the new priorities. Although participants drew connections, an organizational strategy for explicitly connecting the priorities was not present. Therefore, both school leaders and teachers depict different types of connections between culturally responsive practices and trauma-informed approaches.

A Shift to Trauma-Informed Practices

Once the shift from CRP to trauma-informed practices occurred, participants viewed the two initiatives as either competing priorities or integrated initiatives. Figure 6.2 represents both major themes as well as the subthemes that describe each of them.

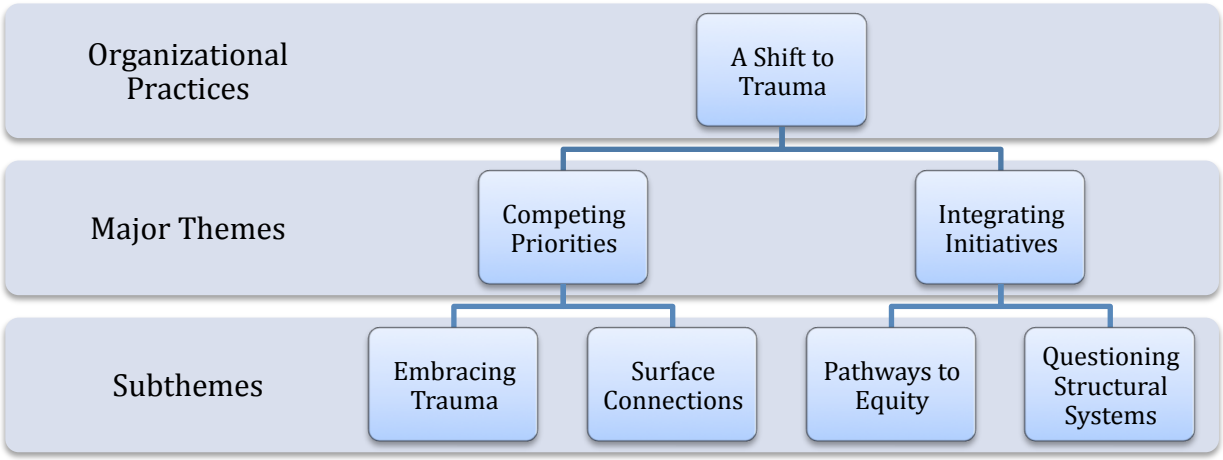

***Figure 6.2*. Major Themes and Subthemes**

Competing Priorities: Leaving CRP Behind

One prominent theme is the notion that CRP and trauma are competing priorities within WPS. Trauma-informed strategies were perceived as a new focus for some of the leadership

team members and teachers. Although they indicated that cultural responsiveness was a previous priority, they named trauma as the current focus, leaving CRP behind. Mel, a school leader, discussed the transition:

> We did a lot of that equity stuff…but that has kind of taken more of a backseat to the trauma...Now that can involve, be tied in with some cultural pieces as well, but it seems like now, all of a sudden, that's a hot button that we've got to start working on that, and helping that support...Yeah, culturally responsive stuff is still there, but I think right now, it's probably second place to dealing with trauma in the classroom. Because without that under control, learning's not going to happen, we're all held accountable for that.

Mel's description that CRP took less of a role in the district's priorities clearly showed the disconnect between trauma and CRP. It also exemplifies similar opinions held by Mel's colleagues. There is an indication of the pressure to support the work on trauma, highlighting the tension of competing priorities. Pat, another leadership team member, had a similar response, where they expressed the feeling that they were no longer doing the work of CRP but focusing on trauma-informed practices instead. In fact, when asked if CRP was still a leading priority in the district, one teacher described CRP as more of a "voluntary" practice.

A classroom teacher, Taylor, recognized that trauma is a focus area for the district by the number of professional development hours and days that are dedicated to the issue. They felt that CRP is no longer a priority for WPS because it has been replaced by trauma-informed practice. Taylor did not talk about connections between CRP and trauma or how their prior professional learning about CRP is connected to trauma. Taylor described mixed understandings about the role trauma will play in their classroom. They

discussed the professional development training on trauma and its lack of impact on their personal growth.

> We've had a lot training earlier this year on trauma and how early trauma, any trauma, any kind of trauma in a student changes their world and can affect who they are in the classroom, can affect who they are out of the classroom, etc. I was a sociology minor in college. I've heard all this stuff. I don't know if I've learned anything, and listening to this woman that came to speak for like three and half, four hours that she did, total, between a couple different times. I don't know if I learned a whole lot from it.

Interestingly, Taylor positioned themselves as somewhat of an expert in issues related to trauma because of their degree. They feel that there is no new learning to gain, nor do they feel that it would largely impact classroom practice. Taylor continued, "But again, because of my background, with sociology being my minor, I feel like it's all about the study of people. I've learned about trauma. I've learned about ethnicity. I've learned about race. I've learned about all sorts of different aspects…[trailed off]" The repeated comments show that Taylor did not find the professional development helpful or even necessary because they already felt equipped to work with students with trauma. In Taylor's example, they felt that CRP has been left behind for the implementation of trauma, but they also did not feel connected to trauma-informed practices. Conversely, some of Taylor's colleagues understood trauma-informed practices to be important frameworks to integrate into their practice.

Embracing Trauma. Under a theme of competing priorities, subthemes also surfaced during the analysis of the data. Many educators embraced the framework of trauma as a way to meet the needs of struggling students. During our interview, Mel described the rising percentages

of students who receive free and reduced price lunch at their school in the last few years. In fact, the percentages of students who reported eligibility for free and reduced price lunch have risen dramatically, from 60% to 88% in the last 10 years. Mel connected students who receive free and reduced price lunch to issues of trauma, mobility, and lack of resources. For Mel, focusing on trauma is an avenue to directly meet the immediate needs of students. Mel explained the necessity of dealing with issues of trauma in the classroom. "When you have trauma in your room, you need to figure out ways to offset that…kids bring things to the table that you have to work through, in order to teach, for kids to learn." However, there was not a clear connection for Mel between CRP and trauma; where they saw trauma as an issue to be dealt with immediately, they did not describe the same sense of urgency for culturally responsive practices or pedagogies.

Pat, a school leader, made a strong personal connection to the initiative regarding trauma and chose for an individual professional development goal "to help students in trauma and assist teachers to help students in trauma." They chose to develop and build their skills through a personal book study of *Reading & Teaching Children Exposed to Trauma* (Sorrels, 2015). As with the case of Mel, Pat pointed to the immediate and direct need of students in trauma.

There is a strong sense of investment for Pat. As part of their professional development, Pat chose a student for a case study and relays one story as an example of strategies to assist students with trauma. Pat described the student coming from trauma, with an incarcerated father and a difficult home life. The student faced particular struggles in the classroom, including not completing homework. Pat felt that using trauma as a framework allowed for thinking about the situation in a different context and therefore applied different actions to a situation when the student was sent to the office because he didn't want to take his medicine. A natural instinct was

to be straightforward with a directive for him to take his medicine, but Pat applied a different approach to the situation:

> I backed off and I said, "I see you're upset. What's going on? Why don't you want to take it?" Blah! It just all comes out. Just that different approach to it of that understanding and compassion and trying to understand instead of getting in his face. He explained [the situation] to me. The first time it was, "I didn't get sleep last night. It's loud in my house and everyone's screaming. I can't. I didn't sleep last night." I said, "How can I help you?" "You tell my mom I need to go to bed. I need it quiet."

Pat explained that they talked to the student's teacher and asked her to talk to the student's mother about his needs; subsequently, the student took his medicine that day with no further incident. Pat applied a similar approach when the same student was sent to the office another time.

> The next time he comes in, same thing. He was crying. Crying and crying and crying because he had to miss dodge ball because he didn't have his homework done. Then he says and very eloquently, he says, "My house is chaotic. How does my teacher expect me to do my homework when it's so loud and nobody's there to help me? It's not fair. I'm punished because I don't have someone at home to help me and my house is chaotic."

Pat developed a realization about the situation of this young person who was not in control of his home space: how could he continue to be punished simply for his circumstance? For Pat, it was essential to create an action plan to address the student's needs, so they came up with a plan for his teacher to help complete his homework before

the end of the school day so that he did not have to complete it unassisted. It was important for Pat to include the classroom teacher in developing the action plan for the student. The data from this study showed that teachers also understand the idea of trauma as a way to serve students.

Val characterized trauma as a leading priority within WPS and talked about the training during professional development sessions. The presenter of the professional development sessions was familiar to Val, and they found the training extremely helpful to determine specific classroom strategies:

> We have been working with a psychologist and she did our opening talk this year for school on teaching students with “trauma brain.” I came back and just really narrowed my classroom expectations to quiet voice, work hard, body still. But what does work hard look like now? Well, if you're working hard right now, it's read-to-self time, so you're following all the ... Where's the poster? [points to poster in classroom] I put it down. The read-to-self expectations …but some of the things that we say as teachers, she [the psychologist] just brought to the forefront of, "They don't really know what you're saying. What does that look like?" So I'm trying to be more aware of that.

Val determined that the new training regarding how to work with students in trauma could be directly applied to their own classroom practice. This school year had been difficult for Val. They taught in a new school this year and were struggling to adjust to the change. Although Val grappled with the change, they found the training on trauma useful and were willing to abandon old strategies to try new ones.

> What I have done in the past is I use this clip chart system. Now this year, over the last couple years, like I said, I try to do things that are current. It's been something that they feel that does not work well with students that have been in trauma, so it's juggling that because at the end of the day, then they could color their color chart. I think that maybe had some kind of reward to kids at the end of the day.

The clip chart system is a familiar strategy that Val relied upon in the classroom as a behavior management and progress tool for students. Val showed a willingness to change their practice in order to be "current" and meet the needs of different types of students, such as students in trauma. However, Val did not feel confident about the changes and was also challenged with student behaviors in the classroom.

> I just am not where I want to be with behavior [student behavior] so therefore, my lessons are not as complete, so I feel like the kids are not feeling the success with that and that drive to like, "Oh, I want to come back to this writing piece tomorrow and add more to this." Today, we're getting there. I just try to do a lot of positives, you know, the six to one or whatever it is and to give kids those positives as much so that when I do need to say, "This is not going well." They can handle that.

Even though Val described difficulty with implementing strategies, they hoped using "current" practices will help students to improve. Val acknowledged value in using a trauma-informed framework but could not articulate the same confidence in CRP. Furthermore, Val portrayed CRP as voluntary. Their frame of reference is the voluntary professional development sessions that the district provided throughout the school year.

The sessions are over "hot topic" issues, are held at the main district office, and cover topics such as immigration and LGBTQi communities. Val connected these topics to CRP, but because they are not part of the mandated, district-wide professional development, felt that teachers must attend to these issues voluntarily and figure out strategies for the classroom on their own. When Val described continued conversations about working with students in trauma, they did not talk about continued training or conversations about using CRP in their classroom.

Surface Connections. Another subtheme under competing priorities is the surface, or superficial, connections that both school leaders and teachers make between CRP and trauma. They recognize that often the students who are experiencing trauma are the Black and Latinx students in their schools and classrooms. For instance, Pat explained the importance of trauma to district priorities and admitted that CRP was no longer a focus. However, during our conversation, it was as though a light went on and in that moment, Pat made connections from trauma to CRP.

> Right now, I'm just really focused on this trauma piece, but it's really being culturally responsive if you think about it. A lot of my trauma kids, if I look at a couple of them right now, they're African-American. They're low-income…The other one is homeless, or in transition living with somebody, so they don't really have their home. Another one is Hispanic. I think how do we reach everybody, right?

Pat made a surface connection between CRP and trauma by noting that some of the students who are dealing with instances of trauma are also "African-American" and "Hispanic." By attending to the needs of students in trauma who are also students of

color, this practice is a way to enact cultural responsiveness. It was evident to Pat that a trauma-informed framework permits the incorporation of different strategies, yet the connections made to culturally responsive practices are based on addressing the needs of students of color in trauma. In other words, the two priorities are linked because students who are experiencing trauma are also students of color.

Bailey, a teacher, also recognized that trauma plays an important role in personal practice, naming children in trauma as an important focus for safety reasons. They described how CRP and trauma are linked as priorities in the classroom:

> I do think that we keep coming back to that [CRP] and we have dialogue about it…We're working on these children with trauma but a lot of the children are children of color, they're not all but some are. So instead of exasperating [sic] that situation, we're learning how to diffuse it, how to calm them down, how to give them breaks. We're being sensitive to all children, and we're really working hard to not send children home because then they're not learning.

Bailey also recognized that many students who experience trauma in their school are also students of color. Much like Pat, Bailey acknowledged a connection but did not connect it to the systemic oppression that has created the situations for students of color to experience trauma. Framing "students with trauma," Bailey suggested that teachers implement strategies in their classrooms to diffuse escalating student behavior. Sending students home or suspending students of color is problematic for WPS. Bailey alluded to the issue of suspension and the problems that arise from schools sending students home because they do not have access to curriculum and instruction.

Bailey elaborated on the idea of surface connections by explaining that often they lack time and training to make deeper connections. Bailey discussed how culturally responsive practices, literacy, and trauma play a role in the school's priorities:

> It [CRP] still comes up, but I feel like we could go about it, we could go deeper, and I feel like that with lots of things…Right now I will say part of the issue is that initiative, the literacy initiative, it's like the center of everything. And then the other thing is we have such issues with children of trauma, children who are acting out at school and are dangerous to themselves and others sometimes and disrupting classrooms. That has taken our focus for right now.

Here, Bailey described feeling that district-wide priorities and professional developments often only touch on the surface of these issues. They felt it is necessary to continue to do more work in these areas. In particular, they named CRP but used it as an example of missed opportunities to learn more about the priority and how it applies to practices and strategies in the classroom. Educators need time and space to go beyond making surface connections to initiatives and to understand the issues surrounding perspectives on CRP and trauma.

Although some students of color may also be experiencing trauma, there is a danger in conflating these two issues. Viewing all students of color as students who come from trauma is rooted in deficit perspectives (Valencia, 1997) and is a troublesome viewpoint. Skrla and Scheurich (2001) described the problems that result from deficit perspectives:

> The result of this pervasive deficit approach is that students from low-income homes and students of color routinely and overwhelmingly are tracked into low-level classes, identified for special education, segregated based on their home languages, subjected to more and harsher disciplinary actions, [and] pushed out of

the system. (p. 236)

Viewing students of color as students in trauma does not address the structural inequalities that lead to trauma situations (poverty, lack of stable housing, incarcerated family members, etc.) for many students of color. The problems that Skrla and Scheurich (2001) named are some of the same problems that WPS was trying to resolve with culturally responsive goals, such as harsh disciplinary actions for Black and Latinx students.

Overall, there is confusion about how culturally responsive pedagogies are connected to trauma-informed approaches. Or rather, the two seem to be separate priorities that are tangentially connected to one another. Feelings of starting over or working on "a new initiative every year" came up in several conversations. Bailey was not alone in their frustration of competing initiatives. Others also expressed the tension of changing priorities. Val conveyed frustration feelings of constant change. They stated, "I feel like my work isn't valued." This is not a personal lack of appreciation by colleagues, but rather the feeling that no matter how much work Val puts into learning new strategies, it will not matter because the next year, they will be engaged in a new priority set by the district leadership. Despite the fact that some educators in WPS felt that there were competing initiatives within the district, others felt that the initiatives were part of an integrated approach.

Integrating Initiatives

Not all of the leadership team members and teachers feel that CRP and trauma are competing priorities. In this section, I present the perspectives of individuals who integrate CRP and trauma by drawing connections to their pedagogy. This theme underscores the perspective that CRP is inextricably part of everyday practice, and a shift to trauma led is another course to

achieve CRP by creating a more equitable environment for all. This theme embodies two subthemes: pathways to equity and questioning structural systems.

Pathways to Equity. Dale felt strongly that CRP is still an important part of the overall goals for WPS. They provided an analogy to describe how all of the district-wide initiatives lead to equity.

> I can give an analogy of being on the highway. And there's all different lanes on the highway, and you have the lane of trauma and the lane of equity related to race. You have the lane of sexuality and gender identity. You have the lane of all these different lanes and we're all moving towards the place of increasing student achievement; ensure they all have equitable access.

In this comment, Dale expressed their belief that the destination of increased student achievement and equity for all students is attainable through multiple pathways, whether explicitly talking about cultural responsiveness or creating trauma-informed pathways. This vision of integration of initiatives allows for flexibility and variation. Other members of WPS leadership felt that CRP was connected to their everyday practices.

Sam also viewed various initiatives as pathways toward larger goals. As they are part of the leadership team, it is understandable that leaders possess a larger vision about the ways different initiatives, priorities, and professional development all lead to achieving goals stated in the strategic plan. In fact, when asked about other initiatives, Sam named several, including developing courses, continued professional development, and new student programming. Sam drew connections from yearly initiatives to continued goals. However, classroom teachers struggle to make these same types of connections and often saw initiatives as separate or competing.

When asked about teachers' beliefs that there was a new priority every year, Sam explained:

> I think that's a common theme with school districts, though. Just other places I've worked. Honestly having been a teacher myself, I think a lot of times PD days and staff meeting days are really like time to just relax and not be on stage. And sometimes when you relax your mind, you get lazy about making those connections. They need more hand holding to make those connections and maybe we do need to do that piece better.

Sam raised an important issue. How are teachers guided to make connections from various initiatives to overall goals? Admitting that teachers may have difficulty drawing these connections during professional development time because teachers may view it as down time means that administrators will have to work harder at making these connections more explicit between district-wide priorities.

Questioning Structural Systems. The integration of CRP and trauma as a path toward equity lay in the foundation of questioning structural systems that systematically lead to inequalities for students of color. Both Sam and Jordan discussed ways that CRP remained a priority in their work. For instance, Jordan relayed an example about a professional development session regarding strategies for working with students in poverty. During the session, the staff members were asked to think about indicators that show a teacher would be successful in working with students in poverty. Jordan explained:

> And this individual who has done a lot of research said that the number one indicator that he has determined based on his research…is the teacher who's willing to [ask] why do students experience poverty? Looking at it from the

systemic versus a deficit ideology.

Here, Jordan's point was that it is essential to understand the systemic issues that cause students to experience issues such as poverty, or at least to question why these systems exist. They continued this type of reflection when discussing the importance of CRP. Jordan believed that educators must problematize the systemic oppression and racism that lead to students of color experiencing trauma. It is not mere coincidence that many of the students who are experiencing crises such as poverty are also students of color who struggle with academic expectations from schools.

Teachers, such as Casey, also saw clear connections between CRP and trauma. Casey recognized the new priorities for WPS overall, and when asked what the priorities are for the year, they named literacy and trauma. Yet, Casey connected CRP and trauma in the following way:

> I think with understanding trauma, part of that trauma can be cultural…How structural racism, structural inequality can be a huge cause of trauma and so just by very nature of being within that, that is a cultural responsiveness thing.

Casey complicated trauma by associating structural racism and inequality as a direct cause of trauma. They did not view them as separate from each other, as some of their WPS peers indicated in earlier sections. When asked about what they feel the priorities are for WPS, Casey described equity as an important priority for the district.

> I think equity inclusion throughout all levels…How do we really, without trying to exclude and pull the "try and get skills up," how do we, in individual classrooms that form that whole, how do we bring those levels of students that might not be equitable, how do we create that equitable environment? For the

> district, I know, how they're doing that within evaluations. One of the evaluation focuses is scaffolding and differentiation within the classroom. How are you differentiating for your students that might not be at the same level right now on different things for a variety of reasons?

Casey made clear connections about how equity, an important outcome of CRP, is connected to trauma. Also, Casey alluded to educating students in socially, emotionally, and politically comprehensive (Gay, 2010) ways by moving beyond teaching students rote skills. They also believe that equity remained an important priority for WPS and state that it is a part of the evaluation process of teachers. Even though Casey understood that professional development is a driver for district-wide priorities and the staff had received professional development on trauma, they realized how different phases of professional development fit together to strive for a larger vision of a more equitable learning environment for all. Understanding that structural systems inherently play a role in the circumstances of students of color was foundational for leadership team members and teachers who integrate initiatives of CRP and trauma. The importance of questioning systems in place is one strategy to integrate priorities and their role toward a larger goal.

Discussion

All of the participants in this study identified trauma-informed practices as a new initiative and focus within the district. Yet, this seems to be where the congruency ends because school leaders and teachers interpreted the focus on trauma-informed practices in different ways. At this point, I want to incorporate Dale's analogy of a multiple lane highway as a way to discuss the findings.

Dale contended that all lanes lead to the same destination. However, there are several detours and roadblocks for both leadership team members and teachers. First, not everyone has a clear destination in mind. The view that CRP and trauma are competing priorities shows that the organizational systems in place failed to assist school leaders and teachers in finding strong connections between their previous learning about CRP and how trauma could be integrated as part of the broader strategy (Crossan & Berdrow, 2003). Although the strategic plan remains the same, participants did not have a clear vision about what those goals looked like in their schools or individual classrooms. Even though some leadership team members understood how various initiatives and priorities work together to create the larger goal, that may not be true for teachers. Senge (2006) posited that building a shared vision motivates individuals toward the collective advancement of a common agenda. In WPS, there was no system in place to encourage a shared vision of CRP that included different strategies.

It may not be necessary for teachers to understand the intricacies of how initiatives such as CRP and trauma fit together to create a more equitable school district, but there is a danger in teachers misunderstanding how different initiatives are connected. Most of the teachers in the study did not possess a clear picture of the larger vision set out by the leadership team and communicated through the strategic plan. Casey was unique because they have prior experience as a school leader. Casey's former role as a school leader may have facilitated their ability to envision the connections of CRP and trauma to meet a larger goal of equity. Lack of connections can lead to misunderstandings, feelings of resentment, or lack of motivation when teachers and school leaders feel that priorities are constantly changing. Both school leaders and teachers lacked a clear picture of how changing priorities were connected to a larger goal for WPS.

Without systems in place to develop school leaders' and teachers' learning, WPS will struggle to meet the strategic goals.

> Organizations that excel will be those that discover how to develop people's commitment and capacity to learn at all organizational levels. Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. While individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning, without it, no organizational learning occurs. (Owings & Kaplan, 2012, p. 128)

The leadership of WPS must create ways to continue to build capacity for the school leaders and teachers to become more culturally responsive. In order to arrive at the intended destinations, WPS leaders must provide members with maps and show them how to use them.

If there is no map, people will choose routes that are familiar to them. There are several participants who embrace the idea of trauma-informed practices. The trauma framework gave educators permission to act with urgency to meet students' needs. Discussing students in trauma is a safe way to talk about the progress or needs of students because educators can talk about issues such as poverty without ever directly naming race or ethnicity (Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen, 2016). Conversely, conflating students of color with "students in trauma" is a hazardous idea because it utilizes deficit perspectives for students of color. It becomes another way to continue the practice of applying coded language to enforce deficit perspectives of students of color (Solorzano, 1997; Yosso, 2005). In this case, using trauma-informed terms is a form of applying coded language to students of color by labeling them as "students in trauma." This practice runs the risk of reinforcing colorblind perspectives and practices while simultaneously imposing deficit perspectives when considering students' of color progress and achievement in schools.

A trauma framework allowed some of the school leaders and teachers to place responsibility for change on an outside person or situation (family, cultural values, poverty, etc.) This type of thinking does not necessarily require self-interrogation of beliefs and practices. Yet, the trauma-informed framework was important for the Latinx student that Pat referred to in their story. Instead of being disciplined, a plan was developed to assist the student. This is not to say that trauma-informed practices are not useful or that they are not culturally responsive. Many of the school leaders and teachers recognized that CRP and trauma-informed teaching may be connected, but few of them interrogated what that connection means for their students. This lack of connection led to a focus on the traumas of individual students without consideration of the systemic inequalities that may have caused that trauma.

Conclusion

Some school leaders and teachers are headed in the right direction. Not all educators in this study saw trauma as a competing initiative with CRP. In fact, some held complex views about the initiatives and how they informed CRP. The question becomes about how school leaders utilize organizational strategies to help other leaders and teachers make similar connections, especially considering the many other external pressures of both federal and local governments in terms of accountability and testing that school leaders and teachers must prepare for during the school year. It is important for WPS to determine systems that allow their members to loop back to previous concepts in order to understand how to integrate them into new ones (Argyris, 1976). New initiatives such as trauma-informed practices do not have to compete with culturally responsive practices, but they can provide a more nuanced understanding in the effort to improve teaching practices to improve the educational experiences for students of color.

CHAPTER 7: COLLECTIVE FOR EQUITY

Introduction

The *Collective for Equity* (CFE) emerged as an organizational strategy utilized by WPS to maintain culturally responsive practices in the district. *CFE* is a pseudonym for the group, which is made up of WPS administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members. Every participant I interviewed, both leadership team members and teachers, stated that I needed to talk with the facilitator of the CFE because this was the group within WPS that worked on culturally responsive practices and equity. Ultimately, I became an active member of the group. As I considered my research question, *How does a school district utilize organizational practices to achieve CRP goals?*, I realized that individuals in WPS viewed the CFE as the keeper of CRP work. Essentially, the CFE is an independent group, yet they are directly connected to WPS through mission, purpose, and membership.

I sought out the group and intended to observe their activity and possibly gain some participants for my study in the process. Although I did not begin attending meetings with the intention to become a member, I found myself a willing participant in the work of the CFE. I discuss my shifting perspective as a researcher within Chapter 3. Even after I completed the data collection for my study, I continued to attend meetings. I now consider myself a full member of the CFE where I actively engage in discussion, participate in activities, and help plan future events.

In this chapter, I discuss the organizational structure of the CFE and the implementation of their work in the broader WPS community as it relates to or advances the district's CRP work. The data presented in this section is a combination of participant interviews, document analysis, and personal experience as a participant observer. I draw upon voices of CFE members who

were not formal participants, but due to my role as a participant observer, I include their voices to illuminate the representation of diverse perspectives in the CFE. In the next section, I provide a brief history of how the CFE was formed, consider the mission and its alignment to CRP, and review the group membership and meeting structure. Next, in the section titled "Implementation," I discuss the CFE's engagement with WPS and the Waterville community. Finally, I reflect on the work of CFE and its broader impact on the CRP goals of WPS.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure includes the purpose, systems of operation, and membership of the group. To examine the organizational structure of the CFE and the way it takes up the work of CRP, I consider its formation, mission, membership, and meeting procedures.

Formation of CFE

The group was founded in 2016 as a way to continue advocacy for equity work in WPS. It was derived from one of the recommendations from the equity audit team to create "culturally responsive community partnerships" (WPS Equity Audit, 2014). The recommendation was to foster more positive relationships between the families in the community and Waterville Public Schools. It is also an approach to establish more trusting relationships that are rooted in authentic community partnerships between underserved communities and WPS. A series of events led to the formation of CFE.

First, Jordan, a school leader, was part of several events that were centered on issues of equity. The district leadership team engaged in a book study on *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* (Wise, 2008), and they were also part of district-wide professional development sessions on creating and sustaining culturally responsive classrooms, implicit bias, and promoting positive school climate. According to Jordan, they distributed a survey after these

events that asked individuals to indicate if they wanted to be involved in equity work. Jordan reported that 70% of respondents from the survey indicated "yes" to the statement, "I want to be part of moving this [equity] work forward in WPS." Jordan explained the background regarding the formation of CFE:

> [W]e decided at that point to form a collaborative, to form an equity team, to help shoulder the burden that [the superintendent] was often carrying. I don't want to speak for him but he was kind of driving the efforts…I kind of popped in as a thought partner and collaborator as well as other administrators. But, really thinking of how do we take a team to help share this workload, carry the burden, lean on each other and then knowing there's a lot of capacity. I noticed through those series of events that there was a lot of capacity and energy and eagerness and a willingness to dive in and tackle and grapple with these really tough issues.

Several WPS staff, students, and community members formed the CFE because they wanted to continue equity work within the district. Next, the group set out to accomplish the task of determining the group's intention by developing their purpose, mission statement, and meeting norms.

Simultaneously, the CFE submitted a grant application to a Waterville community foundation requesting funds to help establish and fortify the CFE with training, learning materials, and funds for public events. The budget requests in the application reflected one-third of the overall WPS budget plan to engage staff and students in equity aligned training. The CFE was awarded roughly half of the requested amount. The grant application also elucidates more about their purpose and intention. The following is directly from the grant application:

> WPS seeks to establish an intergenerational equity team, who will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to be equity-literate community members, and research, plan, and facilitate events and programming that will be tailored to meet the specific needs of the WPS and Waterville Community…The WPS [Collective for Equity] represents a district-wide and community collaboration that is focused on systemic changes and broadening the scale of impact over time (to reach beyond [Waterville]). This group will intentionally engage a variety of WPS stakeholders, including parents, students, staff, and community members with the goal of seeking multiple perspectives.

The CFE largely began from the motivation of individuals who felt compelled to engage in equity-minded work. Although it was a recommendation from the equity audit team, the superintendent did not mandate the establishment of the group. Rather, the group grew somewhat organically as a result of WPS staff initiative and motivation.

As stated in their grant application, the spirit of the CFE is to create an intergenerational team to collaborate on building equity perspectives in the district. In this sense, the CFE takes on the culturally relevant idea of engaging in fluid social relationships where members are expected to learn from one another. Ladson-Billings (2009b) described fluid relationships in regards to teacher-student relationships to illustrate CRP in classrooms, but the CFE proposes the same type of fluidity and collaboration in its structure. Members, many of whom represent multiple roles in WPS, learn together and work together to meet goals. They also specifically name the involvement of different stakeholders within the community. These connections to the community are underscored in a culturally responsive approach, and naming this as a key aspect of the group is a step toward CRP. However, it is important to contemplate how the group will

recruit members and maintain membership. If membership composition is a fundamental aspect of the group, there should be plans in place to support those relationships. How does the structure of the group and their organizational practices sustain outside relationships? Building a strong foundation to continue practices toward gaining and sustaining memberships are an important consideration for the CFE.

The CFE gained monetary support from WPS and official recognition from the school board. The WPS school board voted unanimously to deem the CFE a citizens advisory committee that would bring recommendations to the school board about proposed changes to WPS that aligned with the CFE's mission and purpose. Waterville Public Schools shows a commitment to sustain the group as an active part of the community. Although the CFE was awarded half of their grant requested funds, they needed support to continue to build the skills of their membership, as the grant money only sustained a portion of their activities. As it states in their purpose and mission statement, they have goals to build community connections, continue to educate their members and broader community in equity work, and determine measures of accountability for WPS. They also have a responsibility to propose recommendations to the WPS school board regarding practices that promote equity within the district.

Mission Statement

The CFE established their mission statement as a guide for future goals and work. Broadly, the mission statement placed community involvement, social justice, and equity at the forefront of their priorities. The CFE identified eleven key points to incorporate into their mission statement (see Table 7.1).

Waterville Public Schools Collective for Equity Mission Statement	
● Keep social justice and equity at the forefront of our work in our community (in & beyond WPS) ● Bring more voices to the dialogue, engage youth intentionally ● Break down barriers for those who've resisted engaging in existing equity work, meet people where they are ● Continue to research and learn (about self and what's worked in other districts) ● Determine measures of accountability ● Educate others, in our own personal and professional spaces	● Build a forum to engage multiple stakeholders, be accessible ● Identify just and unjust paradigms, practices, and policies, and structures in individuals, institutions, and systems. ● Work to build community and establish authentic human connections, learn from each other's stories ● Use data to develop and implement a plan that meets the needs of this community ● Develop proactive approaches, events, and strategies to engage all stakeholders in creating a learning culture of justice.

Table 7.1. **Collective for Equity Mission Statement**

A mission statement is a declaration about the purpose of an organization and the reason for its existence. DuFour and Eaker (1998) indicated that a mission statement should answer the question, "Why do we exist?" (p. 58). Taking DuFour and Eaker's question into consideration, the first point in the mission statement seems to generally sum up the intention of the CFE. "Keep[ing] social justice and equity at the forefront" appears as the main purpose, with the other points serving as key ways to operate in culturally responsive ways. For instance, several points describe the continued need to research, reflect, and learn from one another, describing fluid and reciprocal relationships between stakeholders (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b, 2014). Also, the mission statement called for members to "identify just and unjust paradigms," raising their sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002) and discovering emancipatory practices and ideologies (Gay, 2010). The explicit naming of youth as part of a group of multiple stakeholders, who are positioned to engage in this work as equal partners, also aligns with CRP (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Milner, 2011).

Creating a mission statement is an important first step for the development of a group. Calder (2002) argued that developing a mission statement is a healthy and productive task that allows groups to identify strengths as well as areas for growth. The CFE recognized that an area for growth is engaging stakeholders (students and families) in authentic relationships in WPS. Almost half of the points in the mission statement speak directly to building relationships and engaging stakeholders, showing a priority for building and sustaining relationships. Therefore, membership and interactions with the community are important considerations in the work of the CFE.

Membership

The original membership at the inception of the CFE included WPS teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community participants. The superintendent and CFE members engaged in a four-day professional development titled *Justice in Investigative Leadership Training* (JILT). The objectives of the training are listed in Table 7.2. I included the objectives of JILT here for two reasons. First, this training happened before I joined the group, but the objectives provide a glimpse into how the group members situated themselves in the work. Their participation in this training advanced the work they were setting out to do in the CFE. By participating in discussions and activities about race, diversity, intersectionality and oppression, members were raising their awareness and skills to discuss these issues as they directly related to the work in WPS. In essence, they were engaging in work at the institutional level in order to have similar language and broader understanding of issues within WPS (Owings & Kaplan, 2012; Senge, 2006).

The objectives of JILT are also included because of the impact it had on the CFE members who attended JILT and viewed it as a powerful experience. They used words such as

"transformative" to describe it and often talked about the experiences and conversations they had during this time. The experience served as a pivotal point for the group members and provided them with a common experience to begin to work toward their goals. Members' participation in this training is also an example of their effort toward becoming more culturally responsive not just at a group level, but also at an institutional level. Several participants, including the superintendent, are school leaders within WPS, but the training also included classroom teachers.

Justice in Investigative Leadership Training (JILT) Participants leave JILT with:
• Strategies to facilitate a learning community where all stakeholders are engaged in creating a culture of justice • Fluent discourse regarding race, diversity, intersectionality, and oppression • Skills to clearly articulate their vision regarding justice, questions others without manipulative intentions, peacefully confront injustice, and model simple yet profound methods for achieving equity • Elevated awareness to identify just and unjust attitudes, intentions, strategies, structures, and policies • Motivation to continue independent enrichment and investigation regarding justice and community building

Table 7.2. **Objectives for JILT Training by the Social Centric Institute, 2016.**

The CFE demonstrated culturally responsive intentions with the development of their membership. Waterville Public School staff members actively recruited students, parents, and community members to be participants in CFE. During the JILT training, they confronted their own biases, listened to group members' experiences, and purposely engaged in conversations centered on race and racial discourse. Ideally, the membership would maintain its diversity in race, ethnicity, and roles members play in the district, but membership has changed since the group's inception in 2016.

I began attending the CFE meetings in the spring of 2017. Regular meeting attendance varied, but during my time, a majority of the attendees were WPS teachers. There were a few

community members and maybe one or two parents at each meeting. Some of the teachers who attended CFE also had children in WPS. Even though they held a dual role, I believe their status as teachers and staff provided a different power dynamic, as their roles were mostly viewed as WPS staff by non-WPS members. Out of the 10 monthly meetings I attended, there was only one meeting where one student was in attendance. Although several students had been invited to join the meetings, scheduling issues, such as students working or attending school activities and events, meant they were often absent from the meetings. This means that vital stakeholders were absent from CFE.

Although the CFE had continued membership from a core group of individuals, this mostly included people who worked for WPS in some capacity. Even these members struggled to remain active members of the group. One member stated, "I'm trying as hard as I can just to make it to the meetings and to just be a part of it in that respect. I'm overloaded, busy on a weekly basis." Although this member felt they could participate in the monthly meetings, they felt too overwhelmed to be able to complete any tasks outside of meetings. The demands of their position and schedule within WPS made anything more than participation in CFE seem unmanageable.

The members of the CFE had several discussions about how to recruit and engage more students, parents, and community members to be a part of the equity work. The CFE also lost individuals who had previously been a part of the group, including a parent. There were no students for a majority of the meetings I attended, but there were discussions about how to recruit more students and parents to become involved. One concern about membership was the CFE's status as a citizens advisory group. A majority of CFE members should be from the community with no direct employment by WPS. This was a tension for the group because it was

difficult to sustain participation from those who were not directly affiliated with WPS. Membership is a clear area for growth in the CFE. It is an issue that must be resolved if they want to ensure the representation they set out in their mission.

Meeting Procedures

In order to accomplish the goals set out in their mission and purpose, the CFE meets once a month. Although the agenda changes with each meeting, there is a general meeting structure. Meetings normally last two hours and are usually held in the same location within a WPS building. Attendance varies, ranging from eight to twelve members present for the duration of the meeting. Normally, meetings begin with reminders, a review of the norms (see Table 7.3), and updates about previous meeting or events. Many times, there is also an experiential or learning component to the meeting.

CFE Norms	
• Respect opinions & thoughts • Trust the process • Speak your truth • Listen with intention • Let words simmer	• Honor each other's experiences • Reflective facilitation • Honor the time, be present • Clarity when it's dialogue vs. decisional

***Table 7.3*. Collective for Equity Meeting Norms**

Jordan often led the meetings and set the agenda but was reluctant to continue the practice. It was not that Jordan was reluctant to do the work; in fact, it is just the opposite. Jordan was extremely passionate about issues of social justice and equity and was drawn to WPS because the district leadership was willing to participate in equity work. However, Jordan feared being the voice of the group because they felt that this practice does not align with equity work. Jordan often asked others to take the lead or set the agenda, but other members strongly saw Jordan as the "head" of the group and a driver of equity work in WPS. Members saw Jordan as

the "initiator" of equity practices, so other members were reluctant to take on Jordan's self-appointed yet reluctant role. Taylor stated,

> That's why I keep pushing [Jordan]. [They are] great at this. They love it. They have a passion for it more than I do. I do have a passion for it, but they are also kind of the initiator. [Jordan] is our leader whether they like it or not…I think I'm not trying to be that because A: I don't want to create friction there, and I don't think I would. To be honest with you, Jordan is really good about giving responsibility away. But, I kind of like where it is right now…I want to continue to be a part of it, but I'm not looking to be a leader. I'm looking to kind of just help. Maybe that's not what we need, but that's kind of where I'm at.

An assortment of texts and discussion structures are employed to engage CFE members in aspects of equity work. At times, there have been short texts to read and discuss during the meeting, such as *Building a Pedagogy of Engagement for Students in Poverty* (Gorski, 2013). At one meeting, I engaged CFE members in a discussion about building bridges and barriers to working with diverse students and families (see Chapter 3). At another meeting, two CFE members engaged the group in a discussion about common sayings with negative racial undertones. The meetings functioned as a space for raising consciousness, engaging in critical self-reflection, learning new concepts, and making connections to broader practices within the Waterville community. Members' participation in these activities engaged them in processes to become more culturally responsive. Sleeter (2012) argued there is a need "to educate parents, teachers, and educations leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom" (p. 578). The activities in the CFE meetings are one step toward this

education. Meetings also included other tasks, such as preparing for upcoming events sponsored by the CFE.

Implementation

The CFE implements their goals centered on issues of equity in two ways. First, in relation to their status as a citizens advisory board, they engage with the district by making recommendations and proposals to the WPS school board. Second, they engage the community through different events. In this section, I illustrate the ways the CFE implements their goals through district engagement and community outreach.

District Engagement

Presentations to the School Board. A goal of the CFE is to make recommendations to the school board about policies, professional development, and training for WPS. On two different occasions, the CFE made presentations to the schools board. The first was to provide an overview of the group's work and a rationale for the continuation of CFE. The CFE had been granted a one year status as a citizens advisory board and received approval to continue in their designated capacity. The CFE made a second presentation to the school board, where they proposed the addition of an ethnic studies course.

Proposal of Ethnic Studies Course. The CFE decided to recommend an ethnic studies course as a graduation requirement for Waterville High School. As we discussed a plan about the proposal, I offered to provide research on ethnic studies courses. I determined this was one way I could actively participate and use my skills for the benefit of the group. I also felt that I might have better access to peer reviewed journals and research about ethnic studies courses.

I compiled a few articles, completed a quick review of some research, and highlighted a few key issues. I was unsure of exactly what the group felt they wanted or needed to include

about ethnic studies, so I emailed my two-page synopsis to Jordan, thinking it was a preview or that after receiving feedback, I would continue the work. I received a short email reply that it looked great. I was surprised to see the two-page document I sent as part of a handout for the school board on the day of presentation of the proposal for ethnic studies.

The proposal of an ethnic studies course was an idea the CFE had been working on for the past year. It was part of the initial brainstorming that the group completed during its establishment. At the school board meeting, members of CFE (including myself) made a case to the board to adopt an ethnic studies course as a graduation requirement for WPS students. The members of the school board listened to the proposal and asked various questions about curriculum and teacher qualifications to lead the course. At the time of this writing, no decision has been made about whether ethnic studies will be added to the high school course list, either as an elective or a requirement. Regardless of the outcome, the proposal by the group is aligned directly to CRP. Making course recommendations to increase student motivation and student interest and enhance positive student self-perceptions for students of color is CRP in action (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Dimick, 2012).

Community Outreach

My Story. Part of the mission of the CFE is to "build community and establish authentic human connections, learn from each other's stories." One way the group sought this goal was by hosting an event titled "My Story." The focus of the event was to "create spaces and places to build human connections." The event took place at the local public library and was free and open to the public. The CFE tried to encourage people to join the event with punch and a few bakery items lined up on a table in the back of the room. This event was my first interaction with the CFE.

The event began with an explanation of the purpose and description of the CFE's mission and goals. Following the introduction, CFE members shared personal stories about their interactions with people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, struggles with friends and family members around issues of racism, and their own thoughts and perspectives about the Waterville community. After continued sharing, there was a short writing activity. Audience members were given a sheet of paper that said "My Story" at the top, and then questions or statements were posed for us to ponder and write about on our papers.

> Can you think of a time when you felt welcome or included by strangers? Positive images. What do you think is best about humanity? What does it mean to earn your humanity?

After a few minutes of writing time, the CFE group opened the stage up to the public to share their stories. There were more stories shared by adults and youth. They shared stories of topics like death and mental illness, but also stories of compassion. This was the first public event sponsored by the CFE, and they felt it was successful because it attracted a broad age range of people, from second graders to one audience member who identified herself as 90 years old.

I found it to be a unique event. The members of the CFE were the first to tell their stories. They allowed themselves to be vulnerable by talking about experiences centered in racial interactions. Some of the stories were about negative experiences or personal biases that had to be overcome in order to be more culturally responsive. I was surprised to hear stories from members who named themselves racially and discussed negative experiences. I believe their vulnerability gave other members of the audience the courage to share their own stories. Within a short time period, the CFE was able to establish connections with the broader community who attended the event. While the adult members of the CFE were represented in this event, the

students were not. None of the students from CFE participated in the event. When the CFE opened up the event, a few students shared from the audience participated by telling their own stories.

Discussion

At the beginning of one of the CFE meetings, Jordan said, "Equity work is messy." Meetings were sporadically attended by members; some had to bring their children, while others came late or needed to leave early. Yet, through this reality, members continued to come each month to talk about what could be done about equity in WPS or to participate in learning about issues related to equity. While CFE remains committed to equity work, questions arise about whether the group can meet the goals stated in their mission.

Membership of the group is one key issue. Admittedly, the CFE has tension between its mission to ensure diverse stakeholders and its actual ability to sustain the membership of diverse stakeholders. The members who consistently attend monthly meetings do not reflect the goals of the mission statement to engage multiple types of stakeholders. Consequently, the CFE has been unable to sustain regular student and parent attendance in the group and is currently strategizing ways to attend to this issue. The CFE will have to come to recognize the barriers for family participation (Hanover Research, 2016). Family and student perspectives are largely absent from this work. Why has the membership changed? There are multiple possibilities for the lack of participation. These could include the meeting times, needs for childcare, or the meeting space. During one of our meetings, we talked about finding a more neutral space to have the meetings because the majority of meetings were held in a classroom in one of the school buildings. What would it mean to have the meetings out in the community? Another issue with membership is the lack of representation of people of color.

Often, I was one of two or three people of color in a CFE meeting. During the ethnic studies proposal to the school board, I was the only person of color in the room. Diversity of perspectives is crucial for the work of CFE, especially in a district where it has been established that there is a lack of equitable treatment for Black and Latinx students, none of whom are part of the CFE. What does it mean that not all of the stakeholders are represented in CFE? It is imperative that the CFE actively recruit and reestablish a presence of students and parents, especially families of color, to be a part of the work. Otherwise, the CFE is reinforcing inequitable representation and a lack of voice for some students and families who also represent WPS. An organizational perspective elucidates the tension between what the group seeks to do (espoused theory) and what it actually does (theories in practice) (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Although the CFE seeks to uphold diverse stakeholders as an essential part of their membership, they have been unable to do so in actual practice.

Membership is not the only issue to consider for CFE. Larger questions remain about the role and power of this group to promote and sustain culturally responsive practices within the broader entity of WPS. It is still unclear whether the group can make a broader impact on the school leaders, teachers, and students in WPS. Although the CFE is not solely responsible for CRP in the district, many WPS administrators and teachers view the CFE as the keeper of culturally responsive practices or equity work in the district. This is a problem because it means that CRP has failed to become integrated into the organization as an institutional practice (Crossan et al., 1999). Instead, an outside yet connected group is viewed as responsible for this work. How can WPS transition this responsibility to individual schools and classrooms? Should membership include representatives from each school? How can this group leverage its power to truly affect policy and practice for the district?

It is not that the CFE has failed in their mission to center equity and social justice. The CFE advances CRP on multiple levels. First, their mission is based in culturally responsive practices, such as requiring the composition of the group to include diverse stakeholders. Next, they provide professional development opportunities regarding CRP for group members as well as the larger staff of WPS. Also, the CFE made an important proposal for the addition of a course that could have a broad and positive impact for students in WPS. Finally, the group hosts community events that bring the voices of WPS students and staff together with the larger Waterville community to not only share experiences but also to hold critical conversations. Of course, this group should not be the sole organizational strategy to ensure culturally responsive goals are met in WPS, and they have met challenges along the way. However, the CFE provides a possible model for other districts that are attempting to advance culturally responsive goals.

Conclusion

Whenever an organization takes on new learning, there will be tension in integrating the new learning into everyday practice (Crossan et al., 1999). Learning to be culturally responsive is an ongoing process that must be supported through additional opportunities to engage in the ideas in order to integrate it into everyday practice. The CFE could be a voice to ensure that these opportunities continue to be prioritized as part of the professional development and overall practice of the district. The CFE cannot be solely responsible for driving culturally responsive practices in WPS, but they can be the voice to make sure that CRP does not get left behind.

Whether the CFE has the power to affect policy within WPS remains to be determined. Although CFE members received word that the ethnic studies proposal was being considered, it would not be accepted in its original form. The school board was exploring the possibility of offering the course as an elective for students. However, the CFE was not deterred. In our last

meeting, we discussed ways to continue to push forward. Members were willing to concede ethnic studies as an elective but were strategizing a new proposal to replace what they felt was an outdated course requirement of speech and communication. The next year will be important for the group to regain and retain membership and determine their next proposals for equity work in WPS.

CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to understand how a school district attempts to become more culturally responsive to the students and families they serve. In particular, the guiding research questions centered on individual school leaders' and teachers' conceptions of culturally responsive district-wide priorities and the organizational practices implemented to promote and sustain CRP priorities. The individual perspectives of school leaders and teachers as well as supporting district documents were collected and analyzed for alignment to the different aspects of cultural responsiveness and the organizational practices implemented to aid in intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization. In this chapter, I discuss some of the tensions between what school leaders intended to do (espoused theories) from what was actually done (theories in practice), as well as implications for school leaders, teachers and educational researchers.

Research Questions Revisited: Tensions Between Intent and Actuality

School leaders and teachers lack a collective vision for culturally responsive practices in their district and schools. There is tension between the culturally responsive practices WPS aspires to in the strategic plan and the plan/practices to actually achieve these goals. Overall, school leaders and teachers in WPS saw CRP in varied approaches. This is not necessarily negative, but it can be problematic in some aspects. The staff in WPS did not spend time developing a collective vision to understand what the goals look like for the district, their schools, or their individual classrooms. Neither school leaders nor teachers articulated a clear vision about sustained practices for CRP. Some of the participants had a limited understanding of CRP; for example, some educators view CRP as a strategy based primarily in curricular choices.

Also, this curricular view raises questions as to what other aspects of culture or social identities are excluded in the discourse of educators. What about issues of gender, immigrant status, socioeconomic status, and language? A curricular understanding of CRP leaves out the critical reflection necessary to implement CRP. In other words, members of WPS did not refer back to discuss their practices or undertake a critical view to understand if their practices actually aligned with CRP. Without a collective vision and an organizational strategy to critically review practices, how will members of WPS know if they are successful in becoming culturally responsive?

A collective vision of culturally responsive practice can be multifaceted. Diverse interpretations of CRP can strengthen critical reflection and deepen educators' understanding of the possibilities for implementing CRP strategies into practice. If educators view CRP through a pedagogical lens, then the avenues to implementation are endless, as educators work to refine their practice. Yet, a pedagogical interpretation alone does not guarantee that educators will view practices through the critical lens that is imperative to CRP. School leaders must consider institutional practices that allow teachers to deepen their understanding of CRP and work collaboratively to create a collective vision about what CRP looks like for the district, for each school, and for the individual classroom. Although constructing culturally responsive goals as part of an expansive approach stated in the strategic plan is an important foundation, how those goals are realized is another consideration.

Although the paths to reach strategic goals will vary, not everyone understands they are headed in the same direction. School leaders and teachers understood district-wide initiatives to be either competing against culturally responsive goals or the integration of approaches to become culturally responsive. There is a danger when district-wide initiatives are viewed as

competing priorities. In this case, those educators who viewed initiatives as competing priorities felt CRP had been left behind, and this view is detrimental toward meeting culturally responsive goals. In one sense, it seems a waste of resources to spend both time and allocated funds to developing practices and strategies that individuals feel are no longer expected as part of their practice. Also, the feeling of competition can affect educator motivation and satisfaction. If teachers feel as though their work is not valued, or that their work will be tossed aside the next school year in favor of work on a new goal, they feel less invested in developing strategies to add to their pedagogy. If school leaders are not clear about how district-wide initiatives are different paths to a larger goal, then they will be unable to develop this understanding within the teachers at their schools.

District leaders must anticipate challenges, such as viewing various initiatives as competing priorities, when they develop strategies, plan professional development, and consider ways to further develop the skills of school leaders and teachers within the district. Facilitating connections among priorities and initiatives is an important skill for leaders to develop. In fact, within WPS, there are individuals who understand that district-wide priorities are part of an integrated approach to become more culturally responsive. How do school leaders find ways for collaboration to help broaden this understanding to others? Finding spaces for peer to peer interactions to advance culturally responsive connections should become a priority for the leadership in WPS (Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; Williams, 2013). If learning does not become integrated, teachers will feel as though they are starting over each time a new initiative begins.

Organizational strategies to institutionalize culturally responsive practices should include multiple stakeholders in the process of determining and developing culturally responsive

strategies. A unique organizational strategy emerged from WPS in the form of the Collective for Equity (CFE), a group of diverse stakeholders with a mission to advance culturally responsive practices. The membership of the group included WPS staff but also students, parents, and community members. The goal of the group is to make recommendations about policy and practices to promote equity within WPS. They provide a platform for community conversations about curriculum, school policies, and professional development for staff members within WPS. They not only discuss issues, but they also make recommendation about these issues to the school board. Most recently, they proposed adding ethnic studies as a required course for all high school students in the district. The CFE provides a model for other districts that are attempting to advance culturally responsive goals.

A new vision of family and community participation can overcome several challenges to the involvement of these groups. First, an embedded structure similar to the CFE can facilitate connections between educators and community members. Weiss and Stephen (2009) described some of the barriers to community partnerships as lack of prioritization of these partnerships by the education community and an absence of understanding the expectations for both educators and community members. If community participation is prioritized for the group by a requirement of members, this obligation prioritizes the need to recruit and retain community members. Becoming culturally responsive educators means creating opportunities for direct involvement with the community, but it also means sharing the power structure within the system. The model of the CFE is not about educating families about the business of school, but rather about receiving citizen input and educating schools about working with diverse students and families. Another voice that must be present in this structure is the voice of students. A student presence on the committee provides authentic opportunities for student input on their

educational experiences, desires, and needs. It is critical to foster community partnerships that innovate parental and student engagement in new and responsive ways to community needs (Loder-Jackson, Voltz, & Froning, 2014).

Yet, the CFE should not be the sole organizational strategy to ensure culturally responsive goals are met in WPS. It is unclear in what other ways WPS is engaging multiple stakeholders into the work of CRP. It is a dangerous precedent to entrust this critical task to one group within the organizational practice of the system. Many participants view the CFE as the keeper of CRP work, allowing this group to bear the responsibility of engaging various stakeholders to drive CRP goals forward in the district. The leadership in WPS must incorporate different mechanisms for accountability in order to achieve CRP goals.

Implications for Practice

There is power in the intentionality of setting strategic goals and forming priorities centered in cultural responsiveness. Developing culturally responsive goals creates an anchor from which all priorities, strategies, and practices should be grounded. The perspectives of the school leaders and teachers in this study indicated a clear understanding that Waterville Public Schools was working toward becoming more culturally responsive as an entire district. Although some school leaders and teachers felt that there were multiple pathways to meet culturally responsive goals, others felt those goals had been left behind. The broad goals for the district were clearly outlined in the strategic plan through 2020, yet some of the participants felt that cultural responsiveness had been left behind for new goals. Furthermore, this study uncovered the tensions around messaging and perceived commitment to broader goals. This research has implications for the practice of district leaders, school leaders, and teachers.

It may helpful to consider Lipsky's (1980) idea of the *street-level bureaucrat* when determining how policy and action converge by those who are left to implement it. Lipsky believed that public servants, such as teachers, should be considered street-level bureaucrats because their jobs require them to work directly with citizens and because they have a great amount of discretion in the ways they conduct their work. Lipsky argued the decisions that teachers make, routines they create, and the coping mechanisms they employ essentially become policy. In other words, often teachers interpret and implement policies in ways that best fit their personal situations. This type of implementation became evident for WPS, where teachers as well as school leaders began to interpret cultural responsiveness and its level of priority in ways that did not necessarily align with the overall vision of district leadership or the way that the authors of the strategic plan envisioned. As such, it is important to determine how policy and practice converge in the various roles in WPS.

District Leaders. District leaders must be more intentional in their practices to assist the larger staff to make connections about how current priorities lead to larger goals. Therefore, messaging plays a key role (Owings & Kaplan, 2012). While district leaders have a clear vision of how individual initiatives and the strategies to promote them are pathways to larger goals, it is not always clear to school leaders or teachers. Without a collective vision, everyone carries their own ideas about why strategies are in place, and sometimes these ideas are not aligned with the expansive vision. However, creating spaces to make connections to understand new strategies, new terms, and how they play a role toward the same goal can assist with increasing motivation to implement new strategies.

In particular, district leaders must assist school leaders to draw direct connections to understand how strategies, professional development, and evaluations systems all connect to

wider goals and visions regarding culturally responsive goals. As the school leaders, they will drive the practices that support the mission for the district at their individual schools. It is essential that they understand how their school site fits into the overall vision for the district. School leaders must spend time determining what cultural responsive practices look like in their individual work and at their school sites. What does CRP look like in their school? What are benchmarks to help them determine that CRP goals are being met? What incentives do school leaders have for this work? It is important that district leadership facilitate these conversations and continued learning about implementing culturally responsive goals and policies throughout the school level.

School Leaders. School leaders predominantly carry out the initiatives and strategies to achieve culturally responsive goals at their individual school sites. Yet, do they clearly understand what it looks like at their schools? For their teachers and students? Although school sites may reside within the same district boundaries, the students, context, and local community are distinctive for each school. Each school leader must consider in what ways they are promoting connections and relationships with the local families and communities. Also, how are they modeling practices, such as building relationships with families, for their teachers? They must promote ways for teachers to understand the community context; however, they need to challenge deficit perspectives about communities and families who make up their schools.

School leaders must consider how they carry out organizational practices that promote teachers' continued learning beyond the basics of new concepts such as CRP. Also, what incentives are available for teachers to engage in this work? This is especially important because if teachers do not have opportunities to understand why CRP is important to their practice and what it looks like in their individual practice in the classroom, they will never reach the level of

sustained integration of the ideas into their practice, and CRP will fail to become institutionalized or embedded in the system (Crossan et al., 1999). This becomes problematic as organizations, such as WPS, work toward meeting culturally responsive goals.

Teachers. It is fundamental that teachers are provided with opportunities for new learning, but they must also be given support to attempt new strategies and solve issues that arise. Often, this is where professional development and integration of new strategies fall short. Extended learning opportunities with peers can be a strategy to aid in this process. Although this is not a new concept, the findings in this research reaffirm the importance of concepts such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to teacher learning. Spaces for peer discussions and interactions can facilitate problem-solving approaches as teachers try to integrate new CRP strategies in their classrooms.

Teacher motivation is also relevant to this discussion. If teachers do not feel as though they are making progress in new strategies or that their work is not valued, it can affect their motivation to continue to incorporate CRP as part of their daily practice (Blase & Blase, 2000). Moreover, if teachers do not see clear connections from past initiatives to current ones and how those strategies fit toward a larger goal, they may feel as though they are starting over every year. Certainly, this can affect motivation through feelings of disconnect. Promoting communities of practice is one way to facilitate connections from past learning to new learning and to promote positive outcomes for teachers who integrate CRP into their classrooms.

Implications for Educational Research

Educational researchers conduct studies in spaces that operate within a particular social and political context, and each context should be considered at multiple organizational levels. An organizational approach to educational research can shed light on how institutional goals are

perceived and envisioned at multiple levels. In this case, disconnects between district, school, and classroom became apparent as individuals perceived goals and strategies in varied ways. As researchers, how do we uncover strategies that foster or inhibit clear connections between mission and strategies to achieve culturally responsive goals? In what ways must we consider organizational practices as foundational to promoting CRP throughout schools and classrooms throughout the district? As research highlights, including this study, educators continue to struggle to implement and sustain CRP into their individual practice (Castagno, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Parsons & Wall, 2011; Sleeter, 2012). We must consider ways that organizations develop and attempt to institute culturally responsive goals in order to meet the needs of their students.

Espoused theories juxtaposed with theories in practice (Argyris & Schön, 1978) are beneficial to understanding how intentions differ from actual practice in organizations such as school districts and individual schools. Although mission, vision, and goals of districts can align with culturally responsive tenets, the actual practice to carry out the mission may or may not be aligned with those goals. As educational researchers, administrators, and teacher educators, it is important to recognize practices that foster progress toward culturally responsive goals. Incorporating conceptual frameworks that help to map out these practices can have positive impacts for sustaining CRP in districts, schools, and classrooms.

Educational researchers must consider their own participation in research within school contexts. How do we gain trust from our participants in the educational community? How do we write about our participants in ways that represent them fairly and anonymously (if appropriate)? In this study, I implemented a double-blinded approach because participants were deeply concerned about their location, voices, and perspectives being recognized. Although this

approach was one way I attempted to alleviate their concerns, we must attempt to develop new ways to gain trust and balance participant concerns. We must also consider the idea of reciprocity for our participants.

The idea of reciprocity is one consideration for all who engage in educational research. What makes us worthy or deserving of participants' time, perspectives, or permission to intrude on their schools and classrooms? We must move past our own notions of reciprocity and engage in a mutual process to determine what it looks like for a particular community in order to fit their wants and needs. As was the case in this study, my ideas of reciprocity did not necessarily align with the needs of the participants. How do we conceptualize notions of reciprocity in partnership with those individuals and contexts with which we conduct the research? As educational researchers and scholars, we receive indirect benefits from the research in the form of publications, grants, etc. Yet, how do we develop models that build relationships with educators and benefit them in tangible ways?

Reimagining the participant observer role may be vital to building relationships that lead to authentic reciprocal relationships. Deliberation over Green's Double Dutch Methodology (2014), or the need for a more flexible participant observer role, is an important discussion in developing methods for qualitative research that build trusting relationships while leading to reciprocal outcomes. How do we hold strong to our theoretical standpoints while allowing for flexibility in our participation? Also, how do those theories stand up to developing authentic relationships with those educators within the context? How do we determine when and how to jump in and out of the research context? We must continue to contemplate these questions as we approach educational research in new contexts.

There is also a need for future studies to consider race and colorblind ideology in education. Scholars argue that race remains under-studied and under-theorized in education research (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Dixson, 2013). Studies that are grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) can shed light on how organizational practices can improve or enforce deficit perspectives and practices toward students of color. In particular, Milner, Pearman and McGee (2013) argued that the concept of interest convergence, derived from CRT, should be utilized as a theoretical tool to understand intersections of race and teacher education. Even though they underscore the need for interest convergence in teacher education, I believe that it is equally useful in educational research that takes places in schools. As more educators shift to implement CRP in their schools and classrooms, it is important to understand the impetus for such practices, which are often sanctions from state governments for gaps in achievement between students of color and white students. Interest convergence in this area is the idea that practices and policies that benefit students of color will only advance when they simultaneously benefit the interest of white educators and students. A critical race theory perspective focused on the tenet of interest convergence could uncover factors that lead to the creation of policies and organizational practices that reinforce colorblind ideology and deficit perspectives of students of color.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study, I had my own experience as a classroom teacher in mind. My insufficient attempts to incorporate district-wide strategies into my classroom left an indelible impression about my experience. This study investigated the ways that school leaders and teachers envisioned CRP and the initiatives that were employed to meet broader strategic goals. An organizational lens contributes to understanding systemic practices that foster or inhibit

district- and school-wide practices to meet culturally responsive goals. In the current political climate, we must focus on research that facilitates and maintains culturally responsive practices in all areas of educational practice, whether administrative or classroom teaching. Schools across the United States continue to become more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. Moving forward, research must promote the discovery and dissemination of organizational practices that promote growth in culturally responsive practices. Within the education community, we must be clear whether we are changing lanes or headed in a new direction. School leaders and teachers must continue to enact CRP and include organizational strategies to create more equitable schooling practices for the students they serve.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Participant Solicitation Letter

Dear [name],

My name is Bernadette Castillo, and I am a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University in the College of Education. I am writing to request your participation in a doctoral research study. I am conducting a study to explore how a school district engages in the act of becoming more culturally responsive. I am interested in understanding how educators work together to meet mutual goals established by the school leadership. I would like to understand your individual experience in working to meet those goals.

To sign up, please use the following link:

[insert link]

The objectives of this study include the following:

- to determine how school leaders promote culturally responsive practices
- to ascertain how teachers perceive and enact district initiatives to incorporate culturally responsive practices in their classrooms
- to identify the strategies and practices school leaders incorporate to help teachers meet culturally responsive goals

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study it will take about two hours of your time. You will be participating in a one-on one interview to share information about your perceptions and experiences of educators employed in a school district working toward becoming more culturally responsive. All information will be kept strictly confidential, and names will not be recorded or included in the study. Interview sessions will be audio recorded in order to ensure accuracy.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bernadette Castillo
Michigan State University
Doctoral Candidate
Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Letter

You are being asked to participate in a doctoral research study conducted by Bernadette Castillo. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how educators work together to meet district goals and become more culturally responsive.

If you volunteer to participate in this research study, your involvement will take up to two hours of your time. This involvement will include a one on one interview and, possibly a classroom observation.

Know that there are no physical, emotional, social, legal, or other risks expected from participating in the research study. Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. You are free to choose not to take part in this study. Your decision of whether or not to participate will in no way affect your relationship with Michigan State University as an employee, student, and/or alum. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Names will not be recorded or included in the study. Interview sessions will be audio taped to ensure accuracy.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Bernadette Castillo at 956-784-4752 or bmc@msu.edu. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact - anonymously, if you choose –Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews, Professor in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education, Erickson Hall 620 Farm Lane Room 352 East Lansing, MI 48824: 517-432-2070 or dcarter@msu.edu.

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. I will give you a copy of this form.

Your signature indicates that you have decided to take part in this study and you have read the information above.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

APPENDIX C: Superintendent Interview Protocol

Before the first interview, participants will be sent an email asking them to fill out a form with the following info:

Name:
Race/Ethnicity:
Gender:
Position Title:
Number of years working in current school district:
Number of years as a superintendent:

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your role as superintendent.
2. Describe your personal goals as superintendent.
3. Describe what culturally responsive pedagogy means to you.
4. Why did the district leadership identify CRP as a goal? How was this message communicated to school leaders and teachers?
5. How do you utilize culturally responsive practices in your work?
6. How do you support school leaders and teachers to engage in culturally responsive practices?
7. What expectations/goals do you have for school leaders and teachers regarding CRP? How will they be held accountable?
8. How do you communicate the goals you want school leaders and teachers to achieve?
9. How do you feel they are meeting those goals? What's going well? What needs improvement?
10. What support has been provided to meet the CRP goals set for the district? What support do school leaders and teachers still need? What support do you still need?

APPENDIX D: Principal Interview Protocol

Before the first interview, participants will be sent an email asking them to fill out a form with the following info:

Name:
Race/Ethnicity:
Gender:
School:
Position Title:
Number of years working in current school district:
Number of years as a school administrator: In this school:

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your role as administrator.
2. Describe your personal goals as an administrator.
3. Describe what culturally responsive pedagogy means to you.
4. Why did the district leadership identify CRP as a goal? How was this message communicated to you?
5. How do you utilize culturally responsive practices in your work?
6. How do you support teachers to engage in culturally responsive practices?
7. In your opinion, what expectations/goals does the superintendent have for you regarding CRP? How will you be held accountable?
8. How does he communicate the goals he wants you to achieve?
9. How do you feel you are meeting those goals?
10. How do you communicate the goals/expectations you have for the teachers at your school around CRP? How will teachers be held accountable?
11. How do you feel they are meeting those expectations/goals? What's going well? What needs improvement?
12. What support has been provided to meet the CRP goals set for the district? What support do you still need?

APPENDIX E: Teacher Interview Protocol

Before the first interview, participants will be sent an email asking them to fill out a form with the following info:

Name:
Race/Ethnicity:
Gender:
School:
Position Title:
Number of years working in current school district:
Number of years as a teacher: in this school:

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your role as teacher.
2. Describe your personal goals as a teacher.
3. Describe what culturally responsive pedagogy means to you. Do you view it as a useful to your practice?
4. Why did the district leadership identify CRP as a goal? How was this message communicated to you?
5. How do you utilize culturally responsive practices in your teaching?
6. What support have you received to engage in culturally responsive practices?
7. In your opinion, what expectations/goals does the superintendent have for you regarding CRP? Your principal? How will you be held accountable?
8. How were those goals communicated to you?
9. How do you feel you are meeting those goals? What's going well? What needs improvement?
10. What support has been provided to meet the CRP goals set for the district? What support do you still need?

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