

**Perspectives of Elementary Teachers' Sense of Agency in Implementing Culturally
Responsive Pedagogy and Practices: An Action Research Study**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addressed a problem of practice in a school district located in Mid-Michigan regarding the cultural gap between elementary school teachers and the students they teach. Teachers may encounter cultural gaps and be challenged in their practice of educating students of diverse backgrounds. This study explored the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices as a way for teachers to address the cultural gap and meet the needs of all students.

An action research approach was employed to explore the beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, dispositions, instructional competencies, and self-assessed sense of agency of teachers about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Three iterative cycles of data collection encompassed four distinct stages of action research outlined by Mertler (2017): planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. Data were gathered by a qualitative survey, interactive professional development workshop, focus group, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Findings indicated that the purposeful sample of teachers in this study could benefit from further support when implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. A professional development workshop supported the teacher participants in enhancing their knowledge about how to work with students from diverse backgrounds. The action research study facilitated the conversation with educators about cultural competence to impact the larger field of education through the perspective of practitioners working in the field. Further exploration into the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices can have transformative effects on both teachers and students.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The cultural canvas of learners has rapidly transformed in American public education. Many school districts have experienced an increase in diverse student populations, whereas the cultural gap between the students and White middle class teachers who dominate public school education is widening (McNulty & Brown, 2009). Ladson-Billings (2005) determined the problem that demographic and cultural mismatch makes it difficult for teachers to relate to the cultural backgrounds of their students. This phenomenon is exacerbated in school cultures that are largely staffed with White majority middle class teachers who may have limited knowledge or experience teaching racial/ethnic minority students. This dilemma elicits the question of how prepared teachers perceive themselves to be in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that are aligned with the unique cultural characteristics encountered in the classroom. Further, if schools are expected to meet the learning needs of all students, it is imperative to know more about the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency teachers have working with students of diverse backgrounds.

Hill, Bachler, Allen, and Coble (2004) contended that teachers of color tend to teach in schools with a higher percentage of racial/ethnic diversity, and students achieve at a higher rate if they are taught by teachers that reflect their students' racial background. Racial and ethnic similarities might diminish barriers that impede teachers' ability to build relationships and connect with students and families.

Context of this Study

A small suburban school district in Mid-Michigan that experiences the problem of cultural gap between teacher and students was chosen as the site for this study.

Pseudonyms were introduced to maintain the privacy of participants and the participating school district. The student enrollment of slightly more than 4,000 is served by the Western Community School District staff that includes 212 teachers, 15 administrators, and 213 support personnel who serve in secretarial, paraprofessional, custodial/maintenance, nursing, food service, transportation, and computer technology jobs. More than 70% of the staff chooses to live within the school district community that comprises 65 square miles and a population of approximately 25,000.

The district's board of education is composed of seven local citizens, each elected to a six-year term of office. Two positions are open for election every two years on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November. The school board has control over local school matters within the framework of the Michigan State Legislature and Michigan State Board of Education. The local school board determines general policies for the care, management, and control of the district's public schools. The district superintendent, the chief executive officer of the board, is a professional educator employed to administer laws and regulations and carry out board adopted policies.

The governing body and the instructional staff consists largely of persons of White European descent (2017 Niche Best Schools K-12 School & District Rankings). The socioeconomic class of the staff is middle to upper class with an average teacher salary of \$64,943.00. Nearly one-third of the student population receives free and reduced lunch (2017 Niche Best Schools K-12 School & District Rankings). Overall,

demographics indicate that the student population primarily represents middle to upper class status.

Statement of the Problem

The problem identified for this study was the imbalance in student-to-teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. In Western Community School District, the student and staff population has historically been homogenous representing a majority White demographic (2017 Niche Best Schools K-12 School & District Rankings). However, in recent years, students of multiple culturally diverse backgrounds have entered the district. The district entered a county-wide initiative, schools of choice, which allows students from neighboring districts to be eligible for potential enrollment. The demographics of residents within the district have begun to look different as families of African American, Hispanic, and Asian backgrounds are moving into the city and surrounding areas.

A contributing factor to the imbalance in student-to-teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds was based on statistics that reported the increase in multiethnic student enrollment with little to no ethnic diversity among instructional staff. The school district's racial demographic of staff is more than 95% White, with instructional staff greater than 98% who are representative of European backgrounds.

Tables 1 and 2 show racial demographics of staff from 2013 to 2016 and an upward trend in enrollment of students from African American, Hispanic, and Asian backgrounds in that period.

Table 1

School Staff Demographics (Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017)

Year	Total Teachers	African American	Hispanic	White
2013-2014	221	1	4	216
2014-2015	232	1	4	227
2015-2016	230	1	4	225
2016-2017	224	0	4	220

Table 2

Student Demographics (Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017)

Year	Total Students	Native American/ Alaska Native	African American	Asian	Hispanic/ Latino	Other	White
2013-14	4,106	23	321	34	110	118	3,500
2014-15	3,988	22	310	38	122	121	3,375
2015-16	4,090	20	334	40	138	137	3,421
2016-17	4,053	0	352	38	160	153	3,350

An exploration of teachers' beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, dispositions, instructional competencies, and self-assessed sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices led to this action research study, which was designed to examine teachers' perceptions of their preparedness in using culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to address the phenomena of the changing demographics in Western Community School District.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study to investigate perceptions of elementary school teachers in Western Community School District about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices:

1. How do first to sixth grade teachers in a diverse school district in Mid-Michigan perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices? Further, the following subsidiary questions helped to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of teachers' experiences:
 2. Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences, and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?
 3. What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and/or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural content, enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and build relationships with students?
 4. How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?
 5. After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the additional types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?

Responses to the research questions can support an action plan that can be implemented with the teacher participants.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived understandings regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of first to sixth grade teachers in Western Community Schools. An action research approach was used to devise a data-driven, teacher inclusive, action-plan for teacher improvement through professional development. This study focused exclusively on the work of first to sixth grade teachers with their students from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Hill, Bachler, Allen, and Coble (2004) noted that teachers' culturally laden instructional and interpersonal dynamics are complex and incoherent when teaching racial/ethnic students. Heeding the advice of Spaulding and Falco (2013), this action research was intentionally designed to determine the needed actions to address a potential problem of practice within a specific educational context, as is the gradual imbalance in student to teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds identified within Western Community Schools.

The action research design, which was conducive to existing professional learning community practices, included strategically collected data to inform the construction of three iterative action research cycles that allowed for the implementation of organizational change and the development of a data informed action plan

Cycle one involved a needs assessment introduced as a survey of participants' perspectives regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Cycle two involved

the enactment and implementation of a determined professional development as a result of the needs assessment. In cycle three, participants engaged in a focus group and interviews to achieve a deeper analysis of their own self-efficacy and experiences regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

According to Mertler (2014), conducting action research is a four-stage procedure: (a) planning, (b) acting, (c) developing, and (d) reflecting. Teachers can use action research and reflection to better inform their practice in a cycle of continuous improvement. Reflective practices are embedded within the process of action research. Both Schon (1987) and Kilbourne (1988) believed that reflection on one's experience was an important method of improving and building a repertoire of professional knowledge. Reflection as an important aspect of professional learning continued to emerge in literature about school improvement over the decades. For example, Grimmett, Erickson, Mackinnon, and Riecken (1990) stated that reflective practices involve the introspection of experiences. More recently, Danielson and McGreal (2000) stated, "Few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice" (p. 24).

Action research enables educators to inquire, to observe, to collect data, and to dialogue during the school day. Further, action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry that is now being used in school-based curriculum development, professional development, school improvement schemes. The primary goal is for teachers to critically assess their actions to change their practices. The research plan in this study engaged the participants in self-reflective inquiry that McNiff (1997) described, and each cycle of this action research involved a planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stage.

The focus of this action research study was designed for teacher participants to increase their understanding of how to reach every learner through culturally responsive pedagogy and classroom practices. No classroom should lack these attributes if individual students' abilities, learning needs and interests, developmental levels, learning styles, family and community backgrounds are considered. This is an important skill as students do not all share the same learning styles and cultural norms. Banks (2003) said when teachers are equipped with multiple ways of reaching their students, their opportunities for successful instructional experiences increase. When a school district's governing body provides professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, that emphasis may serve as an avenue for instructional practices, attitudes and behaviors to be challenged or transformed.

Significance of the Study

This study addressed a growing discontinuity between student and teacher, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This cultural gap can be problematic when teachers are working with culturally diverse student groups. The research explored the extent to which participating teachers believed they have been prepared to work with students of diverse backgrounds. Additionally, this study was significant because it adds to the body of knowledge about how teachers learn, in practice, to become more culturally responsive to a growing population of ethnically diverse learners.

James A. Banks (2003) a leading scholar of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, argued in the early development of the field of multicultural education: "Educators should carefully define concepts such as multiethnic and multicultural education and delineate the boundaries implied by these concepts" (p. 237). Banks and

other scholars expressed ideas, beliefs, and philosophies applied to this action research study that attempted to engage participants in a self-reflective process around student culture, race, and ethnic identities. This action research study was informed by the scholarly literature available on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and provided a foundation based on current practices in education that addressed cultural competency in the classroom.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study:

Sense of Agency – “Sense of Agency refers to the feeling of control over actions and their consequences” (Moore, 2016, p. 1).

School Culture – “School culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols, and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school” (Education World, 2017, p. 1).

Pedagogy – (n.d.) “Pedagogy is defined as the art of profession of teaching.”

American Heritage College Dictionary (4th. ed.). Boston” Houghton Mifflin.

Teacher Professional Identify – “Teachers Professional Identity is defined as the beliefs, values, and commitments an individual holds toward being a teacher (as distinct from another professional) and being a particular type of teacher” (UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2010, p. 1).

Culturally Responsive Teaching – Culturally Responsive Teaching recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning, enriching classroom experiences and keeping students engaged (The Education Alliance, 2017)

Diversity – Diversity is defined as individual differences including personality, interests, learning, modalities, and life experiences. Diversity is also defined as group differences including race, ethnicity, ability, gender expression, sexual orientation, nationality, language, religion, political affiliation, and socio-economic background. (TASC Model Core Teaching Standards, 2011).

Multicultural Education – Multicultural education is a philosophical concept built in the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity, as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations (The National Association of Multicultural Education, 2017).

School Climate – School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (National School Climate Center, 2007).

Chapter Summary

This chapter included the background of the study’s problem that explored the experiences and knowledge of first through sixth grade instructors regarding implementing an action research approach of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in Western Community Schools. Statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and key terms were discussed. A review of pertinent literature and the theoretical framework informing this study are topics included in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This action research study conducted in Mid-Michigan's Western Community Schools addressed the imbalance in student to teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds which may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The literature review includes identified and synthesized literature that relates to the problem of practice and attempts to close a distinct gap in extant research.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice

Schools nationwide have been challenged to meet the needs of rapidly changing demographics by providing diverse educational experiences that are responsive to all learners. Leading multi-cultural educational scholar, James Banks (2003), asserted that current demographic shifts points towards America becoming more ethnically diverse, and made supporting the learning of diverse populations more urgent. Multiple studies on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices have been conducted to emphasize a need to provide diverse educational experiences for all students in the classroom (Schmitz, Nourse, & Ross, 2012; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011; Milner 2011; Wallace & Brand 2012).

Banks (2003) insisted that teachers must know how to structure and provide a curriculum that reflects cultural diversity to meet the needs of all students. In 2004, he presented ways in which teachers and school leaders might think about the overall curriculum and instructional program. He suggested that cross curriculum content and multiple competencies be taught in a culturally responsive manner to meet the needs of all students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. Banks (2004) has made vast

contributions to the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. His studies have given birth to ideas focused on the fair and equal treatment of underrepresented students in the educational setting. Other leading scholars on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices asserted that Banks' (2004) work transforms curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching toward a goal of emphasizing social justice in the classroom and ethnic content in the curriculum (Hudalla, 2005; Nieto, 1992; Gay, 2004).

Banks' (2004) work is steeped in social justice theory. Social justice has been defined many ways. However, in a foreword to Ladson-Billings and Tate's (2006) *Education Research in the Public Interest*, Banks defined social justice as the promotion of educational equality for marginalized groups. He proposed that because of their cultural differences, students of diverse backgrounds might be subjected to inequitable learning experiences more often than students representing the larger White majority.

Further, opportunities and experiences afforded to teachers in their own educational backgrounds may be dissimilar to the diverse students they currently teach. For example, teachers may consistently instruct through a lens that represents their own cultural background or experiences. An unintentional consequence is then imposed upon those students who cannot relate to or share the same experiences of their teacher. One research study examined a multiyear professional development program designed to help English teachers incorporate connected learning into their classrooms (Johnson, Sieben, & Buxton, 2018). The researchers learned that professional development that considers a focus on social justice and equity should be afforded to teachers.

Banks' (2004) standard for teachers in five dimensions. Banks (2004) developed five dimensions of a standard for teachers to use when imparting fair and just

educational experiences to students: (a) Content Integration, (b) Knowledge Construction Process, (c) Prejudice Reduction, (d) Equity Pedagogy, and (e) Empowering School Culture and Social Structure (p. 1-8). These five dimensions are specific in their application to social justice, how they support culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and intentional consideration of the culture of diverse student groups.

Dimension 1. Content integration relates to the infusion of various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities to be represented in the curriculum. Banks (2004) noted that one of the first steps in developing culturally responsive classrooms is to speak about persons of multiple cultural backgrounds. He believed that introducing culturally diverse figures to students in a classroom can build capacity for culturally responsive instruction.

Dimension 2. Educators who understand the cultural foundation of their students, use this knowledge to inform their instructional practices and pedagogy. The knowledge construction process involves students in critiquing the social positioning of groups through the way knowledge is presented (Banks, 2004). In this process, students can purposefully question, challenge, or critique assumptions they may have about sociopolitical arenas and race. The teacher who encourages students to explore these inequities understands the role culture can play in the educational process.

According to Milner (2014), “These teachers actually use student culture in their curriculum planning and implementation, and they allow students to develop the skills to question how power structures are created and maintained in U.S. society” (p. 5). These practices help students personalize and identify learning that is interesting and relevant to their lives past, present, and future. Here teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and

perspectives of the discipline they are teaching (Banks & Tucker, 1998). The culturally responsive teacher will encourage their students to explore inconsistencies, biases, inequities, or stereotypes that arise during discussions and conversations centered on cultural differences and race.

Dimension 3. Prejudice reduction describes lessons and activities that teachers implement to assert positive images of ethnic groups and to improve intergroup relations (Banks, 2004). This dimension tugs on the perceived intrinsic ability of teachers to tear down stereotypes and construct more positive racial attitudes. Too often the educational system disregards and dismisses the reality of students' lived experiences (Saathoff, 2017). As a result, students learn that their experience, languages, and histories hold little or no value in the educational setting (Saathoff, 2017). When educators have developed a classroom environment that does not judge and is embracing of all students, teachers are successfully meeting the principles of this dimension.

Dimension 4. Equity pedagogy concerns modifying teaching styles and approaches with the intent of facilitating academic achievement for all students (Banks 2004). The educator immersed in this dimension makes a concerted effort to change their pedagogical practices to be equitably responsive to the individualized needs of each student. By taking time to get to know their students, the teacher invests in the academic success of each learner by nurturing supportive relationships.

Dimension 5: Empowering school culture and social culture describes the exploration of the school culture and organization by all members of school staff with the intent to restructure institutional practices to create access for all groups (Banks, 2004). Banks developed this dimension with the entire school in mind, not just classroom

instruction. School culture involves all areas of an institution that enlist common beliefs and values that are displayed by its members. An empowering school culture acknowledges inequities in achievement and goes into action to address existing gaps. Banks suggested that an empowering school culture cares about students, provides love and support to them and their families, and maintains high student expectations.

Similarly, Milner (2014) addressed the empowering school culture and social culture dimension by arguing that teachers must intentionally connect with their students. He emphasized, “Research has stressed the importance of teacher learning and understanding of the background and lived experiences of their students in order to be successful” (p. 3). Teachers should think about and use what they learn about students to inform their curriculum development and instruction. This idea would require the entire school staff to explore their school culture and the impact it has on overall instructional programs and curriculum.

Research highly suggested that school staff intentionally learn about the outside-of-school practices of students and families that can be mirrored and connected to the in-school curriculum in different areas (Milner, 2014). Whole school re-culturing strategies imply that teaching staff should equip themselves with as much information about their students as possible and build relationships as indicated by Banks’ (2004) fifth dimension. Relationship-building can be a gateway for schools to understand fully the cultural needs of their students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

Banks’ (2004) five dimensions provide concepts for teachers to explore and potentially incorporate into their professional pedagogy and instructional practices. The dimensions also supply a means for teachers to respond to students’ cultural needs in a

deliberate and purposeful manner. These dimensions create an avenue for teachers to make connections and build relationships with students who are underrepresented, underprivileged, a minority, or introverted. The research conducted by Banks (2004) is relevant to this action research study, as it provides a framework for further exploration into culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and the preparedness of teachers and also creates platforms for educational practitioners to strengthen their preparation and knowledge when attempting to work with students of diverse backgrounds.

Nieto and Bode's (2008) seven characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. In addition to Banks (2004), another leading scholar, Sonia Nieto (1992), offered a definition of cultural responsiveness that continues to influence discourse in the field of multicultural education (Nieto, 1992; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Nieto and Bode (2008) expanded on Banks' (2004) five dimensions and proposed seven characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices: (a) antiracist education, (b) basic education, (c) education important for all students, (d) pervasive education, (e) education for social justice, (f) education as a process, and (g) critical pedagogy (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 5).

Nieto and Bode's (2008) antiracist education explored developing a curriculum that equips students with skills to deflect racist views and other modes of domination. Like Banks' (2004) knowledge construction process dimension, this characteristic empowers students to exercise their voice and engage in conversations around race. Nieto and Bode's (2008) basic education advances the fundamental right for all students to engage in core academics and arts. The principles of basic education are that all students can learn from teachers who shape differences and mold varying cultural groups.

It could be perceived that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are only necessary for students of color or other diverse groups; however, Nieto and Bode (2008) viewed this characteristic of education being inclusive and essential for all students.

Nieto and Bode (2008) emphasized that pervasive education is an approach that permeates the entire educational experience, including school climate, physical environment, curriculum, and relationships. For example, a school that begins each day with all students reciting the Pledge of Allegiance could be an example of the pervasive characteristic. Another example might be schools that celebrate and acknowledge traditional holidays such as Kwanzaa, or Hanukkah. Culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are holistic experiences present in all areas of a school.

In the characteristic of education for social justice, Nieto and Bode (2008) envisioned teachers and students putting their learning into action. In practice, schools may have living values and traditions that are applied daily. Research suggested the importance of teaching students in culturally responsive ways and further, to dive deeper into teaching equity literacy, fostering the development of social justice (Stachowiak, 2017). The primary goal within the social justice framework is for teachers to create learning environments where students are taught to recognize, examine, and challenge perceived inequities in and around their own lives and then act.

According to Nieto and Bode (2008), culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are processes that highlight the ongoing organic development of individuals and educational institutions involving relationships among people. The process is further defined as the intangibles of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that are less recognizable than specific curriculum content, such as expectations of student

achievement, learning environments, students' learning preferences, and cultural variables that influence the educational experience (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Essentially, creating positive ongoing relationships with students should be embedded in the school's culture which allows students to feel liberated through their learning and ability to think. The last characteristic, critical pedagogy, draws upon experiences of students through their cultural, linguistic, familial, academic, artistic and other forms of knowledge (Nieto & Bode, 2008), and takes students beyond their own experiences, enabling them to understand perspectives with which they disagree, and to think critically about multiple viewpoints leading to praxis or reflection combined with action (Freire, 2000).

Sleeter and Grant's (2006) five approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Although Banks (2004) and Nieto and Bode (2008) offered interesting perspectives on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, other scholars have equally advanced sociopolitical connections to this concept. In a 1987 Harvard Educational Review, Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant provided extensive reviews of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and explained five approaches: (a) teaching the exceptional and the culturally different, (b) human relations, (c) single-group studies, (d) multicultural education, and (e) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist.

The goal of teaching the exceptional and culturally different is to equip students with academic skills, concepts, and values to function in American society's institutions and culture (Sleeter & Grant, 2006). This approach is related to the educational strategy of differentiated instruction, the premise of which is grounded in the belief that not all students learn in the same way. Further, this educational strategy recognizes multiple

learning styles that exist amongst students. Essentially, differentiated instruction relies on teachers to tap into those unique styles to optimize the learning of every individual.

Sleeter and Grant's (2006) human relations approach develops relationships among diverse groups and individuals to fight stereotyping and promote unity. Like Banks' (2004) prejudice reduction dimension and Nieto and Bode's (2008) antiracist education characteristic, the human relations approach attempts to break down barriers that may exist between students based upon perceived labels attached to diverse cultural groups. Societal perceptions can create misconceptions about the unknown, but barriers may begin to dissipate if students learn what is true about different races and cultures.

The goal of single-group studies, the third approach outlined in Sleeter and Grant's (2006) research is to engage in an in-depth, comprehensive study that moves specific groups from the margins by providing information about the group's history, including experiences with oppression and resistance to that oppression. The hope is to reduce stratification and create greater access to power. Although there are many positive components to this approach, viewing it as a beginning or entry level approach to multicultural education may be the most appropriate. Criticism of this approach cites the unintentional effect of keeping groups, such as people of color, women, people with disabilities, and working-class people segregated and out of the mainstream curriculum. Other potential pitfalls are the possibility of promoting cultural separatism and the tendency for this approach to be implemented as a mere add-on (Sleeter & Grant, 2006).

Regarding multicultural education, Sleeter and Grant (2006) cited Gollnick (1980) who explained that this approach promotes a range of goals, including the value of cultural diversity, human rights, respect for differences, alternative life choices, social

justice, equal opportunity, and equitable power distribution. Sleeter and Grant (2006) saw these themes as essential elements to creating fair and equitable learning opportunities for students.

Finally, Sleeter and Grant (2006) discussed multicultural and social reconstructionist education that places an emphasis on the educational institution as an environment for implementing social change and challenging social inequalities (Center for Teaching, Learning, & Leadership Tallahassee Community College, 2015). This approach could be defined as a complete redesign of an educational system or program (Sleeter & Grant, 2006), as it attempts to place the power of control in the hands of students and encourages them to speak out against what they deem to be unjust or unfair and to have it transformed. Students, guided by this approach, would join forces with other like-minded groups and engage in intense exploration of common or related issues.

The work of Banks (2004), Nieto and Bode (2008), and Sleeter and Grant (2006) provides major definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, helps to propel the field, and continues to sustain a discourse that is ever evolving. Geneva Gay (2004) has referenced the “shifting contours of multicultural education and its effectiveness” (p. 193). She contended that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices have historical connections to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which has grown through developmental phases. Gay’s contributions are explored by implementing educational equality through the lens of curriculum desegregation and equity pedagogy.

Gay (2003) advised that curriculum desegregation requires analysis from every discipline and should not be relegated to the task of social studies and language arts. Gay contended that becoming a culturally responsive educator is a process which is echoed in

Nieto and Bode's (2008) seven characteristics and Banks (2004) five dimensions. Gay believed that refining curriculum content affects equity pedagogy. The premise of her beliefs addressed how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices places value on how instructors can effectively teach diverse students as well as what to teach them. Gay (2004) argued that educational equity is multi-dimensional and includes many domains involving teacher attitudes and expectations toward diversity, building community among diverse learners, and caring across cultures. She also asserted that educational equity includes use of multiple teaching techniques congruent with cultural backgrounds, values, experiences, and orientations of different ethnic groups (Gay, 2004).

A study that highlighted some dehumanizing treatment received by African immigrants in K-12 schools in the United States determined that educators must create and use balanced and stereotype-free instructional content and materials in their classrooms (Ukpokodu, 2018). The study called for culturally responsive and globally competent teachers. Gay's (2003) concepts merge perfectly with this study and earlier philosophical predecessors' belief systems.

This action research study was informed by a synthesis of the works of Banks (2004), Nieto and Bode (2008), Sleeter and Grant (2006) and Gay (2003) because their foundational research is germane to understanding culturally responsive pedagogy. Their viewpoints outlined specific beliefs and values that teachers should possess when implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Banks' (2004) five dimensions represent multicultural education, whereas Nieto and Bode (2008) highlight seven characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. A common thread between the works of those researchers speaks to redefining educational curriculums to

better reflect diverse student groups. Banks' (2004) content integration dimension of multicultural education and Nieto and Bode's (2008) antiracist education characteristic of culturally responsive education both address implementation of unbiased curriculums. These ideas guided this action research process that enlisted teachers to reflect on their curriculum development efforts and instructional practices. Further, concepts supported by both Banks' (2004) and Gay's (2003) philosophies on equity pedagogy was synthesized to study the extent to which teachers perceive themselves as having a sense of agency in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Sleeter and Grant (2006), Banks (2004), and Nieto and Bode (2008) offered positions that supported this action research study, as it allowed teachers to reflect upon how they perceive relationships with students. The human relations approach when implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices described by Sleeter and Grant (2006) contributed to the understanding of the multidimensional design of this study. The human relations approach focused on the teachers' abilities to develop relationships amongst diverse learners while promoting unity. Banks' (2004) fifth dimension, empowering school culture and social structure, addressed the need for teachers and entire staff in schools to intentionally foster positive relationships with their students. Nieto and Bode (2008) also described positive relationships with students as a process of the organization not to be overlooked.

This action research study focused on teachers' ability to challenge themselves through reflection on their current practices and how teachers engage students to think globally about themselves and the world. Banks' (2004) dimensions offered insight on how teachers might provoke thought in students; Nieto and Bode (2008) and Sleeter and

Grant (2006) provided ideas specific to these methods. Nieto and Bode's (2008) critical pedagogy characteristic enables students to understand perspectives with which they may disagree and to think critically about multiple viewpoints. Sleeter and Grant (2006) proposed that students not only recognize perspectives with which they disagree, but that they speak out and act against them. With ideas drawn from previous researcher, potential participants in this study might reassess how they are preparing students in rationalizing authentic ideas, perceptions, and beliefs.

The review of literature continues in the following four subsections—pre-service teaching experiences; school climate, culture, and leadership; curriculum and content areas; and impact of professional development. Research related to these topics directly address the primary and secondary research questions discussed in Chapter I.

Pre-Service/Student Teaching Experiences

Various studies not only highlighted classroom teachers and their experiences but also examined pre-service teachers and how they need to be prepared for teaching diverse student groups. Research indicated that new teachers often feel unprepared for racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom and find that coursework addressing these issues provides little to no help in classroom practice (Lucey & White, 2017). However, according to Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011), the field of education is “ushering in a new generation of teachers who need experiences that will prepare them to acknowledge the multiple worldviews of the diverse student populations they will teach” (p. 223). Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning's (2011) perspectives on the field of education are consistent with Banks' (2004) knowledge construction process dimension in which teachers allow students to critique the social positions of groups through the

way knowledge is presented. Zumwalt and Craig (2005) found that most pre-service teachers entering the profession do not share the same cultural, linguistic, or racial background with most of the students with whom they will work with daily. It could be concluded that this creates a pre-determined disconnect between students and their teachers, even before stepping foot into the classroom.

Research further demonstrated a demand for prospective elementary school teachers in the U. S. to learn to educate culturally and linguistically diverse students in an impactful and effective manner (Daniel, 2016). Results of one study suggested that it is the duty of teacher education programs to educate preservice teachers to close the cultural gaps that exist between teachers and the students that sit before them (Shedrow, 2017). As noted, Banks (2004) stressed the importance of creating an inclusive environment for all students in his empowering school culture dimension.

Brooks et al. (2012) noted that although enrollment of culturally diverse children is steadily rising, the teaching profession reflects a different profile. Further, most teachers are White and female, with high probability of bringing limited multicultural experiences and low expectations of culturally diverse children to the classroom (Sleeter, 2005). As a result, “The field of teacher education is riddled with stories of white pre-service teachers resisting experiences that require them to critique their white identity and the privileges associated with that status” (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011, p. 224). Across time, studies, such as those by Sleeter (2001) and Galman (2010) have provided a meta-narrative of White teachers shown as unwilling and/or unknowledgeable regarding educating children of color.

In a more recent study, teacher educators reported experiencing resistance from pre-service teachers when challenging them to reflect on their own biases and to recognize socio-historical and institutional racism in society (Demoiny, 2017). Both Banks (2004) and Gay (2003) wrote of equity pedagogy and the need for classroom teachers to be willing to modify their approaches to teaching to reach all students. Although some studies show a resistance from White teachers, this narrative is not true of all White teachers and the impact of their backgrounds and personal experiences can influence how they teach.

Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) worked with a White female teacher to document the pedagogical choices she made to create an engaging learning environment for a diverse group of students. The students were mostly African American, which bridged her emerging theory for social justice education with her daily practices. The study was conducted in a large Midwestern city during the months of January through June 2007. The pre-service teacher was assigned to an urban middle school and worked with students in Grades 6 through 8, spending the last eight weeks as a full-time student teacher in charge of curriculum and instruction.

The student teacher grew up in a large urban city in the northern region of a large Midwestern state. During this period, most of her friends were African American, and she immersed herself in African-American cultural practices. Her family moved to the suburbs when she was getting ready to enter high school, and she found herself in a culture shock. The student teacher's background posed an interesting illustration of what would be assumed of a typical White female upbringing. However, being raised in an urban setting with predominantly African-American friends, her perspectives, values,

mindset, and moral compass might be different than that of a typical White female teacher.

Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) explored the pre-service teacher's understanding of diversity, equity, and social change through classroom observations and interviews. The researchers' goal was to understand how the pre-service teacher interpreted tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in her teaching to address the needs of diverse student groups. Findings from the research study indicated that the pre-service student teacher was able to account for developing conceptualizations of diversity, equity, and social change through her pedagogy during student teaching. Interpreting these results, Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) suggested that "She examined how race, equity, and social change matter in teaching and learning by connecting these ideas to the everyday lives of the middle school students with whom she worked" (p. 230), therefore creating a culturally responsive classroom. The pre-service teacher in the Price-Dennis and Souto-Manning (2011) study implemented strategies to connect with her students that had been forged by an earlier theorist on relationship-building (Milner, 2011). The teacher's overall pedagogical choices included the use of dialogue, personal relationships, and literacy practices.

Banks' (2004) and Gay's (2004) ideas around equity pedagogy and how the pre-service teacher met the diverse needs of her students are applicable to this study. There is a clear alignment in this study between the pre-service teachers' practices and the domains of culturally responsive teaching proposed by Gay. These major domains include,

multicultural content; pluralistic classroom climates and learning environments; teacher attitudes and expectations toward diversity; building community among diverse learners; caring across cultures; use of multiple teaching techniques that are congruent with the cultural backgrounds, values, experiences, and orientations of different ethnic groups; developing personal efficacy and an ethos of success among diverse students; and using culturally informed assessment procedures to determine learning needs, knowledge acquisition, and skill proficiencies (Gay, 2004, p. 214).

The pre-service teacher had confidence in her sense of agency to teach diverse student groups. She exemplified in her practices the use of multiple teaching techniques that are congruent with the cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences of her students. Additionally, Price-Dennis' and Souto-Manning's (2011) study is supported by Gay's (2004) outline of the many domains of culturally responsive teaching and how the pre-service teacher in their study expressed them in her practices, and the data gathered contributed to answering the research questions in this study.

The practices of teachers who are successfully implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices demonstrate that they use the best of what they know about good teaching. These characteristics mean that the successful teacher develops caring, consciousness, communication, and a sense of community within their classrooms (Brown & Mowry, 2017). For example, in literacy education, some teachers have developed activities wherein students begin to identify their own self-awareness and cultural heritage. Banks' (2004) content integration dimension is relevant in these practices in the classroom as it intentionally allows for students to explore their culture in

a safe and nonjudgmental manner. This dimension is demonstrated by teachers whose students write ethno-autobiographies, a celebratory way for students to connect to their cultural selves (Chenowith, 2014). Meaningful activities such as this build capacity for teaching and learning that is adaptive, culturally aware, and sensitive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Further, these activities equally reshape the thinking of teachers who do not share backgrounds like the students they service, and teachers who engage in these types of activities with their students are also willing to adjust their pedagogical practices to meet the needs of their students.

Some research contended that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices assumes that cultural diversity of students is a strength and favorable resource for maximizing learning for all students (Gay, 2000). When teachers view cultural differences as a strength and not a deficit, students are more likely to be successful. Glover and Harris (2016) found that culturally responsive teachers view students and their families as valuable resources and work with them to create learning activities that are inclusive of students' lived experiences. Teachers who do not have experiences with cultural diversity may not recognize these strengths and have negative assumptions about culturally diverse children, which can be a detriment to overall learning (Colombo, 2004).

Literature reviewed on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices placed a focus on how pre-service and certified teachers are being prepared to work with diverse student groups. The dramatic change in student demographics contributes less to the problem than the way in which educators have responded to this societal shift. Changing student demographics have emphasized the need for all teachers to have the

attitudes, knowledge, and skill to work effectively with racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students (Banks, 2016). Researchers over the past few decades have found reason for schools and teachers to find creative and meaningful ways to work with diverse student groups (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Erickson, 1987; Gay, 2002; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1990).

One method to enhance the learning of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is to make a connection to their home life, background, and culture. Sleeter and Grant's (2006) human relations' approach to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices may be applicable when teachers are trying to build a relationship with their students. Culturally responsive teachers believe that culture deeply influences the way children learn (Stoicovy, 2002). Challenges arise when teachers have vastly different experiences and backgrounds than that of the students they teach. Long time practice indicates that mainstream culture and teachers often filter curriculum through their own cultural backgrounds and teach the way they were taught (Cuban, 1993). Connecting with students to achieve maximum academic progress is often very difficult, when students exhibit cultural characteristics that are so different from their teachers.

Schmitz et al. (2012) reported that local school districts need to work with colleges and universities on how to prepare pre-service student teachers in teaching students of diverse backgrounds. When new teachers come into the field equipped with strategies, ideas, and competencies centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, all students will be more successful. According to Phuntsog (1999), "Classroom teachers are in a crucial position to provide learning experiences that will ensure cultural integrity and academic success for all children" (p. 99). The goal is for all

students to be successful and benefit from the principles of a culturally responsive learning experience. While minority students may be the immediate target group for these practices, all will benefit equally.

Racial stereotypes are confronted by students and led by teachers in a healthy and safe learning setting. Students can voice their opinions and affirmations of what they deem to be true from their own lived experiences about prejudice and race. Nieto and Bode's (2008) critical pedagogy characteristic affirms the idea of students confronting prejudice and race through their own lens and understanding. Banks (2004) also spoke about knowledge construction process in his second dimension, which encourages students to think critically about what they are being taught. Phuntsog (1999) pointed to these ideas as reasons for an immediate need to prepare teachers with cultural knowledge and competencies to adapt curriculum and instruction for culturally responsive classroom practices to enhance the learning of all students in culturally diverse schools. The need is also necessitated by perpetual statistics that report the gross absence of culturally diverse teachers entering the field. The statistic connects to the identified problem of practice for this action research study and serves as a gap in the literature.

Morettini (2017) concluded that as students of color continue to comprise most K-12 students in the U. S., it is important for these children to see successful teachers who look like them. Researchers Fasching-Varner and Seriki (2012) reported the National Center of Education Statistics (2012) estimates that, over the last 20 years, 85% to 92% of the teaching force has been both White and female, indicating a disproportionate overrepresentation of White female teachers. Statistics project that by 2024, 29% of all students will identify as Latino-American, 6% as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 15% as

African American. Today, 9% are classified as English learners (National Center of Education Statistics, 2016). As this statistic continues to remain constant, it is important to educate all teachers about how to work with all students, particularly students of diverse backgrounds.

African-American and Hispanic/Latino populations are the largest racially and culturally different groups nationally in schools today. This demographic tends to be the majority in many school districts in the United States (Ford, Henfield & Scott, 2013, p. 65). However, the language and literacy practice of students' homes are often left out of curriculum in favor of English language texts and materials that reflect mainstream cultural values and norms (Puzio, Newcomer, Pratt, McNeely, Jacobs, 2017). These statistics further represent a problem of practice and identify a distinct gap in the literature, providing a rational basis for the infusion of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in school districts nationwide and adding to the foundation upon which this action research study is based.

School Climate, Culture & Leadership

School climate and how it is cultivated might be used to measure effective implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Schools that embrace a positive school climate could find value in a teaching and learning environment focused on student success. Willis (2003) noted research findings that healthy school climates are those in which teachers hold positive attitudes about students, high expectations of students, and positive extended family relations. Teachers also make it a priority to listen to their students and incorporate elements of students' culture in their teaching. Positive and mindful student engagement empowers learners and positions them as active

members of the school community. Students can share their personal stories with teachers and classmates, which can build bridges to strong relationships. When teachers are in tune to their students' cultural behaviors and view those behaviors as assets, culturally responsive teaching becomes more congruent with the students' learning styles and needs (Harmon, 2012).

According to Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007), "Teachers must create a classroom culture where all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed and supported and provided with the best opportunity to learn" (p. 64). Banks' (2004) equity pedagogy dimension is applicable, as it suggests teachers instinctively know when to modify their teaching styles. One of the domains of equity pedagogy, according to Gay (2004), is demonstrated when teachers creating pluralist classroom climates and learning environments. The gateway to creating a school climate that is accepting of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices may start with effective school district and building leadership. Nieto and Bode's (2008) pervasive characteristic speaks to enhancing school climate by way of building positive relationships.

Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, and Rhodes (2009) believed that "School boards represent the starting point for culturally responsive leadership" (p. 12). Often, the role of school leaders encompass developing school communities with an emphasis on creating positive school cultures and climates. School culture and climate, in this sense, focuses only on those guiding principles that internally reflect traditions and rituals of the school. However, the external traditions, rituals, and cultures in which students live and bring to school are rarely considered. Emerging literature suggested that schools need to

show an intentional effort to build bridges connecting the school and the community in which it is situated (Howley et al., 2009).

Connecting schools to local communities starts with the district and building leadership. Studies suggest school leadership is most effective when it acknowledges and responds to the cultural values and norms of communities (Walker & Quong, 1998). Current literature underlined that cultural responsiveness involves the use of leadership practices and advocacy of educational standards that make sense within the framework of the local culture (Howley et al., 2009).

One study reported by Howley et al. (2009) presented scenarios where building principals did not simply adhere to cultural norms, but instead deployed a combination of culturally resonant and culturally dissonant practices. The schools highlighted in this study were situated in four distinct rural communities, which differed in terms of their economic circumstances as well as their cultural features. According to this study, principals were seeking to make educational improvements primarily by using leadership practices that were understandable and acceptable to community members (Howley et al., 2009). Principals working directly with community members and building relationships with students and their families was a direct focus. Relationship building was a priority simply because it provided a basis for understanding the lived experiences of students outside of school. Emotional connections were developed between the school and families, which enhanced the implementation of culturally responsive practices. Ultimately, these findings positioned cultural responsiveness as a merger between community culture and organizational culture (Howley et al., 2009). This study's results

suggested that school leadership is at the pinnacle of developing a school and community culture that is bonded and functions cohesively.

School leaders may be more supportive of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices when they display a social awareness of the community in which they serve. Additionally, school leaders must look at the total school culture and how to make it more equitable as suggested by Banks (2004) and his fifth dimension empowering school culture, which is applicable when school leaders are attempting to create school cultures that meets the needs of all students. The principals made it a priority to unify the external and internal school communities to support all students and they empowered and transformed their school communities through an acknowledgement, understanding, and acceptance of the surrounding neighborhood in which their students live. The principal's efforts were grounded in the goal of restructuring institutional practices to create access for all groups (Banks, 2004)). The work of Howley et al. (2009) displayed traits of Banks' (2004) ideas around supporting all students through an investment in school culture.

Laura (2018) noted that the school administrators in the study by Howley et al. (2009) could be referred to as social justice leaders. Social justice leaders consciously and regularly attend to how school culture, curricula, pedagogical practices, and atmosphere create and reproduce societal inequities. These administrators created school cultures that challenged unjust practices to overcome inequity and create a school environment conducive to the success of all students. The findings in the study by Howley et al. (2009) contributed to answering subsidiary questions for this action research study.

School leaders are charged with recruiting, evaluating, and retaining teachers that exemplify best educational practices. Bond (1998) discussed a need for the assessment of accomplished teaching as an indicator towards identifying exemplary instructional practices. Researchers contended that a valid system of teacher assessment must be appropriately flexible and comprehensive to recognize and honor excellence in teaching wherever it occurs, whether in overcrowded schools serving largely at-risk students or within a poorly funded school in an economically disadvantaged rural setting (Bond, 1998).

Bond (1998) suggested that teacher assessment tools should not depend upon the ethnicity of the teacher or upon that of the students being taught. The research extended the idea that accomplished teaching and exemplary teachers are consistently committed to all students and their learning. Additionally, the research explained that highly effective teachers know the subject they teach and how to teach those subjects to students. Further, extremely skilled teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning as they think systematically about their practices and learn from experiences. Distinguished teachers are active members of educational learning communities (Bond, 1998) and essentially, accomplished teachers will incorporate best instructional practices with a natural regard for culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. However, school leaders have the duty of identifying and hiring teachers who are prepared to implement these practices.

Curriculum and Content Areas

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) stated that to diminish the achievement gap of students of color, some researchers have explored the cultural relevancy of the

curriculum in promoting student achievement. The researchers conducted a study to explore the preferences of African-American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons through a six-week seminar in an American history classroom. Irvine-Jordan (1991) concluded that African- American children often experience cultural discontinuity in schools, predominately schools in which most of the instructors who control, administer, and teach are White or Eurocentric. The minority group of students is further alienated when the curriculum in which they are engaged lacks ethnic diversity. Scholars argued that a cultural mismatch or lack of cultural sync may occur when African-American children do not see themselves in the curriculum and encounter frequent experiences in which their cultural behavior is not honored or accepted (Irvine-Jordan, 1991). Banks and Banks (1995), for example, argued that all students and teachers can bridge this cultural disconnect and rise to meet these current challenges through culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. Thus, infusing cultural perspectives into the curriculum may increase educational equity for all students and address the growing cultural gap between teachers and students.

Lee (2006) pointed out that for many years, international research has shown that significant achievement gaps exist in mathematics classrooms between various racial groups and between students living in poverty and their more affluent counterparts. Researchers have taken a more direct approach on how to close achievement gaps of diverse groups of students in specific core content areas. In support of this phenomena, Bonner (2014) said, “Statistics have shown that the further students’ progress in school, the wider gaps in mathematics become” (p. 377), contributing to an overall lack of success for students.

Research also contended that socioeconomic status often mediates student performance with students in richer or more democratic countries performing better in mathematics (Chiu & Xihua, 2008). To address this global issue, some teachers are approaching math instruction through the discussion of students' lived experiences. Relationships and trust are central to culturally responsive mathematics teaching (Bonner, 2014).

Students are best understood in relation to their environment. For teachers to capitalize on students' cultural funds of knowledge, they must be aware of these mediating cultural filters through which mathematical knowledge is sifted (Gay, 2010). Essentially, Bonner's (2014) research explained how teacher interactions with students, which are social and therefore culturally significant, have great impact on student identity development and perceived ability in mathematics.

Findings of Bonner's (2014) study implied that positive results in mathematics increased as teachers dedicated more time to building assertive relationships with students. Studies have shown that teachers working first and foremost on making connections with students to build relationships largely relied on gaining knowledge about students and communicating in culturally connected ways. Bonner's (2014) maintained the practice of teachers investing in their students by systematically making cultural connections through instructional practices leading to academic success in mathematics.

Academic success in mathematics often is determined by socioeconomic status or race of diverse student groups (Bonner, 2014). Studies have been conducted to present information that begins to fill these gaps and capture educational methods displayed by highly successful mathematics teachers of traditionally underserved students (Bonner,

2014). Theorists reported that student learning is mediated by culture, language, and other socially constructed factors (Boykin & Allen, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Nieto, 2010).

The literature presented by Howley et al. (2009) also placed an emphasis on how students are best understood in relation to their environment and home lives. Bonner (2014) reported one study that highlighted mathematics instruction and how a teacher's interactions with students framed individual realities, each of which is constantly shifting based on social necessity and response to social constructions. In that study, a community nomination process was used to select the teachers participating in the study. Community members were targeted at local churches, school events, and after school programs to give feedback on what they considered to be highly successful teachers of mathematics. Community members were asked open-ended questions, such as which teachers are highly successful in mathematics for children in this community and how do you define student success in mathematics for children in your community. These questions were asked to define constructs and validate nominations. The results of the community nominations process yielded nominees who inspired passion in the community.

The research suggested that the nominees were mathematics teachers who identified and valued an individual student's culture. Supporting this issue is the overt perspective of families reporting "When parents and community members spoke passionately about effective mathematics teachers, they focused on the idea that the teacher would teach their child mathematics while allowing the child to explore and maintain his or her cultural identity and practices" (Bonner, 2014, p. 381).

Five foundational categories emerged from Bonner's (2014) study: (a) relationships/trust, (b) communication, (c) knowledge, (d) reflection/revision, and (e) pedagogy/discipline. A key attribute of the teachers involved in the study was making connections to their students. Teacher to student connections were a focus to build relationships. It was also important that these teachers built meaningful relationships in culturally connected ways. This was strategically done through knowledge of students and ongoing communication.

The teachers acknowledged that the process of building relationships takes a large amount of time and effort by teachers and students. However, the teachers found success in relationship-building by gaining knowledge about student cultures and lives and using the knowledge to communicate with students effectively. Observations of teacher and student relationship-building displayed a unique dynamic whereby students gained trust in their teachers and became powerful learners of mathematics.

Bonner's (2014) research also aligned to culturally responsive mathematics teaching discussed in the prior works of Geneva Gay (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billing (1995) that indicated that culturally responsive teachers not only create environments in which students experience academic success, but also create spaces where students develop and maintain strong racial and cultural identities. Gay (2010) has conveyed that culturally responsive teachers hold high expectations for all students and understand cultural filters. Further, students in these classrooms demonstrated high academic achievement in mathematics.

The teachers in Bonner's (2014) study displayed an understanding of Nieto and Bode's (2008) pervasive characteristic of building relationships with students. For a

student to learn mathematics, the teacher understood that a personal connection with each student was necessary for overall success. The teacher adopted a sense of agency that was widespread, extensive, persistent, and insidious towards ensuring that every student was connected to the teacher and to the content of mathematics. Additionally, the teacher practiced Gay's (2004) curriculum desegregation method for reaching students' cultural needs through mathematics and not just social studies or language arts. The teacher understood that an analysis of math instruction through a cultural lens is not an easy task; however, the process was necessary for reaching his students both socially and academically.

Ukpokodu (2011) quoted a White male teacher regarding how to teach mathematics in a culturally responsive manner: "Teachers must have faith that their urban students can learn mathematics and, more importantly, convey it to them" (p. 57). The teacher acknowledged that being White, from a middle-class background, and attempting to teach students mostly from poverty, posed a challenge to his current pedagogy and practices. Emerging research suggested that, "The crisis in mathematics learning among urban and low-income students is caused by school policies, curricula, and teaching practices that do not engage those students" (Ukpokodu, 2011, p. 50).

Banks' (2004) fifth dimension, empowering school culture, is relevant to this discussion, as school leadership must operate in a culturally responsive manner. For example, district and building administrators must be intentional in creating learning environments that empower teachers to make decisions that will engage students in learning about various cultures. The instructional curriculum of an empowering school culture is ethnically diverse and represents the cultural needs of all students. However,

the lack of culturally responsive thinking may contribute to the growing crisis in mathematics. Ukpokodu's (2011) study points out that "Most practices in urban schools do not consider and capitalize on the rich cultural capital that urban students bring to the teaching/learning process in order to make mathematics learning successful for them" (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Gay, 2000; Gutierrez, 2000; NCTM, 2000; Tate, 2005).

Researchers explicitly asserted that students from diverse backgrounds possess cultural qualities and experiences that can be used as assets by which they can become successful learners (Milner, 2011; Gay, 2000; Banks, 2004; Martinez, 2012; Bonner, 2014; Milner,(2014). For example, Tate (1995) declared that failing to provide African American students with curriculum, instruction, and assessment centered on their experiences, culture, and traditions, is a major obstacle to providing them with an empowering mathematical experience.

Ukpokodu (2011) conducted a study that targeted 45 graduate students taking a course entitled *Teaching and Learning in Urban Classrooms* at a university in a large urban community. The aim of the course was to explore research related to culturally responsive and transformationist pedagogy and change agency. One activity of the course required participants to break into groups and discuss their knowledge of culturally responsive mathematics practices. Feedback from the conversations ranged from some teachers never really thinking about the approach of mathematics as needing any diversity to how the subject is textbook-driven. Some participants viewed the subject matter as a textbook-based curriculum, which makes it difficult for teachers to incorporate culturally responsive mathematics instruction (Ukpokodu, 2011).

Analyzing these results, Ukpokodu (2011) suggested that the "Teachers feel

restricted and powerless to teach in ways that are culturally responsive to meet their student's needs" (p. 54), creating an instructional climate that limits autonomy. Other feedback led to teachers honestly not knowing how to teach mathematics in ways that are culturally responsive to their students. They also expressed a lack of culturally responsive mathematics' models to implement in their instruction. Participants noted that the following would need to occur to engage students in culturally responsive mathematics instruction:

- Culturally responsive mathematics must first begin with the classroom teacher deconstructing beliefs about mathematics as a culturally-neutral subject, as universal truth, as a non-reasoning system, and as an exclusive European and Western Discipline (Ukpokodu, 2011).
- Culturally responsive teaching should involve integrating culturally relevant content into the mathematics curriculum (Ukpokodu, 2011).
- Culturally responsive instructional strategies are needed that include contextualizing learning by using student's language and experiences to engage in mathematical knowledge construction and skill development, scaffolding mathematics instruction through peer support learning (Ladson-Billing, 1994).
- Culturally responsive instructional strategies are needed that engage minority students' communal structure that emphasize cooperative learning (Ukpokodu, 2011).

While these points outline just a few strategies that would need to be considered to effectively engage students in culturally responsive mathematics pedagogy and practices, the participants' lens by which they viewed mathematics instruction was

widened. Ultimately, they understood that culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional and involves teachers willing to transform their mindset that includes designing and implementing culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, student empowerment, and mathematical identity development (Gay, 2000).

Through his equity pedagogy, empowering school culture, and social structure dimensions, Banks (2004), suggested that school leaders must create school cultures allowing teachers to modify their teaching styles. The students in the Ukpokodu (2011) study did not feel they possessed the autonomy to make changes to their instructional practices or deviate from the district provided curriculum. According to Banks (2004), teachers must feel comfortable modifying, restructuring, transforming, adapting, revising, or adjusting their teaching practices and curriculum in ways that will support all students in reaching academic success. The information shared in Ukpokodu's (2011) study exemplifies educational practitioners who may not possess a robust sense of agency on how to implement culturally responsive practices. Information gathered in the studies discussed contributed to answers of subsidiary questions in this action research study.

Key studies were found related to the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in science instruction. Milner's (2011) study involved a White male science teacher's experiences in building culturally responsive instructional practices within a diverse urban classroom. The goal of the study at Bridge Middle School, an urban school in a relatively large city in the southeastern region of the United States, was to stress the importance of teachers developing cultural competence to extend learning opportunities in the classroom over a 19-month period for all students. Bridge Middle School was considered a Title I school, which meant that the school received additional federal funds

to assist students with instructional and related resources. The student demographic population comprised approximately 60% African American, 7% Hispanic American, 32% White, 3% American Indian, and 2.8% Asian American. These demographics represent a diverse learning environment, at least in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. Many students attending Bridge Middle School were from a lower socio-economic background (Milner, 2011).

Milner (2011) selected Bridge Middle School as the site of the study because it was known in the school district as one of the better middle schools in the urban area. The teacher whose experiences were documented was nominated by his colleagues as the Teacher of the Year in 2008, which was quite an accomplishment for a teacher with only three years' experience at Bridge Middle School. The teacher possessed important attributes, including his mindset and belief system which shaped his ability to build culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and to succeed with his students. For example, the teacher was able to build and sustain meaningful and authentic relationships with his students. He also recognized the multiple layers of identity among his students and confronted a matter of race with them (Milner, 2011).

The teacher in Milner's (2011) study wanted what was best for his students, and he demonstrated this by building caring relationships. Essentially, his students were like his family, and he refused to allow them to fail. He was also strict enough to not allow them to get away with behavior or activities that would be destructive or disadvantageous to or for them. Teachers who implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices affirm to maintain high academic and behavioral expectations for all their students (Bode, 2009).

Allowing students multiple opportunities to turn in assignments was a practice that connected the science teacher in Milner's (2011) study to his students and showed familial relationships. He also saw the good in students whom others had forsaken, even those who caused problems in his classes. The teacher possessed a mindset towards reaching his students by any means necessary. Milner (2011) concluded the teacher "was able to build relationships with his students based on what they shared with him" (p. 87).

The teacher was able to build culturally responsiveness practices by listening to his students and respond to their cultural needs (Milner, 2011). Nieto and Bode's (2008) pervasive characteristics is evident in Milner's (2011) study, as the science teacher cultivated caring relationships with students and used them to yield high academic performance in his classroom. Additionally, equity pedagogy is prevalent in this teacher's approach to working with his students. He studies the individuals in his classes and uses that information to provide instruction that is culturally appropriate. The teacher is ubiquitous in his drive to build lasting relationships with his students and make the content he teaches culturally relevant.

Milner (2011) advised that teachers must assess themselves through an internal lens of their own learning experiences, morals, and beliefs. Regarding teachers' perspective, "Those who practice culturally relevant pedagogy do so because it is consistent with what they believe and who they are" (p. 68). These personal tenants help them to understand, shape, and mold teaching practices that cater to students of diverse backgrounds. Teachers who implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practice want their students to develop a critical consciousness and move their students beyond spaces where they simply consume information. A teacher, who implements culturally

responsive pedagogy practices, encourages students to explore and challenge status quo principles embedded in today's society. Researchers have firmly established that educators who create culturally relevant learning contexts are those who see students' cultures as an asset, not a detriment to their success (Milner, 2011; Gay, 2000; Banks, 2004; Martinez, 2012; Bonner, 2014; Milner, 2014).

Wallace and Brand (2012) conducted a qualitative research study in which the philosophies, beliefs, and practices of two middle school science teachers deemed culturally responsive educators were investigated to determine the key to their consistent success over the years with minority students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It can be assumed that teachers with many years of experience in the profession naturally come to understand how to work with students from diverse backgrounds. The two teachers in this study had a combined total of 50 years of teaching experience; a White female with 23 years of teaching experience and an African American female with 27 years of teaching experience. Villegas and Lucas (2002) noted the following qualities in teachers who are culturally responsive: (a) having an affirming view of students, (b) embracing constructivist views about teaching and learning, (c) designing instruction that builds on what students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar; and (d) being familiar with students' prior knowledge. Both teachers in the Wallace and Brand (2012) study taught science at City Middle School, a predominantly White middle school located in a middle-class neighborhood. White students outperformed African American students in the areas of reading and mathematics; however, the much smaller achievement gap in science was partly attributed to the efforts of the teachers involved in the study.

Observations from the Wallace and Brand (2012) study indicated that the teachers' sociocultural awareness caused them to view their students with empathy, positioning themselves as advocates. Both teachers in that study processed their students' behaviors within the context of the circumstances of their lives. In the classroom, the teachers' responses to the students showed regard for their students' welfare, as well as a commitment to minimizing the impact of adverse conditions on their achievement. It appeared from the study that the two teachers had great compassion for their students; they cared for the students as if they were their own children. For example, one teacher consistently provided positive reinforcement and built trust with her students to improve low scores; the other understood the students' home life and empathized with their dilemmas (Wallace & Brand, 2012).

Wallace and Brand (2012) concluded that building trusting relationships with their students was the motivational goal for each teacher. Their strategy for achieving this goal entailed providing safe and secure learning environments, motivation, high expectations, open communication, availability, optimism, genuine concern, and belief in their students' abilities. Nieto and Bode's (2008) pervasive characteristic of building relationships surfaced as a key component of success for the teachers in the Wallace and Brand (2012) study. The teachers believed that their students could be triumphant in learning science, and this belief was substantiated by the love and compassion they had for their students. These teachers recognized the reality of their student's circumstances and used empathy to teach them with an open heart and open mind.

Culturally responsive pedagogy and practices should be considered when teachers are instructing history, mathematics, science, and art. Martinez (2012) said, "Educators

must engage in more comprehensive teaching that utilizes the cultural backgrounds of their students as a tool for engagement” (p. 12). Martinez suggested that “Art education is positioned to challenge assumptions arising from mass media and visual culture because art education creates, interprets, and critiques visual images” (p. 12). Culture jams offer students an opportunity to explore and reinterpret dominant forms of culture, become active agents in the construction of knowledge, utilize cultural backgrounds, and correct misconceptions about their cultural heritage.

Researcher Gay (2010) contended that culturally responsive teaching teaches “to and through personal and cultural strengths” (p. 26). She also stressed that culturally responsive practices and pedagogies are validating and affirming, which means that teachers recognize the inextricability of culture and schooling. In accordance to studies conducted by Howley et al. (2009), Gay (2010) suggested that teachers practicing culturally responsive practices must provide students with positive examples and images of others in their culture

Culture jam, a learning activity. Martinez’ (2012) study proposed that culture jams can be an art form that provides students with tools they need to question, critique, and reinterpret images of ethnicity in the mass media. The culture jam used in that study took the distorted images of six people from different backgrounds and ethnicities; three last names were placed under each picture from which participants could select. The title of the culture jam was “What’s My Name?” Participants had to select the name they thought matched the image in the picture. After revealing the actual names of the persons depicted, some participants were surprised, whereas others were not surprised at all. This unique activity can serve as a sample investigation for elementary or secondary aged

students to participate in and explore cultural differences, similarities, and stereotypes. Culturally responsive teachers and empowering art forms, like culture jams, can help all students gain confidence in their academic abilities and realize their true potential to evoke change within societal norms (Martinez, 2012).

The Martinez (2012) study exemplifies Banks' (2004) knowledge construction process dimension, as the culture jam activity allowed students to challenge stereotypes about race. The teacher in Martinez' study intentionally engaged students in an activity that allowed them to think about race and their social position in society by way of culture jams. The teacher possessed a sense of agency that would involve her students in an activity that helped them to think about or challenge social norms. The activity purposefully garnered a powerful reaction from students that would be empowering for them as learners and reflected attributes of Nieto and Bode's (2008) pervasive critical pedagogy characteristic empowering students to think critically about cultural differences and ethnicities. The culture jam would allow the students to move beyond their own experiences and understand varying perspectives for which they may disagree. This type of instructional activity can proactively prepare students to engage in conversations about culture, race, social status, societal norms, and diversity within their acquaintanceships and communities.

Impact of Professional Development

It cannot be assumed that all teachers entering the teaching profession fully understand the intrinsic needs of their students. Many students enter school with varying backgrounds and experiences unlike those of their teachers. Achieving equity in diverse schools is a global challenge, and educational disparity takes on different forms

depending on the context (Savage, Hindle, Meyer, Hynds, Penetito & Sleeter, 2011). Providing professional development for teachers working with students of diverse backgrounds might be an important step in the process of reaching all learners. For example, in New Zealand, disparities exist between the indigenous Maori and New Zealand Europeans whose culture dominates the education system. Maori immersion schools for Maori children exist, but the majority of Maori children attend English-medium schools where mono-cultural western practices prevail to the exclusion of Maori heritage, culture, and language (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). A lack of connection between the culture of the school and student has been associated with low engagement in the absence of culturally responsive practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cothran & Ennis, 2000). For teachers to teach to and through students' personal and cultural strengths, they must contextualize instruction in cultural forms, behaviors, and processes of learning familiar to students.

A national teacher professional development initiative in New Zealand provided an opportunity to extend existing literature on the effects of culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom. Entitled *Te Kotahitanga* (unity), this Kaupapa Maori researched-based professional development program was implemented beginning in 2004 in 33 secondary schools with relatively high proportions of Maori students. The professional development program framed the collaborative networking including students, families, principals, and teachers. The most prevalent attribute of the collaborative networking identified classroom caring and learning relationships at the center of educational achievement. The core purpose of the professional development

was for teachers to experience the following: understanding how students experienced schooling in ways that they might not otherwise have access, creating critical reflection upon their own discursive positioning, to explore ways this might impact their own students learning, and creating an effective teacher profile (ETP; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009).

The professional development model of Bishop et al. (2009) comprised four major components: (a) an initial induction workshop introducing Te Kotahitanga as a model of culturally responsive pedagogies and relations, (b) structured classroom observations focused on implementation of the ETP followed by feedback to teachers in individual meetings with facilitators who have culturally responsive pedagogical expertise, (c) co-construct meetings where teacher teams problem-solve collaboratively based on observational and student outcomes data, and (d) specific shadow-coaching sessions for individualized teacher professional development. Other researchers discussed the model that incorporated sustained support for teachers' over time, emphasis on specific instructional strategies and content areas, involvement of teachers collectively rather than individually, peer coaching, and active learning professional development activities (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Neufield & Roper, 2003; Snow-Runner & Lauer; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

Ultimately, in the Bishop et al. (2009) study, classroom observations revealed meaningful differences in practice by teachers who were participating in professional development as part of the ETP compared with teachers from non-participating schools. However, it was also reported that while the participating teachers' efforts were highly

appreciated by the students of Maori descent, it is unlikely that professional development alone is enough for school reform needed to address other factors that could be having a negative impact on students.

The Bishop et al. (2009) study encompassed qualities of Sleeter and Grant's (2006) approach of single group studies. The teachers engaged in training that allowed them to gain a deeper knowledge of the social context related to a specific group of students and how those students learn. The power in the Bishop et al. study is revealed by the use of two different test groups. The goal of single group studies is to engage in an in-depth, comprehensive study that moves specific groups from the margins by providing information about the group's history, including experiences with oppression and resistance to that oppression. Teachers exposed to the professional development in the Bishop et al. study were collaboratively working with key students and their families. The best way to learn in detail about their social context was to have them involved in the professional development activity. This action research study sought answers to research questions by examining distinctive types of professional development activities and how they impact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices for teacher participants.

Theoretical Framework

This action research study explored how teachers perceive their ability to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in their daily interactions with diverse students. Further, this study determined whether teachers felt a sense of self-efficacy about unmasking discrimination and biases that may exist in the classroom. This study explored teachers' self-reflections as they embarked upon the social justice and

equity inspired work of breaking down cultural barriers to develop strategies that embrace all students. Through this study, teachers were asked to think about how they approach their daily practices and utilize their pedagogical repertoire to be more culturally inclusive. This action research study included the provision of professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy that teachers co-designed to allow them to identify their needs to be better positioned to adapt their classroom instruction and practices. This action research study was implemented over three interactive cycles, which required documented teacher self-reflection about their perceived sense of agency about implementing with efficiency culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

This action research study was informed by propositions that scholars asserted as key variables evident in the work of teachers seeking to introduce culturally appropriate and diverse learning experiences in their classrooms. Banks (2004), Nieto and Bode (2008), Gay (2003), and Sleeter and Grant's (2006) contributions to the field of education and commitment to social justice supported this study as it explored how teachers perceived their own efficacy in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in elementary school classrooms.

Social justice theory undergirds these concepts and this action research exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. This action research is informed by the definition of social justice stated as "the promotion of educational equality for marginalized groups" (Ladson-Billings & Tate 2006, p. 22).

Two main principles of action research are critical theory and emancipation. The tenets of critical theory served as the theoretical framework for this action research study. In action research, critical theory shares several fundamental purposes with critical theory

in the social sciences and humanities (Kemmis, 1988). Critical action research is known as emancipatory action research because of its goal of liberation through knowledge gathering (Mills, 2011). A plan that fits the four elements of action research was developed for this study: (a) identifying a problem, (b) collecting data, (c) analyzing and interpreting data, and (d) developing an action plan. As schools across the country begin to enroll more diverse students, the need for culturally responsive instructors is apparent. This reality led the researcher to conduct an action research study to address the initial problem of practice.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II began with a review of the literature highlighting the works of Banks (2004), Nieto and Bode (2008), Sleeter and Grant (2006), and Gay (2003) and continued with a review of the literature regarding four relevant topics: (a) pre-service/student teaching experiences; (b) school climate, culture, and leadership; (c) curriculum and content areas; and (d) impact of professional development. The researcher extrapolated themes from the literature review that established a supporting argument for the problem of practice identified in Western Community School District as the existing cultural gap between instructional staff and the increasingly diverse student population.

The literature review unveiled specific elements with which teachers should be equipped to work with all students, particularly students from diverse backgrounds. Recurring themes in the literature review were established by teachers' experiences, school culture, and the perspective of school leaders on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Subsequent themes focused on what teachers teach and how they teach a curriculum that is accountable to the needs of diverse student groups. The impact of

professional development was reported to have lasting effects on teachers and their pedagogical approach to working with students. These thematic understandings shaped and informed the methodological approach to selecting and implementing this action research study. Discussion of the theoretical framework for this study centered on social justice and critical theory completed the literature review. The action research approach to engage a specific group of teacher participants in self-reflection, collaboration, professional development, and ultimately emancipation is further outlined in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to provide an understanding of the impact that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices had on teachers of students in Grades 1 through 6 in Western Community Schools. The study explored the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived understandings regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of teachers working with students of diverse backgrounds given current student to teacher cultural ratios. This chapter includes a brief review of the problem and research questions, with emphasis on the research design, setting, participants, data collection plan, data analysis, and validity.

A Brief Review of the Problem

Research affirmed that teacher interaction with students that is grounded in cultural awareness impacts student identity development and perceived ability in core content areas, such as mathematics, reading, or science (Bonner, 2014). The integration of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices within the classroom can yield positive outcomes for students of diverse backgrounds. Although much of the research identifies culturally responsive pedagogy and practices benefitting students of all cultural backgrounds, many school districts struggle with implementing these foundational conventions for teachers. However, the literature review revealed little to no information on professional development for teachers on the concept of culturally responsive teaching techniques or strategies on how to close the cultural gap that exist between teachers and their students.

The imbalance in racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds between student and teacher may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Western Community School District, the site of this study, has historically been homogenous representing a majority white demographic in (2017 Niche Best Schools K-12 School & District Rankings); however, in recent years, students of multiple culturally diverse backgrounds have entered the district. Although reported demographics of school district has shown an increase in multiethnic student enrollment, little to no ethnic diversity is shown amongst instructional staff, which remains over 95% White and greater than 98% representative of European backgrounds.

This action research study was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of their preparedness in the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices as well as their beliefs, perspectives, attitudes dispositions, instructional competencies, and self-assessed sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices to address the phenomena of the changing demographics in Western Community School District.

Research Questions

A primary question guided this action research study: How do first through sixth grade teachers in a diverse school district in Mid-Michigan perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices? The following four subsidiary questions addressed the problem of practice identified in the statement of the imbalance in student-to-teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices:

1. Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences, and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?
2. What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and/or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural content, enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and build relationships with students?
3. How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?
4. After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the additional types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?

Research Design

A mixed method approach was chosen to conduct action research to explore the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived understandings regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of teachers working with students of diverse backgrounds. Quantitative data were collected in surveys of participants and analyzed by various statistical procedures. Qualitative data provided by focus group and interview responses of participants were coded to reveal themes to extract meaning.

According to Mills (2011), action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors or other stakeholders in the

teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. (In this action research study, the researcher is a principal gathering information about teachers).

As described by Mertler (2006), data were collected toward implementing an action plan to be utilized by the participants in the study. Mills (2011) proposed that the purpose of the action plan is to represent one round of reconnaissance and thinking ahead, that educational practitioners might use an action plan to prepare themselves for taking action, and that the action plan could ultimately provide the educational practitioner with a benchmark for later reflection (Mills, 2011). In this study, the purpose of the action plan was to provide a collaboratively designed approach for teachers to explore culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The action planning process encompassed opportunities for teacher participants to not only reflect on their own instructional practices, but to gain a fundamental plan towards change.

Principles of action research. Principles that serve as the perspectives and foundations of action research, which is fundamentally a spiraling, cyclical process of planning, execution, and reconnaissance, include critical theory and emancipation (Mills, 2011). Critical theory, known as emancipatory action research because of its goal of liberation through knowledge- gathering (Mills, 2011), shares several basic purposes with critical theory in the social sciences and humanities (Kemmis, 1988).

This study includes a plan that fits the four elements of action research: identifying a problem, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and developing an action plan. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked to share their beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency

regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. An initial needs assessment illuminated any assumptions of the researchers about knowledge on the topic of study and allowed participants to have a voice that was incorporated into the knowledge-gathering process. Following the advice of Mills (2011), this action research was designed to develop the professional disposition of teachers and to encourage continuous learning in their classrooms and in their practice.

Another principle of action research embodies collaboration, a method that empowers all participants in the educational process with the means to improve the practices conducted within the educational experience. According to Hopkins (1985), action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.

Participants accepted mutually agreed upon protocols as an explanation of the extent of their involvement in the study (see Appendix B). Although collaboration was intended at various stages of the study, direct collaboration was more prevalent during the data collection process; expectations of the participants were explicitly described through verbal and written communications. One focus of participant collaboration was shown in a professional development activity centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Reflection is a principle embedded in the action planning stage of action research.

Mills (2011) noted that action research is designed for participants to reflect and act. Reflection allows time for teachers and administrators to determine what they have learned from their investigations and the related professional literature and to decide on

the necessary steps of action. For the purposes of this study, participants reflected upon their involvement in a targeted professional development session determined through a needs assessment model.

Emancipation. A goal in the action research process is for participants to become emancipated and changed through collaboration, engagement, and reflection. Essentially, action research provides methods for teachers to incorporate a reflective attitude into their daily teaching routine and assesses a teacher's willingness to aim their own instructional practices toward potentially making improvements (Mills, 2011). Change was anticipated within the organization in this study as teachers evolved through collaboration, professional development, and reflection. The goal was for participants to gain a renewed sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The researcher served as a mediator as participants were encouraged to explore the dynamics of their classrooms, ponder the actions and interactions they have with diverse student groups, validate and challenge existing practices, and take risks in the process.

One final principle of action research emphasizes constant evolution and redefinition of the original goal through a series of investigations recurring over multiple cycles. This action research study generated an action plan inclusive of three cycles connected by a spiraling iterative pattern towards implementing change within the organization. As shown in Table 3, each cycle included four interconnected stages: planning, acting, developing, and reflecting.

Cycle One involved a needs assessment with the teacher participants that was designed to collect information related to the primary research question guiding this study about what the teacher participants might need to incorporate culturally responsive

pedagogy and practices within their classrooms. The needs assessment was informed by the results of an initial survey completed by teachers in first through sixth grades in Western Community School District.

Cycle Two involved a targeted professional development based on data gathered in the needs assessment. The works of Banks (2004), Nieto (2008), Sleeter and Grant (2006), and Gay (2004) contributed to a customized professional development activity wherein the professional participants engaged in ideas, strategies, and content that could support them in their instructional practices with students.

Cycle Three of the action research study involved a focus group and interviews with participants to gather additional information and reflections about the teachers' perspectives, ideas, and experiences with the topics of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Emerging and recurring themes identified in Cycle Three were used to address the initial and subsidiary research questions for this study.

The methods of action research were determined by gathering information through iterative cycles and each cycle was restructured based on information provided in the previous cycle. The goal was for each cycle to take on a new shape or form to engage participants and ultimately address the research questions for this study.

Table 3

Action Research Model

Cycle One Needs Assessment	Cycle Two Professional Development	Cycle Three Data Collection/Reflection
Planning	Planning	Planning
Acting	Acting	Acting
Developing	Developing	Developing
Reflecting	Reflecting	Reflecting

Teachers of Grades 1 through 6 were identified as targeted participants in this study. For the purposes of this study, the phenomena occurrence was in relation to one school district across four elementary school buildings. This action research design was intrinsic, as it developed out of genuine interest of the researcher to implement an action plan toward changing the status quo currently present within Western Community School District. The action research design was important for this study, as it endeavored to prompt participants to change the way in which they implement instructional practices involving students from diverse backgrounds. Participants' mindsets were transformed by self-reflection, collaboration, professional development and ongoing implementation of innovative skills.

Setting for This Study

A school district in Mid-Michigan's, Western Community School District provided the educational context of this study. The district comprises one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, and one early childhood center. The school

district staff includes 212 teachers, 15 administrators, and 213 support personnel working in nursing, secretarial, paraprofessional, custodial/maintenance, food service, transportation, and computer technology. More than 70% of the staff chooses to live in the school district where their children also attend the schools. The student enrollment slightly exceeds 4,000. The area of the school district covers 65 square miles with a population of approximately 25,000.

Seven local citizens, each elected to a six-year term of office serve on the school board. Two positions are open for election every two years on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November. The board has complete control over local school matters within the framework set by the State Legislature and State Board of Education. The school board acts like a corporate board of directors, determining general policies for the care, management, and control of the district's public schools. The superintendent, who is the chief executive officer of the board, is a professional educator employed to administer laws and regulations and carry out board adopted policies.

Selection of Participants

Western Community School District was selected as the site for this study based on the demographic profiles of teachers and students and identified cultural gap that exists between teachers and their students. The targeted participants for this action research study were approximately 100 elementary classroom teachers of Grades 1 through 6 in four elementary schools. Prior to launching the study, proper approval was received from the school district's superintendent to conduct the action research study and to solicit teacher participation.

Rai and Thapa (2017) explained that purposeful sampling methods that focus on characteristics of a population best enable the researcher to answer the research questions. The selected participants were appropriate for the study, as the goal of the action research was to learn more about the perspectives of teachers on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Participation in this action research study by a relevant sample of teachers was voluntary, and consent was received from the participants prior to their engagement in the study; participants could end their involvement in the study at any time without consequence or reprisal.

Data Collection Plan

This action research study used multiple sources of data, including an online survey, focus group, and interviews. The data collection techniques ensured the confidentiality of the teachers participating in the study, and pseudonyms were used to assure participants' anonymity. Participants were invited to give responses to data collection tools in their own words based upon their individual ideas, perspectives, and beliefs.

Three cycles of action research, which built upon each other, provided opportunities for sophisticated descriptions and powerful explanations to provide data leading toward answering the research questions that guided the study. The action research was conducted according to the following steps to reveal how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impact teachers teaching in first through sixth grade classrooms:

Prior to the data collection process, a letter of approval to conduct the study was received from the school district superintendent and the University of Michigan-Flint'

Institutional Review Board (IRB) issued an exempt determination (see Appendix A). Upon approvals, the researcher met with building principals to give a brief overview of the study, clarify teacher participation, and answer any questions from the principals.

Participants received formal protocols that clearly communicated the guidelines of each data collection tool and the nature of their involvement (see Appendix B).

Participants were assured confidentiality of their involvement and protection for anonymity of their names and affiliations to the school district. Contributors provided consent of participation by signing off on each protocol indicating that they understand their role in the data collection process.

Survey—Cycle One. Aggregate and disaggregated data were collected for this action research study. Data collection in Cycle One included an online survey generated through *Qualtrics*, an online survey generator and data collection service provided by the University of Michigan-Flint, which was emailed as a link to approximately 100 teachers of Grades 1 through 6 across the school district (see Appendix C). The survey was cross-sectional as well as structured and included a brief description of the action research study and purpose of the data collection tool. The structured survey asked for opinion responses that were measured on an ordinal level. Teacher anonymous responses encouraged open and honest feedback.

The researcher utilized a third-party entity to disseminate the survey. The person who disseminated the survey is a colleague of the researcher who also serves as a superintendent of a local neighboring school district. The researcher referred to the third-party entity as a co-contributor to the action research study. The co-contributor was also carefully selected based on the philanthropic work he does as founder of his own non-

profit organization. The researcher felt it was necessary to use a third-party entity to disseminate the survey to reduce any potential bias that could be created if the researcher was to conduct the survey.

All survey results were returned directly to the researcher who organized and synthesized existing frequencies of perception participants' responses regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The individual responses were tabulated using a four-point Likert scale with values of (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. The four-point scale eliminated the option of neutral responses. Data collected on the Likert scale were used to collect data having categorical variables that were measured in an ordinal scale. Tabulated teacher opinions, therefore, were relative and not absolute. An ordinal scale can only measure the order of non-numeric concepts; however, the significance between responses are unidentifiable. Use of the Likert scale provided a means to measuring psychological attitudes in a scientific manner, and survey results were used as a needs assessment to create a targeted professional development activity for available participants. Recruitment for participation in the action research study beyond the survey was facilitated through email by the co-contributor who disseminated the survey.

A targeted professional development activity—Cycle Two. Participants were invited to engage in a professional development activity using an online *Smore*, an online instrument used to create electronic invitations for workshops, professional developments, or newsletters. To mitigate all potential bias, the co-contributor generated the invitation, which was sent out to the same group of teachers targeted for the survey.

The Smore was designed to share specific information about the professional development activity and to record reservations.

The professional development activity located in the school district in July 2018 was developed based on the survey results and did not exceed three hours. Participants completed a brief survey at the end of the professional development to provide feedback about the workshop and reflection.

Focus group and interviews—Cycle Three. Participants provided additional information needed to complete the action research study, which was used to conduct analysis and determine findings. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) noted that focus groups have been popular in business and marketing to gather opinions and perceptions of employees and customers. This approach has become more popular in the educational field for many reasons, including the overwhelming changes in education and the need to ascertain the perspectives of key stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents. According to Kruger and Casey (2000), this qualitative research instrument offers a natural and comfortable means for collecting data, as participants are not limited by multiple choice responses like with a survey and the researcher can confirm meaning behind the facts. While simplistic, focus groups convey a major advantage in gathering insights as to how people think, behave, or respond to a phenomenon.

The focus group activity for this study involved ten teachers and was guided by nine open-ended questions (see Appendix D). The focus group activity created an environment where the researcher gained feedback from participants on their perspective and experiences in regard to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The focus

group prompted teachers to ask questions of one another, compare experiences, and generate a deeper conversation.

The focus group was audiotaped with the permission of the participants and was electronically transcribed using an online transcription company, which allowed a transcript-based analysis of the data. As described by Hahn (2008), established coding techniques were used to help organize and analyze the overwhelming amount of data that are frequently collected during qualitative research. Saldana (2009) explained that coding is often done in cycles and rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted.

In this study, the coding process was used to identify and place similar ideas and concepts into categories sharing the same characteristics. An open coding technique was used to organize the data and identify concepts, trends, themes, behaviors, terminology, or phrases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This technique was used to identify the most important aspects of the data, the main points, and new information learned during data analysis. As described by Saldana (2009), emergent themes that represented ideas, concepts, actions, relationships, and meanings that consistently surfaced in the data were categorized as they surfaced from the transcript analysis.

As a continuation of Cycle Three, five of the focus group participants were invited to engage in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow participants freedom to express their views in their own terms (See Appendix G).

The interview process required a personal sensitivity and adaptability as well as the ability to stay within the bounds of the designed protocol. Interviews were conducted

to gather data from the teacher participants following their reflection upon skills and strategies learned from the professional development training and discussions from the focus group.

The researcher was the interviewer during this phase of the data collection process; however, the interviewer asked each respondent the same series of 18 pre-determined, open-ended questions regarding the participants teaching and learning experiences. The interviewer played a neutral role, and did not insert their opinion during the interview.

The interview process allowed the researcher to probe deeper to clarify or to draw out examples (Hall & Hord, 2001). It also provided a clear topical focus and well-developed understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) asserted that interviewing was an important aspect of a research study because it was conducive to identifying critical information, for digging deeply into surface answers, for testing rival explanations, and for making the process more meaningful to participants.

The interviews were audiotaped with the permission of the participants. All interviews were transcribed from an audiotaped format into a Microsoft Word document that allowed a transcript-based analysis of the interview data. The collected interview data were coded using an open coding technique, from which emergent themes representing ideas, concepts, actions, relationships, and meanings were identified.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data set for this mixed methods action research study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative tools. Survey, focus group, and

interviews data sources addressed the research questions for this study, and data were collected and analyzed triangularly. Mertler (2006) explained that triangulation in action research consists of analysis of multiple methods to increase the understanding of a phenomenon. Senior (2011) suggested use of a triangulation matrix, a simple grid that shows the various data sources used to answer each research question. The triangulation matrix developed to report the data sources used to answer the five-research questions in this study is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Triangulation Matrix Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Research Questions	Data Source	Data Source	Data Source
Primary Research Question How do 1 st -6 th grade teachers in Western Community School District perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
Subsidiary Research Questions Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences, and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, culture, financial resource allocation, or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural content and enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?		Focus Group	Interviews

Murphy (2011) stated that triangulated methods of data collection increases the concurrent, convergent, and construct validity of research. Although many forms of triangulation to collect data are extant, a between-method triangulation, as explained by Senior (2011) was used in this study because two or more data collection tools were used to analyze the same source. Mertler (2006) concurred with this decision to ensure that the instruments used to collect data measured what they were intended to measure. For example, because surveys, focus group and interviews data explored teachers' views on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, the protocols of each needed to deal with various aspects of cultural responsiveness. Between-method triangulation, in turn, enhances the researcher's ability to imply trustworthiness of the analysis (Murphy, 2011); The principles of triangulation helped to establish clear and concise results.

Analysis and Interpretation of Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was collected from the use of an online survey which was tabulated and stored in Qualtrics. Interpretation of the survey responses that were collected and tabulated using a four-point Likert scale assisted in answering the primary question and subsidiary questions for this action research study. Mertler (2006) pointed out that the use of descriptive statistics and the parameters of the mode and median to analyze and interpret the survey data served to simplify, summarize, and organize relatively large amounts of numerical data.

An analysis of the data collected based on measures of central tendency indicated, with a single score, what was typical or standard about a group of individuals. The measure of central tendency for this study focused on the median, the specific score in the set of data that separates the entire distribution in equal halves; that is, it is the score at

which 50% of all scores fall below and 50% are located above, or mode, the most frequently occurring score in the overall set of scores (Mertler 2006). It was important for the researcher to understand the meaning of these measures of central tendency and to apply them appropriately when interpreting quantitative data collected for this study. It was understood that within the quantitative data collection tool of the survey, statistical data can only be measured based on ordinal values and that significant relevance between each question could not be quantified or measured for this study.

Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data

Qualitative focus group and interview data were sorted and analyzed using an inductive analysis approach to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's attitudes, behaviors, interest level, knowledge, and awareness related to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Johnson (2005) explained that the challenge in conducting inductive analysis of qualitative data is to reduce the volume of information collected by identifying and organizing the data into important patterns and themes to construct a framework for presenting key findings of the action research study. Schwalbach (2003) cautioned that during this process of data reduction, the researcher must be careful not to minimize, distort, oversimplify, or misinterpret any of the data. Parsons and Brown (2002) described a system of categorizations, also known as a coding scheme, whereby the narrative transcripts of the focus group and interview are analyzed to identify concepts, trends, themes, behaviors, terminology, or phrases and codes are assigned to those pieces of data. Through this open coding technique, emerging themes and patterns were revealed and explored to extract meaning from the data.

In the final steps, according to Parsons and Brown (2002), of the inductive analysis, the main features or characteristics of the categories resulting from the coding of the data are analyzed to make connections between the data and the research questions. In this study, analysis included review of events, behaviors, and observations represented in the coded categories as well as relationships, similarities, or contradictions, as advised by Parsons and Brown (2002); the most important element at this step was the search for aspects of the data that answered the research questions.

Summary of data analysis methods. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods used in this action research study were instrumental steps outlined in the research design. Data collection methods were embedded at each step, as participants engaged in iterative cycles of the research plan. The principles of action research involve planning, acting, developing, and reflecting over cyclical stages. These principles resonated within ongoing quantitative and qualitative data analysis of statistical exploration and qualitative inquiry.

Validity and Reliability

As many types of qualitative research became more popular in classroom settings in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it became common for qualitative researchers to begin to justify and defend the validity of their studies according to the criteria that had previously been applied to quantitative studies (Mills, 2011). Ideally, the researcher in this action research study wanted to explore solutions to a potential problem in a school district and provide planned intervention that addresses the problem. For action researchers to qualify their work as valid and reliable, key concepts must be considered.

For this study, Mills (2011) cited Maxwell's (1992) criteria for validity of qualitative research. Maxwell's typology based on understanding included descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. Further, Mills (2011) outlined Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen's (1994) criteria for validity measures of democratic validity, outcome validity, process validity catalytic validity and dialogic validity.

Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of how collected information is reported. According to Maxwell (1992), descriptive validity ensures the researcher is not making up or distorting things they saw or heard and interpretative validity as the concern researchers have with the meaning attributed to behaviors by the people who have been studied. As defined by Maxwell, theoretical validity refers to the ability of the research report to explain the phenomenon that has been studied, and generalizability refers to the applicability of findings to settings and contexts different from the one in which they were obtained. This concept is applicable when researchers compare the behaviors of a small group of individuals against a wider group of people (Mills, 2011).

Internal generalizability in this study was applicable as all data were gathered within the same organization. External generalizability to settings beyond the parameters of this study was not a factor. The last criterion addressed by Maxwell (1992) is evaluative validity, which considers the objectivity of the researcher to report the data in an unbiased nonjudgmental manner (Mills, 2011).

The first of Anderson's et al. (1994) criteria for validity is democratic validity, a concept requiring that the multiple perspectives of all the participants in the study have been accurately represented. Mills (2011) citing Anderson et al. (1994), noted that

outcome validity requires that the action from a study leads to the successful resolution of the problem that was being studied. Essentially, this means that the study can be deemed valid if the researcher learned something new that can be applied to the subsequent research cycle. Process validity alludes to the integrity of the conduct of a study, and the criteria of catalytic validity require that the participants in a study are moved to act on the basis of their heightened understanding of the subject of the study. Finally, dialogic validity, rooted in the word dialogue, involves having a critical conversation with others about research findings and practices (Mills, 2011). In this study, the most appropriate measures of validity applied to this action research study included democratic and dialogic criteria.

The trustworthiness of measurements used for an action research study is dependent upon the reliability of the data collection tools being utilized, which is different than validity. Mills (2011) explained that reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever is intended. In other words, if the same data collection tools were used to conduct the same study again, would the study yield consistent results? Guba (1981) argued that the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry could be established by addressing the following characteristics of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Guba, credibility of the study refers to the researchers' ability to consider the complexities present in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained. Guba determined that the criteria of transferability refers to qualitative researchers' beliefs that everything studied is context-bound, and that the goal of the work is not to develop *truth* statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people.

According to Guba (1981), dependability refers to the stability of the data. The final characteristic that Guba addressed is the confirmability of the data or the neutrality of the data that has been collected. The most appropriate reliability measure for this study would be the test-retest reliability measure (Trochim, 2006). The test-retest reliability measure determines whether consistent results would be reported having used the same data collection tools. In this study, time did not permit the researcher to implement the test-retest reliability measure.

Qualitative inquirers employ a variety of techniques to increase the validity of their research. It is important for participants to know that the researcher did everything possible to ensure that data was appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported (Creswell, 2003). Member checking is an opportunity for participants to approve aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1998). According to Curtin and Fossey (2007), member checking is a “way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences” (p. 92). In this study, member checking was conducted to gain feedback and trust from each participant, which enhanced the validity of the action research study. Member checking continued throughout the interview process, as participants received copies of the transcribed interviews via email. The researcher established reliability by applying dependability and confirmability to the data collection process. The dependability criteria allowed the researcher to apply an audit trail to the data collection tools and process. The confirmability criteria allowed the researcher to apply practice triangulation and practice reflexivity. Additionally, to increase the reliability of this action research study, protocols were clearly outlined for participants taking the survey, involved in the

focus group, and partaking in interviews. The protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of the action research study and is intended to guide the researcher in carrying out the data collection process.

As a seasoned administrator conducting research with teachers, the researcher restrained research bias and reactivity with each data collection tool or instrument and process throughout this research study. In Cycles One and Two, a co-contributor disseminated the survey to participants and helped to facilitate the professional development activity. During the professional development activity, the co-contributor shared the survey results with the participants, which allowed the participants to review responses collected in Cycle One.

The researcher involved the assistance of the co-contributor in the cycles to mitigate any potential bias that could have been created in the absence of an outside person. The researcher conducted member checking to reduce research bias and reactivity within Cycle Three. The researcher shared the type-written transcripts of the focus group and interviews with the participants. This gave the participants a chance to review the transcripts to confirm that their thoughts, ideas, and words were accurately reported.

The personal emails of the researcher and participants were used to share the focus group and interview transcripts in Cycle Three. Using personal emails eliminated any potential threat to participants if their school district emails were used. Lastly, to protect the participants throughout the data collection process, the researcher required signed focus group and interview consent forms. The consent forms distinctly expressed to the participants that their involvement would remain confidential, and all collected

transcripts would be destroyed at the end of the study. To mitigate bias during the data collection process, the researcher acknowledged his role in the action research study and implemented the procedures discussed.

Chapter Summary

An overview of methods that were used to conduct the action research study of how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacted teachers in a first through sixth grade educational setting at four Michigan elementary schools within a northern Genesee County school district. Topics discussed included a brief review of the problem, research questions, research design, setting, selection of participants, data collection plan, data analysis, analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, and validity and reliability criteria for the action research study. Discussion of the methods employed in this study outlined a strategic plan for addressing the problem of practice, which explored the imbalance in student to teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds that may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Findings of this action research study are discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The cultural divide between teachers and students continues to widen, as many school districts experience increasingly diverse student populations. This phenomenon is exacerbated in school cultures that are largely staffed with homogenous, middle-class teachers who may have limited knowledge, preparation, or experience with teaching

racial/ethnic minority students (McNulty & Brown, 2009; Hill, Bachler, Allen, & Coble, 2004). Ladson-Billings (2005) illuminated this challenge stating that demographic and cultural differences make it difficult for teachers to relate to the cultural backgrounds of their students. This brings forth the question of whether teachers perceive themselves to be prepared to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. If schools are going to be equipped to meet the learning needs of all students, it becomes imperative to take proactive measures to learn more about the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency teachers have when working with students of diverse backgrounds. The researcher launched an action research study to explore a problem of practice that results from cultural dissonance between the teachers and students in Western Community School District (WCSD). A purposeful sample of educational practitioners teaching first through sixth grade within WCSD voluntarily elected to participate in the action research study.

The data collection process was implemented over six months in three iterative cycles including administration of a Qualtrics survey, planning and provision of a professional development (PD) workshop, distribution of a PD evaluation, facilitation of a teacher focus group, and a one-on-one interview protocol. Each action research cycle was initially planned to include a planning stage, acting stage, developing stage, and reflecting stage, as described by Mertler (2017). Mertler's action research stages contain nine embedded steps that are illustrated in Figure 1 that he titled *Integration of Two Organizational Schemes for the Step-by-Step Process of Action Research*.

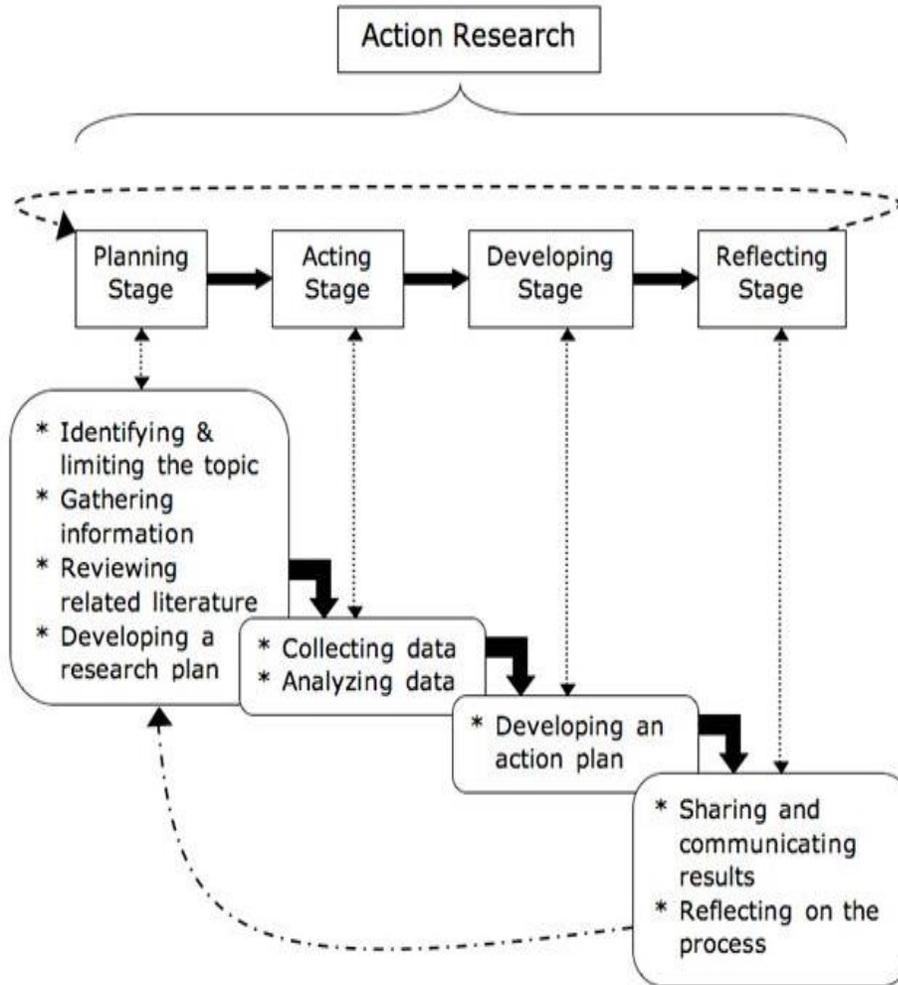


Figure 1. Action Research Model (Mertler, 2017, p. 37)

It should be noted that although action research has structured stages and steps, it is intended to allow for flexibility that allows practitioner-researchers to adjust the steps in progress while conducting action research. According to Mertler (2017), “Whereas action research has a clear beginning, it does not have a clearly defined end point” (p. 37). Consequently, this action research project is an adaptation to the action research stages proposed by Mertler (2017) that reflects the multi-cycled iterative action research study.

Results from each data collection source allowed the researcher to reflect and make changes to the action plan as it evolved through each action research cycle. Findings from the survey, focus group, and interviews are reported in this chapter. The major sections of this chapter include a review of the problem of practice investigated, the primary and subsidiary research questions, general demographic data for the research context and interviewees, followed by a presentation of the results from Cycles One, Two, and Three of the iterative action research process.

Primary and Subsidiary Research Questions

This action research project was guided by the following primary research question to investigate how a purposeful sample of elementary school educators understood and applied culturally responsive pedagogy and practices:

1. How do first to sixth grade teachers in a diverse school district in Mid-Michigan perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?

The researcher also explored subsidiary questions to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the teachers' pre-service and professional experiences. These questions include the following:

2. Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences, and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?
3. What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and/or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural

content, enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and build relationships with students?

4. How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?

5. After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the additional types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?

The primary and subsidiary research questions directed the action research plan for this action research study.

Action Research Cycle One: Qualtrics Survey

Planning stage. The planning and implementation of a Qualtrics' survey began Cycle One of this action research study and served as a needs assessment for Cycle Two. Qualtrics is an online survey tool licensed by the University of Michigan-Flint for student use. The survey questions were derived from a review of the literature, which Mertler (2017) identified as an essential pre-requisite step in developing a viable action research plan. The survey questions were structured to allow teacher participants to partake in a self-inventory of their knowledge, awareness, dispositions, perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, and actions regarding culturally responsive pedagogy, policies, and practices.

Acting stage. During the acting stage, the researcher launched the Qualtrics' survey, which opened on May 7, 2018 and closed on June 2, 2018. The response rate for the survey was 41 responders of 70 potential survey participants (59%). The survey was active four weeks during which time potential participants received weekly invitations to

complete the survey. Participation was strictly voluntary, and the identity of responders was anonymous.

After the time allotted to complete the survey expired, the researcher entered the acting stage by analyzing the results to derive focus areas that would structure the creation of a professional development workshop to be implemented in Cycle Two of the action research study. The researcher clustered survey question findings to derive the emergent agenda of topics for the professional development workshop. Specific survey questions were reorganized into five clusters, each of which signaled a deficit in the participants' knowledge base or professional practices.

Developing stage. The survey results were collected and tabulated using a four-point Likert Scale with values of (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. During the developing stage, the researcher used a deductive process and utilized descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative survey results, as described by Mertler (2006). Descriptive statistics allow researchers to summarize, organize, and simplify data (Mertler, 2006). Further, the researcher analyzed the central tendencies of the survey data using descriptive statistical parameters that simplify, summarize, interpret, and organize how a distribution of data tends to pile up around the center (Mertler, 2006).

Three measures of central tendency are the mean, median, and mode. The measures of central tendency reported and analyzed for this survey were median and mode, as the analysis methods used describes ordinal data (Mills, 2011). The survey results were collected and tabulated using a four-point Likert Scale with values of (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. The median is the

specific score that represents the 50th percentile; the mode is the most frequent score in the overall set of scores (Mertler, 2006). Column graphs were used to display the data from the survey where adjacent bars did not touch due to the categorical nature of the variable on a y-axis (Mertler, 2006). Significant survey question findings were clustered to justify the development of the professional development workshop.

The survey included four important questions (Q1, Q2, Q8, Q16) that influenced the determination of the icebreaker for the professional development workshop in Cycle Two:

Q1. I recognize and value the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.

Q2. I am knowledgeable of the various cultures represented by the students in my classroom.

Q8. I implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups.

Q16. I am emotionally concerned about racial inequality.

The column graph shown in Figure 2 represents the collective of survey results for these questions.

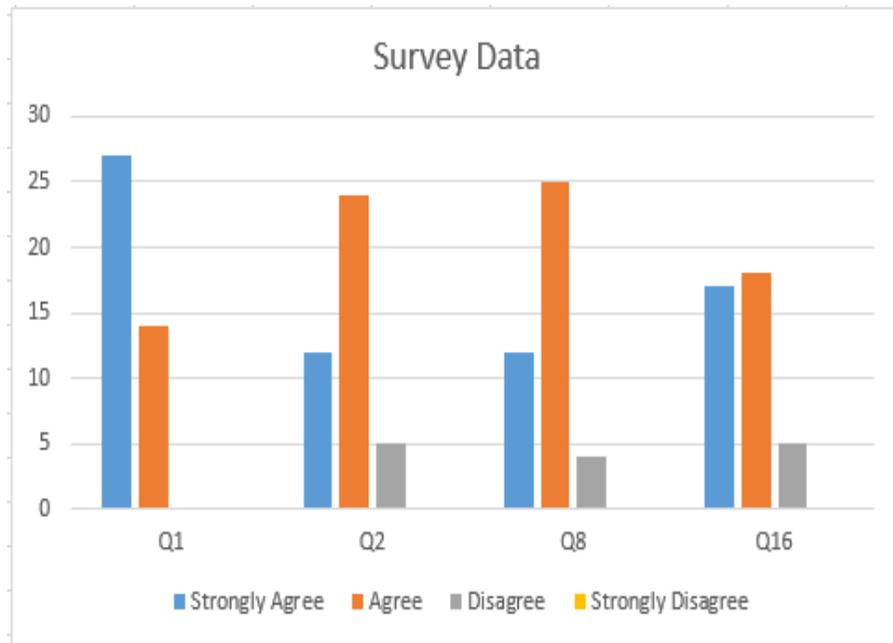


Figure 2. Q1, Q2, Q8, Q16 survey results

Survey Question 1 indicated that responders value the cultures represented by the students in their classroom. Findings reported that 66% of the responders *strongly agreed* and 34% *agreed*. The mode for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree. The median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 2 indicated that respondents are knowledgeable of the various cultures represented by the students in their classrooms. This survey question reported that 30% of the respondents *strongly agree* and 59% *agree*, and 12% *disagree*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 8 indicated that responders implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups. Findings reported that 29% of the responders *strongly agreed*, 61% *agreed*, and 10% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 16 indicated that responders are emotionally concerned about racial inequality. Findings reported that 43% *strongly*

agreed, 45% *agreed*, and 13% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree.

These specific survey questions were grouped together, as the findings revealed that the responders expressed a surface level respect towards different cultures. However, 12% of the respondents did not express an awareness or have knowledge of various cultures represented by the students in their classrooms, additionally, 10% of the respondents did not appear to implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups, and a shocking 13% were not concerned about racial inequality. Interpretation of these findings led to introduction of an icebreaker at the outset of the professional development workshop to dispel stereotypes around culture, gender, and race.

The survey included four essential questions (Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21) that influenced the determination of the knowledge-building component for the professional development workshop in Cycle Two.

Q17. Culturally responsive teaching contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem of all culturally diverse students.

Q18. Regardless of cultural differences, all children learn from the same teaching method.

Q19. Culturally responsive practice is essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment.

Q21. Encouraging respect for cultural diversity is essential to create an inclusive classroom.

The column graph in Figure 3 represents the collective survey results for these questions.

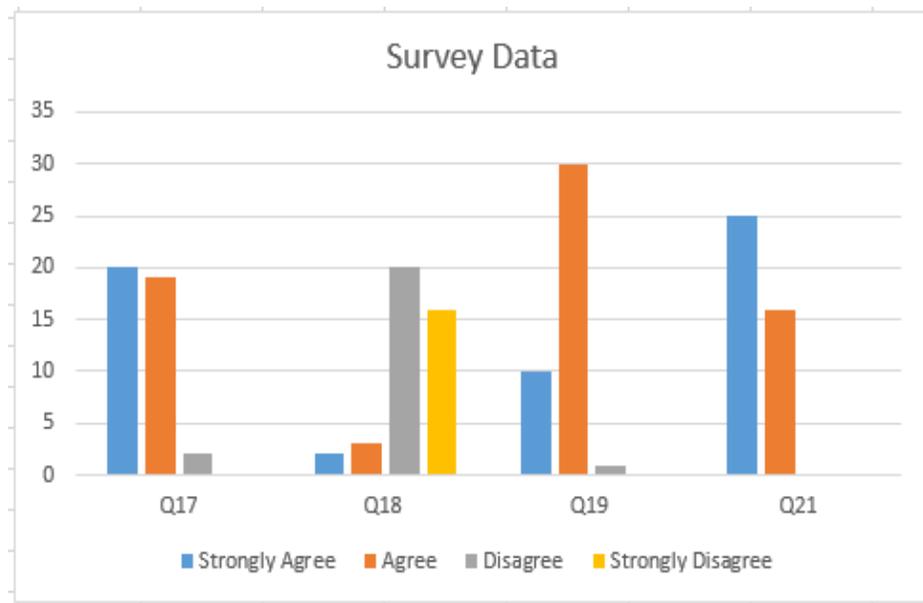


Figure 3. Q17, Q18, Q19, Q21 survey results

Survey Question 17 indicated that respondents believed that culturally responsive teaching contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem of all culturally diverse students. Findings showed that 49% *strongly agreed*, 46% *agreed*, and 5% *disagreed*. The mode for this distribution is 1, strongly agree, and the median is 2, representing agree. Survey question 18 indicated that regardless of cultural differences, all children learn from the same teaching method. Findings reported that 5% *strongly agree*, 7% *agree*, 49% *disagree*, and 39% *strongly disagree*.

The mode and median for this distribution is 3, representing disagree. Survey question 19 indicated that participants believed that culturally responsive practices is essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment. Findings reported that 24% *strongly agree*, 73% *agree*, and 2% *disagree*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey question 21 indicated that participants felt encouraging respect for cultural diversity is essential to create an inclusive classroom. Findings

showed that 61% of the responders *strongly agree* and 39% *agree*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree.

The researcher grouped these specific survey questions together, because it appeared the respondents may need more guidance on the definition of what culturally responsive pedagogy and practices means. Results showed that more than 90% of the responders *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that culturally responsive teaching contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem of all culturally diverse students; 5% *disagreed*. Additionally, 12% of the responders *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that regardless of cultural differences all children learn from the same teaching method. A large percentage of respondents (97%) *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that culturally responsive practices is essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment; however, 2% *disagreed*. A careful analysis of this data conveyed that an activity that engaged the participants on a specific definition and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices would need to be incorporated into the professional development workshop. A quick write activity was incorporated into the professional development workshop to gauge the participants' perceived definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, cultural competence, and cultural responsiveness. This activity was represented in Cycle Two of the action research study.

The survey included four essential questions (Q3, Q4, Q12, Q24) that influenced the skill-building component for the professional development workshop in Cycle Two:

Q3. I recognize and consider my own cultural influences and how they affect the way I communicate my expectations and how I teach.

Q4. My classroom is decorated in a way that represents multiple cultures and global awareness.

Q12. I know my students and build strong working relationships with them.

Q24. A positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students.

Figure 4 represents the collective survey results for these questions.

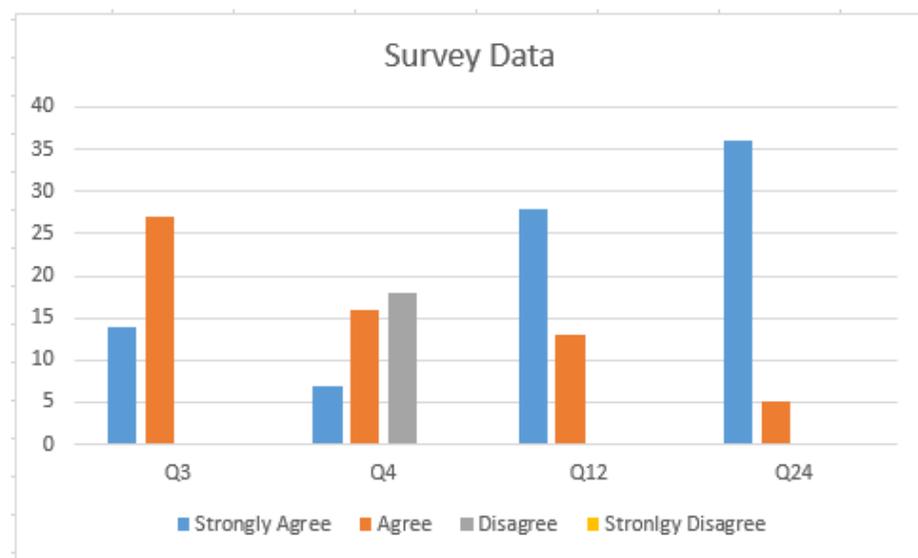


Figure 4. Q3, Q4, Q12, Q24 survey results

Survey Question 3 indicated that respondents recognize and consider their own cultural influences, how they affect the way they communicate expectations, and how they teach. Findings reported that 34% *strongly agreed* and 66% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 4 indicated that respondents decorate their classrooms in a way that represents multiple cultures and global awareness. Findings showed that 17% *strongly agreed*, 39% *agreed*, and 44% *disagreed*. The mode for this distribution is 3, representing disagree, and the median is 2,

representing agree. Survey Question 12 indicated that participants know their students and build strong working relationships with them. Findings showed that 68% of the respondents *strongly agreed* and 32% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree. Survey Question 24 indicated that a positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students. Findings reported that 88% *strongly agreed* and 12% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree.

The researcher grouped these specific survey questions together as they addressed a few important elements. The first element was how teachers decorate their classrooms in a way that represents multiple cultures. Upon reflection, it appeared that 44% of the respondents did not decorate their classes in a way that represented multiple cultures. Further, this cluster of survey questions highlighted how teachers reflect upon their own cultural influences and how they impact the way they communicate and teach students. The last element involved building strong and positive relationships with students. In the professional development workshop, examples of how teachers can implement strategies that resonated with the data represented by these findings were shared with participants in a video showing what culturally responsive pedagogy and practices looks like.

The survey included four essential questions (Q5, Q7, Q22, Q26) that influenced the critical analysis component for the professional development workshop in Cycle Two.

Q5. The curriculum that I teach incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities.

Q7. I help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of my teaching.

Q22. Inclusion of literature from different cultural groups develops tolerance among children.

Q26. My entire school's culture is evolving with the intent to restructure institutionalized practices to create access for all groups.

Figure 5 represents the collective survey results for these questions.

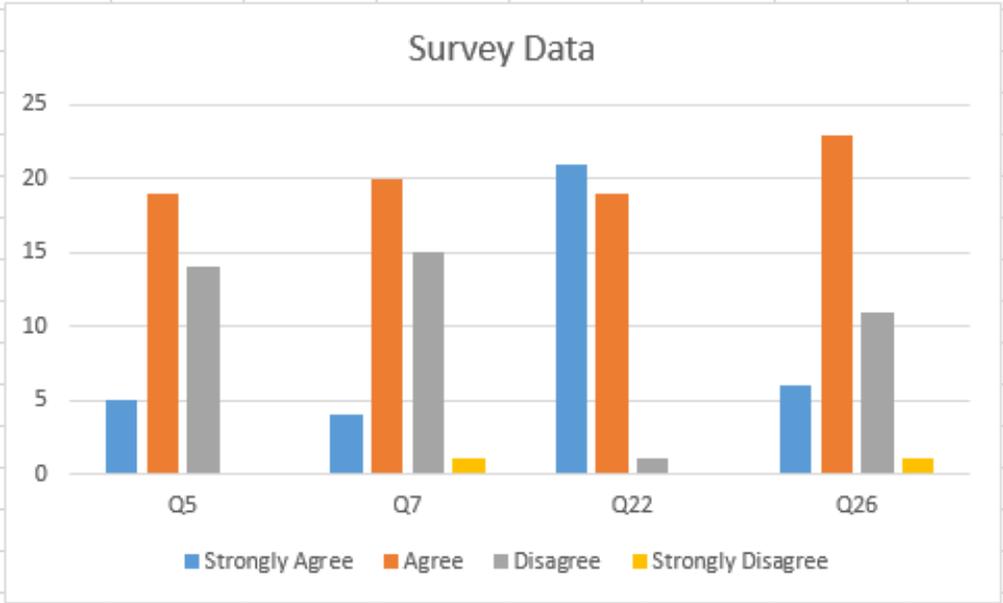


Figure 5. Q5, Q7, Q22, Q26 Survey Results

Survey Question 5 indicated that the curriculum that respondents teach incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities. Findings reported that 20% *strongly agreed*, 46% *agreed*, and 34% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 7 indicated that participants helped student to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives of their teaching. Findings reported that 10% *strongly agreed* 50% *agreed*, 38% *disagreed*, and 3% *strongly disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 22

indicated inclusion of literature from different cultural groups develops tolerance among children. Findings showed that 51% *strongly agreed*, 46% *agreed*, and 2% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing *strongly agree*. Survey Question 26 indicated responders' support of restructured institutionalized practices to create access for all groups. Findings reported that 15% *strongly agreed*, 56% *agreed*, 27% *disagreed*, and 2% *strongly disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, which represents *agree*.

The researcher learned that 34% of the respondents did not implement a curriculum that incorporates content from various culture, ethnicities, and other identities. These findings also showed that 29% of the respondents did not agree that the entire culture in the school district is not evolving with the intent to restructure institutionalized practice to create access for all groups. Finally, the researcher learned that 41% of the respondents *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that they help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspectives of their teaching. This information led to the decision to include a jigsaw activity in the professional development workshop where participants read excerpts of a seminal article *Multicultural Education* by Patty Bode (2009). The aim of this critical reading and analysis activity was to support participants developing a critical awareness of the origination of the tenets of cultural responsiveness in education.

The survey included six essential questions (Q6, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q14, Q15) that influenced the synthesis component for the professional development workshop in Cycle Two:

Q6. I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultures and experiences.

Q9. I communicate with the parents of my students in positive ways, not just when there is a problem.

Q10. I make an effort to educate families about our school district.

Q11. I build strong, positive working relationships with the parents of my students.

Q14. Creating a sense of community in my classroom is key to student success.

Q15. I modify my teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students.

Figure six represents the collective survey results for these questions.

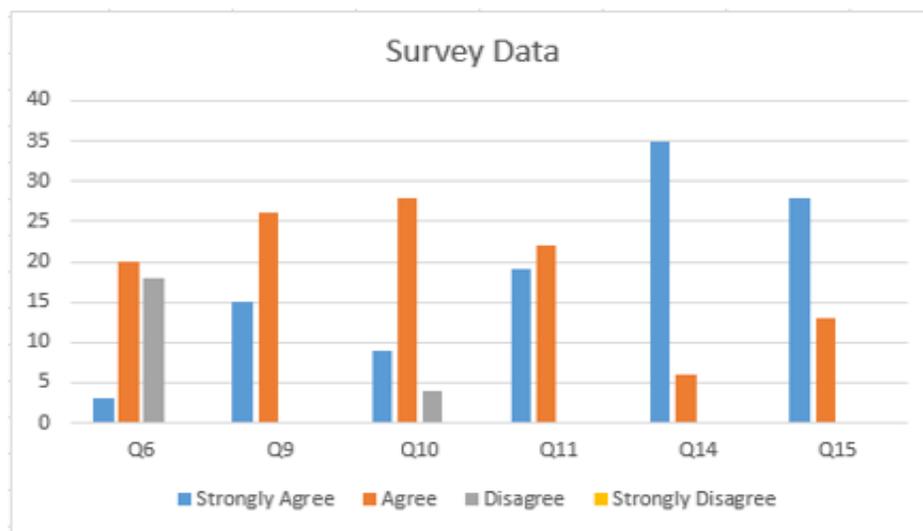


Figure 6. Q6, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q14, Q15 Survey Results

Survey Question 6 indicated that participants plan lessons to capitalize on their students' culture and experiences. Findings reported that 7% *strongly agreed*, 49% *agreed*, and 44% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, indicating strongly agree. Survey Question 9 indicated that participants communicate with the parents of their students in positive ways, not just when there is a problem. Findings

reported that 37% *strongly agreed*, and 63% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 10 indicated that participants make an effort to educate families about the school district. Findings reported 22% *strongly agreed*, 68% *agreed*, and 10% *disagreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing *agree*. Survey Question 11 indicated that participants build strong, positive working relationships with the parents of their students. Findings reported that 46% *strongly agreed*, and 54% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 2, representing agree. Survey Question 14 indicated that participants create a sense of community in their classrooms, which is key to student success. Findings reported that 85% *strongly agreed*, and 15% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree. Survey Question 15 indicated participants modify their teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students. Findings reported that 68% *strongly agreed*, and 32% *agreed*. The mode and median for this distribution is 1, representing strongly agree.

The researcher grouped these specific survey questions together as they addressed several inquiries involving how teachers engage parents and how they teach through a cultural lens. Findings showed that 44% of the respondents disagreed, that they plan lessons that capitalize on their students' culture. However, 100% of the responders indicated that they modify their teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students. Based on these findings, a discussion around equality, equity, and ultimately liberation was an important component in the professional development workshop.

The researcher utilized a video (Howard, 2012) to spark discussion amongst participants during the workshop in Cycle Two and build a capacity around equity pedagogy. The researcher also shared a culminating video at the end of the professional development workshop that showed how a teacher capitalizes on the culture of his students to inspire them to learn (Lancaster, 2015). These findings also revealed how the responders perceive positive parent engagement and relationships. The findings were positive in this area, and most responders strongly agreed or agreed that they build positive working relationships with their parents.

Reflecting stage. The reflection stage of Cycle One was crucial, because once the survey questions were clustered into thematic groups; decisions had to be made about what to do with the findings. The researcher enlisted a collegial coder to confirm the descriptive categories that emerged to guide the development of planning for the professional development workshop. Collaboration proved to be invaluable to co-construct the professional development workshop. The co-contributor serves as a superintendent of a neighboring school district of Western Community School District and he is also the founder of a local non-profit organization named Gear Up2Lead. He brought a wealth of experiential knowledge and expertise in cultural responsiveness in public school education. The co-contributor also worked with the researcher to create an online invitation for the professional development workshop and disseminated it to the same group of 70 teachers targeted for the survey. Sharing in the critical reflection process with professional peers allowed the researcher to dislodge preconceived notions about teachers' preparedness and receptiveness to culturally responsive pedagogy, practices, and policies.

Indications from survey results showed that more training on culturally responsive pedagogy and practice was needed and desired by the survey participants. More than 90% of the survey responders indicated a desire to learn more about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The survey findings were used to collaboratively plan for the professional development workshop in response to teachers' expressed needs and interests. Reflecting upon the four action research stages of Cycle One allowed data-informed decisions about how to enact Cycle Two of the action research study.

Action Research Cycle Two: Professional Development Workshop

Planning stage. At this point of the action plan, the researcher and co-contributor entered the planning stage. The planning stage of Cycle Two involved the implementation of the professional development workshop plan. The planning stage also engaged the participants in a three-hour workshop. The professional development workshop seemed like a rational course of action considering research that characterized professional development being a form of self-reflective inquiry (McNiff, 1997). Opportunities to be self-reflective were afforded to participants during each iterative cycle of the action research study.

The researcher collaboratively created and facilitated the summer workshop with the assistance of the co-contributor. The workshop engaged the participants in several activities centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The researcher provided a historical context of the evolution of multicultural education and cultural competence in academia, explored the workshop participants' perceived definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, cultural competence, and cultural responsiveness, then provided researched informed delineations of each term. The

researcher sought to enhance the workshop participants' respect of different cultural frames of reference while encouraging them to unpack the stereotypes they may have about people that are culturally different from themselves. The professional development workshop set the stage for having participants reflect upon their own cultural influences and how they impact the way they communicate and teach students.

The researcher and co-contributor provided workshop participants with visual representations of how a culturally responsive classroom is decorated and informed workshop participants about how they might benefit from building positive relationships with students and enlisting culturally diverse parents as cultural informants. Finally, the researcher planned to show participants how they could plan lessons that capitalized on their students' culture and develop a curriculum that incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and identities.

Acting stage. The acting stage required identifying participants and drafting an agenda (plan of action) for an engaging professional development workshop. The researcher viewed the co-contributor's experiences as an educational leader and philanthropist to be invaluable in assisting during the Cycle Two planning stage of this action research study. The co-contributor assisted the researcher in identifying participants and facilitating the professional development workshop.

The participants for the professional development workshop were invited to a three-hour workshop held in July 2018, anticipating that conducting the workshop during the summer might create more potential for teachers to participate. The teachers received the invitation as an email link. When accessing the link, potential participants were able to read a quick overview about the workshop, which included the purpose, date, time, and

location. Incentives to participate included assurance that those involved would receive district provided professional development hours, and the researcher also provided five-dollar gift cards to those who were able to attend.

Teachers reserved their participation by registering through the online invitation. This information was useful to the researcher for planning purposes. After three weeks of the invitation being sent, 10 teachers registered to participate in the workshop. Based on the Western Community School District's public demographic profile, it could be assumed that the teachers who elected to participate in the workshop represented a wide variety of years of experience, age, college degrees, professional development training, and interests.

Developing stage. The purpose of the workshop was for participants to explore their beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived understandings regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Workshop participants were engaged in conversations and collaborative activities centered on cultural competence. The goal was for participants to gain increased awareness of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices through engagement, conversations, and collaborative dialogue. The workshop facilitators assured the participants that the workshop would be engaging and collaborative. Ultimately, the facilitators were most interested in starting the conversation around culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that allowed participants to reflect upon their own sense of agency as educators. Specific areas identified from the professional development activity findings helped to shape the tone of the focus group discussion and the one-on-one interview protocol. The researcher created these activities with the intent of engaging

participants in experiences that might assist them in becoming more culturally responsive in their instructional practices. Table 5 is an annotated agenda outlining a list of activities that the researcher and co-facilitator implemented during the professional development workshop.

Table 5

Workshop Agenda

Time	Activity
9:00a.m. - 9:15a.m.	Introduction – Facilitators introduced themselves and welcomed guests
9:15a.m. - 9:30a.m.	Purpose – Facilitators explained the purpose of the cultural competence workshop
9:30a.m. - 9:40a.m.	Courtesy Norms – Facilitators reviewed courtesy norms for the workshop.
9:40a.m. - 10:00a.m.	First Thoughts Ice-Breaker – Participants wrote the first thoughts that came to mind after reading word headings posted around the room. The words were related to race, age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. A brief discussion followed.
10:00a.m. - 10:30a.m.	Survey Results - Participants reviewed Survey Results collected within the school district in which they work
10:30a.m. - 10:45a.m.	Quick Writes – Participants wrote their perceived definitions of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices, cultural competence, and cultural responsiveness. Facilitators provided definitions
10:45a.m. - 11:00a.m.	Video –Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher presented by Gary Howard 2012), Director of Gary Howard Equity Institutes
11:00a.m. - 11:30a.m.	Article Read – Bode, P. (2009, December). Multicultural Education Included Historical Information from Banks (2004), Gay (2010), Sleeter, Grant (2006), & Nieto (2010)
11:30a.m. - 11:45a.m.	Discussion – Participants discussed Equality vs. Equity and pondered their own self efficacy of understanding and implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices
11:45a.m - 12:00p.m.	Concluding Video and Discussion – Facilitators showed a video of culturally responsive teaching and briefly discussed Equality vs. Equity vs. Liberation

Courtesy norms were established at the beginning of the workshop. These types of norms allowed participants to understand that they were engaging in a safe and judgment free activity. The facilitators encouraged participants to be respectful and honest during the workshop. The facilitators wanted participants to understand that the content of the workshop might push them out of their comfort zones, allowing them to take risks. The norms established were grounded in respecting confidentiality and others' opinions. After the facilitators briefly reviewed the purpose and courtesy norms, the workshop began with a first thoughts ice-breaker, entitled *first thoughts*, because participants wrote what suddenly came to mind after reading word headings posted around the room. The words were related to race, age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The list of word headings was as follows:

- Black Man
- Black Women
- White Man
- White Woman
- Elderly
- Gay Woman
- Gay Man
- Asian People

A brief discussion followed the first thoughts activity. Participants shared their ideas around this icebreaker. One participant shared, “The ice-breaker was a good activity because it made you aware how a word or word heading made you think of a stereotype associated with it” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

Another participant stated:

The ice-breaker activity opened up ideas of stereotypes we have on the different groups of people. The conversations we were having made me more comfortable to share my views and thoughts on the topic. I enjoyed listening to the stories and connections others shared (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

The goal of the ice-breaker was to set the tone of the workshop and allow participants to share their thoughts openly and freely. It also was intended to explore our pre-existing stereotypes. According to feedback from participants, the icebreaker served the purpose of allowing participants to feel comfortable and share their thoughts and ideas openly without being judged by other individuals.

Next, the facilitators provided participants with the survey results that had been conducted within Western Community School District. The facilitators wanted the participants to have time to discuss the findings in small groups using the following guiding questions:

- What stands out?
- What wasn't surprising?
- What triggers more interest?
- What needs clarity?
- What's next?

After having some time to discuss the survey findings in small groups, the participants shared their reactions to the larger group. The facilitators guided the conversation, as the larger group discussion allowed for participants to reflect on the survey outcomes.

During the discussion, one participant shared, "Two-thirds of us respect the cultural differences within our classes. We implement strategies or conversations to welcome all students. The remaining third could possibly implement more or seek out more

opportunities for developing strategies as a teacher” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). Another participant said, “I think as educators we feel that we provide a well-diverse environment for our students. I think that the hardest thing for us to understand is what kind of home life these kids experience” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). These interpretations of the survey data indicated that although some teachers understand the cultural differences within their students, there are existing roadblocks to fully meeting the needs of their students. These roadblocks appear to involve teacher knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and knowing that the lived experience of their students matter in the classroom.

Participants were led through several different exercises during the workshop. Next, they completed three quick writes which probed them about their own perceived definitions of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The quick write activities are outlined below:

Quick Write Activity 1:

- What does culturally responsive pedagogy and practices mean to you?
- Write your own brief definition.
- Be prepared to share at your table.
- Develop one definition your table would like to share with the larger group

Quick Write Activity 2:

- What does cultural competence mean to you?
- Write your own brief definition.
- Be prepared to share at your table.
- Develop one definition your table would like to share with the larger group

Quick Write Activity 3:

- What does cultural responsiveness mean to you?
- Write your own brief definition.
- Be prepared to share at your table.
- Develop one definition your table would like to share with the larger group.

The quick-write activities enabled participants to reflect upon their own perceived definitions of key terms related to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The facilitators provided research-based definitions from the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems and Equity by educator Gary Howard (NCREST, 2018; Howard, 2014).

Reactions from the quick writes were varied; however, perceived definitions were mostly aligned to the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. One participant said culturally responsive pedagogy and practice is "...teaching kids about the diversity within the classroom/school in many aspects, ways to be proactive and forthcoming about diversity versus waiting for kids to notice differences and not understand how to communicate and respond to our difference" (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

Another response stated that cultural competence means, "...that as the teacher, I'm educated, comfortable, and excited to teach kids about culture. I can do this through the use of our curriculum, life experiences, and teaching to the group of students that I have" (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). It appeared from the quick writes that the participants understood what culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are and how these principles might impact them as teachers.

The facilitators incorporated two videos in the workshop for teachers to view and discuss. The first was entitled *Becoming a Culturally Responsive Teacher* (Howard,

2012). This five-minute video, narrated by equity educator Gary Howard, explored how teachers can reach their students who are culturally different from them. The video showed teacher participants exploring their own assumptions about race, class, and culture. The teachers were exposed to principles of culturally responsive teaching, such as affirming students' cultural connections, stressing collectivity as well as individuality, and managing the classroom with firm, consistent, caring control. The teachers gained information on strategies for creating classrooms that are culturally inviting to all. The second video was entitled *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, which served as a conclusion to the workshop (Lancaster, 2015). This five-minute video, narrated by educator Demetrius Lancaster, gauged the impact of culturally responsive teaching practices in a second grade classroom at a public charter school in Washington, D.C.

The videos and debriefing discussions engaged participants in a meaningful conversation and reflection upon culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Reactions from the videos were positive. One participant stated, "The videos were a great resource and good information. Helps to understand the topic when real world situations are present and fellow teachers share their understanding and experiences" (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). Another participant said, "It was very informative and positive. Gave me things to think about when teaching" (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). One other comment, "Again very informative and positive. Upbeat and energizing! Helped me to reflect on my teaching and how important it is to build those relationships" (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

Building relationships with students was heavily expressed in the literature review of this action research study. As teachers reflected on the videos, it allowed them to

explore how fostering positive relationships with their students supported culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

The workshop facilitators guided a jigsaw activity, wherein the ten participants seated in groups of three or four were assigned parts of an article to read and then report to the others in their separate groups. The article described several different scholars and their contributions to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, including Sleeter and Grant's (2006) five approaches to multicultural education: Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different, Human Relations, Single-Groups Studies, Multicultural Education, and Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. The article also discussed Nieto's (2010) seven characteristics of multicultural education: Antiracist Education, Basic Education, Education Important for All Students, Pervasive Education, Education for Social Justice, Education as a Process, and Critical Pedagogy. Gay's (2010) ideas around Curriculum Desegregation and Equity Pedagogy and Banks' (2004) five dimensions of multicultural education: Content Integration, Knowledge Construction Process, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and Empowering School Culture and Social Structure.

The jigsaw reading activity added to the participants' understanding of the historical context of culturally responsive and multicultural education. The facilitators circled around to each group and joined in discussion with participants about their assigned section of the article. The goal of the jigsaw activity was for participants to understand some of the seminal ideas centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The facilitators realized that this activity may have needed more time. It appeared that participants would have liked more time to fully engage in the content of

the jigsaw activity. One participant said that “more time was needed to get into meaningful discussion” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018). Another participant stated that, “The article read was too heavy. We needed more time to dissect what the article actually meant” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

The participants engaged in discussion around equity and equality as one of the last activities in the professional development workshop. The discussion focused on reactions to three illustrations: The first showed three children standing on boxes trying to watch a baseball game from behind a fence. Each box was the same size; however, the children on the boxes were different heights, and the shortest child could not even see the game. The word *equality* is listed under this picture. In the second illustration, the shortest child is now standing on two boxes so that they can see the game. The word *equity* was shown under the picture. The metaphoric take away from the first two divergent pictures were that although children are provided the same resources, some may require additional resources based on their personal needs. The third illustration showed the same three children watching a baseball game from behind a fence. However, in this picture, the fence was removed and the word *liberation* was shown under it. The idea of liberation was a key component to this action research study, as teacher participants were taken through various cycles of study inclusive of collaboration and self-reflection towards liberating their current mindsets.

One goal of the workshop was to have participants reflect upon implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The center of the action research study was for teachers to evaluate their perceptions of self-efficacy in relations to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Part of this evaluation encompassed a self-

assessment of equity pedagogy, teacher skill set, cultural identity, and professional identity. The facilitators of the workshop saw these illustrations as powerful ways for teachers to further assess and reflect upon their own sense of agency when learning about the structures of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Furthermore, the illustrations hinted that all children are different and require different resources. The illustrations added value to the idea of equity pedagogy when exploring pedagogical practices focused on culture.

The illustrations were determined to be strong examples of what happens when equality and equity are purposefully considered in educational practices and then extended to a place of liberation for staff and students. Feedback from the participants on the illustrations were powerful. One participant said, “The illustrations shows that there should be no limitations. Regardless your situation, accommodations are made for all to be successful and given an experience that supports them” (Workshop Field Notes, 2018).

Reflecting stage. At the reflecting stage of Cycle Two, the researcher pondered what was learned from Cycle Two of the action research study and considered that further development of similar workshops or professional development would only be defined by feedback from the participants. Information gleaned from Cycle Two indicated that the professional development workshop was a necessary and meaningful step towards participants becoming more familiar with culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The workshop was pivotal in creating a dialogue amongst participants to collaboratively share their perspectives on the research topic. To measure the validity of the professional development experience and provide reflection, a workshop evaluation

was conducted to further explore the thoughts of the participants, create a basis for additional thought and deliberation, and most importantly serve as the reflection stage within Cycle Two.

In the last activity within Cycle Two of the action plan, participants completed a quick 11-question workshop evaluation form utilizing a Likert scale to reflect on the experience. Eight questions encompassed categorical variables with ordinal values, and three questions were open-ended. The results of the evaluation form completed by the ten participants were manageable for analysis. The following are results of the workshop evaluation questionnaire, which used a five-point scale with responses of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree:

- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop lived up to their expectations.
- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the content of the workshop was relevant to their jobs.
- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were more informed about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices after workshop.
- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the activities in the workshop gave them sufficient practice and feedback on the subject matter of the workshop.
- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they will be able to use what they learned about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.
- More than 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would attend more workshops on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

The workshop evaluation also included three open ended questions:

- What improvements would you make to this workshop?

- What was least valuable about the workshop?
- What was most valuable about the workshop?

Participants shared similar thoughts about improvements that could be made to the workshop: “I would make the workshop longer to get more information and activities in. I want to know more” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2); “More time. Great start to making teachers aware to help students be more aware” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2); and “No improvements. Very informative. I like how there was group work, individual quick writes, getting up to go to the hallway to discuss chart paper, and the videos” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). The most reported improvement that could be made to the workshop was needing more time.

Responses about least valuable aspects of the workshop included the comment that the jigsaw activity needed more time to have meaningful discussion: “The article activity. There was not enough time to get into meaningful discussion of the article” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). Another respondent said that more teachers needed to participate: “Need more teachers to feed off of, maybe building staff” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). A last comment stated, “I honestly felt all information shared was important to our understanding and ability to move forward with this topic” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2).

The last open-ended question asked what was most valuable about the workshop. One participant stated, “The workshop made me think about my own perceptions, stereotypes, and practices. I will improve my classroom decorations and think more about it because of this workshop” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). Another participant said, “The simple knowledge and understanding behind understanding all

cultural backgrounds – not just race” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). A respondent said, “Challenging people to get out of their comfort zones, express ideas more freely” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2). One final comment stated, “Knowing that cultural responsive teaching needs to be practiced and taught” (Workshop Evaluation, 2018, p. 2).

The results of the workshop evaluation provided a basis for further development of the action plan and overall reflection. As the researcher reflected upon the information provided in Cycle Two of the action plan, it was apparent that the professional development workshop was meaningful and valued by the participants. The researcher learned that this specific group of teachers were interested in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and would participate in future trainings on the topic. The workshop experience in Cycle Two assisted in the further development of the action plan and how to move forward. Subsequent cycles would need to be developed and explored.

The purpose of Cycle Three, which comprised a focus group and interviews, was conducted for the purpose of taking participants through a deeper dialogue of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Additional data collected in Cycle Three created reflective discussion and built capacity towards answering the research questions for this action research.

Action Research Cycle Three: Qualitative Focus Group and Interview Data

Planning stage. Qualitative data were gathered by engaging participants in a focus group discussion and subsequent interviews. In Cycle Three, the researcher explored more deeply the dispositions of the participants on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices through a small focus group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

As part of the planning stage, ten volunteers from the Western Community School District who had participated in the professional development workshop were recruited to take part in the focus group activity. Based on information learned from the survey in Cycle One, discussion prompts were developed for the focus group (see Appendix E). The nine discussion prompts were largely related to survey information that conveyed teachers needing more support on how to incorporate curriculums from various cultures, ethnicities, and identities and were determined by survey data that explained teachers needing support in helping students understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, and perspective of their teachings. Finally, the discussion prompts explored the perspectives of teachers about how they build relationships with students who represent a different culture from their own.

Acting stage. The focus group and voluntary one-on-one interviews composed the data collection protocols in the acting stage. The focus group, held on the same day as the professional development workshop, was conducted at a local venue within Western Community School District. Participants in the focus group offered a wide variety of years of experience, age, college degrees, professional development training, and interests. To understand their involvement and to grant permission to be in the focus group, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form before starting the focus group activity (see Appendix D). The one-hour focus group was recorded using a tape recorder and a mobile device to record the focus group conversation. At the completion of the focus group, the recorded audio data was transcribed by GMR Transcriptions, an online transcription company, into a typed written narrative.

Additional data from participants were collected in five semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Planning for the interviews involved developing interview questions from information the researcher gathered from the survey in Cycle One, professional development workshop in Cycle Two, and the focus group discussion in Cycle Three. An analysis of the survey data conveyed that teachers needed more support with implementing a curriculum that represented various cultures. Feedback from the professional development workshop essentially communicated that teachers needed more time to fully understand the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and findings from the focus group discussion expressed that teachers believed that culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are important but that they were not always confident on how to engage students in this content.

Shown in Table 6, five of the ten participants from the focus group agreed to one-on-one interviews: two from a different elementary building and three from the same elementary building. The number was narrowed to gather individual ideas and perspectives about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Table 6

Demographic Information of Interviewees

Name	Age	Years Teaching	Gender
Interviewee One	55	18	F
Interviewee Two	34	10	F
Interviewee Three	49	24	F
Interviewee Four	30	6	M
Interviewee Five	34	15	F

The participants were referenced numerically when their comments were cited as evidence in this section. The interviews were conducted in October 2018, several weeks after the focus group activity. In that substantial amount of time following the focus group, the participants had time to reflect and to implement skills learned during the workshop and focus group. To understand their involvement in the interviews, each participant completed an interview consent form (see Appendix F).

The interview protocol is shown in Appendix G. Each interview was recorded using an electronic device and lasted approximately one hour. When the interviews were complete, recorded audio data were transcribed by GMR Transcriptions, an online transcription company, and typed into written narratives.

Data analysis followed after collection of the transcribed information from the focus group and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. In an inductive process (Mertler, 2006), an open coding technique was used to organize the transcribed narrative data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Patterns and themes, identified by words or phrases that were repeated throughout the data, began to emerge as focus group and interview transcripts were read multiple times. Codes, represented by abbreviated initials of larger words or phrases were applied to the repetitive patterns, themes, and ideas.

The coded patterns were organized into categories that comprised major ideas and interpretations from the focus group and interview transcripts. Supporting evidence from direct quotes of focus group and interview participants were extrapolated to provide answers to the primary and subsidiary research questions. The coded categories are shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Focus Group/Interviews Coded Categories

Code	Description
CIC	Representations of Cultural Diversity in the Curriculum
TACD	Teacher Acknowledgement of Cultural Difference
TBR	Teachers Building Relationships
SBI	Student Background Information
CL	Comfort Level
SLE	Student Life Experience
TLE	Teacher Life Experience
SCC	School Climate/Culture
TAPP	Teacher Adjusting Practices and Pedagogy
ResDiff	Respecting Differences
PDCC	Professional Development in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy & Practices

Developing/reflecting stage. Evidence supporting the emerging themes that surfaced from the qualitative data gathered in the focus group and interviews was represented by direct quotes from the participants. Pseudonyms were not used to represent the participants, as direct quotes reported in this section were a combination of both focus group and interview data; however, the researcher referenced each direct quote as being reflective of the participant’s expressions from the focus group or interviews conducted in 2018. The researcher concluded that using direct quotes was the best way to represent how the participants conveyed their beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Representations of cultural diversity in the curriculum. The theme culture in the classroom surfaced and focused on whether the instructional curriculum used by the teachers in Western Community Schools was representative of various student cultures. Research has indicated that teachers must know how to structure and provide a curriculum that reflects cultural diversity to meet the needs of all students (Banks, 2003; Hudalla, 2005; Milner, 2014; Gay, 2003). The purposeful sample of teachers confirmed that diverse cultural representations are prevalent in the curriculum that they teach. They stated that the reading, math, social studies, and writing curriculum represented diverse cultures. One participant said, Well, again, like going back to readings, because I do a lot of non-fiction readings about, um, famous people. And they come from all different ethnic backgrounds” (Interviewee Three, 2018).

The teachers talked about how stories can introduce diverse cultures and language. For example, one participant stated, “In reading, the stories will sometimes include different cultures, names, um, that type of stuff” (Interview, 2018). Specifically, a participant referred to the benefits of read-alouds, a literacy technique that can build reading skill and fluency while introducing a variety of topics, by saying, “The read-alouds are very culturally diverse, that we read” (Focus Group, 2018). Teachers also indicated that “Cultural differences are shown in videos that accompany the math curriculum” (Interview, 2018). One participant said, “I noticed that at least the math curriculum that we use often is constantly using different names, when they talk about students and kids their names that are, you know, very unique” (Interviewee Four, 2018).

Another content area that lends itself to cultural representation is social studies. One participant said, “Some lessons will lend itself very easily to kind of talking about

why people do certain things and, um – that's the social studies part.” (Focus Group, 2018). One last participant said, “And sometimes talking about culture is natural when you're teaching like social studies” (Focus Group, 2018). The participants also expressed writing as an area where culture can be expressed. A participant said, “And, the writing, like the writing curriculum seems applicable to different cultures, especially when the students – if we write like small moment stories or narratives about themselves” (Focus Group, 2018).

Some teachers were more intentional about how they introduce culture into the curriculum. One participant said, “I make sure that my books have different families in them, different cultures, and different backgrounds” (Interviewee Three, 2018). Another participant stated, “I guess I just make sure different cultures and their cultural backgrounds are represented in the literature” (Interviewee Two, 2018). The researcher found these responses important, as they provided answers to the primary research question that inquired about teachers’ sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Additionally, the research question that investigated teachers’ experiences in implementing culture in multiple content areas was addressed.

Teacher acknowledgement of cultural difference. Research indicated that viewing cultural diversity as a strength and favorable resource can maximize learning for all students (Gay, 2000; Glover & Harris, 2016). This purposeful sample of teachers reported being very intentional about acknowledging cultural differences in their classrooms. One recurring approach to acknowledging cultural differences with their students was to have conversations. The participants expressed the importance of allowing students to talk about themselves and their backgrounds by way of

conversations. It was important to this group of teachers that to acknowledge cultural differences, they had to recognize their own thoughts and not let them interfere with meeting the cultural needs of their students. The teachers expressed being kind and loving to students was important to acknowledging their differences. One participant said, “I guess just keeping that open-mindedness that it’s okay to ask questions and be curious” (Interviewee Five, 2018). Another participant expressed making students feel special. They said:

I teach reading groups, so, making them feel a part of the group and that they're a part of something special, and that they belong, and, um, they were chosen, they're very special to be in the group. I guess just making them feel special (Interviewee Three, 2018).

One of the most prevalent approaches to acknowledging differences was to talk about them. One participant said, “I make it a point to talk about, you know, some of those differences” (Interviewee Two, 2018). Another participant expressed, “I engage in conversations with the kids explaining kind of, you know, the child's background, their history, or these are some of the ideas that I know about their cultures” (Focus Group, 2018). One final comment was made regarding putting your own thoughts and feelings aside to be responsive to students.

The participant stated:

Regardless of your own thoughts, you know, try to put those aside as much as you can and make sure that you're there and you're responsive to their needs and their culture and make sure that you are aware of your own beliefs, and make sure they don't project onto your students (Focus Group, 2018).

The researcher understood that the responses reported by this theme may play a key role

in answering the primary research question for this study regarding teachers' sense of agency implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Teachers building relationships. This purposeful sample of teachers affirmed that building relationships with their students is key to understanding the students' culture. Teachers believed that investing time to get to know their students assisted in making connections and building relationships. The teachers want to be connected to their students and understand their backgrounds. The teachers expressed that getting to know students requires getting to know and connecting to the families of their students. Teachers said that having conversations with parents is key to building relationships with them and their students.

Research contended that building relationships with students can build bridges for teachers to connect and get to know their students (Banks, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2006). One participant shared how important relationships are to them, "It is important for me to get to know my students, where they've come from, and what they're about" (Interview, 2018). One participant reported how their experiences helps with building relationships. They said, "I've done, like communities in schools and the big focus was, you know, how to engage schools with the community, and the community with the school, and try to build those relationships." (Focus Group, 2018).

Another participant stressed making connections, "Um, I think they need to feel a connection to their teacher, I feel that very strongly that they need that connection" (Interviewee One, 2018). Participants expressed that building relationships not only involves the student, but also their family. They said, "Well, by understanding them and asking them to share, like what their likes are, dislikes. Talk about their family. Do they

sit down at dinner? Um, they have Grandma and Grandpa living with them, aunt, and uncles” (Interview Two, 2018). Someone else said in terms of family, “And just, you know, just being personable, I think, to a lot of them, you know, trying to find some way to relate to the kids, and the families” (Interviewee Five, 2018).

One participant expressed the importance of building relationships in the classroom with peers, “I think it goes back to the relationship. And I think it’s the relationship that they’re building with each other in their teams, and the relationship that we have built as a family, and I think it goes back to that” (Interviewee Four, 2018). The researcher found these responses important, as they may provide answers to the research question that probes about teachers building relationships with students.

Student background information. Research has expressed the importance of teachers learning and understanding the background and lived experiences of their students (Milner, 2014; Banks, 2004). This purposeful sample of teachers expressed the importance of how student’s background life and experiences helps in connecting with them. Particularly, learning about students’ home life plays a role in teacher making connections and understanding students’ background. Being aware of their students’ cultural differences is important. Understanding the traditions, heritage, and family history of their students also resonated with the teachers in this study.

Connecting with parents also helps to understand the backgrounds of their students. One participant stated, “By getting to know them, by being truthful and heartfelt with them – you know–, making eye contact with them, greeting them in the morning, wanting to know who they are, like I mean, they become one of your own” (Interviewee Three, 2018). Another participant expressed knowing about the values

students are taught — “What are their backgrounds, what values are in their homes, what is their family like, and what they view as important” (Focus Group. 2019). Participants spoke about having students bring in artifacts from home that might represent their culture to understand their backgrounds. The participant said, “And, if they bring something in that's culturally different or whatever, I always make it a big deal to talk about it and let the other kids get involved and ask questions” (Focus Group, 2018).

Another participant said, “I've done little projects before where they bring in like a picture of themselves when they were younger, or a picture of their family, or any picture they want, and then they talk about, you know, their home and their family” (Interviewee One, 2018). The researcher found responses reported in this theme having purpose in potentially answering the primary research question and the second research question that inquired about building relationships with students.

Comfort level. The qualitative data related to the participants’ comfort level when talking about individual student’s culture. The purposeful sample of teachers expressed being very cautious about not being offensive to students who are of a different culture than the teacher. Some teachers believed that they lacked training in cultural content or diversity and expressed having culture shock in certain school settings. Teachers were intentional in not wanting to make students uncomfortable when culture was discussed in the classroom. Some teachers admitted having no plan or not being prepared to have conversations about culture.

Research indicated that teachers must feel comfortable modifying, restructuring, transforming, adapting, revising, or adjusting their teaching practices and curriculum in ways that will support all students in reaching academic success (Banks, 2004; Gay,

2000). One participant explained their experiences at work in an environment where the students spoke Spanish. The teacher said, “I had never been trained on having students that only spoke Spanish, and so then it was like what am I supposed to do?” (Interviewee Four, 2018). Another participant expressed difficulty in talking about culture in the classroom. They expressed, “It's hard to have conversations about culture and approach it without them feeling like I'm just singling them out” (Focus Group, 2018).

Another point of view alluded to the comfort level of the student. The participant said, “Talking about culture might make some kids feel really uncomfortable” (Focus Group, 2018). Although the participants want to have conversations about culture, they don't always know a proper approach. One participant stated, “We want to have those conversations, but, um, you know, don't necessarily have a plan in place to how we're gonna get there” (Focus Group). The researcher viewed the responses within this theme as potential information to answer the primary research question regarding teacher sense of agency. This information also assisted in answering research questions regarding teacher preparation. This feedback also addressed the area of professional development for teachers on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that is raised by the fourth research question.

Student life experience. This purposeful sample of teachers believed that engaging the students in conversation helps to bring out details about students' lived experiences and backgrounds. The teachers placed value on allowing students to express themselves in the classroom. Teachers were intentional about recognizing differences and being sensitive to those differences. They expressed the importance of connecting to the student's real life and how they live at home. Research supported the idea of placing

value on the lived experiences of students and used them as a resource in the classroom (Saathoff, 2017; Milner, 2014; Glover & Harris, 2016; Nieto & Bode, 2008, Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, & Rhodes, 2009). One participant spoke about blending student goals with their experiences. They said:

Because what I'm doing is more specific to individual goals and then it kinda works in the student goals, so you have to understand kids. So, you're blending all of that to try to bring in experiences they have. And then maybe from the reading, we draw in, you know, what culture that might have been or diversities (Interviewee Three, 2018).

One participant shared how they create activities that require students to share their experiences: "We have ways that they – you know, they share, they bring in sharing, they do mystery things, they bring All About Me, things about their families. I ask the families to fill out things at the beginning of the year to tell me special things about them" (Interviewee Four, 2018). Another participant refers to simple conversations they have with their students: "I engage in conversations with the kids explaining kind of, you know, their child's background, their history, or these are some of the ideas that I know about their cultures" (Focus Group, 2018). Another technique that was shared involved having students write about themselves. The participant said, "And, the writing, like the curriculum seems like, especially when the students – if we write like small moments stories, narratives about themselves" (Focus Group, 2018). From this emerging theme, information assisted in answering the primary research question focusing on teachers' sense of agency and the second research question that highlighted building relationships.

Teacher life experience. Teachers' lived experiences emerged as the seventh theme. This purposeful sample of educators made it a priority to consider their own life experiences. They expressed that how they were raised impacts how they interact with

their students. They shared how their own life experiences helps them to build relationships with their students. This sample of teachers reflected upon their own experiences and ideas about culture and how they carefully examine those ideas when working with their students. Both Kilbourne (1988) and Schon (1987) believed that reflection on one's experience was an important method of improving and building a repertoire of professional knowledge. The notion that reflection is an important aspect of professional learning continued to emerge in literature about school improvement over the decades. For example, Grimmett, Erickson, Mackinnon, and Riecken, (1990) stated that reflective practices involve the introspection of experiences.

Participants considered their experiences growing up. One participant said, "Working with people and building relationships with people was kinda my experience. I started off going to school in Flint, you know, and I was a White kid in a Black community, for the most part." (Focus Group, 2018). One participant indicated not remembering cultural differences being prevalent in their experiences. "You know 25 years ago in college, I don't remember anything about cultural differences" (Focus Group, 2018). Another participant highlighted being mindful of his or her biases.

You're gonna have those in there, and just when you're teaching, and you have kids in your classroom, just being mindful of, kind of, your own biases or your own thoughts and just making sure that those don't project, you know, in your students. (Focus Group, 2018).

The researcher found the responses in this emerging theme to be significant and relevant to answering the primary research question on sense of agency and the third research question involving their own experiences.

School climate/culture. The purposeful sample of teachers believed that the school district is changing to meet the cultural needs of all students. They particularly talked about a district initiative called the Positivity Project and how it helps to teach students tolerance and to embrace differences. Nieto and Bode's (2008) *Pervasive Education* characteristic emphasizes an approach that permeates the entire educational experience, including school climate, physical environment, curriculum, and relationships.

The participants expressed that the school district is challenging the status quo and allowing teachers to introduce initiatives that systematically teach students that other people matter. One of those system changes involves the Positivity Project. One participant said, "The initiative that our district, um, is doing is the Positivity Project, which is, um, character strength. And we're talking about those character strengths with the students and doing one character strength per week" (Interviewee Two, 2018). Another participant acknowledged that the school district is making the Positivity Project a focus. They said, "Well, the district now – and it seems like some of the schools have already started with that positivity project, as kind of a big focus that's, you know, put in some of the qualities that each person has" (Focus Group, 2018). One participant said that the Positivity Project integrates culture. The participant said, "I do say that our Positivity Project does a really good job at integrating culture, and differences, and how to respect others" (Interviewee One, 2018). The responses and ideas presented in this emerging theme provided some answers to the second research question that inquired about school climate and culture.

Teacher adjusting practices and pedagogy. Qualitative data gathered in the focus group and interviews involved teachers adjusting their practices and pedagogy to meet students academically. This purposeful sample of teachers expressed having to make changes to meet the needs of their students so that they could be successful at school. Adjusting practices to teachers meant ensuring a variety of cultural backgrounds present in the curriculum. They believed it was necessary to ensure that they are doing things differently to support their students. According to Banks (2004), teachers must feel comfortable modifying, restructuring, transforming, adapting, revising, or adjusting their teaching practices and curriculum in ways that will support all students in reaching academic success. A critical principle of action research is for participants to become emancipated and change their instructional practices towards improvement (Mills, 2011). One participant said: “I might have to do things differently to support them, and make it more of a welcoming place, and more of a, you know, a place they’re willing to interact with” (Interview, 2018).

One participant indicated doing whatever it takes to help students learn. They said, “So, I just want everyone to learn. So, I will change anything I need to do to make them to learn” (Interviewee Five, 2018). Another participant indicated understanding different cultures as a means of changing practices. They said, “It is important for me to understand different cultures and adjusting my teaching and conversations to put understanding to action” (Focus Group, 2018). The researcher felt that the responses presented in this emerging theme spoke directly to answering the primary research question that inquired about teachers’ sense of agency.

Respecting differences. This purposeful sample of teachers expressed the

importance of being sensitive to the needs of their students. They believed that creating a safe classroom environment for students to learn is important. Additionally, understanding traditions and cultural holidays is key to making connections and respecting diversity amongst their students. The participants affirmed that having meaningful dialogue in the classroom is important in respecting and celebrating students' cultural differences. Research has highlighted approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that values cultural diversity, human rights, respect for differences, alternative life choices, social justice, equal opportunity, and equitable power distribution (Sleeter & Grant, 2006; Gollnick, 1980).

One participant spoke directly about differences with their students: "I'm always quick to say, you know every family's different, that's what makes the world a beautiful place; everybody's different, that's what makes the world a beautiful place" (Interviewee Three, 2018). Another participant expressed having conversations about differences in the classroom is often initiated by students, "If we have these conversations about cultural differences, or, you know, whether something comes up that's a stereotype, probably is something driven from the kids. You know, it's not something that I'm necessarily, you know, making a purposeful effort to teach." (Interviewee One, 2018).

Purposeful conversations are the vehicle that drives discussions around cultural differences. One participant stated, "I make it a point to talk about, you know, some of those differences" (Interviewee Three, 2018). Celebrating differences is accepted by some participants. They said, "We want to teach kids to celebrate our differences and uniqueness within our school community" (Focus Group, 2018). The researcher found the ideas represented within this theme important in addressing the primary research

question focusing on teacher sense of agency and the second research question involving building relationships.

Professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry that is now being used in school-based curriculum development, professional development, and school improvement schemes.

This approach to research actively involves teachers as participants in their own educational process (McNiff, 1997). The research study of Bishop, et al. (2009) explained that the core purposes of professional development was for teachers to provide teachers with a vicarious means of understanding how students experienced schooling in ways in which they might not otherwise have access, create critical reflection upon their own discursive positioning, and to assess what impact this might have upon their own students learning.

This purposeful sample of teachers did not have a lot of training in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. They expressed the need for more training to understand diverse student populations. One participant talked about the experience in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices: “I mean, like, we weren’t officially trained but I think I was immersed into some diversity because I did my student teaching in Flint” (Interview, 2018). Another participant expressed, “More training I think would be more specific to really understanding some of the history behind some different groups of people” (Interviewee One, 2018).

One participant reflected upon their university experience: “I went to U of M Flint, and I don't remember having any training. If I did, and I would have to be honest, it was so long ago” (Interviewee Four, 2018). Another participant also reflected upon their

college experience: “I only remember taking one class and it was, um, Classroom Management Mixed with Diversity, at Saginaw Valley” (Focus Group). The researcher noted that professional development on the culturally responsive pedagogy and practice was not robustly represented in the literature review. It also appeared that participants would be interested in learning more about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, which was reported in Cycles One and Two of the action research study. The researcher found the reflections represented within this theme helpful in answering the research question that inquired about teacher preparation programs. These findings may also assist in answering the fourth research question that explored the types of professional development in which teachers would be interested.

Reflecting stage. This level of Cycle Three comprised the final reflecting stage. The focus group and interviews provided information to shape the results and outcomes of the action research study, and these qualitative data collection techniques worked simultaneously in concluding the action plan and study. In developing the outcomes of the focus group and interviews, the researcher found it necessary to report all responses that essentially characterized the legitimacy and strength of the participants’ points of views.

Analysis in Cycle Three encompassed reflection that was valuable in providing a basis to answer the research questions and fulfilling the tangible methods of action research. The researcher learned from Cycle Three that the participants engaged in this action research study possessed a basic understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The focus group and interview data analysis conveyed that the participants were open to learning more about how to implement strategies that are culturally

responsive and meet the needs of all students. Further, that the participants would need to be exposed to subsequent professional development on the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

The emerging themes that were identified from the qualitative data led the researcher toward answers to the research questions based on the experiences of the participants and guided toward a deeper exploration and analysis of how the participants may have encountered culturally responsive pedagogical techniques as educational practitioners.

The information gathered from the emerging themes created an opportunity for reconnaissance to occur over multiple cycles. This critical principle of action research was exercised in the development and formation of concluding thoughts for the action research study and in possible ways to extend the study to include a fourth cycle of action research represented by the principles of action research. An explanation of a fourth cycle is discussed in the concluding chapter of this study.

Validity & Reliability Techniques

Member checking is an opportunity for participants to approve aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1998). It is a “way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Member checking was conducted continuously throughout the focus group and interview process by providing participants with copies of the transcripts via email and requesting additional feedback following review of the transcripts. Member checking was also conducted to consider democratic validity, which requires that the multiple perspectives of all the participants in the study have been accurately represented (Mills, 2011).

Dialogic validity was also considered. From the word dialogue, dialogic validity involves having a critical conversation with others about your research findings and practices (Mills, 2011). The researcher was purposeful in enlisting a co-contributor in various cycles of the research study. The co-contributor offered credentials as an educator and superintendent of a local school district who has conducted philanthropic work through a personal, non-profit organization, Gear Up2Lead. The co-contributor was heavily involved in working with the researcher in the data collection process of the action research study. The co-contributor was enlisted to mitigate any potential bias generated throughout the data collection process, and engaged in conversation with the researcher about the findings and practices implemented before, during, and after the action research study.

Quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were employed in this action research study. The researcher used multiple data sources to address the research questions for this study. Data was collected and triangulated using multiple methods of analysis to increase the understanding of teachers' perceived sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Data collected through a survey, focus group activity, and interviews were analyzed.

Between-method triangulation was used to collect data for this study. As explained by Senior (2011), between-method triangulation is appropriate for this study because two or more data collection tools were used to analyze the same data source. Triangulated methods of data collection increases the concurrent, convergent, and construct validity of research (Murphy, 2011). This in turn enhances the researcher's ability to imply trustworthiness of the analysis (Murphy, 2011).

Qualitative methods were used to collect data addressing the problem of practice centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices; this approach increased the researcher's understanding of participants' perspectives. The principles of triangulation helped to establish clear and concise results from the findings. Sagor (2000) suggested a triangulation matrix, a simple grid showing the various data sources used to answer each research question (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Triangulation Matrix Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Research Questions:	Data Source	Data Source	Data Source
<p>Primary Research Question:</p> <p>How do 1st-6th grade teachers in Western Community School District perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?</p>	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
<p>Subsidiary Research Questions:</p> <p>Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?</p>	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
<p>What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, culture, financial resource allocation, or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural content and enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?</p>	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
<p>How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?</p>	Teacher Survey	Focus Group	Interviews
<p>After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?</p>		Focus Group	Interviews

Chapter Summary

An analysis and findings of data derived from three iterative cycles of the iterative action research study were discussed in Chapter IV. Each cycle relied on specific action research methods that included the stages of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. Each section of Chapter IV helped to address the problem of practice, which explored the mismatch in student to teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in Western Community School District. Emphasis was shown in learning more about the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency among teachers who worked with students of diverse backgrounds. The results and analysis of data in Chapter IV provided rich responses to the primary and subsidiary research questions explored in this study. The action research approach revealed information that support concluding arguments toward answering the research questions, bring closure to the action research study, and envision future iterations of this action research study.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Summary of the Action Research Study

Action research is a call to action for practitioners who want to solve problems of practice in the workplace by using their knowledge of the scholarly literature, problem-solving skills, and ability to conduct practitioner research to improve educational practice. The researcher began the action research journey seeking answers to a problem of practice that school leaders face more frequently as schools become increasingly diverse. The increase in diverse student groups creates a cultural mismatch between teachers and their students. Cultural diversity is not a problem; rather, the researcher maintains that it is a strength when valued by all members of a learning community. Schools are powerfully positioned to draw strength from diversity when educators are prepared to learn in practice how to respond appropriately to cultural demographic shifts.

The Western Community School District was selected as the site to explore teachers' beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency regarding implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. In this school district, the demographics reflected a cultural disconnect between the instructional staff and the growing diverse student population they served. Further, understanding and supporting the needs of teachers in becoming more culturally competent is a personal and professional priority of the researcher, who is an administrator in the Western Community School District

The research questions. A primary research question and four subsidiary questions guided the action research study.

Primary research question. How do first through sixth grade teachers in a diverse school district in Mid-Michigan perceive their individual sense of agency regarding implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices?

Subsidiary research questions. The following questions addressed the problem of practice identified in the statement of the imbalance in student-to-teacher racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which may create difficulty for teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices:

1. Do teachers believe that their undergraduate programs, pre-service teacher education experiences, and student teaching experiences adequately prepared them to work with their students of diverse backgrounds?
2. What beliefs do teachers hold about how school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and/or leadership affect their ability to implement multicultural content, enact culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, and build relationships with students?
3. How do teachers describe their preparedness and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas?
4. After participating in a collaboratively designed professional development on multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, what do teachers believe are the additional types of professional development required to support them in becoming culturally responsive?

This action research study and the recommended fourth cycle of action research is illustrated in the following diagram:

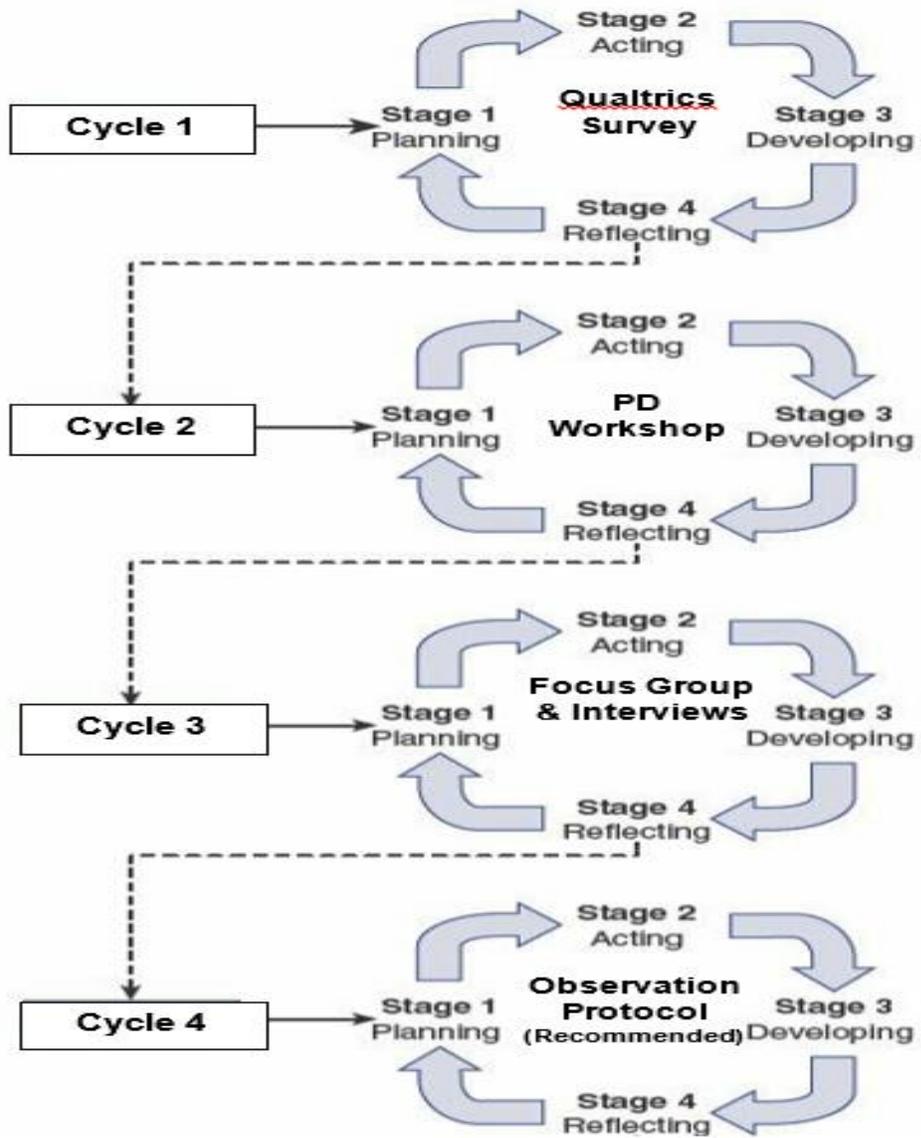


Figure 7. Four iterative cycles of action research

To answer the research questions, three iterative action research cycles which built upon one another were conducted to gain a better sense of how teachers think about and negotiate their professional obligation to meet the diverse cultural needs of students who may not reflect their own cultural identity.

Data collection methods. Three data collection techniques narrowed the pool of teacher participants and refined the focus of the information collected in each data collection cycle. Figure 8 illustrates the triangulated data collection plan to initially gather broad information from teacher participants and then become progressively more focused with responses from fewer teachers.

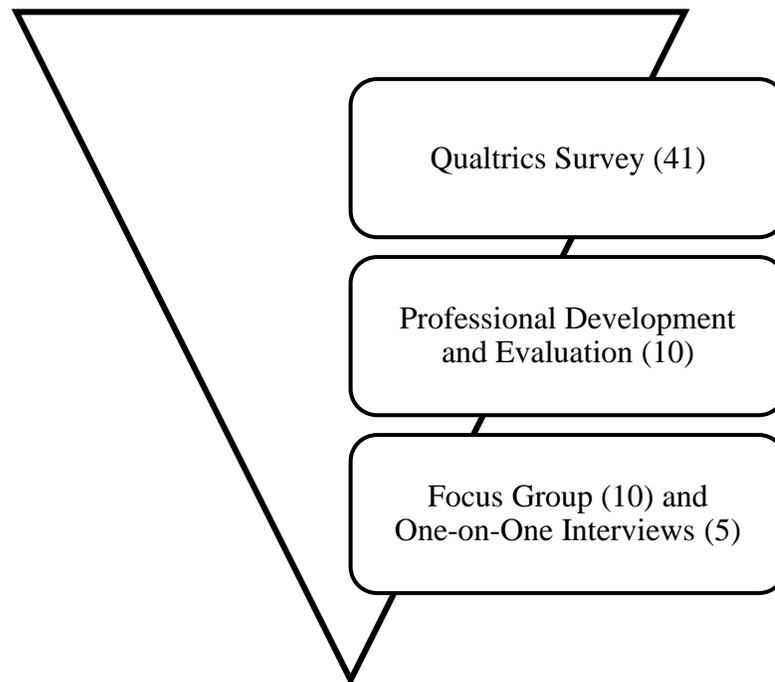


Figure 8. Triangulated data collection plan.

Data collection methods included a Qualtrics survey to gather information from 41 teachers, followed by a professional development (PD) workshop and PD evaluation with ten teachers, a focus group with ten teachers, and one-on-one interviews with five teachers. The methods were designed to engage participants in a cooperative and collaborative process framed around three iterative cycles of action research, each of which included a planning stage, acting stage, developing stage, and reflecting stage. Through a compilation of survey results, professional development, meaningful focus group discussion, and rich one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the researcher captured the beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived understandings regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of the participants.

Discussion

An open coding technique was used to categorize, label, sort, and resort data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) from transcribed narratives of the focus group and interviews to identify 11 emergent themes that were then used to analyze the findings and provide answers to the research questions for this action research study.

Importance of life experience beyond student teaching. Findings from this study suggested that teacher preparation to work with students from diverse backgrounds required experiences beyond student teaching. Some of those skills are embedded in a teacher's experiences as a child or cultural encounters they may have had throughout life. These life experiences can be the impetus for implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Information shared in some of the interviews illustrated experiences of teachers who attended diverse schools. One participant said that growing

up in an extremely diverse neighborhood provided a different experience than other people who shared his racial background. Gay (2004) expressed that teachers' experiences and their ability to care across multiple cultures assists in aligning to the domains of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Teacher preparation lacks courses on diversity or culture. Some participants in this study did not recall having courses on diversity or culture. A teacher who remembered having had one course on diversity in college, expressed that the one course certainly was not enough to prepare them to work with a wide array of students from diverse backgrounds. Another interview participant noted having no college courses about culture or diversity in their educational program of 20 years ago. For that specific group of teachers, undergraduate and pre-service student teaching experiences were limited in regard to culturally diverse content. The researcher concluded that those preparation experiences could have exposed teachers to more content on how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that have an impact on students from diverse backgrounds.

Climate is a factor in healthy schools. School climate and how it is cultivated can measure effective implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Schools that embrace a positive school climate will be able to find value in a teaching and learning environment that is focused on student success. Some researchers found that healthy school climates are those in which teachers hold positive attitudes about students, high expectations of students, and positive relationships with families (Harmon, 2012; Willis, 2003, Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Teachers in touch creates a positive learning environment. Findings of this study showed that teachers made it a priority to listen to their students and incorporate elements of their students' culture in their teaching. Positive and mindful student engagement empowers learners and positions them as actively engaged contributors in the school community. When students can share their personal stories with teachers and classmates, bridges for strong relationships are built. When teachers are in tune to their students' cultural behaviors and view those behaviors as assets, culturally responsive teaching becomes more aligned with the students' learning styles and needs (Harmon, 2012). Richards et al. (2007) suggested that "teachers must create a classroom culture where all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed and supported and provided with the best opportunity to learn which displays culturally responsive pedagogy and practices" (p. 64). According to Gay (2004), one of the domains of Equity Pedagogy is teachers creating classroom climates and learning environments that reflect pluralism.

District support with positivity project. Participants in this action research study said that they believed their overall school culture and climate coupled with support from district leaders supported the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. A major finding from the interviews showed that teachers believed that Western Community School District was moving in the right direction through a character education program entitled Positivity Project.

The positivity project teaches students how to treat people by understanding 24 character traits. A new character trait is introduced weekly, and students engage in related activities. One participant felt that the positivity project helped to break down

barriers of cultural differences and encouraged students to be open-minded and to treat each other with respect and kindness. Another participant stated the following: “I think the positivity project is going to be huge; just having the conversations, students might be able to identify more of their own personal beliefs that they never even thought about before” (personal interview, 2018). The positivity project seemed to be an initiative the teachers believed could restructure institutionalized practices to create access for all students.

An aspect of school climate that resonated with the participants in this study was building healthy and positive relationships with their students. Survey, focus group, and interview results showed that building positive relationships with students and their families was a priority for this group of teachers. Participants noted the impact that positive relationships can have with students and explained how they go about making those connections.

Teachers talked about how investing the time to get to know students is a key element to building strong, positive relationships. One participant shared during interviews, that ensuring students feel comfortable and safe in class is a good way to foster healthy relationships. Teachers expressed a genuine love and concern for their students regardless of the students’ cultural background. Teachers also showed an interest in the lives of their students outside of the school setting by home visits or attending extra-curricular activities like sporting and social events involving students.

Cultural relevancy of the curriculum. Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) explained that to reduce the achievement gap of students of color, some researchers have explored the cultural relevancy of the curriculum in promoting student achievement.

Scholars argue that a cultural mismatch or lack of cultural sync may occur when students of diverse backgrounds do not see themselves in the curriculum and have frequent experiences in which their cultural behavior is not honored or accepted (Irvine-Jordan, 1991; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011, Banks & Banks, 1995). Banks and Banks (1995), for example, argued that all students and teachers can bridge this cultural disconnect and rise to meet these current challenges through culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy; thus, infusing cultural perspectives into the curriculum may increase educational equity for all students and address the growing cultural gap between teachers and students.

This researcher supports the idea of teachers implementing a well-balanced curriculum that includes cultural diversity. Findings of this action research study indicated that the participants are intentional about utilizing curriculum that supports the students in their classrooms and reflects their cultural backgrounds. The researcher believes that when teachers are proactive and intentional about selecting a wide array of diverse instructional materials, they are becoming more culturally competent with their students.

Participants conveyed that the district-provided curriculum represented various cultures in the areas of reading, mathematics, writing, and social studies. One participant shared that she tried to incorporate curriculum content that is representative of various cultures, ethnicities, and identities. Interviewees perceived themselves to be prepared to implement content that is culturally responsive to the students they teach; however, teachers were cautious when attempting to implement these strategies to avoid embarrassing or pointing out diverse student groups. The teachers acknowledged that

time must be dedicated to building relationships with students to be able to teach in a culturally responsive manner,. Scholarly work indicates that relationships and trust are central to culturally responsive teaching practices (Bonner, 2014).

Building positive relationships. Studies have shown that teachers first working on making connections with students to build relationships largely relied on gaining knowledge about students and communicating in culturally connected ways (Bonner, 2014, Gay, 2010, Nieto, 2008). This research maintained the practice of teachers investing in their students by systematically making cultural connections through instructional practices leading to academic success in multiple areas. The researcher asserts that no matter what the content is that teachers are responsible for teaching, they must take the necessary steps to build positive relationships with their students.

It cannot be assumed that teachers entering the teaching profession fully understand the cultural needs of their students. Many students enter school with varying backgrounds and experiences that are not always aligned with those of their teachers. Achieving equity in diverse schools is a global challenge, and educational disparity takes on different forms depending on the context (Savage et al., 2011). Providing professional development for teachers who work with students of diverse backgrounds might be an important step in the process of reaching all learners.

Professional development is key to culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The researcher has concluded that for teachers to recognize and reach students' personal and cultural strengths, they must contextualize instruction in cultural forms, behaviors, and processes of learning familiar to students. These skills are not always overtly present in teachers' instructional practices, and teachers may not be

equipped with the knowledge of how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts students' learning.

Participants interviewed shared that they rarely have been involved in professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The literature review for this action research study gave examples of how teachers who attend professional development on culture and diversity have a better understanding of the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. The focus of most powerful professional development activities include collaborative networking including students, families, principals, and teachers. This type of collaborative networking accounts for establishing caring and positive relationships amongst all individuals involved in the learning process. Although professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices seemed to be lacking amongst the participants, they were open to the idea of learning more about cultural competence and engaging in professional development activities that could equip them for working with students from a wide array of cultural backgrounds.

Implications

Views about teachers' sense of agency. The researcher sought to determine how the findings of this action research study were meaningful for addressing how teachers viewed their sense of agency regarding the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and to understand how implications from the study directly impacted participants. Sense of agency was defined in this study as the feeling of control over actions and their consequences (Frontiers in Psychology, 2016). The findings communicated that the sample of teachers believed that they had control over their actions when working with students from diverse backgrounds. Finding showed that

participants were intentional in building relationships with students, acknowledging and respecting cultural differences, and in considering the background and lived experiences of their students. It appeared that this group of teachers possessed a sense of agency that aligned with understanding and practicing the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Views on teacher preparation. The first subsidiary research question explored participants' views on whether their teacher preparation and preservice educational experiences prepared them to teach diverse student populations. The findings revealed that participants had little to no exposure, experiences, or classes that prepared them to work with diverse student groups, although the participants' professional work and life experiences required them to understand the culture of their students. The teachers did not feel that their undergraduate or student teaching experiences were enough to understand diverse student populations or how to teach them. The life and work experiences of this group of teachers exposed them to student populations to whom they would need to connect and teach.

Views about school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and leadership. The second subsidiary research question inquired about the beliefs held by participants about school climate, school culture, financial resource allocation, and leadership and how those factors affected their ability to implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices and build relationships with students? Findings showed that teachers' beliefs about the factors listed in this research question were positive and reflected an environment that welcomed culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Further, teachers reported that school building and district leadership initiatives aimed to

disrupt status quo educational norms, giving the example of school district financial commitments to evolutionary programs such as the positivity project, which teaches respect of others and that all people matter. The participants valued building relationships with their students and understanding their backgrounds; connecting with families was equally important in building long lasting positive relationships.

Views about teachers' preparation and experience. The third subsidiary research question involved teachers' preparation and experiences implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in various content areas. This group of teachers reported cultural diversity in reading, math, social studies, and writing curriculums. They also described experiences that involved their intentionality, including diverse student groups in their instruction. Some content areas, such as math were very intentional in integrating unique student names and other indicators of diversity in instructional materials. The teachers seemed to be well equipped and prepared to introduce and implement culturally responsive pedagogy and practices using the district- provided instructional program and their own personal resources.

Views about professional development. The last subsidiary research question gauged the teachers interest in additional types of professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that could support their work with diverse student groups. Findings indicated that professional development experiences about culturally responsive pedagogy and practicing was not robust amongst the participants. Many of the participants had not participated in professional development that focused on a recognition of students' cultural differences and how those differences might impact their learning. Although professional development on the topic of this study was not prevalent

amongst participants, the findings led to the conclusion that teachers would be open to learning more about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

The professional development activity included in this study was the beginning of steps to create a dialogue that will need to continue to promote culturally responsive pedagogy and practice for all educators. Findings confirmed that the participants would be interested in workshops, trainings, and professional development on this topic to become more culturally responsive.

The transformative data collection exercises including the survey, focus group, and interviews in this study engaged teachers to challenge themselves and current instructional practices. In addition to the means of gathering information for analysis, the data collection tools in this study offered participants an opportunity to reflect about the status of cultural competency in their practice. The professional development activity had the most impactful effect, as participants engaged in conversation with colleagues, learned new content about cultural responsiveness, and ultimately reflected on how the experience might precipitate change in their instructional practices.

Limitations and Delimitations

Elements over which the researcher has no control limit any research study and may include time, financial resources, and access to participants and venue as well as assumptions regarding the validity and accuracy of the theory, methods, and instruments that are the foundation of the design of the study. A specific timeline with strict deadlines was a limitation to this study. Given more time, participants could have engaged in the stages of action research more extensively. With a larger budget, potentially more participation could have been generated through initial recruitment to

participate in the study. Limitations identify those factors that may produce potential weaknesses in the study. Value of data collected by self-reporting participants depends on the assumption that respondents provided truthful, unbiased information.

Delimitations are boundaries, parameters, exceptions, and qualifications determined by the researcher (Castetter & Heisler, 1977). Delimitations identified for this study included the target group of elementary teachers in first through sixth grades. The research sample did not include students or parents. The participants represented a small sample of teachers in the greater educational field and their dispositions and beliefs on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices may not be reflective of all teachers within the school district. The teachers, the central source of data for this study and upon whom the study was intentionally focused, were honest, open, and receptive to the process.

The size of the sample of participants in this action research study may have limited the data collection process. Given the sample that was used for this study, information shared may have been more linear as opposed to assorted and varied. Observational data were not used as a data collection source. Survey focus group and interview data were the primary data sources used for this action research study; more time would have allowed for collecting observations of teachers as they implemented and carried out their pedagogical practices in the classroom. Considering the identified limitations and delimitations to this the action research leads to questions and ideas for potential future study around the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Recommendations of Further Study

Conducting action research is a process that requires planning, engagement, collaboration, implementation, reflection, and ultimately transformation. The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' beliefs, perspectives, dispositions, instructional competencies, and perceived sense of agency regarding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. The teachers demonstrated through their participation in the study that they can explore, reflect, control, and guide their instructional practices so that they may meet the needs of all students including those of diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Lack of observational data was identified as a limitation in the present study. A recommendation for future study would be to collect observational data in the action research study in the same setting. One way to extend this study would be to follow Mertler's (2017) concept to engage the purposeful sample of teachers in a fourth cycle of classroom observations. The fourth cycle would recommended stages of action research which includes planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. In the first stage a checklist of culturally responsive principles to be identifiable in the classroom would be developed. The emergent themes in cycle three would be reviewed to assist with developing the checklist. The literature review outlined in Chapter 2 would be a guide in developing the checklist of no more than 15 items, with particular emphasis on aspects of information regarding content integration, equity pedagogy, curriculum desegregation and critical pedagogy (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2004; Nieto, 2008).

A participation protocol that outlined the purpose of the classroom observations would be shared to solicit volunteers with acquire potential participants. In the acting stage of cycle four, classroom observations of available participants would be conducted.

An opportune time for the observations might be in the late fall after teachers have established their instructional routines and protocols for the school year.

After collection of observational data, the developing stage of analysis and interpretation of results would begin. In the analysis, findings of the classroom observations might help to determine whether additional cycles might be necessary. The last stage would involve reflection. At the reflection stage in the fourth cycle, an evaluation could determine if the additional cycle served the purpose of identifying culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in the classroom. Findings within this cycle could implement steps in providing further support to teachers through additional training and professional development.

Adding a fourth cycle could potentially mean creating additional research questions. The researcher might consider creating a research question that explores how teachers react to feedback provided by administrators through observations. Because time was identified as a limitation in the present study, future research may extend study to two fiscal school years, giving sufficient time for the researcher to conduct multiple classroom observations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter comprised a review of the process employed in the conduct of this action research study, discussion of findings related to the research questions, limitations, and recommendations for further study. The complexity of engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy and practices was discussed, and findings indicated that successful implementation is impacted by the lived experiences of teachers, lived experiences of students, and the relationships that are developed between the two. The transforming

process includes recognition of the lived experiences of teachers and students, and with engagement, action, and reflection, teachers might explore their practices in an intentional and ongoing manner. The process of understanding culturally responsive pedagogy and practices is multifaceted; however, effective culturally responsive pedagogy and practices are attainable, as teachers work to address the cultural gap that may exist between them and the students they serve.

As a school leader, the researcher believes that taking action is an important commitment in addressing problems that exist in schools. Based on findings from the action research study, it is apparent that teachers need to be supported in learning how to work effectively with all students, especially those from diverse backgrounds. Actions resulting from this study includes providing professional development activities by which teachers can further their knowledge on cultural competence and continuing school district-support of programs that engage teachers on improving cultural awareness and positive school climate. The researcher plans to ensure that school district leaders are aware of the cultural gap that exists in schools and particularly the cultural gap within Western Community School District. The hope will be to create a shift in mindsets to improve the way educators think about cultural responsiveness to the realities facing educators regarding diversity, race and the cultural differences represented by student populations.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: IRB Authorization Letter

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00133321]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Title: An Action Research Study. First Responders: Elementary Teachers' Perception of Their Personal/Professional Agency to Utilize Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Full Study Title (if applicable): An Action Research Study. First Responders: Elementary Teachers' Perception of Their Personal/Professional Agency to Utilize Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Study eResearch ID: [HUM00133321](#)

Date of this Notification from IRB: 7/27/2017

Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 7/27/2017

UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the [UM HRPP Webpage](#))

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000248

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:

The IRB Flint has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION #1 of the 45 CFR 46.101.(b):

Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:

You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:

Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

Marianne McGrath

Chair, IRB Flint

Appendix B: Research Participation Letter

Dear Elementary School Teacher,

You are invited to participate in an action research project that explores how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades. This research project is part of my doctoral dissertation being obtained from The University of Michigan-Flint.

Part of your participation involves completing a 5-10 minute survey questionnaire. Within the survey description you will be asked if you are willing to participate in a focus group activity by emailing the researcher your information at jhagens06@gmail.com. If you agree to participate in the focus group activity you will be asked to complete a written informed consent form. You will be contacted by the researcher via email with a time and location for the focus group activity. Available participants from the focus group will be asked to participate in interviews. Interview participants will be asked to complete a written informed consent form as well.

The goal of the focus group activity is to have ten to fifteen participants from each elementary building. The goal of the interviews is to have no more than eight participants involving two teachers from each elementary building.

The results of this project will be used in my doctoral dissertation that is examining how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades. Through your participation, I hope to build capacity and gain a deeper understanding around why there might exist a specific need for increased implementations of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices in elementary school classrooms.

Additionally, the dissemination of results will be through the dissertation and any related professional publications or presentations. No identifiable information will be shared. Participants may discontinue involvement at any time. All of your survey answers are confidential and guaranteed not to be identified with you personally. If you choose to be interviewed, I will conduct and transcribe the interviews. The interviews will be recorded on an audio device to enhance accuracy. When the interview is transcribed, the recording will be destroyed. Likewise, survey results will be destroyed after the results are complete. The informed consent form, with your real name, will not be matched with the data, and your participation will be kept confidential.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no penalty if you do not participate. To receive a summary of the results, e-mail jhagens06@gmail.com.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, you may contact me at jhagens06@gmail.com or (313) 418-9804. You may also contact The University of Michigan-Flint for any questions regarding the consent agreement and research protocol approval procedures:

Dr. Pamela Ross, University of Michigan – Flint, School of Education and Human Services,
Education Department, (810) 762-3260, rosspam@umflint.edu

Appendix C: Survey

- Q1. I recognize and value the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.
- Q2. I am knowledgeable of the various cultures represented by the students in my classroom.
- Q3. I recognize and consider my own cultural influences and how they affect the way I communicate my expectations and how I teach.
- Q4. My classroom is decorated in a way that represents multiple cultures and global awareness.
- Q5. The curriculum that I teach incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities.
- Q6. I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultures and experiences.
- Q7. I help students to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of my teaching.
- Q8. I implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups.
- Q9. I communicate with the parents of my students in positive ways, not just when there is a problem.
- Q10. I make an effort to educate families about our school district.
- Q11. I build strong, positive working relationships with the parents of my students.
- Q12. I know my students and build strong working relationships with them.
- Q13. I make connections with my students outside of school and support them during extra-curricular activities beyond school hours.
- Q14. Creating a sense of community in my classroom is key to student success.
- Q15. I modify my teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students.
- Q16. I am emotionally concerned about racial inequality.
- Q17. Culturally responsive teaching contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem of all culturally diverse students.

- Q18. Regardless of cultural differences, all children learn from the same teaching method.
- Q19. Culturally responsive practice is essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment.
- Q20. Regardless of cultural differences, using the same reading materials is an effective way to ensure equal access for all children in the classroom.
- Q21. Encouraging respect for cultural diversity is essential to create an inclusive classroom.
- Q22. Inclusion of literature from different cultural groups develops tolerance among children.
- Q23. Children learn better when teachers are sensitive to home and school cultural differences.
- Q24. A positive teacher-student relationship can be established by building a sense of trust in my students.
- Q25. My undergraduate and student teaching experiences prepared me to work with students from all cultural backgrounds.
- Q26. My entire school's culture is evolving with the intent to restructure institutionalized practices to create access for all groups.
- Q27. I have participated in professional development centered on culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.
- Q28. I make an effort to implement culturally responsive lessons across all subjects that I teach.
- Q29. I want to learn more about culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.

Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form

Dear Focus Group Participant,

I am conducting an action research study to determine how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades. The study will consist of six to eight focus group questions.

The activity should take approximately 1 hour to complete. For this research study, I would like to use your verbal responses as data for my dissertation. The research study will also provide me an opportunity to reflect on my own views, knowledge, and experience. This data will only be towards collecting information to complete my dissertation.

The focus group activity will be audio-recorded. Individual results of this activity will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form. Pseudonyms will be used in any reports of this study and neither the school district nor the individual participants will be identified.

I anticipate this study will benefit you, in the short and long-term, by helping you to explore your own ideas, notions, and philosophies around culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Through your participation in this study you will be afforded the opportunity to dialogue with other educators and peers who share the experience of working with students of diverse backgrounds.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Because this is a group discussion, your discussion is being communicated and shared with other people making it possible for conversation to be taken out of the meeting. Therefore, in order to enhance confidentiality for all participants, it is important that you understand that as a participant you will be agreeing not to discuss identity and content with people not present. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting me at 313 418-9804 or jhagens06@gmail.com.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, you may contact me at

jhagens06@gmail.com or (313) 418-9804. You may also contact The University of Michigan-Flint for any questions regarding the consent agreement and research protocol approval procedures:

Dr. Pamela Ross, University of Michigan – Flint, School of Education and Human Services, Education Department, (810) 762-3260, rosspam@umflint.edu

Thank you for your consideration,

John Hagens Jr.

By signing below, I hereby consent to participate in the research study and focus group activity on how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades and allow the use of my responses for the study data.

Please Print Your Name	Signature	Date
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Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Discussion Prompts

1. Tell me how the curriculum you teach incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities?
2. Tell me how you help student to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of your teachings?
3. Tell me how you implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups and to improve intergroup relations?
4. Tell me how you modify your teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students?
5. Describe how your entire school culture and school climate is evolving with the intent to restructure institutionalized practices to create access for all groups?
6. Tell me how you get to know students who represent a different culture than your own?
7. Tell me about any professional development training that you have participate in centered on diversity either in your current role as a teacher or in your student teaching experiences.
8. Tell me how you might incorporate strategies learned from the professional development activity on diversity into you daily instruction with students?
9. What would you like to contribute to the topic of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices that has not been covered?

Appendix F: Interview Consent Form

Dear Interviewee,

I am conducting an action research study to determine how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades. The study will consist of 18 interview questions. The interview should take approximately 1 hour to complete. For the purpose of this research study, I would like to use your verbal responses as data for my dissertation. The research study will also provide me an opportunity to reflect on my own views, knowledge and experience. This data will only be used towards collecting information to complete my dissertation. The interview will be audio-recorded. Individual results of this interview will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form. Pseudonyms will be used in any reports of this study and neither the school district nor the individual participants will be identified.

I anticipate this study will benefit you, in the short and long-term, by helping you to explore your own ideas, notions, and philosophies around culturally responsive pedagogy and practices. Through your participation in this study you will be afforded the opportunity to dialogue with other educators and peers who share the experience of working with students of diverse backgrounds.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. This interview will not be communicated and shared with other people.

You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting me at 313 418-9804 or jhagens06@gmail.com.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, you may contact me at jhagens06@gmail.com or (313) 418-9804. You may also contact The University of Michigan-Flint for any questions regarding the consent agreement and research protocol approval procedures:

Dr. Pamela Ross, University of Michigan – Flint, School of Education and Human Services, Education Department, (810) 762-3260, rosspam@umflint.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

John Hagens Jr.

By signing below, I hereby consent to participate in the research study and interview on how culturally responsive pedagogy and practices impacts teachers teaching 1st – 6th grades and allow the use of my responses for the study data. _

Please Print Your Name

Signature

Date

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your past educational experiences as a student growing up?
2. How do your experiences as a learner impact your experience with your students as a teacher?
3. How many years have you taught? Briefly describe your teaching experiences?
4. What is your philosophy of teaching?
5. Did you receive any diversity training or multicultural training in your pre-service teaching program? If so, please describe the experiences?
6. When you're lesson planning, how do you lesson plan to respect the cultural or learning differences, with your students?
7. How do you build upon students' prior knowledge, experiences and or cultural backgrounds in your teaching?
8. Tell me how the curriculum you teach incorporates content from various cultures, ethnicities, and other identities?
9. Tell me how you help student to understand, investigate, and determine the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference and perspectives of your teachings?
10. Tell me how you implement lessons that assert positive images of ethnic groups and to improve intergroup relations?
11. Tell me how you modify your teaching style and approaches with the intent of facilitating achievement for all students?
12. Describe how your entire school culture is evolving with the intent to restructure institutionalize practices to create access for all groups?
13. How do you feel you develop a sense of caring or relationships with your students?
14. How do you involve life experiences of the students in your classroom?
15. What tends to motivate your students to learn?
16. What professional development trainings have you received as a teacher to work with students of diverse backgrounds? What types of professional development would you like to receive to prepare you in becoming more culturally responsive?
17. How have you implemented strategies learned from the professional development activity? And How have you monitored the implementation of these strategies
18. Do you have any questions for me?