

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS:
AN EXPLORATION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

by

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DEDICATION

To all culturally and linguistically diverse students with and without dis/abilities you are enough
and your culture matters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey is a collective marathon made possible by the support of my amazing village who have cheered me on, given feedback, and run alongside me. My village is vast including but not limited to my husband Ron, son Ronald, mother, Dorothy, and best friend Ebony, whose support is beyond measure. My #TeamGetFinishEdD classmates, Kendra, Mercedes, Lori, and Nikki, have weathered the highs and lows of the doctoral journey with me. While my committee has invested in and encouraged me. There are also countless others, too numerous to name, whose contribution has mattered. Truly it is a blessing to arrive at this space and realize my ancestors' dreams for me. I am sincerely thankful to God and the earthly support received, that contributed to making my Doctor of Education dream a reality.

ABSTRACT

General education and special education students in American P-12 schools are becoming increasingly more diverse as racial/ethnic group representation expands. However, the teaching staff remains predominantly white, female, and middle-class. Since its inception, special education has served as a strategic service continuum to support improved outcomes for students with dis/abilities with high-leverage practices setting the gold standard. However, evolution is necessary as students' needs evolve, like the changing demographics. An approach incorporating culture is vital to appropriately addressing the cultural mismatches plaguing P-12 special education classrooms. Culturally responsive pedagogy is the right innovation. It is a strategic approach to mitigate achievement disparities linked to staff and student racial/ethnic differences. Interestingly, despite special education and culturally responsive pedagogy's promotion of student achievement, limited research exists on their nexus. This multiple case study acknowledged the gap in research. It explored how special education teachers described their utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy and its overlap with high-leverage practices in special education using a DisCrit theoretical framework.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Special Education, Diverse Learners, Dis/abilities

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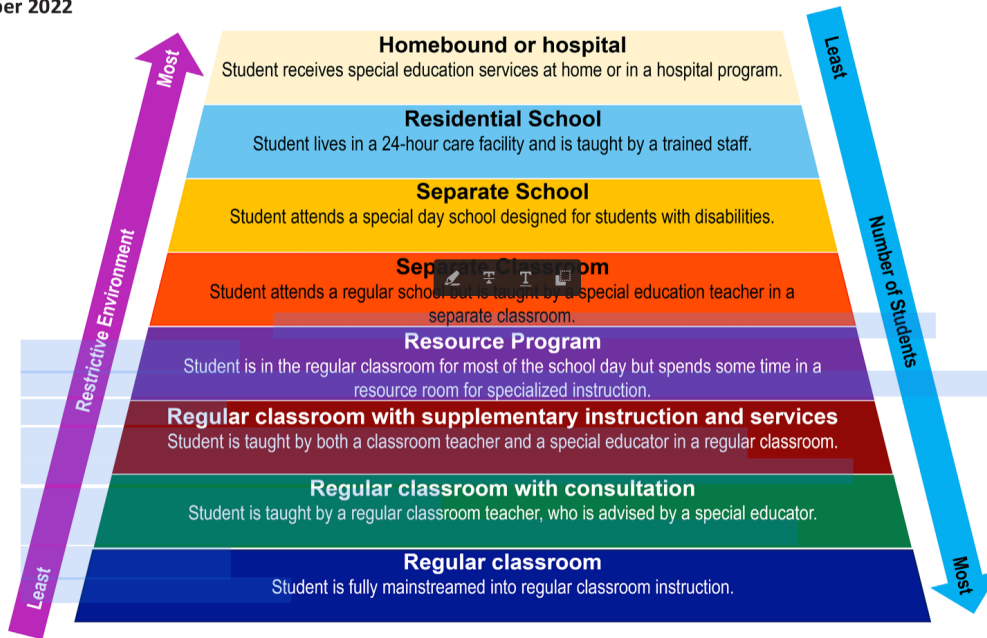
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Figure 1



Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Continuum

Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education
October 2022



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This multiple case study explored the utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education practices as implemented by special education teachers in elementary and secondary public-school classrooms for students with dis/abilities. The introduction chapter consists of five sections beginning with the Summary of the Problem Statement and Research Questions, and Purpose of the Study. It concludes with the Study's Significance, Rationales, and Key Definitions.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The student body demographics within P-12 public education continue to increase in its diversity within general education and special education classrooms (US Department of Education, 2019). However, the teaching staff has remained white, middle-class, women (Special education teacher demographics, 2021). Culturally responsive pedagogy emerged to mitigate the adverse effects of the racial disparity between staff and students. At the same time, special education serves as a system of services and supports for students with dis/abilities through the delivery of specially designed instruction to address gaps in achievement for P-12 students (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). However, culturally and linguistically diverse students are overrepresented in special education programs. According to the US Department of Special Education, culturally and linguistically diverse students account for sixty-five percent of program membership (Office of Special Education Programs and Rehabilitation Services, 2021). This incongruity between the student body and educators can negatively impact student outcomes (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012).

The cultural mismatch is amplified by institutional racism and ableism, which pervade American public elementary and secondary schools. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an

approach that disrupts oppressive school paradigms, embraces whole students' identities, and fosters improved success. Significant research has been devoted to studying culturally responsive pedagogy and special education and their effect on student outcomes (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Powell et al., 2016). Previous culturally responsive pedagogy research has primarily focused on teacher preparation and general education classrooms (Gay, 2010; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Scott et al., 2017; Sharma & Lazar, 2019). Special education research involving diverse students with dis/abilities has focused on racial-ethnic groups' disproportionate representation (Shealey et al., 2011). Limited study is devoted to culturally responsive pedagogy implementation in special education classrooms by current and seasoned practitioners, with the majority focusing more on pre-service training or perceived efficacy of culturally responsive strategies (Scott et al., 2014; Barrio, 2020; Chu, 2011). This gap persists despite special education programming objectives, culturally and linguistically diverse representation, and the positive effects of culturally responsive pedagogy (Farkas et al., 2020; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Kavale et al., 1999; Martin, 2022; McLeskey et al., 2017; Riccomini et al., 2017). Given special education student demographics, it was appropriate to explore the phenomenon for which these strategic delivery systems intersect within special education settings. In this study, I explored the reported implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices within special education classrooms to create a framework for understanding their typical execution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore how culturally responsive pedagogy and special education practices coexist within public elementary and secondary special education classrooms for students with dis/abilities. This study deepened phenomenon

knowledge by gathering current practitioner data, then, formulating a snapshot of the patterns and typical understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation in special education practices within its bounded cases. The characteristics that bound the case were elementary or secondary public-school special education teachers in diverse, urban districts with at least one twenty minute in-person session/class per day during which students with dis/abilities were instructed. Using this bounded case, the study examined practicing teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy usage within special education practices for their students. The study's phenomenon is defined as the self-reported practices of special education teachers aligned with culturally responsive standards for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities in special education classrooms within the context of high-leverage practices in special education. The literature gap for culturally responsive pedagogy research within current special education classrooms created a void in understanding how culturally responsive pedagogy manifests in special education practice. This study added to the understanding of this phenomenon.

A disproportionate number of students with dis/abilities that receive special education services and supports are from racial/ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The purpose of special education programming is to mitigate achievement disparities between students with dis/abilities (often the neediest portion of the student body) and their peers (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). It adds a layer of service(s) on top of typical instruction within the general education setting. Most individuals responsible for providing special education and general education services do not culturally represent their students, as they are disproportionately white, middle-class women (Special education teacher demographics, 2021). Research has demonstrated that white, middle-class women frequently report having little or no

experience with or knowledge of diverse settings resulting in decreased expectations and cultural misunderstandings (Clayton, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2018; Special education teacher demographics, 2021; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Culturally responsive pedagogy research emerged to find ways to address the cultural incongruence between teaching staff and students (Ladson-Billings, 1992;1995).

It has resulted in an approach to remedy the negative impact this disparity can have on student outcomes. Despite the ongoing diversification of the student body and the overrepresentation of racial/ethnic groups in special education, research has not demonstrated how or if students with dis/abilities are receiving culturally responsive pedagogy within their classrooms (Shealey et al., 2018). Based on the separate culturally responsive pedagogy and special education research, culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities should benefit from programming that elevates their cultural backgrounds and dis/abilities. However, the research gap regarding their intersection is an obstacle to examining the phenomenon to evaluate its positive or negative impact on student outcomes, as most investigations involving it in special education have focused on evaluation frameworks, culturally and linguistically diverse student disproportionality, efficacy, and teacher education (Chen & Lindo, 2018; Chu & Garcia, 2018; Scott, 2017; Shealey et al., 2018). Exploring this phenomenon served to create a deeper understanding of how these two strategic approaches operate and encourage future studies regarding support(s) for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities in special education classrooms.

Study Limitations

Limitations are those elements that may occur beyond the researcher's control. The goal was to have at least fifteen survey participants, with up to 10 agreeing to participate in one of

two focus groups (elementary and secondary) and individual interviews. The number of survey respondents was limited by individuals choosing to complete it. A larger sample would generate a greater base from which to select interview and focus group participants. Insufficient participation resulted in expanding the geographic boundaries without altering the research design. Additionally, the sample size also limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized across the field of education. Moreover, neither the demographic or interview questions solicited the extent to which participants may have received culturally responsive professional learning opportunities. The absence of these questions impacted this researchers' ability to effectively qualify the reported special education teacher culturally responsive practices.

Study Delimitations

Regardless of design, research pursuits are subject to limitations and delimitations. The delimitations are elements enlisted by the researcher to support effective study execution. This body of work is a multiple case study that relied upon survey data, interviews, and focus groups. Sample size and setting were the first initial delimitations of this study. The researcher selected diverse urban Michigan public school districts. Participation was limited to full-time certified special education teachers with their own elementary or secondary classroom and caseload. Co-teaching settings were excluded because of the complexity it would have added to the study. The five different instructional delivery models of co-teaching and the varying dynamics present between teaching partners would have added too many factors to sort through, analyze, and synthesize data. The participant criteria were created to ensure that study membership included individuals that could serve as key informants on the phenomena. Given the criteria, more than forty special education teachers received an adaptation of Siwatu's (2007) survey, *The Culturally*

Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale. The survey explored teacher perceptions and included demographic questions. Participant bias was also a limit of this self-report instrument that could not be eliminated. A maximum of three groups with three to five participants for focus group composition and eight individual interviews are delimitations set to ensure the manageability of multiple case study data. Another delimitation is the restriction of study data to respondents who complete the survey and agree to focus group and interview participation.

Key Definitions

Some key definitions were necessary to understand the exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy and special education practices overlap within special education classrooms for students with dis/abilities. First, culturally and linguistically diverse refers to individuals whose group membership or identification differs from the dominant language, ethnic, racial, or culture. In this study, it is reserved for nonwhite students and or those students whose first language is not English. Intersectionality is referenced throughout this study. It is the interrelating or intersecting of socially constructed identities in relation to systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2013). The term culture is also essential to this research because it stands at the foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy. It is the collection of practices and philosophies shared among members of a specific group that sets them apart from others (Lindsey et al., 2019). Understanding this concept is essential because culture is intertwined with everything practitioners and students experience (Lindsey et al., 2019). The perpetuation of dominant (white/Eurocentric) culture necessitates the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy to shape school environments and instruction to be inclusive of individuals from nondominant cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Moreover, it is also important to know that culturally relevant pedagogy is the basis for culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy consists of three components, "academic achievement or student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 4)." The learning/achievement within its definition does not rest solely upon standardized tests but an intentional, holistic acknowledgment of stakeholders of all student growth (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Cultural competence rests upon a continuum that requires educators to move beyond,

Cultural Destructiveness-Seeking to eliminate the cultures of others in all aspects of the school and in relationship to the community served; Cultural Incapacity-Trivializing and stereotyping other cultures; seeking to make the cultures of others appear to be wrong or inferior to the dominant culture; Cultural Blindness-Not noticing or acknowledging the culture of others and ignoring the discrepant experiences of cultures within the school; treating everyone in the system the same way without recognizing the needs that require differentiated interaction; [toward] Cultural Precompetence-Increasing awareness of what you and the school don't know about working in diverse settings; at this level of development, you and the school are moving in a positive, constructive direction, or you are faltering, stopping, and possibly regressing; [and positioning one's practices with] Cultural Competence-[the alignment of] your personal values and behaviors and the school's policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive of cultures that are new or different from yours and the school's and enables healthy and productive interactions (Lindsey et al., 2019, p. 41).

Whereas "sociopolitical or critical consciousness" asks the culturally relevant educator, to be an agent for and an empowering instrument for reflective thought, structural changes and student advocacy (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 4).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is a strategic approach to creating, implementing, and maintaining environmental structures (policies, procedures, operations) and lesson delivery that deliberately acknowledges, celebrates and includes diverse students and families to foster increased engagement and mitigate disproportionate discipline and achievement (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Hammond (2015) offers a practical definition that it is an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching that uses cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning.

Simply put, culturally responsive teachers don't rely on the text and school policies at face value. When creating lessons, they look at the materials and standards and find ways to create authentic connections to the diverse backgrounds of their students. When those same students are homogenous, they seek ways to challenge a static view of the world, empowering them to embrace the rainbow of differences they will face beyond the school grounds. Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy asks educators to elevate their understanding of themselves and the world around them and consider the ways in which sincere partnerships can be made with families to bridge the home-school divide. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an umbrella under which equitable practices are deployed.

In addition to defining culturally responsive pedagogy and its constituent parts, understanding dis/ability is also key to this study. Nine prevailing models govern how disability is understood globally: moral and/or religious, medical, social, disability as a socially constructed phenomenon; identity, human rights, cultural, charity, economic, and limits (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Of these, the medical, social, and moral provide the greatest influence on differences in abilities and are addressed globally (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017; Goodley, 2017; Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Watson & Vehmas, 2019). The moral model espouses that a dis/ability is an act of God delivering a flaw/defect tied to a "moral lapse or sin, failure or a test of faith" (Goodley, 2017, p. 7). The medical model sees dis/ability as a "flawed tragedy isolated [to a] person(s) [and] treatable through interventions (Goodley, 2017, p. 7)." Whereas the social model espouses separating impairment from dis/ability and declares it as a socially constructed concept, that uses "social, cultural, historical, economic, relational, and political factors to disable people" (Goodley, 2017, p. 8). Impairment in the social model is defined as a physical, mental, or sensory functional limitation, while dis/ability is the inequity of opportunities to typical life activities because of "physical or social barriers" (Goodley, 2017, p. 8). This study acknowledges the models that frame perceptions of ability (Goodley, 2017). It embraces the social model and acknowledges the persistent (but evolving) use of the medical model within special education (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017; Goodley, 2017). For this purpose, it intentionally uses a "/" in the word dis/ability to honor varying abilities of individuals rejecting a deficit understanding of ability framework against a normed standard (Connor et al., 2016; Dirth & Branscombe, 2017; Retief & Letšosa, 2018).

Additionally, special education is specially designed instruction intended to meet the unique needs of students with dis/abilities bound by federal, state, and local legislation. The

federal legislation is the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). IDEA is a federal law that provides free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities and safeguards special education programming and related services. It has four parts: A (general provisions), B (assistance for all children with disabilities); C (infants and toddlers with disabilities); and D (national activities to improve the education of children with disabilities) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). However, this study only addresses kindergarten through twelfth grade as a function of part B. Part B guides the provision of free and appropriate public education for children (3 to 21) with dis/abilities within the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment refers to the inclusion of students with dis/abilities with their typically developing peers to the greatest extent permissible to facilitate access to general education (see figure 1). Students with disabilities may be eligible for special education programming under 13 areas of eligibility within a range of settings. Special education teachers who provide service within special education classrooms must be certified within one or more of the eligibility areas. Additionally, in Michigan, the Michigan Administrative Rules of Special Education (MARSE) provides state specific guidance (Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education,2016). MARSE specifically outlines timelines, defines program and services, and procedural safeguards within Michigan aligned with IDEA (Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education,2016). While regional educational service agencies regulate the practical implementation of program and services continuums within school districts.

This study focused on classroom programs that provide "elementary or secondary resource programs", "programs for students with mild cognitive impairment", and programs for students with emotional impairments" (Michigan Department of Education Office of Special

Education, 2016). Students receiving support from an elementary or secondary resource program need minimal support to access the general education curriculum, spending less than half of their day away from their general education peers. Students in programs for "mild cognitive impairment" are individuals demonstrating less than average intellectual capacity and requiring instructional support at least half of the academic day, separate from their same-age peers. While students in programs for "emotional impairment" are individuals who have presented social emotional difficulties that negatively impact their matriculation requiring instructional support at least half of the academic day, separate from their same-age peers. Students within these programs have an Individualized Education Plan, which outlines what and when services or supports will be delivered. Another critical definition is high-leverage practices. High-leverage practices are an instructional framework created by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) to foster improved outcomes for students with dis/abilities. They are considered "best practices" within special education.

The last key definition is teacher self-efficacy. Coined by Albert Bandura, Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment (American Psychological Association, 2009). Culturally responsive teacher self-efficacy refers to the degree that one believes themselves' able to execute culturally responsive pedagogy.

These terms and concepts set the stage for the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy and special education.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study and its purpose to explore the convergence of culturally responsive pedagogy and special education practices for students with dis/abilities within elementary or secondary special education classrooms. It initiated discourse on the study's problem and questions and expressed the importance. It also illuminated the research's significance to the field of education. Lastly, it defined limitations and delimitations as well as identified key study terms and concepts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities face multifaceted inequities revolving around the foundation of American P-12 education, eligibility for special education, and the pedagogical approach used to remediate skill deficits for those in special education programming. American P-12 schools never intended to support the needs of diverse learners. Boston Latin School, the oldest documented school in the United States, opened its doors in 1635 and did not provide education to nonwhites, dis/abled, or female students (Moody, 1936). American P-12 public schools were designed to prepare white male students to be productive members of society (National Education Association of the United States. Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1894). Court battles and legislation ushered in the integration of culturally and linguistically diverse students and those with dis/abilities into public schools. A concept elucidated by the fact that it was not until 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of Education* that courts decided that separate was not equal, beginning the movement toward educational equity (1954). However, it took another ten years before the 1964 Civil Rights Act mandated school desegregation (1964). Over the last sixty-eight years, schools have experienced a slow progression toward equitable structures and essentially unchanged pedagogy despite an evolving student body demographic, with 50.6 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary public schools in 2019 (United States Department of Education, 2019).

TABLE 1

Significant Legislation and Legal Precedent Supporting Equity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1954 Brown v. Board of Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Separate is inherently unequal • 1964 Civil Rights Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School Desegregation • 1965 ESEA Title I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equal Funding by Race • 1972 Title IX <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equal funding by gender • 1973 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ End of ability discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1975 IDEA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Established special education • 1982 Plier v. Doe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-citizen children entitled to education • 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reinstated Title I regulation • 2011 NCLB <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Every child should be well educated • 2015 ESSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved achievement tracking ○ Language around equitable outcomes and programming

Moreover, in 2019, student enrollment percentages comprised 47 White, 15.1 Black, 27.1 Hispanic, 5.3 Asian, .4 Pacific Islander, 1.0 Alaska Native, and 4.1 two or more races. In addition, 14.1 percent of these students received special education services (United States Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, 20 percent of students for the same year lived in poverty (United States Department of Education, 2019). These student demographic trends are expected to continue, amplifying the importance of providing equitable educational opportunities.

Despite the ongoing diversification of student body demographics, a dominant narrative that devalues and ignores differences derived from class, race, ethnicity, culture, and ability has persisted in P-12 public schools (Gay, 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This sameness ideology promotes beliefs, values, and actions based upon white American cultural standards and hinders an equitable education (Gay, 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). It fosters achievement disparities between whites and culturally and linguistically diverse students (Farkas et al., 2020; Hammond, 2007). The impact of these inequities is notable for students with dis/abilities receiving special education services, as a disproportionate number are from (52%) non-dominant racial and ethnic groups (Hammond, 2007). Yet, many strategic approaches and services are available to address achievement gaps. However, most special education research has focused on white students or the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Sinclair et al., 2018).

Researchers have identified culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework for implementing an asset-based approach to instruction, setting, and engagement to foster improved outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students. But culturally responsive pedagogy studies have concentrated on general education students and teacher preparation programs (Scott, 2017; Shealey et al., 2011). As a result, there is limited research on culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within special education settings or practices for current practitioners, creating a research gap (Shealey et al., 2011). Given the disproportionate representation of students from racial and ethnic groups within special education programming, it was just and appropriate to investigate culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within it (Annamma et al., 2012).

This chapter reviews the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy related to special education practices using a Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) theoretical lens. First, it explores Dis/Crit and its relevance to this work. Second, it defines terminology and synthesizes the literature on special education practices, racial/ethnic representation, and culturally responsive pedagogy while affirming the research problem. Finally, this chapter examines the research design used for culturally responsive pedagogy and special education teaching practice exploration.

Theoretical Framework

P-12 American public-school students are not a monolith. The intersectionality of their identities should be a factor when considering best practices to promote improved outcomes. *Group membership* is a complex social construct that affects personal identity and social relations. The assignment to one or another group has connotations tied to time, place, and specific context (Ford & Harawa, 2010). Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (Dis/Crit) addresses the identity of those who are concurrently dis/abled and culturally and linguistically diverse (Annamma, 2012; Connor et al., 2016).

DisCrit offers a lens that incorporates all identity facets to reflect individuals' experiences singularly, within groups, and in institutions (Annamma, 2012; Connor et al., 2016). Drawing upon Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory, Dis/Crit was constructed to refute the dominant narrative surrounding race and dis/ability in society (Annamma, 2012; Connor et al., 2016).

Critical Race Theory

History of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory recognizes how the social construct of racial/ethnic membership shapes the nature of society and its governing systems. It originated with the legal field in the

1970s and 1980s arising out of concern for the gap in study left by critical legal studies in its failure to address racism and racial inequity (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2019). Derrick Bell first addressed it in an article entitled, “Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation”, where he expressed concerns with the legal remedies available to clients for school desegregation; questioning the representation and remedies accessible when so many factors impacted the solution (Lovelace, 2018). Specifically, could justice be achieved when there was more than “racial balancing” at work in the inequities surrounding desegregation (Lovelace, 2018). He expanded the discourse with “Brown v. Board of Education” and interest convergence dilemma, where he asserted that racial progress was only possible when alignment happened between the interest of white society and civil rights leaders (Lovelace, 2018). The concept of “interest convergence dilemma” became a foundational component in critical race theory (Lovelace, 2018).

The theory grew in its analysis of racial inequity in the United States with contributions from but not limited to Gotanda, Freeman, Crenshaw, and Delgado (Lovelace, 2018). Gotanda added the idea that justice was not colorblind (Lovelace, 2018). Freeman offered an anti-subordination perspective that civil rights issues be considered from the perspective of the nondominant group (Lovelace, 2018). While Kimberle’ Crenshaw penned the term intersectionality contending that the commonly held understanding of racism did not include the intersectional experience of black women; as, women referenced white women and blacks denoted black men (Lovelace, 2018). Additionally, Richard Delgado introduced historical practices as means to understanding the ingrained nature of racism in America’s foundation. These founding scholars developed a theoretical concept that is inclusive of culturally and

linguistically diverse heritages in its analysis of racial inequality in the United States (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2019).

Key Critical Race Theory Concepts

Six key concepts define critical race theory.

Racism is both persistent and pervasive in America; [questions] dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness, and meritocracy; challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of colour; is interdisciplinary and eclectic; works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019, p.3).

Critical race theory acknowledges the challenges facing people with culturally and linguistically diverse membership in general. It is particularly applicable to culturally and linguistically diverse students educated in a system that is not color-blind or built solely upon a meritocracy, and often sees them through deficit-skewed glasses.

Disability Studies

Disability Studies is the other half of DisCrit. According to Goodley (2017), “Dis/ability is a label, a signifier that ‘inaugurates consignment to an identity category, which signifies disadvantage and oppression (p. 9).” Dis/ability studies examines the value that society assigns to one's perceived ability, how it impacts individuals with differing strengths and “transcends, class, age, gender, nation, wealth, national borders”, education, and politics (Goodley, 2017, p.2). It embodies the social, minority, relational, and nordic relational models of disability.

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability has transformed the discourse on disabilities, rights, and equity. Prior to the social model, dis/ability conceptions relied primarily on the medical model which viewed differences in abilities as a tragedy to be remedied. In 1975 the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation declared that society disables, “Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 197).” The work this group did to identify the oppression imposed upon people with impairments evolved with Mike Oliver’s 1983 work, “Social Work with Disabled People” (Barnes, 2019). He contributed idea that individuals with “any form of accredited impairment are disabled by an unjust and uncaring society (Barnes, 2019, p. 14).” The social model is further characterized by a focus on disablism over impairment, societal deficiencies, social tragedy, social change and revolution, activism, and the idea that disabled people know best (Goodley, 2017). This model ushered in revolutionary discourse on the historical and traditional ways contemporary society disables people with impairments through pervasive policies and practices (Barnes, 2019).

This revolution was and is overdue as fifteen percent of the world’s population is dis/abled (Goodley, 2017). Often individuals with dis/abilities are subject to poor living conditions, higher rates of victimization, inequities in education access, and economic opportunities (Goodley, 2017). The inequities have a name, disablism, “a form of oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being (Goodley, 2017).” Value-laden assertions attributed to dis/ability cannot be allowed to persist. Their presence contributes to inequities in education, economic, and community opportunities (Goodley, 2017).

Minority Model of Disability

Another aspect of disability studies is the minority model which acknowledges that biases against nontypical ability presentations fuels discriminatory practices. This facet of disability studies authored the people first language used when referencing individuals with dis/abilities. It is the deliberate inclusion of “humanity and diversity beyond the narrow confines of [labor] and consumption (Goodley, 2017, p. 13).” Moreover, it incorporates the “neo-Marxist critiques of capitalism with theories of race and [racialization] and adopted an eclectic understanding of the socio-cultural formations of disability (Goodley, 2017, p. 13).” It also identified the exclusionary white, able-bodied standard that is used as an oppressive benchmark to measure ability.

Cultural Model of Disability

The cultural model of disability launched the inclusion of culture into the dis/ability discussion. It questions the dominant interpretations of physical and mental abilities. The way in which an ability is understood is directly impacted by who is being assigned a designation (Goodley, 2017). Simply put, power dynamics influence the value assigned to disability labels. Therefore, biology and culture cannot be separated as the value/characterization are bound together. It is a chicken or the egg conceptualization, in that how we see/interpret the biology is tied to cultural contexts.

Relational Model of Disability

The last aspect of disability studies is the relational model of disability. It expands the discourse to include the interaction between the concept of dis/ability and the environment. Specifically, it points out the disconnect between services, policies, dis/ability determinations, and people with dis/abilities. The mismatch leads to dis/empowering people with dis/abilities because they are excluded from “communities, services, and professional practices” due to an

incongruence in able-bodied “expectations, biological needs, and environmental opportunities (Goodley, 2017, p. 18).” It is understanding that often people with dis/abilities are subject to the projection of able-bodied values onto what they should or should not receive or have access to without including them in the conversation. Adding them to the room where decisions happen is critical to changing the narrative.

In short, disability studies posit that dis/ability is an identity. Dis/ability is a part of life and the human condition. It is a “sociocultural and personal, [embodiment of] physiological or psychological phenomenon. [It encourages folx] to ponder how we normally (or normatively) understand our bodies, minds, relationships, communities, and economic priorities. And we are encouraged to think of living non-normatively (Goodley, 2017, p. 1).” However, it does not completely encapsulate students’ journey with racial/ethnic and dis/ability memberships.

Disability Critical Race Studies

DisCrit Defined

DisCrit marries Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies to provide a framework that honors the intersectionality of culturally and linguistically diverse people with dis/abilities. It continues to challenge the notion that people are defined by what they cannot do, and the value placed on their racial/ethnic membership. It counters with the understanding that what they can do is connected to the underlying concept that one's ability is not fixed but a social construct. As such, ability should align with how a person functions in each context (Connor et al., 2016; Annamma et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Dis/Crit asserts that "race, racism, dis/ability, and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education," affecting culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities differently than their white counterparts

(Annamma et al., 2013, p. 7). This is particularly relevant to eligibility areas for special education because these labels are assigned based on constructed notions of capacity (Annamma, 2016). Moreover, DisCrit seeks to dismantle the ways racism and ableism support discriminatory practices and structures that culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities experience daily. The battle cry to address the inequities facing culturally and linguistically diverse individuals with dis/abilities is expressed in seven tenets:

Focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate independently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy; values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality, etc.; emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as race or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms; privileges voices of marginalized population, traditionally not acknowledged within research; considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens; recognizes Whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of White middle-class citizens; and requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (Annamma et al., 2012, p. 11).

DisCrit in Education

DisCrit was the most appropriate lens to approach the study of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education practices because, as asserted by Annamma et al., (2016) “race has figured so prominently in special education status,it is nothing short of irresponsible to leave race out of dis/ability-related research in special education (Annamma et

al., 2016).” Culturally and linguistically diverse students experience a persistent gap in school achievement, discipline, and disproportionate representation in special education programs. Furthermore, culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities cannot separate their racial/ethnic membership from their perceived ability. Their intersectional identities are constructed upon each other.

DisCrit critically examines the positive or negative structures that impact schools for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities and seeks to reimagine their identity. Specifically, it addresses the social position of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities by “reframing dis/ability from its subordinate position to a positive marker of identity and something to be claimed” (Annamma et al., 2016). The exploration of the phenomenon of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education teaching practices was appropriately matched to DisCrit.

Special Education

History of Special Education

Prior to 1975

The special education continuum that is seen in contemporary school settings originated with (federal) Public Law 94-142 in 1975, known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Cook et al., 2014). Before 1975, special education lacked policy and guidance. It used psycholinguistic strengths or weaknesses to build remediation programs (Batemen, 2014). Students with dis/abilities were barred from education with their more typically developing same-age peers, and courts supported their exclusion (Colker, 2013). The segregation of students with dis/abilities was exacerbated with immigration population surges in urban areas and intelligence assessments. Testing led to a disproportionate number of culturally

and linguistically diverse students being identified as mentally retarded. Moreover, special education emerged as a method to perpetuate racially segregated schools with tracking (Colker, 2013). However, the intelligence tests were inherently biased. One of their creators, Carl Brigham, publicly shared his belief that culturally and linguistically diverse students were intellectually inferior to their white counterparts (Colker, 2013). The systematic segregation of African American students with dis/abilities led to *Mills vs. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (1972) and *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children ("PARC") v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971). In these landmark cases, the courts applied the Due Process Clause of the 14th amendment and invalidated local laws that barred students with dis/abilities from schools thereby furnishing them with the right to public education (Colker, 2013). This set the stage for the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (currently known as IDEA).

Post IDEA

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides free and appropriate public education for children with dis/abilities and safeguards special education instruction and related services. It has four parts: A, general provisions; B, assistance for all children with dis/abilities; C, infants, and toddlers with dis/abilities; and D, national activities to improve the education of children with dis/abilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Part B guides the provision of free and appropriate public education for children (3 to 21) with dis/abilities within their least restrictive environment. Students with dis/abilities may be eligible for special education programming under 13 areas (autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain

injury, visual impairment) of eligibility within a range of settings. Qualification for special education programming occurs through a referral and evaluative process focusing on students' skills deficits. An Individualized Education Plan is developed for eligible students with dis/abilities to mollify achievement disparities between them and their "typical" peers with specially designed instruction (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Specially designed instruction is lesson delivery uniquely tailored to individual students' needs (Riccomini et al., 2017). IDEA Sec. 300.39 defines specially designed instruction as adapting,

as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—

(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and

(ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children (2004).

Under current legal and legislative guidance, special education is, by design, an intervention.

Disproportionality in Special Education

Student Demographics

In 2018, 6,315,228 students ages 6 through 21 received special education services and supports (Office of Special Education Programs and Rehabilitation Services, 2021). Even though IDEA provides safeguards for students with dis/abilities, special education's roots in segregation and exclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students from general education have

resulted in their disproportionate representation in program and service offerings (Graves & Ye, 2016, Skiba et al., 2008). Nationally, special education program/service membership consists of 47.5 % white, while 52.5% belong to culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Office of Special Education Programs and Rehabilitation Services, 2021). Using a risk ratio (RR), the US Department of Education measures this phenomenon (US Department of Education, 2021). The risk ratio is the comparison of the number of students from specific racial/ethnic groups receiving special education supports to the total number of students (US Department of Education, 2021). For example, black or African Americans have a 1.4 risk ratio compared to Whites at 0.8 risk ratio (US Department of Education, 2021).

TABLE 2

Number of students ages 5 (school age) through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, and percentage of the population served (risk index), comparison risk index, and risk ratio for these students, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2019		
Race/Ethnicity	Risk Index	Risk Ratio
American Indian or Alaskan Native	15.5	1.6
Asian	4.8	0.5
Black or African American	12.8	1.4
Hispanic/Latino	10.6	1.1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	14.4	1.5
White	9.1	0.8
Two or More Races	10.8	1.1

This data illustrates a persistent pattern of overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities in special education. This is magnified by the evaluation process for special education eligibility bias for culturally and linguistically diverse student inclusion with its heavy reliance on teachers' input (Sciuchetti, 2017; Morgan et al., 2016; Graves & Ye, 2016).

Teacher Demographics

Special education teacher demographics show 73.1% are White, followed by the other 20.9% identifying with membership in culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Special education teacher demographics, 2021). The incongruity between culturally and linguistically diverse students and their predominantly white teachers can negatively impact student outcomes as persistent stereotypes entrenched in deficit perspectives can reproduce low expectations (Husband, 2012). Also, many white teachers describe themselves as having little or no experience or knowledge of diverse settings resulting in decreased expectations and cultural misunderstandings (Clayton, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2018; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Notwithstanding the potential cultural disconnect, special education teachers are responsible for delivering specially designed instruction.

High-leverage Practices in Special Education

High-leverage practices in special education are the gold standard for specially designed instructional delivery (McLeskey et al., 2017). High-leverage practices are a professional framework that yields effective specially designed instruction when implemented with mastery by special education teachers (Riccomini et al., 2017). There are twenty-two high-leverage practices covering four categories: collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavior, and instruction.

Collaboration

There are three high-leverage practices in the collaboration category (McLeskey et al., 2017). Collaboration high-leverage practices emphasize special education teachers creating partnerships with all stakeholders (professionals, families, caregivers, and students) to foster student program designs with clearly specified outcomes, data collection, and progress monitoring to support goals (McLeskey et al., 2017). These partnerships foster assorted expertise and viewpoints to improve student achievement.

Assessment

Similarly, there are three high-leverage practices under assessment (McLeskey et al., 2017). The assessment strand encourages special education teachers to use various evaluative tools, scrutinize standardized test data, and consider the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students and those from impoverished backgrounds in special education programming (McLeskey et al., 2017). Evaluating assessment tools and data are essential to making informed decisions on instructional practices and Individualized Education Plan development (McLeskey et al., 2017).

Social/Emotional/ Behavior

In the Social/Emotional/Behavior high-leverage practice category four strategies are covered (McLeskey et al., 2017). Behavior is communication. The ability to interpret and support student social, emotional, behavioral needs is critical to fostering a collaborative learning environment (McLeskey et al., 2017). Special education teachers are expected to provide explicit social skill instruction, practice opportunities, behavior supports, and timely feedback with a team-based problem-solving approach (McLeskey et al., 2017). Implementation should be done with care, respect, and reflect a culturally relevant lens (McLeskey et al., 2017).

Instruction

The final category is Instruction. Instruction is the largest high-leverage practice grouping with twelve (McLeskey et al., 2017). Instruction is special education teachers' use of content, pedagogical knowledge, and student data to develop, deliver, and assess their evidence-based teaching (McLeskey et al., 2017). Students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds also inform instruction (McLeskey et al., 2017). Most importantly, teachers utilizing these methods are willing to throw the whole lesson away if it doesn't suit their students' needs.

Practices included in this list have been identified as both applicable and essential to daily teaching practices in addition to being relevant to teacher development (McLeskey et al., 2017). To be included within high-leverage practices, strategies must be,

[focused] directly on instructional practice; occur with high frequency in teaching; research-based and known to foster important kinds of student engagement and learning; broadly applicable and usable in any content area or approach to teaching; so important that skillfully executing them is fundamental to effective teaching (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 10).

Additionally, the number of practices is limited to promote use, and the ease with which they can be conveyed to practitioners (McLeskey et al., 2017). Their complexity is also restricted to foster implementation by beginning teachers and can be practiced in research-based and practical settings (McLeskey et al., 2017). Moreover, the practices are observable in all settings and grouped according to established educational theories (McLeskey et al., 2017).

Each of the high-leverage practices foster a shift away from a deficit-based viewpoint by recognizing and scaffolding students' strengths using evidence-based practices that value stakeholder perspectives. While high-leverage practices have raised the bar for special education,

further evolution is still needed. Special education's discriminatory history, the persistent disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities, and potential cultural disconnect between special education teachers and their students necessitate that more be required.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

History of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is the compilation of strategies that foster improved outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students. It is a tool that can dismantle the "personal and institutional racism" within schools that contribute to extreme achievement disparities for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Gay, 2018; Teel et al., 2008). It emerged as an evolution of multicultural education out of a need to effectively address schools' diversification. Its foundation rests upon a 3-year qualitative study of successful teachers of African American students conducted by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992).

Ladson-Billings first coined the term culturally relevant teaching (1992). Culturally responsive pedagogy materialized from a need to identify an approach to instruction that opposed assimilation teaching and embraced the African American cultural experience (Ladson-Billings, 1992). It honors and values the multiplicity of students' identities and disrupts the ideology of sameness that has been perpetuated in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive pedagogy is responsive and developmentally appropriate. It enlists students' cultural memberships, experiences, and identities as vehicles to facilitate growth and achievement from an asset-based lens for instructional and operational school practices (Gay 2002). Per Teel et al. (2008), culturally responsive pedagogy pays homage to the "legitimacy of cultural heritages of

different [cultural, linguistic groups], both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum (p. 68).”

Benefits of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates meaningful connections between schools and students' reality beyond campus. It also fosters an inclusive school environment. Three criteria define it, "students must experience academic success; students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).” It is not a formal step-by-step approach. Instead, it is a framework to guide instructional practices that enlists students' culture to construct, define, and express knowledge and achievement. Culturally responsive pedagogy 's primary goal is to empower students to critically examine society and promote social change (Ladson-Billings, 1992). This instructional approach improves the efficacy of best practices by bridging cultural norms and social barriers that influence the acquisition and exchange of knowledge (Gay, 2018). Furthermore, it reimagines the Eurocentric rubric by which school behaviors (i.e., thinking, talking, writing, task performance, and self-presentation) are measured (Gay, 2018). It is more than a theory or movement. Research has shown that culturally responsive pedagogy can positively impact academic achievement outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Powell et al., 2016). Traditional paradigms are doomed to fail culturally and linguistically diverse students without positive disruptions like it (Gay, 2018). It serves as a revolutionary tool to unravel inequities in education as an approach established by prominent researchers such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and guidance from other leaders in the field like Siwatu (Ladson-Billings, 1991; 1992; 1995; 2014; Siwatu, 2005; 2007).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Standards

Siwatu (2005) established culturally responsive teaching standards to guide teachers with four categories: curriculum and instruction, classroom management, student assessment, and cultural enrichment based on previous culturally responsive scholarship.

Each standard provides guidance for the development and execution of culturally responsive pedagogy to disrupt traditional paradigms and foster achievement for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The curriculum and instruction standard requires teachers to make connections between classroom activities and their students' cultural identity; accommodate and adjust instruction to maximize achievement; create culturally relevant materials and activities; as well as develop instruction that addresses the learning styles, growth, and cognition of students (Siwatu, 2005). The classroom management standards require teachers to create a welcoming and supportive setting compatible with students' cultural backgrounds, foster strong communication, and promote a sense of belonging and community (Siwatu, 2005). The third set of standards, student assessment, compels teachers to differentiate assessments and analyze standardized outcomes with a lens that acknowledges inherent biases (Siwatu, 2005). The final standard, cultural enrichment, involves teachers intentionally fostering students' success while promoting cultural identity (Siwatu, 2005).

In short, culturally responsive pedagogy is the purposeful, ongoing inclusion of students in a cooperative learning journey where their cultural background positively influences instruction, classroom/school ecology, discipline, and assessments, to foster equity of access and outcomes. Understanding this concept is essential to the exploration of its manifestation within special education classrooms.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

The self-efficacy of teachers is another critical point of understanding in this study. Teachers' self-efficacy reflects their perceived ability to implement a given practice. Teacher self-efficacy is based on an expanded conceptualization of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory which asserted that mastery, social persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physical and emotional arousal contribute to how a person feels about their capacity to achieve a given outcome (Chu and Garcia, 2014). The concept has been broadened to include outcome expectancy and self-efficacy (Chu and Garcia, 2014). Outcome expectancy evaluates a teacher's belief that their practices can positively impact student achievement trajectory regardless of setting factors (Chu and Garcia, 2014). Conversely, self-efficacy is a teachers' "internal locus of control and a teacher's perception of his or her ability to reach personal goals for the classroom (Chu and Garcia, 2014). Research has supported the connection between self-reported efficacy and practices (Chu and Garcia, 2014). Aligned with this is teachers' culturally responsive self-efficacy (Siwatu, 2007). It is their professed aptitude to execute culturally responsive pedagogy (Siwatu, 2007). Teacher self-efficacy contributes to this study, so it is essential to have a common understanding of it.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Special Education

Extensive scholarship has been conducted on culturally responsive pedagogy and special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Powell et al., 2016). Robust scholarship supports their approaches and offer structural guidance for supporting student achievement. Because of this it is a reasonable conclusion that culturally responsive pedagogy would be an appropriate tool to combat the inequities facing culturally and linguistically diverse students regardless of their

perceived ability. Yet, despite its positive impact on student outcomes and the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities within special education classrooms, there is a dearth of research regarding culturally responsive pedagogy implementation. The academy has focused culturally responsive pedagogy research on general education, teacher self-efficacy, and pre-service special education teachers. Shealey et al. (2011) scrutinized empirical research on the presence of culturally responsive pedagogy in special education classrooms using finite topic inclusion, time frame, and journal retrieval. Their research reviewed 150 articles and could not identify with certainty how culturally responsive pedagogy was executed within special education classrooms.

A more recent review of the literature identified one multiple case study by Sacco (2018) investigating the culturally responsive teaching practices of one special education teacher with English language learners. It focused on the impact of the teacher's backgrounds on their use of culturally responsive practices. The study demonstrated teacher's use of technology to build student background knowledge along with deficits in their culturally responsive skills. But the study did not create a snapshot of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation thereby leaving the research unfilled.

Scott et al., (2017) further demonstrates this when they examined the incorporation of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education teacher certification programs for master's students through a mixed methods design. The results indicated that inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy within certification programs is promising, but it did not shed light on current special education teachers' practices. Moreover, Alexander (2020) explored the experiences of special education teachers implementing culturally responsive pedagogy with African American students. The study found that special education teachers experienced greater

inquiry, dialogue, inclusive culture, established relationships, and improved their cultural awareness. While the study did offer the development of teacher student relationships as a strategic approach, it was not the prevailing theme within it, nor did it build an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education classrooms as its focused-on teacher experiences, not practice implementation. These studies are indicative of the silence in literature on current practitioner culturally responsive teaching practices within special education classrooms. This gap necessitated phenomenon exploration to provide a deeper understanding.

Literature Related to the Study's Methodology

Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy

Exploring this gap in the research required an examination of special education teachers' culturally responsive self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is an essential foundational component for understanding practices as it sheds light on their believed capacity to perform given tasks (American Psychological Association, n.d.; Moradkhani, 2018). Siwatu (2007) examined teachers' self-efficacy using the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* and observations within a mixed-methods study. His study found a correlation between teacher culturally responsive self-efficacy and actual practices (Siwatu, 2007). Additionally, the survey tool he created has been utilized by numerous subsequent studies as a predictor of teaching methods.

Chu (2011) conducted a quantitative study to examine the culturally responsive teaching efficacy of special education instructors for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities. Thirty-one special education teachers from an urban school district in central Texas participated in the study. The researcher used a questionnaire adapted from two culturally responsive scales developed by Siwatu (2007), *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy*

Scale and Culturally Responsive Outcome Expectancy Scale. Study findings indicated instrument reliability and yielded the following five hypotheses:

a teacher's culturally responsive pedagogy self-efficacy is positively related to their responsive teaching outcome expectancy beliefs; there is [a] nonsignificant relationship between culturally responsive teaching efficacy and perceived effectiveness of teacher education programs in addressing diversity by in-service special education teachers; there is a nonsignificant relationship between culturally responsive teaching efficacy beliefs and perceived effectiveness of professional development training in addressing diversity by in-service special education teachers; several contextual variables could predict special education teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and culturally responsive outcome expectancy beliefs; and teacher's collective teacher efficacy is positively related to her or his culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy as well as outcome expectancy.

The study positively indicated the reliability of *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* and *Culturally Responsive Outcome Expectancy Scale* as indicators of teaching methodology.

In 2018, Chu and Garcia also examined three areas of efficacy: collective teacher efficacy, culturally responsive teacher efficacy, and outcome expectancy beliefs of 344 urban school district special education teachers with a quantitative case study. Three teacher efficacy scales; Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale, Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Culturally Responsive Teacher Outcomes Expectancy were adapted to create the study's questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were used to analyze the data. Study findings indicated a significant relationship between collective teacher

efficacy and culturally responsive teacher outcomes expectancy. A weak positive relationship was found between collective teacher efficacy and culturally responsive teacher self-efficacy. The study's outcomes supported a positive correlation between in-service special education teachers' collective teacher efficacy, culturally responsive teacher self-efficacy, and culturally responsive teacher outcomes expectancy. This study also supported the validity of using self-efficacy surveys as predictors of teaching practices.

Most recently, Cruz et al. (2020) scrutinized teacher efficacy of 245 pre-service and in-service teachers using the Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale in a quantitative study. It specifically analyzed the areas that teachers felt the most confident around their implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants were confident regarding fostering trust and relationships with students. However, they were less confident with student cultural background knowledge. Findings also revealed a relationship between years of experience and improved self-efficacy.

These studies demonstrated the appropriateness of using culturally responsive teacher self-efficacy scales as predictor of teaching practices.

Teacher Reported Practices

Beyond understanding teachers' perceived capacity to achieve a given objective is their thinking about what occurs in classrooms. In 2011, Ernest et al. explored one teacher's instructional practices in a single case study. The researcher identified the subject's specific practices using self-assessments, student data, and reflective journal entries over five weeks. This case study demonstrated the value of reflection and self-reports in exploring teaching practices.

More recently, in 2020, Cavendish et al. studied nine special education teachers' views on their interpretation of assessment, progress monitoring, and transition programming using open-

ended interview data. The study uncovered how teachers assess student needs, support student services, as well as facilitated partnerships and collaborations. Its design and results offered insight into specific practices, teacher rationale for instructional choices, as well as implications for teaching support. Also, in 2020, Tanase explored the culturally responsive pedagogy implementation of urban science and math teachers using a phenomenological study design. Using interviews with twenty-two teachers, Tanase (2020) found that participants utilized students' interests in the lessons, exposure to similar role models, and real-life examples to which pupils could relate. The identification of specific practices affords a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

In 2022, Martin conducted a descriptive qualitative study asking ten transition specialists to shed light on effective teaching techniques for work readiness and self-determination skill development. Through a focus group and interviews, the study showed that community-based instruction, work-based learning, practice opportunities, and fostering community and family collaboration were effective instructional practices to foster work readiness and self-determination skills. Focus groups and interviews in that study proved to be reliable tools for subject exploration.

These studies have used questionnaires or surveys, interviews, artifacts, and focus groups to identify teaching practices and or the thinking behind the instruction from teachers' points of view. The use of multiple data sources points to a case study design to explore teaching practices. Case studies present the opportunity to gather first-person accounts and validation through multiple data sources. For example, Zhang-Wu (2017) used a single case study design to examine culturally responsive pedagogy implementation in a fourth-grade urban classroom. The study identified specific practices using interviews, observations, and informal conversations.

However, the study size, like Ernest et al., 2011 impacts the generalizability of the study's findings.

A multiple case study offers the opportunity to expand upon the breadth and depth of study data. For example, Simón et al. (2021) illustrated the inclusive practices used to support students with dis/abilities in Canada using a multiple case study approach. Sixty-one K-12 teachers across seven schools in one school district participated in the study. Through this approach, Simon et al. (2021) identified seven strategies utilized by study participants using interviews and observations. The magnitude of Simón et al.'s (2021) research yielded greater applicability in the field than single case studies.

Based on the research, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, are all reliable resources for data collection when exploring teaching practices. At a time in education where culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities are disproportionately represented in special education and the scarcity of research on how culturally responsive pedagogy is implemented, investigating its implementation is important and timely. Because of its significance the identification of a study design that went beyond theoretical application to enlist first person input was critical to understanding how culturally responsive pedagogy occurs within special education classrooms. The multiple case study approach supported this objective.

Chapter Summary

This literature review illustrates culturally responsive pedagogy and special education as student supports within P-12 schools and their relevance to Dis/Crit theoretical framework. Despite extensive research on both, little study is devoted to culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within special education classrooms. Given the racism and ableism that have

historically permeated schools, the field must be expanded to identify supports that honor the intersectionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students' with dis/abilities. While the culturally responsive pedagogy and special education literature synthesis gave insight into overlaps, this multiple case study with focus groups and interviews gave the opportunity to solicit current practitioners' information to illuminate practices.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This qualitative case study explored the following research questions:

1. What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities?
 - a. How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities align with high-leverage practices in special education?

Research Design

A qualitative case study is a research design that investigates a phenomenon within a bounded context utilizing various (qualitative or quantitative) evidence sources (Yin, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Through triangulation, the data that emerges converges to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. (Yin, 2018; Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is an iterative process where the researcher develops knowledge to tell the phenomenon's story (Yin, 2018; Neale et al., 2006). The story may focus on people, communities, processes, interventions, or other interesting phenomena. It can be descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory. One of the reasons researchers select a case study approach is because it provides the opportunity to examine a phenomenon in which there is a gap in the research (Yin, 2018). There are four considerations when determining the study's research design:

- Is the research intended to answer the why or how associated with the subject?
- Or is the purpose to create clarity about its occurrence within a given context?
- Does the research seek to build knowledge regarding the phenomenon's relationship to its bounded context?

- Can the behavior of those involved in the inquiry be altered (Yin, 2003, as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008)?

A case study should address one or more of these questions. In response to the research questions, this study addressed the first consideration as it explored the “how” regarding culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within special education teachers’ reported practices. Case study designs can be single instrumental, multiple cases, or intrinsic. Within a single instrument design, scholars concentrate on one subject (issue or problem) bound by a single context to describe it (Creswell, 2013). For a multiple case study, one subject is chosen, but several occurrences of it are investigated. In an intrinsic study, researchers examine the case. According to Creswell (2013), analytic techniques may include evaluating a program or other unique phenomena. For this study, a multiple case study design was appropriate to address the research questions.

Yin (2018) suggests that a multiple case study design must follow an analogous logic. Case selection should be intentional and consistent with supporting characteristic data development as they will serve as a representative sample (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). Appropriate case selection will lead to the identification of correspondence or covariation during data analysis (Stake, 2006). As a result, the cases within their bounded context should generate a complete picture of how the phenomenon manifests (Stake, 2006). Per Stake (2006), multiple case studies should have between four and ten cases to support a reasonable depiction of the phenomenon and maintain inquiry feasibility. The multiplicity of cases increases study validity (Yin, 2018).

Varied sources of multiple case study evidence are critical to supporting research validity and reliability. Stake (2006) offers observations, interviews, coding, data management, and

interpretation as the most used case study methods. Yin (2018) suggests six qualitative sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. Drawing upon Stake (2006) and Yin (2018), this multiple case study employed group interviews/focus groups, one-on-one interviews, documentation, and surveys., which allowed me to gather data on the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy within the context of special education teacher instructional practices across multiple settings to parse out similarities and identify themes, issues, assertions, or patterns (Creswell, 2013). Table 3 demonstrates how the research techniques, data collection sources, and data analysis techniques connect to this study's research questions.

TABLE 3

Research Questions	Research Techniques	Data Collection Sources	Data Analysis Techniques
What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities?	Teacher Survey (Demographic, closed,)	Digital Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale	Surveys responses were summed and analyzed.
	Interviews (semi structured)	Interview Protocol Semi-structured video recorded virtual (zoom) interviews.	Transcribed and coded interview and focus groups.
	Focus groups	Facilitated group discussions with a vignette to direct the conversation.	All instrument data triangulation. Cross-Case thematic analysis of data.
How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities converge with high-leverage practices in special education?	Interviews (semi structured)	Interview Protocol Semi-structured video recorded virtual (zoom) interviews.	Transcribed and coded interview and focus groups.
	Focus groups	Facilitated group discussions with a vignette to direct the conversation.	All instrument data triangulation. Cross-Case thematic analysis of data.
	Literature Review	High-leverage Practices in Special Education Culturally Responsive Teaching Standards	Axial Coding and thematic analysis

Research Techniques

Phase One

The use of surveys, focus groups, and interviews with currently practicing special education teachers was selected to facilitate a robust understanding of how culturally responsive pedagogy manifests within special education practices for students with dis/abilities within three

phases. The first phase utilized surveys. Case studies may use qualitative and quantitative data techniques (Yin, 2018). Baxter and Jack (2008) assert that researchers can incorporate quantitative survey data into research to support a “holistic understanding” of the case, serving as a “piece of the puzzle” (p. 554). Social research surveys gather data from respondents in the same manner (questions, statements, or scales) (Stake, 2010). Data gathered from this instrument were interpreted to reflect medians, percentages, comparisons, and correlations within a quantitative approach. However, for qualitative research, authors can aggregate survey data (Stake, 2010). This study utilized aggregate survey information from a *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* as a data set to inform the research. The quantitative survey gathered data regarding teachers' perceptions of their culturally responsive pedagogy implementation to identify the key informants that served as full study participants. Specifically, the survey asked respondents to rate affirmative task statements based on their ability to complete each one. Each statement began with “I am able to” followed by forty-one task statements. Some of the task statements included were, “adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students”; “obtain information about my students’ academic strengths”; and “identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students’ home culture” (Siwatu, 2007). In addition to identifying key study informants, like Debnam et al. (2015), survey data was also used to corroborate participant focus group and interview data from this study's second/third phase.

Phase Two

During the second phase, eight study participants participated in one of two focus groups, elementary and secondary. In the focus groups, key informants each brought their individual habitus, or lens from which they viewed their classrooms and practices (Bourdieu, 1990). Then, through guided conversation, participants shared their habitus to create a collective

understanding of the explored phenomena. Three elementary special education teacher participants participated in the elementary focus group session. Three secondary (middle or high school) special education teacher participants participated in the secondary focus group. The focus groups were a source for the shared understanding of the thinking behind and implementation of culturally responsive practices by participants (Barbour, 2018; Callaghan, 2005).

Phase Three

Interviews afforded an opportunity to gain insight into individuals' actions and thoughts associated with the phenomenon as they participated in structured conversations (Yin, 2018). Stake (2006) classifies interviews into their different purposes or intents. The first type of interview allows for gathering information or analysis from the interviewee. The second allows the researcher to obtain "numerical aggregation" data from multiple participants. Last, it can also elicit phenomenon details that a researcher cannot observe. Interviews within this study align with the first and last classification. They served to elicit teachers' interpretations and offered details of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within their special education classrooms for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities.

Data Collection Sources and Techniques

Case Boundaries

The bounded case for this study was elementary (P– 5) or secondary (6 – 12) special education teachers who provide instruction to a class/session (20 + minutes) for students with Individual Education Plans without general education teachers or peers present (excluding co-taught/inclusion, remote/virtual) in urban public school districts within a Michigan. Elementary or secondary teaching assignments differentiated cases.

Research Geographic Context

Six urban public school districts in Michigan hosted teaching locations for each case within this study. The selection of urban Michigan city schools was intentional, given that demographic trends in these settings typically have strong representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students. These blue-collar communities used to be home to several large manufacturing companies. However, over the last fifty years, many plants have closed without replacement. In addition, many schools within these cities have closed or reorganized because of declining enrollments and budgetary shortfalls.

Moreover, economic decline, rising inequality, discriminatory governmental policies, and persistent racial inequities are emblematic of these settings as these cities are simultaneously diversifying, with culturally and linguistically diverse groups becoming the majority. This diversification trend aligns with net population declines since 1980, with all the net decreases attributable to White population exodus (PolicyLink & PERE, 2017). With economically, racially, and ethnically heterogeneous student enrollment mirroring their cities, these districts are an extension of the cities they inhabit. Based on enrollment data reported to [mischooldata.org](https://www.mischooldata.org), the average student body demographics are 34% white, 42% African American, 8% two or more races, 8% Latinx, 4% Asian, .24% Native American, 0.19% Pacific Islander, and 3.57% undisclosed. Additionally, within their respective populations, students with dis/abilities account for an average of 13.5%. The predictable presence of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals within these cities and their schools rendered them ideal for this study.

Special Education Continuum

Each host district for this multiple case study employs special education classroom teachers responsible for providing programs and supports for students with dis/abilities in-person and virtually. However, special education teachers that provide instruction exclusively to remote

students were excluded from the bounded case design. The special education continuum of service offered within these districts includes self-contained programs (students with emotional impairment, mild cognitive impairment, moderate cognitive impairment, autism spectrum disorder), intensive resource classrooms (behavior support, hearing impairment), elementary or secondary resource classrooms (all eligible special education areas), secondary co-taught classrooms, and teacher consultant support. Additionally, the districts' ancillary service offerings include Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, School Social Workers, and School Psychologists. The bounded case limited study participation to special education classroom teachers, excluding ancillary staff and teacher consultants.

State School Policies

In 2016, the Michigan Department of Education submitted its Top 10 in 10 strategic education plan. This plan outlines how schools can bolster outcomes for Michigan students satisfying Every Student Succeeds Act requirements. Its goals include:

[expanding] early childhood learning opportunities; [improving] early literacy achievement... health, safety, and wellness of all learners; [enhancing] secondary learning opportunities for all students; increase the percentage of all students who graduate from high school; [boost] the percentage of adults with a postsecondary credential; [raise] the numbers of certified teachers in areas of shortage; provide adequate and equitable school funding. (Michigan Department of Education, 2016)

The strategic plan's implementation was set to occur in three phases. The first was the solicitation of best practices from stakeholders. Second, stakeholders would again be surveyed for best practices and supporting research. From this information, resources and guidance documents were (and continue to be) developed to support local district plan development and

execution. Despite the emphasis on equity within both Every Student Succeeds Act and the Michigan Department of Education's Strategic plan; the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in its 2020 Education Equity Report declared "Michigan's education to be in crisis" (p.2). The Michigan Civil Rights Commission challenged Michigan schools to adopt multiple changes including developing racially conscious strategies for school integration. To foster the development of these strategies in schools, Michigan Civil Rights Commission offered ten effective practices for cross cultural competence:

1. Create a positive climate and culture by intentionally promoting inclusivity and positive relations among students, among teachers and staff and between students and adults
2. Foster stronger partnerships and collaboration between schools and communities to improve family engagement, which is critical to bridging home and school cultures
3. Encourage culturally responsive leadership by hiring diverse and culturally competent leaders and educators
4. Provide strong professional development on cultural competence, diversity, equity, and inclusion so that teachers and staff can improve classroom instructions and curriculum
5. Provide flexibility for decision making to incorporate diversity in staffing, promotion and hiring which are critical in effective turnaround and transformation.
6. Initiate discussions with local, state, and national evaluation process designers to include indicators on cultural responsiveness as essential components in teacher and staff observations.
7. Promote regular school-to-parent communications in the languages of all parents and guardians.

8. Include representatives from all demographic groups in the school 's diversity, equity, and inclusion planning
9. Provide chats, newsletters, and/or blogs written and led by the principal and school leadership team that promote the diverse school culture
10. Conduct individual and building-wide self-assessments along with student-interest surveys to help identify current issues (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2020).

Each of these strategies reflect culturally responsive pedagogy, district demographics, governmental acknowledgement, and Michigan Civil Rights Commission's challenge. This geographic data informed the decision to use urban city public schools to host this multiple case study.

Study Criteria

This study used criterion sampling, a subset of purposive sampling. While purposive, quota, and snowball are the most common forms of sampling (Palinkas et al., 2013; Byne 2001), the filtering of this study's key informant population was critical to identifying participants that were most likely to implement culturally responsive pedagogy within their classrooms. Criterion sampling delivered the ability to identify participants that adhered to a specific set of characteristics to assure the relevance of the information they gave. The sample criterion was elementary or secondary special education teachers in the study site/district(s). There were three criteria for study membership. Participants in this study were practicing, certified elementary or secondary special education teachers in a Michigan urban public city school district. They also indicated culturally responsive pedagogy knowledge with the likelihood of implementation within their instructional practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities based on their *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* score. To be

included in the study, they had to provide instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities for at least one session per day separate from a co-teaching setting. Co-teaching classrooms were excluded. Co-teaching execution rests on the interplay of general education and special education teaching partners (Sundqvist et al., 2020). The failure to isolate special education teachers from the dynamics of these models made them inappropriate for gathering special education teacher culturally responsive pedagogy implementation data. Drawing from this sample design which exclusively included special education teachers in their classrooms produced key case informants critical to exploring this study's phenomenon.

Risk to Subjects

Study participation posed no palpable risks to subjects. Study membership was entirely voluntary. Participants were assigned a study identification number to protect anonymity. Each subject was permitted to exit the study at any point before, during, or after its execution without consequence.

Data Sources

Survey

More than forty special education teachers were invited to complete an adaptation of *The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* survey during the first phase of this multiple case study. The original survey includes "40 Likert-type" items within which teachers rate their perceived culturally responsive pedagogy skill level from 0 (no confidence) to 100 (completely confident) (Siwatu, 2007). The adaption did not change any content. The adaption added a demographic section. This tool has proven a notable addition to research exploring teacher perception of culturally responsive pedagogy (Debnam et al., 2015; Silverman, 2010). The tool served as a predictor of culturally responsive pedagogy prevalence amongst case study

participants. Higher *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* scores correlate to increased occurrences of culturally responsive pedagogy (Siwatu, 2007). Phase two/three subjects were selected from SE teachers with elevated *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* scores.

Yin (2018) recommends a minimum of four and a maximum of ten cases to foster reliability and feasibility in multiple case studies. A total of eight survey participants participated in focus groups (phase 2), and interviews (phase 3). Each phase two/three study participant represented a single case.

Focus Groups

During Phase two, six participants participated in one of two sixty-to-ninety-minute focus groups. There was one focus group for elementary special education teachers and another for secondary special education teachers. Each focus group was conducted virtually (Zoom) and recorded. Verbal consent to record was solicited from each participant before the session recording began. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the why and how they provide culturally responsive pedagogy within their classrooms during a guided discussion. The facilitator used a conversational prompt and agenda (see appendix) to guide the discussion. In preparation for the focus group sessions a special education teacher (not included in the study) reviewed to strengthen reliability.

Interviews

In phase three, participants were interviewed and asked to share classroom artifacts (lesson plans, classroom materials, redacted student work samples). The interview protocol consisted of fourteen questions based on the University of South Florida College of Education *Culturally Responsive Coaching* document (n.d.) and Powell and Cantrell's (2017)

Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol Post Observation Teacher Interview.

Interviews were conducted virtually and recorded. A transcript of each interview was generated using the recording application (Zoom). Notes during the interview were gathered by hand in a spiral binder. The interviews and focus groups contributed to case knowledge.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Access to data was restricted to this researcher and the supervising professors. Physical documents (handwritten notes) were stored in a locked file cabinet. Digital data-- survey data, MS Word field notes, videos, recordings-- were stored in a secure cloud drive.

Data Analysis Techniques**Survey Analysis**

Literature review, surveys, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed to determine the study's findings. During phase one, responses to the "Likert" portion of the survey were summed after participant completion to generate a teacher self-efficacy score. The higher the score, the greater participant confidence in the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale*, indicating a greater likelihood of demonstrating culturally responsive pedagogy (Siwatu, 2007). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize "Likert" and demographic respondent data, then participant scores were assigned. "Likert" data was analyzed to determine the median and range of composite index indicated by participant summed responses (Joshi et al., 2015). Respondents with the highest *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* scores were invited to participate in phase two/three (focus group and interview) of the study.

Coding

During phase two and three, interview and focus group were conducted, transcribed, coded, and analyzed through a Dis/ability Critical Studies Theoretical lens. I reviewed transcripts for accuracy before coding and analysis. After transcript verification, first cycle descriptive coding was conducted. Second cycle coding reduced initial codes.

Case Analysis

Next, case-oriented, cross-case analysis was used to examine case codes and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). This analytic approach ascertained commonalities amongst the individual cases, enabling the quintain examination - a collection of cases bound together by a common focus (Stake, 2006). Analysis of case data generated a description of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within special education classes. This description was then compared to high-leverage practices in special education to identify how the two constructs overlap.

The exploration of common themes within the four categories yielded a typical representation for this phenomenon and addressed the study's questions (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008).

Research Ethics

I exercised diligence in adhering to the ethical research principles throughout the entirety of the study. I acquired an exemption from the University of Michigan -Flint Institutional Review Board (UM-Flint IRB) following the application submission. Each participant received the study's outline and description first in the initial invitation and again before interview and focus group recordings. Study participation posed no palpable risks to subjects. Study membership was voluntary. This researcher obtained informed and voluntary consent from

research participants and school district administration to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. Participants were also asked for digital and verbal consent prior to study participation wherein they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research. I also exercised confidentiality and maintained anonymity with all aspects of this study.

Chapter Summary

The methodology chapter explained and described this study's research design and implementation. This research was a multiple case study with special education elementary and secondary public schools with strict adherence to ethical University of Michigan Flint and local school standards and guidelines. The study executed interviews, focus groups, and surveys with the special education teacher participants. Data was examined using descriptive coding with cross-case analysis to address the study's research questions and formulated how culturally responsive pedagogy manifested within special education practices as well as overlapped with high-leverage practices using a Dis/Crit theoretical framework.

CHAPTER IV FINDINGS and ANALYSIS Introduction

This multiple case study explored how special education teachers described their culturally responsive teaching practices within their classrooms and discerned how this strategic approach intersected with high-leverage practices in special education. The bounded case for this study was elementary (P– 5) and secondary (6 – 12) special education teachers who provide instruction to a class/session (20 + minutes) for students with Individual Education Plans without general education teachers or peers present (excluding co-taught/inclusion, remote/virtual) within urban public school districts in Michigan. Eight cases informed this study's findings. Case membership consisted of four elementary and four secondary special education teachers.

Three data sources were used to explore this phenomenon: *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale*, focus groups, and interviews. *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* surveys identified elementary and secondary special education teachers most likely to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms. Focus groups generated collective elementary and secondary descriptions of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation. Finally, interviews produced individual depictions of special education teachers' culturally responsive methods.

This data was coded and analyzed to illustrate the phenomenon.

Two questions directed this study,

1. What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities?

- a. How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities align with high-leverage practices in special education?

The chapter presents the study's findings in three sections: demographics of participants, findings by the research questions, and closes with a data summary.

Demographics of Participants

Sample Characteristics

This study used criterion, a subset of purposive sampling. The criteria restricted the pool of participants to elementary or secondary special education teachers in Michigan urban public schools. Key informants are practicing certified elementary or secondary special education teachers. They demonstrated culturally responsive pedagogy knowledge with the likelihood of implementation according to their score on *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* surveys. In their current teaching assignment, each delivers instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities for at least one session per day separate from a co-teaching setting. Co-teaching classrooms were excluded.

Sample Composition

During phase one of the study, more than forty elementary and secondary special education teachers were invited to participate from six traditional urban public school districts. Twenty-six special education teachers responded to the study invitation. Twenty-one volunteered to participate, while five declined. Participants included twenty women and one male. The racial-ethnic membership consisted of 57.1 % White/not Hispanic, 33.3 % Black or African American/no Hispanic, 4.8% Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish origin, and 4.8% Asian identifying special education teachers (Figure 1). Approximately 90.5% of the study's teachers reported

having a master's degree or higher. The remaining 9.5% reported having a bachelors or bachelors plus thirty (Figure 2). Meanwhile, participant years of teaching experience distribution was: 9.5% having less than five years, 9.5% six to ten years, 33.3% eleven to 15 years, and 47.6% with fifteen or more years. It is important to note that there was no correlation between years of service and level of education. Moreover, most of this study's contributors were seasoned teaching professionals with eleven or more years of service. Interestingly, despite representation from six urban districts, most participants were white women aligning with the national trends in special teacher demographics. Nationally 73.1% of special education teachers are white while 90.5% of the study's participants are white women, both demonstrating a greater prevalence of white women instructors (Special education teacher demographics, 2021). Twelve teachers were invited to participate in phase two based on their survey responses, with eight continuing to study completion. The individual demographics for each of the eight are in the table below.

TABLE 4

Characteristic	Special Education Teacher (SET)	Racial/Ethnic Identification	Level of Education	Years of Teaching Experience	School Level	Type of Classroom Program
Case/Participant Identification number	12	White/not Hispanic	Masters plus 30	6-10	Elementary	Resource
	91	White/not Hispanic	Masters	11 to 15	Elementary School	Self-contained
	77	White/not Hispanic	Masters	15 years or more	High School	Self-contained
	56	Black or African American	Masters plus 30	15 years or more	Middle School	Resource
	67	Black or African American	Masters	6 to 10 years	High School	Resource
	90	Black or African American	Masters	11 to 15 years	Middle School	Resource
	99	Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish Origin	Masters plus 30	15 years or more	Elementary	Resource
	96	Black or African American	Masters plus 30	15 years or more	Elementary	Resource

Results

Phase One

Twenty-one study participants completed the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* survey during phase one. On it, participants were asked to rate their confidence level in successfully executing culturally responsive teaching-related tasks by selecting 0 (no confidence at all) to 10 (completely confident). The higher the score, the greater the likelihood that a teacher believes they demonstrate culturally responsive teaching practices. The range of participant scores was 118, with a median score of 336. Teachers that obtained the median score or greater were invited to participate in interviews and focus groups. The average score for interview and focus group participants on the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* survey was 350.

Phase Two

Twelve special education teachers were invited to continue to phase two and three. Eight special education teachers (four elementary, two middle, and two high school) from resource and self-contained special education programs accepted the phase two/three invitation. During phase two and three, individual and focus group interviews were scheduled and conducted via zoom during summer school break. Each focus group session lasted approximately one hour, totaling two meetings. Focus group participants shared their collective insight on culturally responsive teaching practices prompted by a curated vignette,

Imagine a classroom at your level with diverse students in a single session/class during which you will address English Language Arts or Math goals. There are between 5 and 14 students with similar performance levels. Given your typical practices how would you support your students using culturally responsive pedagogy?

Through their responses, a consensus around the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices was created for the elementary and secondary focus groups. Focus groups were transcribed, reviewed, and coded by this researcher via Otter.ai, an online speech-to-text platform. Data from phase two, focus groups supplied the second data source for this multiple case study.

Phase Three

In phase three, individual interviews offered the third data source. Each individual interview lasted thirty minutes to an hour depending on interviewee answers. All respondents were asked fourteen questions covering classroom management, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and cultural enrichment derived from University of South Florida's *Culturally Responsive Coaching* questions and the *Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol Teacher Interview* (Powell and Cantrell, 2021). Each interviewee described their implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in response to the interview protocols. The interviews were also transcribed, reviewed, and coded by this researcher via using Otter.ai and delve tools.

Triangulated Results

Survey, interview, and focus group data analysis answered the study's questions. Six descriptive themes developed across elementary and secondary cases: honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers; balanced student-teacher relationships; differentiated instruction and responses; elevating student knowledge and experiences; responsive student assessment; and embrace individual and world cultures. These themes aligned with Siwatu's (2005) four *Culturally Responsive Teaching Standards*: classroom management, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and cultural enrichment. The thematic description centers on family and student relationships, instructional differentiation, accessing student knowledge, and embracing the

student and family differences as assets. Additionally, four high-leverage practices corresponded to the reported practices of special education teachers for students with dis/abilities; high-leverage practices three, six, thirteen, and eighteen. This multiple case study satisfied its objectives.

Evaluation of Findings

Research Question One

What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities?

Culturally responsive special education teachers are reflective practitioners willing to adapt according to the needs of their families and students. Not from the standpoint of saving families and students; it is the understanding that teacher and student success is predicated on positive, student-teacher relationships, balanced home school dynamics founded on mutual respect and understanding, and a willingness to evolve. Each theme serves as an aspect of these reflective revolutionary practices described in the multiple case study data.

Theme 1: Honoring and Collaborating with Families/Caregivers

The classroom management category of culturally responsive teaching standards requires teachers to create a welcoming and supportive setting compatible with students' cultural backgrounds, foster strong communication, and promote a sense of belonging and community (Siwatu, 2005). Honoring and collaborating with caregivers is appropriately placed within this category, as it embodies the welcoming, communication, sense of belonging, and community that characterizes classroom management. Each case member indicated the importance of honoring and collaborating with caregivers. Their collective description portrayed this theme as the intentional solicitation of caregiver involvement in student success. Caregivers are those

adults who actively engage in the ongoing growth and development of a student(s), honoring the diverse family dynamics of those caring for children, and who matter to them. Solicitation of students' caregivers comprises three elements: making connections with them by welcoming them with judgment-free dialogue, frequent communication in the manner most appropriate for them, and delivering targeted positive highlights. This theme resonated most across multiple case data.

The foundation for welcoming caregivers was established with a judgment-free dialogue. SET56 indicated that "regardless [of] who the parent is, what the parent is going through, they all have the same objective. They want their children to learn, be their best and receive the best education that they can." Assuming each caregiver wants what's best for their student(s) influences the tone of the caregiver and teacher relationship. In addition, it requires special education teachers to acknowledge that the relationship they forge may be impacted by negative encounters and power dynamics previously experienced by students' caregivers. As a result, it is important to enshroud positive suppositions in humility. SET99 validated this by saying that,

“Often parents have not had a great relationship with people at school before or are coming from a bad experience. So really being sort of be humble [and] very approachable and being super intentional about how I speak about their child and how I approach them, so that they don't feel judged.”

Judgement-free dialogue actively equalizes the power dynamic that has persistently been imbalanced within American schools for historically marginalized populations. According to SET67, it also includes becoming a family with the families and students. For SET99, this means "cultivating" relationships with caregivers and "listening...a lot. Listening is active hearing in pursuit of understanding. It is according to SET 91 shared honoring that many "parents have felt

really unheard, [and need the agency] to be an expert on their child." Another facet to welcoming families includes being explicit with caregivers as SET96 states, "I'm really vested in your child so that you don't think that I'm just blowing smoke, [I really] care about your child, you know, and I want to make this work." Finally, fostering welcoming, judgment-free dialogue improves the exchange of information. SET99 shared the following story illustrating the power of welcoming and judgment-free dialogue.

Like I had a little boy who loved karate, and his karate teacher was super important to him. When he was doing well, behaviorally, I reached out to his teacher, [and] when he was struggling with certain things, I'd say okay, well, you know, why don't we talk to master Gandhi about self-control? We can practice that at karate, too. [And] I would say to him, [do] you think Mr. Gandhi would be proud of your behavior right now.... That really mattered to him. And that was something that really got him. And it was part of just knowing who he was. And I wouldn't have known that had I not had a great relationship with his mom. [She] talked about how Oh, I use his karate teacher, his karate teacher is really caring and really, you know, hears about how he's doing in school and everything and encourages good behavior in school.

This welcoming, judgment-free dialogue was made possible through frequent communication in the manner most appropriate for families, the second element of honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers.

It is the intentional inquiry and frequent usage of caregiver/families' preferred communication methods. Taking the effort to connect with families using their preferred method conveys mutual respect and understanding. When using the caregivers' preferred communication method, SET91 reports knowing,

"that they're getting the information [and], it's reciprocal communication instead of if I said everybody's using seesaw, and that was out of somebody's realm, then I can't guarantee that they're getting the information about their student. And I can't guarantee that they're going to want to share information with me. So just utilizing what works best for them.

This element is more than reaching out; it is also being a consistent, reliable resource and community member. Elementary and secondary participants reported attending extracurricular, non-school functions and other events demonstrated as a part of their communication. SET99 said that before Covid-19, they actively volunteered at the community neighborhood center to connect and build a "village." Similarly, SET12 frequently attended student activities where they sat with the families and talked to "get to know the families, [for] a better understanding of the kids." SET67 convenes meetings "after school hours" and connects caregivers to resources. Frequent communication in the manner most appropriate is the purposeful cultivation of home-school connections using a variety of mediums.

The last facet of honoring and collaborating with caregivers is the delivery of targeted positive highlights. The following quote from SET90 illustrates this element,

"Parents also need to hear the good in their child. And, and I like making those phone calls. saying, you know, like, your child did it was a rock star today. I love it when I hear you know, the parents say I don't get good calls. Thank you. So, I like making those calls."

Nurturing a welcoming environment where caregivers can experience judgment-free dialogue via the method(s) that make the most sense must include positives. Responsive instructors recognize that the world for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities too often,

through systems or actions, places them in the space of being less than. For this reason, caregivers must hear from teachers more than just when something unruly happens in the classroom. SET56 happily shares positive reports on student growth,

good the things.... especially when the student reached a certain milestone, or they exceeded an expectation or did better than they thought they should. I like to reach out to the parents and let them know, just whatever I can to invite them in other than seeing them at parent teacher conferences.

Delivering targeted positive highlights is more than praise, it includes substantive information about learning opportunities. SET96 uses,

a Friday photo dump,[where]I show them everything that they're doing, whether it's sensory, whether it's educational, whether it's play, whether it's in [general education], whether it's, you know, in the class, or whether it's bucket filling, you know, and they're like, wow, like, because they can't come into the school, you know, and they get to see the classroom, they get to see us singing, they get to see their nonverbal children get hyped.

Meanwhile, SET99 reported spending time during the school day observing students in a variety of settings to identify positives they share with families and solicit feedback. Communicating positives, according to SET91 enables SE teachers,

to build a connection in a positive way [with] families so that it's more than just [you're] the teacher, they're the parent, but instead it's like a mutual connection [of this] classroom's family, and we'll do what we need to do to support each other.

Delivering target positive highlights is the final element in honoring and collaborating with caregivers.

The first theme, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers fosters a home-school relationship: delivering target positive highlights, frequent communication in the manner most appropriate, welcoming them with judgment-free dialogue is characterized by mutual respect.

Theme 2: Balanced Student-Teacher Relationships

Balanced student-teacher relationships is the second thematic concept. It promotes a shared learner experience amongst students to their peers and teachers, fostering a sense of belonging and community supported by dialogue. It aligns with the classroom management category of CRTS (Siwatu, 2005). SET99 articulated that, “kids don't want to learn from someone they don't care about, ... 10 years from now, kids might not remember everything you taught... but they'll remember how you treated them. The treatment SET99 references relies heavily on communication between teachers, students, and each other. SET12 said their, “biggest thing is, I just [talk] with the kids, I don't talk at them. And a lot of people don't understand the difference ... [I] sit down, [and] talk with the kids.” Based on the data, this intentional reciprocal communication between teachers and students sets the tone for the relationship, much like the communication between caregivers and teachers. It enables students and teachers to get to know one another, and as SET56 reports,

if you can break that ice in the beginning, ... and create a positive, cultural environment where everyone feels welcome, and we teach kindness, and we teach respectfulness to each other, I think you can break those things. So, I try to incorporate that daily, most of all, by example. And knowing that there's no toleration for demeaning someone... creating that whole collectivity, of a cultural, respectful classroom.”

SET77 adds to this idea with the notion that, “if us adults can be vulnerable. I think it opens our students up to know that this is a safe place.”

Beyond the communication and vulnerability is understanding that balanced teacher, student relationships require instructors be in tune with their students. SET91 describes this,

“[as having the mindset that we have to Maslow before we can bloom ...Because our kids, if they don't feel safe, if they don't feel loved, if they don't feel like they belong, they're not going to even be open to our learning experiences.

In short, balanced student-relationships is the purposeful initiation of interpersonal interactions to offer information sharing, trust, and collective learning via deliberate dialogue.

Theme 3: Differentiated Instruction and Responses

The third thematic description that emerged was differentiated instruction and responses which fit within the curriculum and instruction culturally responsive teaching standard category. This standard consists of teachers making connections between classroom activities and their students' cultural identity; accommodating and adjusting instruction to maximize achievement; creating "culturally relevant" materials and activities; as well as developing instruction that addresses the learning styles, growth, and cognition of students (Siwatu, 2005). Hall (2002) defines differentiation as the recognition of students',

varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where they are and assisting in the learning process (p.1).

Participant contributions expanded upon that definition to include data driven decisions that reflect the identity and needs of their students being served. SET77 frames this theme, stating that,

“[teachers] need to realize [that] the students don't need to fit into our system, we need to find a system that fits our students, [and] every student needs a different type of system...They're not cookie cutters, [so] we need to be creative in what we do.

This perspective results in a common understanding between students and teachers. SET99 shared that,

all of my students understand that the things I do with each of them are tailored to them. And so, we spend a lot of time talking about being equal and inclusive, and fair, because they often struggle with well, why does that kid get this, and I don't. And so, in the beginning of the year, we [spend] a lot of time [on] understanding how we give each person what they need.

SET96's “infamous songs” demonstrate the variety of ways differentiated lessons are implemented as seen in the following quote,

I'm big on those to the point where ...we were learning about fractions, and I had my whole class learn fractions, we're gonna learn it, we're gonna learn it with, you know, cutting up this cookie, we're gonna learn it with, you know, cutting up these circles. We're going to draw it; we're going to do it on the board [but] I couldn't find a song about fractions...So I wrote a song.

Beyond cutting, pasting, drawing, moving, and singing there are also classroom discussions.

SET90 uses stories for,

“talking, asking questions, or having the students [trying] to ask questions and have discussions. Sometimes it's what's going on in the world, asking questions about what's happening in the news, and what their thoughts are about it. And just having the students to, as much as possible, lead those conversations.”

In addition to intentional conversations other participants like SET67 show student competence through drawing, explicit problems, power points, post-it notes, and exit tickets with a preference for presentations.

I like to [give] rubrics that show examples. And let them [see] what options there are for presenting the same thing. So, if I want to see something specifically in a presentation, I can give you four different ways. Like if I want to know about, like, let's say the Civil War, you can show them different timelines, visually, you can show me different groupings of pictures, you can even just have a bullet point when you're doing the talking, explaining it.

Differentiated instruction and responses is the purposeful usage of holistic data reflective of student identities paired with multimodal instructional delivery to foster growth and achievement.

Theme 4: Elevating student knowledge and experiences

When a student enters a classroom/school environment, they bring a whole person with ideas, dreams, knowledge, opinions and more. The third emergent theme, elevating student knowledge, regards students' personal journey as essential and an asset for engagement, communal growth, and overall achievement. It is oriented to the curriculum and instruction *Culturally Responsive Teaching Standard* category. SET99 shared that,

Because a lot of kids have a lot of things that they come in with. And instead of thinking I'm going to save and make up for the things that they don't have. I've realized that what our job to do is help them find within themselves, what they have, and what strength they have to..., take care of themselves and be successful because of them. Like we need to just be sort of the person who helps ignite that within them so that they do it themselves, because then that's what makes them more successful in the long run rather than us saving them and, you know, doing this to, you know, fix them, we instead go in and build on what they have and help them build that within themselves.

Unfortunately, approaching children with dis/abilities is often associated with a deficit mindset (Annamma et al., (2012). This is compounded for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities who move through a world that marginalizes them twice based only on their intersectional identities (Annamma et al., (2012). Seeing the value in what each student brings to the school community changes the atmosphere. For SET91 it is,

having a lot of give and take with your students understanding of their backgrounds and being cognizant and purposeful with your teaching every day of maybe what they're bringing with them that day, and also like, as the educator, how can I support those families just making it as strong of a community.

Similarly, SET12 finds connections,

then [has students] teach me about it, ...for example, Star Wars...I let them embrace that moment and share that with me...they're getting something out of it, because they're teaching the teacher and I don't talk to them, like I know everything, because we all know, I do not.

Fostering student agency by providing the opportunity for them to take the lead in the learning or collaboration can be achieved in a variety of ways. SET77 encourages students to bring in food or share family customs and traditions; to share all aspects of themselves. An example from SET77 is a Native American student teaching the class about Pow Wows with videos and clothing worn by family members. Elevating student knowledge and experiences is also the cultivation of brave learning spaces where according to SET56,

regardless of what [your] culture is that we're all respectful of that culture and the differences and, and welcoming learning from each other's culture, I find that [my] students in particular, [they] enjoy learning about other cultures and what makes others different and talking about, like the previous participants said, speaking of different foods, and what they may do differently. So just... bringing more awareness of the differences [in]cultures, and also as an educator, recognizing that they may not know what one person, each person may not know what each other knows, but just being aware of what their needs are, and how to create lessons to work around what they need. And ...create an understanding.

The theme also includes trauma informed practices because as SET99 offered, “a lot of students ... in special education, have experienced trauma and being trauma informed is really important.” Moreover, it contains simple, tried, and true methods like KWL (Know, Want to know, Learned) activities. In short, elevating student knowledge and experiences is embracing the journey that contributes to students' identities as assets to support engagement along with the richness of the school/classroom community and learning opportunities.

Theme 5: Responsive Student Assessment

The fifth thematic descriptor is responsive student assessment. It is perfectly aligned with the student assessment category of culturally responsive teaching standards. Within this category teachers differentiate assessments and analyze standardized outcomes with a lens that acknowledges inherent biases (Siwatu, 2005). Responsive student assessment is the active acknowledgement by instructors that standardized evaluations and most typical curriculum-based tests do not appropriately evaluate culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities so alternatives are necessary. Case evidence illustrates instructors who intentionally seek out, create, and utilize evaluative tools better suited to reflect student growth and achievement as a remedy for the errors in more common assessments. SET99 disclosed that,

“very few assessments exist that are culturally responsive and, you know, a lot of the verbiage and rules are written [on] a very, very narrow scope...no one should be assessed on one day or a couple of days a year to reflect who they are, like, I can imagine if you were like, a lawyer, like, what if they just picked one day of your being a lawyer, and...judged your whole career, you know, that's not very effective...kids are so much more than a score, you know, and I want them to see themselves that way, too.

In addition to this reflective perspective on standardized tests, special education teachers also sought ways to reduce the pressure that students experience as a result of examinations. The strategies included but were not limited to reducing the emphasis placed on assessments, praising student effort, and identifying the most beneficial times and days for test execution. After accepting the imperfect nature of most common assessments and finding ways to support students with taking them, case members described the methods, they used to gather information. SET96 responded that they,

give the iReady tests... attempt to do MLPP, but you can't do MLPP with students that [are] nonverbal, [so you have them] sort these bears [or] point to the A. Or give me the A? Or give me the B...or give me the C? Or can you take three steps forward? Can you take four steps back? [or ask a student to do] thumbs up, thumbs down, point to the picture, I have a lot of adaptive activities that [are] velcro, so they can ...put the answer on the Velcro, so without, without talking,... I [able] was to receive [feedback for] nonverbal students.

Matching assessments to learning styles and strengths of students included but was not limited to SET96's counting manipulatives, pointing, and hand gestures; SET91's use of visuals and pre/post-tests; SET77's checklists for documented teacher observations; or SET67's oral assessments. The descriptions shared across cases consistently reiterated special education teachers' commitment to find or make evaluative tools that are appropriately matched to the student(s). This theme also illustrates special education teachers' refusal to accept the status quo for their students and actively seek progressive ways to identify their strengths and growth areas.

Theme 6: Embrace Individual and World Cultures

The sixth and final theme within the case data, embraces individual and world cultures and is positioned in the cultural enrichment category. It is defined as the intentional inclusion of student/family culture in materials, lessons, and overall classroom presentation. This sixth theme aligns well with the cultural enrichment category as it entails teachers intentionally fostering students' success while promoting cultural identity (Siwatu, 2005). SET99 shared a powerful description which epitomized this theme,

kids should always have a window into a world that they may never be a part of a mirror to see their own life, and then a doorway into exploring another way of life, that they

could be a part of in the future... it means that your students see themselves within what you're teaching as more than just the dominating group or the marginalized, like they see themselves in all different roles ...previously, kids of color may only have heard stories about when their culture was marginalized. And white kids may only hear about when they were colonizing and all of that...whereas when you do culturally responsive [teaching], you tell those stories that are important to understand systems that exist within our world. But also, you tell the stories that empower every group of kids

SET67 added to this description the importance of recognizing that no one person or culture is a monolith. Achieving an environment that embraces intersectional identities is strategic. SET56 researches cultural information with students to promote an inclusive environment. While SET96 collaborates with other educators in their building to provide a diverse array of cultural activities and opportunities. Similarly, SET90 uses shared experience activities like four corners, where students move to different spaces based on how a topic or concept resonates with them. Whereas, SET77 has brought in speakers. Deliberate and reliable cultural inclusion crosses all cases.

Interestingly, English Language Arts lessons and activities were the most common vehicle to showcase and elevate student or global cultures. An example is SET90's use of think pair share activities around articles within their classroom to create connections. Or SET99's purposeful rejection of books that were old favorites in favor of ones that are "culturally sound". Per SET91 embracing individual and world cultures is about "being aware with the curriculum [and] making it represent ... students ...so that [they] feel represented

This final theme emphasizes the importance of designing instruction that deliberately includes individual identities and those of the world around them as an instrument for empowerment.

In summary six thematic descriptive components emerged from case study data covering Siwatu's (2005) *Culturally Responsive Teaching Standards* categories. Honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers and balanced student-teacher relationships align with classroom management. While curriculum and instruction boast differentiated instruction and responses along with elevating student knowledge and experiences. Assessment hosts responsive student assessment. While the cultural enrichment category fits the embrace individual and world cultures theme. These categories and themes reveal an underpinning of mutual respect, given, not earned. Respect is conveyed to each student and caregiver/family because their existence is worthy of it. It is not a concept to be earned. It is an actionable concept expressed by the phenomenon's thematic description.

In addition to developing an illustration of special education teachers reported culturally responsive practices, this study also answered how their methods aligned with high-leverage practices. By comparing high-leverage practices in special education literature and the thematic description identified within the study's first research question, it was possible to identify how teachers' reported practices aligned with high-leverage practices in special education. The following section shares these findings in answer to research question 1a.

Research Question One A

How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities align with high-leverage practices in special education?

High-leverage practices in special education are a collection of evidence-based, best practices intended to foster improved outcomes for students with dis/abilities receiving special education programs and services. Four high-leverage practices aligned to the thematic

description generated from case study data. To provide a clear picture of their alignment, the definition of each high-leverage practice has been provided along with an explanation on how it relates to the corresponding theme.

The third high-leverage practice, collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services, is the first one that matches with the thematic description. It is defined as teacher collaboration with families about individual children's needs, goals, programs, and progress over time and ensures families are informed about their rights as well as about special education processes (e.g., IEPs, IFSPs). Teachers should respectfully and effectively communicate considering the background, socioeconomic status, language, culture, and priorities of the family. Teachers advocate for resources to help students meet instructional, behavioral, social, and transition goals. In building positive relationships with students, teachers encourage students to self-advocate, with the goal of fostering self-determination over time. Teachers also work with families to self-advocate and support their children's learning (McLeskey et al., 2017, p.18).

Two thematic culturally responsive pedagogy descriptive components, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers and balanced teacher-student relationships, partially align with high-leverage practice three. High-leverage practice three is, collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services. Like high-leverage practices three, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers and balanced teacher-student relationships emphasize the relationships between students, families, and teachers. Moreover, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers addresses information sharing, stipulated to in high-leverage practice three as necessary to support student progress, program development, via "effective communication" (McLeskey et al., 2017). Additionally, the agency that is fostered within

balanced teacher-student relationships embodies high-leverage practice three's advocacy. Despite the significant agreement amongst honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers, balanced teacher-student relationships, and high-leverage practice three, they do not completely align. Case data did not universally speak to self-determination. Therefore, high-leverage practices three, collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services, closely aligns with two elements of special education teachers reported culturally responsive practices, honoring, and collaborating with families/caregivers and balanced teacher-student relationships.

The second high-leverage practice considered within this study's descriptive findings was number six, "use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes" (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 20). It is characterized by special education teachers' ongoing use of assessments to adjust instruction to meet student needs in relation to instructional goals. Additionally, teachers are expected to use a variety of assessment tools. Moreover, practitioners that utilize high-leverage practice six are reflective, retaining, discarding, and adjusting instruction based on student data (McLeskey et al., 2017). Three thematic concepts corresponded with it; differentiated instruction and responses, elevating student knowledge and experiences, and responsive student assessment. Responsive student assessment embodies matching appropriate evaluative instruments to students' needs using a variety of tools. Differentiated instruction and responses thematic component is the intentional alignment of instruction and response modalities inclusive of cultural identity. While elevating student knowledge and experiences encourages the inclusion of prior learning to impact lesson development directly. These three descriptive components, combined, fully align with high-leverage practice six.

The third area of commonality was high-leverage practice thirteen, “adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals and differentiated instruction and responses (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 22).” Within this high-leverage practice,

Teachers assess individual student needs and adapt curriculum materials and tasks so that students can meet instructional goals. Teachers select materials and tasks based on student needs; use relevant technology; and make modifications by highlighting relevant information, changing task directions, and decreasing amounts of material. Teachers make strategic decisions on content coverage (i.e., essential curriculum elements), meaningfulness of tasks to meet stated goals, and criteria for student success (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 22).

Differentiated instruction and responses reject one size fits all curricular and instructional decisions. Teachers within this thematic area actively seek materials, lessons, and activities that meet students’ needs. It’s an ever-evolving strategic approach to providing culturally responsive instruction that fully aligns with high-leverage practice thirteen.

The final high-leverage practice that matches with the case study data is eighteen. It is the “use of strategies to promote active student engagement (McLeskey et al., 2017).” It states, teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that result in active student responding. Active student engagement is critical to academic success. Teachers must initially build positive student–teacher relationships to foster engagement and motivate reluctant learners. They promote engagement by connecting learning to students’ lives (e. g., knowing students’ academic and cultural backgrounds) and using a variety of teacher-led (e.g., choral responding and response cards), peer-assisted (e. g., cooperative learning and peer tutoring), student-regulated (e.g., self-management), and technology- supported

strategies shown empirically to increase student engagement. They monitor student engagement and provide positive and constructive feedback to sustain performance (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 24).

It addresses three culturally responsive thematic areas; differentiated instruction and responses, elevating student knowledge and experiences, and balanced student relationships. The characteristics it espouses read as a summation of these three elements. They are clearly embedded within and instructionally aligned to high-leverage practice 18.

Four high-leverage practices correspond to elements of special education teachers reported culturally responsive practices.

TABLE 5

High-leverage Practice (HLP)	Descriptive Components of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services	Honoring and Collaborating with Families/Caregivers Balanced Student Relationships
HLP6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes	Differentiated Instruction and Responses Elevating Student Knowledge and Experiences Responsive Student Assessment
HLP13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals and differentiated instruction and responses	Differentiated Instruction and Responses
HLP18: Use of strategies to promote active student engagement	Differentiated Instruction and Responses Elevating Student Knowledge and Experiences Balanced Student Relationships

Summary

This multiple case study answered both of its research questions. The first question was, what culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities? Study data revealed six thematic descriptive elements: honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers; balanced student relationships; differentiated instruction and responses; elevating student knowledge and experiences; responsive student assessment; and embrace individual and world cultures. In

addition, the special education teachers' reported practices illustrated reflection and a strategic approach determined to address negative historical power dynamics. This empowered caregivers/families and children to be active and critical partners in student achievement.

The second study question was, how do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities align with high-leverage practices in special education? Comparing the descriptive components of culturally responsive pedagogy and high-leverage practices in special education literature revealed the ways they align to each other. Specifically, high-leverage practice numbers three, six, thirteen, and eighteen corresponded with all or part of honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers; balanced student relationships; differentiated instruction and responses; elevating student knowledge and experiences; and responsive student assessment.

The data revealed how the reported special education teachers' culturally responsive practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities aligned with high-leverage practices.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

This study explored the phenomenon of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation within special education classrooms and its connections to high-leverage practices in special education. Culturally responsive pedagogy and high leverage practices are strategic approaches to instruction that reject traditional deficit-based thinking and embrace the whole student. Additionally, culturally responsive pedagogy embodies practices that honor the cultural identities of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families, welcoming them into schools as full partners for improved educational outcomes. High-leverage practices are a collection of effective evidence-based practices that address the growth and achievement of students with dis/abilities.

Both culturally responsive pedagogy and high-leverage practices are needed to foster improved outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education. Special education classrooms have disproportionate representation from culturally and linguistically diverse students. Meanwhile, most teachers identify as white middle class women with a scarcity of experience or knowledge to address the intersectional needs of their students. This incongruity between special education instructors and their students can adversely impact achievement. Culturally responsive pedagogy and high-leverage practices can help fill the need.

Significant research has been devoted to studying culturally responsive pedagogy and special education regarding their effects on student outcomes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019; Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Powell et al., 2016). However, much of the previous research has focused on teacher preparation or general

education settings (Acquah & Szelei, 2018; Bennett et al., 2017; Cantrell et al., 2015; Emdin et al., 2021; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Howard, 2010; Scott et al., 2014). Conversely, special education research involving diverse students with dis/abilities has focused on racial-ethnic groups' disproportionate representation (Farkas et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2016; National Center for Disabilities, 2020; Sciuchetti, 2017). The scarcity in research on the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy within special education classrooms inspired this study. This study examined the self-reported culturally responsive instructional practices of special education teachers. It also generated an overview of how teachers' self-reported practices overlapped with high-leverage practices in special education.

This final chapter provides a venue to review implications and recommendations from the analysis of the data presented in chapter four. It is divided into seven sections: Positionality, Review of methodology, Discussions of the findings in relation to the research questions, Findings related to theoretical framework, Implications, Recommendations for future research, and Closing remarks.

Positionality

Professional, philosophical, racial, and family attributes contribute to my position related to this research. First and foremost, I am a black woman who recognizes the problematic way in which my membership has been valued within the society in general. My identity is both a place of pride and peril, professionally and academically. The awareness that comes with membership in a historically marginalized group heightens my desire to explore methodology that can empower, not hinder, equity of access and outcomes. This work is further influenced by the familial experiences I have had as a mother and a sister facing the social constraints that society and schools seek to place on student's with dis/abilities. I am a mother who advocated for her

child with dis/abilities, insisting that she enjoy every opportunity available to her. I am a sister who advocates for her sibling so that she might gain access to and enjoy the same protections as her neurotypical peers. Professionally, I am a seasoned education professional with over twenty years of experience in P-12 schools; having taught in parochial, traditional public (urban and suburban), and charter school across a variety of classrooms. My classroom teaching experience includes general education elementary classrooms, special education self-contained, resource and co-teaching continuums of service. Currently, I am a special education administrator for P-12 programs. Philosophically, I firmly believe all students deserve the opportunity to drive the bus toward their personal success and it is the responsibility of educational leaders to provide the gas and turn over the keys. Critical to providing the elements students need to determine their path is securing equity for those most marginalized by historically oppressive systems in education. These components motivate this inquiry.

It is because of my positionality that I arrived at this work as a participant observer in a less traditional sense. This study does not enlist direct practitioner observations. However, access to the participants is a function of my role as an active special education professional. This has afforded me the ability to solicit study membership from multiple urban districts including the ones I serve. Moreover, my role allowed me a level of rapport with study participants. Access and rapport changed what may have traditionally been a passive role within the research.

Because of my positionality in relation to the phenomenon's exploration and data gathering, I took careful steps to mitigate researcher bias. First, I was careful to use open-ended questions with participants to amplify their voice in the research. Second, multiple transcript reviews were conducted to verify their accuracy. Third and most importantly, each transcript was coded and analyzed separately before cross case comparisons were conducted. Essential to this

research was verifying that assumptions and meaning being drawn from the research data were supported by actual statements made by participants, not biased researcher inferences.

Review of Methodology

Research Questions

Two questions directed this multiple case study,

1. What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities?
 - a. How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities align with high leverage practices in special education?

Research Design

A multiple case study design was employed to execute this research. Eight bounded cases informed the research. Each case consisted of elementary or secondary public-school teachers in diverse, urban public districts with at least one 20 minute in-person session/class per day during which culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities received instruction.

The study utilized focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and surveys to gather research data. The *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* survey was obtained from its author with permission to use it in this study. Additionally, the individual interview questions were an adaptation of two sources, *Culturally Responsive Instructional Observation Protocol Teacher Interview* and the *Culturally Responsive Coaching* questions. The observation protocol was also obtained from its authors along with permission to use it. While the *Culturally Responsive Coaching* questions were open source (University of South Florida College of Education, n.d.).

This researcher created the focus group format and protocol. These tools facilitated research data acquisition.

Study participation was achieved through numerous solicitation emails to urban public school special education teachers. Initially, invitations were sent to one urban school district. However poor response rates from one district prompted this researcher to expand the geographic boundaries of the study after consultation with study advisors. However, case boundaries were maintained. The expanded geographic boundaries produced twenty-one volunteers. Participants expressed their consent in google form that included the study's outline/summary, consent questions, and the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* survey. It took approximately one month to obtain twenty-one volunteers during phase one.

Once sufficient participation was obtained, the survey was closed to respondents. Each participant's answers were added to determine their total Likert score. The scores ranged from two hundred seventy-seven to three hundred ninety-five, with a median score of three hundred thirty-six. Based on Siwatu (2007) research, the higher the score, the greater likelihood a participant may utilize culturally responsive pedagogy. Twelve study volunteers achieved a median score of three hundred thirty-six or higher and were invited to participate in phase two/three: focus groups and individual interviews of the study. Eight of the twelve agreed to and participated in phase two/three.

The transcripts were reviewed in stages. The initial review determined accuracy and pre-coding. Pre-coding comprised highlighting passages and phrases that were thought-provoking on the initial read through. During one of the individual interviews, participant, SET77 said, "I'm vulnerable to them, I'd let them know that I'm somebody's mom. I'm somebody's wife, somebody's Aunt, you know. And so, I humanize myself, I'm not like I am teacher hear me roar

at the front of the classroom.” That moment, that statement stood out as vulnerable and worth noting in the way they built rapport with students. The first read and pre-coding fostered a more reflective consideration of the case study data.

After pre-coding, a descriptive approach was used for first cycle coding. Descriptive coding was selected because it is reflective of the values, attitudes, or beliefs of the study participants (Saldana, 2021). First cycle coding produced ninety codes. During second cycle coding, the ninety codes were analyzed and collapsed into forty broader codes.

Trustworthiness

After second cycle coding was completed, the data was triangulated for comparison across cases. Triangulation of study data addressed trustworthiness. The data for all eight cases was then compared to identify commonalities which gave rise to thematic concepts. Thematic concepts were then organized into the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Standard* categories per the study’s research design.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

The study answered both of its research questions. The themes produced a description of culturally responsive practices to answer the first question. A of the literature on high-leverage practices in special education and a comparative analysis of the thematic findings answered the second question.

Research Question One

Each study group participant indicated a higher propensity towards delivering culturally, responsive instruction via the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* survey. They then participated in focus groups and individual interviews. Focus group participants were given a vignette to consider then provide feedback regarding how they would structure culturally,

responsive lessons. The prompt fostered a popcorn style discussion, where each participant shared their perspectives to create a common understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy for elementary or secondary programs. Additionally, each participant was asked 14 questions that probed how they individually approach and conduct culturally responsive lessons. These data sources generated a representation of culturally responsive pedagogy implementation to answer the study's first question.

What culturally responsive practices do special education teachers report implementing for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities?

Six inclusive and empowering themes emerged from case study data to formulate a description of the study's phenomenon. They are,

1. Honoring and Collaborating with Families/Caregivers: The intentional solicitation of caregiver involvement in student success;
2. Balanced Student Teacher Relationships: The promotion of a shared learner experience amongst students to their peers and teachers, fostering a sense of belonging and community supported by dialogue;
3. Differentiated Instruction and Responses: The deliberate creation of learning experiences across multiple modalities with the use of appropriate data aligned with student identities;
4. Elevating Student Knowledge and Experiences: It is the intentional inclusion of student knowledge and experiences to facilitate engagement, communal growth, and overall achievement;
5. Responsive Student Assessment: The active acknowledgement by instructors that standardized assessments and most typical curriculum-based assessments do not

- appropriately evaluate culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities requiring the use of alternative measures to assess student knowledge; and
6. Embrace Individual and World Cultures: It is the intentional inclusion of student/family's culture in materials, lessons, and overall classroom presentation.

Culturally responsive pedagogy in special education classrooms is the purposeful honoring and collaboration with families/caregivers where balanced relationships are fostered through embracing student intersectional identities/cultures, elevating student knowledge and experiences while differentiating instruction and assessment.

In addition to the thematic agreement across the case descriptions of culturally responsive pedagogy, respect and reflection were consistently interwoven into the thinking behind the practices. Teachers repeatedly specified the respect they conveyed to students and families as fundamental to their work.

In some cases, referencing it specifically as a right due to students, not a privilege to be earned. This was evident in the way they described their interactions with students. Each insisted on conversing with students, being open to the varying perspectives their students brought and being facilitators to students' learning. Respect for students as individuals who practitioners could learn from also resonated. This respect also carried to students' families.

Participants also insisted that families deserved to be a part of the conversation around their student's successes. This air of respect was interlaced in practitioners' resolve to communicate more positives than negatives. Even when participants spoke of frustration when caregivers were not involved, they conveyed concern that their input was desired to fully understand and appropriately meet students' needs. It was expressed in their commitment to

frequently communicate with caregivers via the method most convenient to them. Respect for caregivers was palpable within the culturally responsive pedagogy description.

Beyond the attitude of respect, each practitioner shared their need to constantly evaluate both the why and how of their practice. They shared repeatedly how previous practices had to be improved or set aside as their proficiency or general knowledge made way for better. Simply put, as they know better, they have intentionally sought to do better. A layer to their reflective practice was being mindful not to be in an echo chamber when evaluating methods; instead bolstering agency for students as well as seeking collegial interactions that would sharpen skills not just reinforce the status quo. Their reflective muscles were mirrored in a general willingness to be wrong and correct errant practices.

Based on this study's findings, culturally responsive pedagogy in special education promotes intentional actions to foster improved student outcomes and honor the whole child's experiences grounded in respect and self-reflection.

Research Question One A

To answer this study's second question,

How do the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities align with high-leverage practices in special education?

a comparison between the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers and high-leverage practice literature was conducted. Four high-leverage practices in special education correspond with the reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers; specifically, three, six, thirteen, and eighteen. High-leverage practice three aligns with two themes, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers and balanced student

relationships because of the emphasis each place on the development of cooperative relationships with families and students. Additionally, differentiated instruction and responses, elevating student knowledge and experiences, and responsive student assessment themes correspond to high-leverage practice six because they collectively embody its composition. They are aligned because high leverage practice six is centered on varied assessment tools. Inclusion of student knowledge and manipulation of instruction aligned with reflective practices best serve improved student outcomes. Differentiated instruction and responses mirror high leverage practice thirteen, as both are focused on differentiated instructional practices. Finally, the themes differentiated instruction and responses, elevating student knowledge and experiences, and balanced student relationships are reflective of the high leverage practice eighteen which encourage the utilization of methods that support student engagement. The reported culturally responsive practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities are interlinked to effectively support teaching and learning.

Findings Related to Disability Critical Race Studies

The theoretical/conceptual framework for this study was Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit). DisCrit addresses the lived experiences and structures that impact people who identify as both culturally and linguistically diverse and dis/abled. Specifically, it speaks to the way in which the intersectional space that culturally and linguistically diverse people with impairments are marginalized and disabled by socially constructed ideas. These societal constructs attempt to define how disabled students should function, what they can achieve, and who regulates their access to resources through racist and ableist policies, structures, and practices. Unfortunately, American P-12 school systems have persistently served as oppressive agents. As such, American P-12 systems must evolve to mitigate the adverse impact they have had historically on culturally

and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities. Dismantling systems of oppression is a cornerstone of DisCrit. Both culturally responsive pedagogy and high leverage practices in special education are indicative of instructional approaches that seek to change the way in which students with dis/abilities and culturally and linguistically diverse groups are educated.

Uncovering the reported ways in which teaching methodology demonstrates a shift away from marginalizing practices is relevant to the discourse on improving education for all students. As a result, this teaching methodology is directly and substantially related to the work of DisCrit, as it fills a space in the research that has not traditionally been addressed for current teaching professionals in special education. It is for this reason that DisCrit served as the study's theoretical framework.

Within the discourse on DisCrit is a fundamental reflective consideration of the value society places on culturally and linguistically diverse people with dis/abilities and how those values manifest in practice across settings. The completion of the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* survey was a reflective exercise, as it was a self-assessment of participants' ability to demonstrate inclusive instructional strategies. This aligns with the reflective foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy which implores educators to confront their own assumptions that may limit students who don't share the same cultural background. This process of self-examination makes way for the implementation of systematic practices that foster equitable access and positive academic outcomes for students (Lindsey et al., 2019).

Participants' reflective descriptions on culturally responsive pedagogy implementation were reviewed and analyzed from a DisCrit lens questioning whether the thematic description was both inclusive and empowering. The findings demonstrated a commitment to seeing the children for who they were as individuals who are capable of greatness for whom the teacher

serves as a facilitator and partner. As one participant shared, “I am teacher hear me roar”. It was interesting to note that the data showed their insistence that doing what’s best for the whole child was best for them and society. Phrases like “culture is not a monolith” and “scaffolding to greatness”, when interrogated through the DisCrit lens, point to educational beliefs and practices that seek to level historical power imbalances that are rampant in American P-12 education.

Moreover, each culturally responsive theme that emerged from the data was representative of practices that rejected traditional notions of how students and families should interact with schools and student information. DisCrit also tells us that to rely exclusively on traditions or historical ways of doing school is to be complicit in the ongoing disenfranchisement of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities. This researcher’s findings demonstrate the intentional rejection of oppressive constructs of normalcy and privileged the voices of the marginalized while reframing the interactions between teachers, students, and families in a positive asset-based approach. The first theme, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers welcomed families to be equal partners for student achievement, rejecting a notion that educators know best. Differentiated instruction and responses, and responsive student assessments, both actively acknowledged the flaws in Eurocentric ways of knowing. Viewing skill acquisition and assessment as inappropriate and often perpetuating inequities for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities must cease. Balanced student teacher relationships and elevating student knowledge and experiences, seek to right imbalances in power and reverse a cooperative student teacher learning journey. Finally, the embrace individual and world cultures theme pays homage to inclusivity, requiring increasing knowledge about local and global differences that inform the way we each perceive the world around us. Because

DisCrit is fundamentally tied to this research. A critical review of the data was able to discern the culturally responsive pedagogical descriptive elements as empowering for student achievement.

In addition to DisCrit's influence on how the data was examined to identify thematic descriptive components, it also motivated the inclusion and investigation of high leverage practice commonalities. High-leverage practices were developed to move away from traditional intervention approaches to special education instruction that perpetuated ineffective practices and outcome inequities. Furthermore, they are committed to meeting the student where they are and fostering achievement, without exclusively fixating on the brokenness intrinsic to the medical model – a foundational component of special education. Because of the premise that high-leverage practices rest upon, examining the way they overlap with the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy was important. Discovering the relationship between four high leverage practices in special education and this study's findings illuminates a gap in the literature regarding research methods that positively impact culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities.

DisCrit influenced this study's design and how the data was interrogated to unveil answers to the research questions. This theory aided the examination of culturally responsive pedagogy and high-leverage practices which concurrently reject the traditional status quo for teaching and learning in special education classrooms. Their reported presence signifies the opportunity for improved outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities.

Implications for practice

Philosophical Implications

The exploration of how special education teachers report their use of culturally responsive pedagogy and its correlation to high-leverage practices have philosophical, inferential, and practical implications. An imbalance in power dynamics is pervasive within American P to 12 public schools. It is perpetuated by longstanding systems that seek to maintain power for historically dominant groups, leaving historically marginalized individuals to face challenges that those with dominant group membership do not typically experience with the same frequency or magnitude. Membership in twice marginalized groups such as culturally and linguistically diverse people with dis/abilities experience a more complex journey. Subsequently, this flawed school system was not intended to scaffold culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities to achieve remarkable outcomes. However, the study's description of culturally responsive pedagogy usage and its connection to high-leverage practices in the classroom signify an opportunity to disrupt dominant narratives for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities. The opportunity to shift negative educational paradigms is exciting. However, beyond the philosophical implications are inferential ones.

Inferential Implications

The expansion of the geographic boundaries beyond the initial single district host site allowed for the inclusion of special education teachers in six different urban districts from across Michigan. The case data recounted culturally responsive pedagogy implementation across all cases. Moreover, the triangulation of the data generated commonality. Based on an analysis of the data, it is reasonable to infer that the implementation of culturally responsive practices is not atypical. However, additional research is necessary to confirm this inference.

Professional Development

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Practical implications that arise from this study include the creation of professional learning opportunities that facilitate improved interpersonal interactions and assessment tool evaluations. The teaching profession is no stranger to professional learning opportunities. Unfortunately, it is often plagued by the latest trend. However, professional learning to enhance the home school partnership and student teacher collaboration is not a trendy idea. The research data emphasized the relationship between families and teachers and students across thematic findings as well as high leverage practices. The thematic area, honoring and collaborating with families/caregivers, described practices that fostered an increased flow of information between home and school that contributed to greater knowledge of students and better partnerships. Creating the level of rapport between families and teachers requires strong communication and interpersonal skills. These same skills are necessary to facilitate cooperative relationships between teachers and students such as were described with the balanced student teacher relationship theme. The importance of these skills is further sustained by high leverage practices three and eighteen which address collaboration and engagement. It is negligent to assume that every special educator or education professional in general possesses these skills. Therefore, it is appropriate to provide training that supports communication and interpersonal skill proficiency.

Sample training programs that teach individuals how to think about their interactions with others include Nonviolent crisis prevention (commonly referred to as CPI) and Adaptive schools training. Nonviolent crisis prevention is an evidence-based training that teaches participants how to address frustrating situations with emphasis on tone and proximity. While adaptive school is a program that teaches participants to be better listeners and promote improved dialogue.

Intentionally changing the power dynamic between students, families, and teachers starts with transforming the way in which interactions occur. Interpersonal and communication skills training are practical ways to foster its evolution.

Evaluation of Assessment Tools

Another practical application that arose from this study was evaluating the assessment tools educators are using in their practice. Case study data pointed to the presence of responsive student assessment which can be used to generate more appropriately differentiated instruction. Research participants shared how they create assessments and use informal data to drive instruction. However, like interpersonal and communication skill development, it is inappropriate to assume that the ability to evaluate and create assessment tools that are better suited to identify strengths and instructional areas is innate. Therefore, it is appropriate to develop professional learning opportunities that provide instruction on how to examine existing assessments for their suitability as well as train educators to create formative and summative evaluations.

When educators improve skills, they are better equipped to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to the practical implications the study also produced four recommendations for future study: a grounded theory to explain the culturally responsive pedagogy practices of special education teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities; an examination of the impact of culturally responsive professional development on current special education teacher practices; a comparative study on whether the years of service impact or the age a teacher begins their career impacts the magnitude of teachers reported culturally responsive

practices; and whether or not correlations exists between special education teacher education level and their reported level of culturally responsive pedagogy knowledge. These recommendations arose out of this study's data analysis process.

Grounded Theory

The first recommendation to conduct a grounded theory study on culturally responsive practices in special education emerged as an extension of this study to determine how and to what extent these practices are occurring.

Action Research

Meanwhile, the second proposal calls for the examination culturally responsive professional learning's impact on teaching practices. This recommendation embraces the Michigan Civil Rights Commission's request for professional learning opportunities to promote equity. It expands upon the culturally responsive pedagogy research in special education to produce tangible teacher practice supports.

Case Study

The third and fourth recommendations are for case studies. The third recommendation is for a comparative study on the impact of years of service and the age a teacher begins their career to determine the magnitude of teacher's reported culturally responsive practices. The fourth recommendation is for the exploration of whether there are correlations between special education, teacher education level and their reported level of culturally responsive pedagogy knowledge. Both recommendation three and four resulted from the absence of notable correlations between years of teaching experience, education, and self-reported efficacy on the *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* observed in this study.

The research data revealed that there were respondents with less than five years of teaching experience, a master's degree and a lower *Culturally Responsive Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* scores, whose scores matched individuals with the same level of education, but significantly more experience. The absence of correlation within this data regarding years of experience and culturally responsive teacher self-efficacy sparked the thought of how current teacher shortages may change the landscape of culturally responsive practice implementation. These shortages have generated significant increases in nontraditional (selected education later in life) and transitional career (worked in another field) educators. It is reasonable to wonder at what point in life do teachers begin their educational professional journey or how does obtaining a master's degree impact their desire to engage in culturally responsive practices. As educational professional membership continues to evolve, exploring the factors influencing culturally practices is appropriate.

Closing Remarks

Matthew 25:40 states, “And the King shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me (King James Version Bible, 2022).” Culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities are one of the most susceptible groups to the negative impact of unjust systems, being subjected to both ableism and racism simultaneously (Annamma et al., 2013). Educators must seek and implement remedies to these pervasive ills for students and their families. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an appropriate tool to dismantle school inequities. It deliberately acknowledges, celebrates, and is inclusive of student’s backgrounds within schools (Gay, 2010). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy facilitates student agency with equitable instruction, supports, and opportunities (Gay, 2010). Moreover, addressing social injustice within

school communities, seeking to integrate more inclusive instructional practices, promotes increased levels of engagement and desired student outcome (Mickelson et al., 2020).

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Appendix A

Interview and Focus Group protocols

Interview Protocol

Interview Time:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Study Description:

Special Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy promote improved student outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Gay 2000; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2019; Powell et al., 2016; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019; Kaufman et al.,2018). This multiple case study will explore how Special Education teachers describe their utilization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy within their practice and how the literature may converge around these two strategic approaches. The intent is to develop a representative portrayal of the phenomenon using surveys, interviews, and focus groups with Special Education teachers in elementary and secondary public-school classrooms.

Classroom Management

1. Describe your classroom community and the steps taken to achieve it.

Curriculum and Instruction

2. How would you define “culturally responsive instruction”?
3. How would you describe a typical culturally responsive lesson in your classroom? Are there specific lesson components that you usually include?
4. Do the learning tasks relate to your students’ lives outside of school? What authentic learning tasks have you developed for lessons?

5. What are your biggest successes with using culturally responsive instruction with your students?
6. What are your biggest challenges with using culturally responsive instruction with your students?

Assessment

7. In what way does students' prior knowledge, experiences, or identity factor into lessons?
8. How could you allow for multiple ways for students to show their competence/learning throughout the lesson? Do you utilize these methods and why?
9. How do you use assessments? What factors contribute to their creation and implementation?

Cultural Enrichment

10. Do you have students who speak a language other than English or dialect in your class?
How do you handle the language differences?
13. What can you tell me about how you work with the families and students in your class?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Adapted from

University of South Florida College of Education. (n.d.). USF Culturally responsive coaching questions. <https://www.usf.edu/education/areas-of-study/elementary-education/documents/culturally-responsive-questions.pdf>

Powell, R., & Cantrell, S. C. (Eds.). (2021). *A framework for culturally responsive practices: Implementing the culturally responsive instruction observation protocol (CRIOP) in k-8 classrooms*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Focus Group Agenda and Prompt

Focus group facilitator:

Focus group participant ID #s:

Study Description: Special Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy promote improved student outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Gay 2000; Hammond, 2014; Howard, 2019; Powell et al., 2016; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019; Kaufman et al.,2018). This multiple case study will explore how Special Education teachers describe their utilization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy within their practice and how the literature may converge around these two strategic approaches. The intent is to develop a representative portrayal of the phenomenon using surveys, interviews, and focus groups with Special Education teachers in elementary and secondary public-school classrooms.

Do you consent to participating in this interview? Yes or No

Do you consent to the interview being recorded? Yes or No

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please call (517)435-5855 or email me at precios@umich.edu. The researchers will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask us to delete it from our records. If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis it will not be possible to remove your information.

- Introductions
- Session Objective
 - Create a group consensus on Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices focusing on Classroom Management, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Assessment, Cultural Enrichment
- Creation of Group Discussion Norms
- Definition of Culture and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
- Prompt
 - Imagine a classroom at your level with diverse students in a single session/class during which you will address English Language Arts or Math goals. There are between 5 and 14 students with similar performance levels. Given your typical practices how would you support your students using culturally responsive pedagogy?
- Debrief

Appendix B**School District Consent Documentation Letter**

April 24, 2022Midwestern Public Schools

Central Office Administration

Dear Central Office Administrator,

I am writing this letter to pursue approval for my case study research project entitled, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Special Education Classrooms: An exploration of elementary and secondary special education teachers' instructional practices*. Nationally, student enrollment is becoming increasingly more diverse. Your school district serves as an example of diversity and a commitment to supporting excellence for all learners. Because of your district's demographics and dedication to fostering improved student outcomes that it is an ideal setting to explore the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices in special education classrooms. With this study, I hope to generate a greater understanding of how special education and culturally responsive pedagogy come together to support children.

With your approval, current special education teachers will be invited to complete a survey, focus group, and an interview on their implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Data will be analyzed with a cross-case analysis to identify commonalities and disparities to create a snapshot of what culturally responsive teaching practices looks like in special education classrooms.

Study participation poses no palpable risks to your staff. Study membership is entirely voluntary. Each teacher is permitted to exit the study at any point before, during, or after its execution without consequence. All research materials will be held in confidence. My supervising research professors, Drs. Ross McClain, McClain, Jasper, and I will have or be the only individuals

permitted to access raw study data ensure study participant anonymity. A study identification number will also be assigned to each teacher to maintain anonymity. Physical documents (artifacts, handwritten notes) will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Digital data will be stored in a secure cloud file.

Participants will be invited to review their data and study outcomes. Your administration will also be invited to review study outcomes.

Please feel free to contact me at precios@umich.edu or (517)435-5855 with any proposal questions or concerns. I look forward to your decision.

Sincerely,

Precios M. Armstrong

Doctoral Candidate,

Education Leadership

Education and Human Services Pathways

University of Michigan – Flint

Appendix C

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale

Rate how confident you are in your ability to successfully accomplish each of the tasks listed below. Each task is related to teaching. Please rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 (no confidence at all) to 100 (completely confident). Remember that you may use any number between 0 and 100.

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
No					Moderately					Completely
Confidence					Confident					Confident
At All										

I am able to:

- _____ 1. adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students.
- _____ 2. obtain information about my students' academic strengths.
- _____ 3. determine whether my students like to work alone or in a group.
- _____ 4. determine whether my students feel comfortable competing with other students.
- _____ 5. identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students' home culture.
- _____ 6. implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students' home culture and the school culture.
- _____ 7. assess student learning using various types of assessments.
- _____ 8. obtain information about my students' home life.
- _____ 9. build a sense of trust in my students.
- _____ 10. establish positive home-school relations.

- _____ 11. use a variety of teaching methods.
- _____ 12. develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds.
- _____ 13. use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful.
- _____ 14. use my students' prior knowledge to help them make sense of new information.
- _____ 15. identify ways how students communicate at home may differ from the school norms.
- _____ 16. obtain information about my students' cultural background.
- _____ 17. teach students about their cultures' contributions to science.
- _____ 18. greet English Language Learners with a phrase in their native language.
- _____ 19. design a classroom environment using displays that reflects a variety of culture
- _____ 20. develop a personal relationship with my students.
- _____ 21. obtain information about my students' academic weaknesses.
- _____ 22. praise English Language Learners for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language.
- _____ 23. identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards linguistically diverse students.
- _____ 24. communicate with parents regarding their child's educational progress.
- _____ 25. structure parent-teacher conferences so that the meeting is not intimidating for parents.
- _____ 26. help students to develop positive relationships with their classmates.
- _____ 27. revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups.
- _____ 28. critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes.
- _____ 29. design a lesson that shows how other cultural groups have made use of mathematics.
- _____ 30. model classroom tasks to enhance English Language Learner's understanding.
- _____ 31. communicate with the parents of English Language Learners regarding their child's achievement.
- _____ 32. help students feel like important members of the classroom.
- _____ 33. identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards culturally diverse students.

- _____ 34. use a learning preference inventory to gather data about how my students like to learn.
 - _____ 35. use examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
 - _____ 36. explain new concepts using examples that are taken from my students' everyday lives.
 - _____ 37. obtain information regarding my students' academic interests.
 - _____ 38. use the interests of my students to make learning meaningful for them.
 - _____ 39. implement cooperative learning activities for those students who like to work in groups.
 - _____ 40. design instruction that matches my students' developmental needs.
 - _____ 41. teach students about their cultures' contributions to society.
-

Used with permission from

Siwatu, K.O. (2007). Preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 1086-1101.

Appendix D

Survey Demographics

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Special Education Classrooms: An exploration of elementary and secondary special education teachers' instructional practices.

Study Participant Demographics Survey Questions

How many years have you been teaching? Please circle one.

Less than 5 years 6 to 10 years 11 to 15 years 15 years or more

For which grade level do you deliver in-person instruction? Please circle one.

Elementary Middle School High School

How do you identify racially/ethnically? Please circle all that apply

American Indian or Alaskan Native Asian

Black or African American/ not Hispanic White/not Hispanic

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Choose not to answer

Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed. Please circle one.

Bachelors Bachelors plus 30 credits Masters

Masters plus 30 Education Specialist Doctorate

Appendix E

IRB Exemption

University of Michigan Flint Research Exemption



Precios Armstrong <precios@umich.edu>

eResearch Notification: Notice of Exemption for (HUM00212072)

1 message

ereseach@umich.edu <ereseach@umich.edu>

Fri, Apr 15, 2022 at

11:15 AM

Reply-To: ereseach@umich.edu

To: namcclai@umich.edu, rosspam@umflint.edu, precios@umich.edu



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board

(IRB-HSBS) • [2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI](https://www.umich.edu/locations/ann-arbor/2800-plymouth-rd)

[48109-2800](https://www.umich.edu/locations/ann-arbor/2800-plymouth-rd) • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171

• irbhsbs@umich.edu

To: Precios Armstrong

From:

Riann Palmieri-Smith

Thad Polk

Cc:

Nathaniel McClain

Pamela Ross McClain

Precios Armstrong

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00212072]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Title: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Special Education Classrooms

Full Study Title (if applicable): Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Special Education Classrooms: An exploration of elementary and secondary special education teachers' instructional practices

Study eResearch ID: [HUM00212072](#)

Date of this Notification from IRB: 4/15/2022

Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 4/15/2022

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

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:

The IRB HSBS 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 2(i) and/or 2(ii) at 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **if at least one of the following criteria is met:**

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that **the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained**, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the **human subjects' responses** outside the research **would not reasonably place the subjects at risk** of criminal or civil liability or be

damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thad A. Polk". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Riann Palmieri-Smith Thad Polk

Co-chair, IRB HSBS Co-chair, IRB HSBS