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**CULTURE MATTERS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGICAL  
PRACTICES**

by

Leslie M. Septor

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
March 26, 2019

Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.



## **Dedications**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their never-ending love, support, and encouragement throughout our life's journey. I would never have been able to accomplish this amazing feat without you. To my husband, Brad, and my youngest son, Jacob, who stepped in many nights to care for the rest of the gang so I could write. To Joshua, Matthew, Daniel, and Michael, thank you for your love, support, and continuous encouragement. You are the best boys a momma could ask for!

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## Abstract

Leslie M. Septor  
CULTURE MATTERS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGICAL  
PRACTICES  
2018 - 2019  
Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.  
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy to gain a better understanding of the role professional development has in educational decision making. Data were collected from a group of teachers and support staff who attended cultural competency training and who received subsequent mentoring. The study found, overall, that professional development is important to educators and was effective in shaping their understandings of cultural competency and how students learn in environments that are reflective of their experiences. The study revealed that not all professional development leads to shifts in pedagogy as intended as there are numerous factors that hinder sustainable professional growth of teachers in this district where PD ranges from ineffective and irrelevant, due to lack of input from all stakeholders, to unsustainable due to competing priorities that shift the district's focus from year to year and limit follow-through and follow-up opportunities.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*“Tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever in a world where peoples are becoming more and more closely interconnected.”*

*—Kofi Annan, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations*

As the population across the United States continues to grow more varied, public schools are challenged to meet the needs of a growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. Public schools in the United States are more diverse than ever before, but the teaching force remains primarily White (Goldenberg, 2014). The total student enrollment of public elementary and secondary schools increased from 48.8 million to 50.3 million between the fall of 2004 and fall of 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The racial and ethnic distribution of students also shifted. In 2014, the percentage of students who were white was 49.5%, a decrease from 58% from the fall of 2004 and the number of Black students decreased from 17% to 16% (NCES, 2017). In contrast, the population of Hispanic students increased over the same period from 19% to 25%. While whites will still outnumber any single racial or ethnic group, their overall share of the nation’s 55 million public school students is projected to drop to 45% by 2025 (NCES, 2017). Students of color are expected to make up 51% of public school students in grades pre-K through 8th grade and 48% of those in grades 9 through 12. By 2026, the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2017) anticipates the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students will rise to 54% suggesting a definite need to change the way educators think and respond to these diverse learning styles in student populations.

While the school age population is becoming more diverse, students continue to be taught by teachers who are predominantly female, middle class European Americans (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lowenstein, 2009). A 2014 study indicates 79% of all public school teachers are White, while only 8% are Black and 9% are Hispanic (U.S., 2016). Although some districts recruit in an attempt to hire racially diverse teachers, Gay (2010) posits, “the need for more Latino, Asian, Native, and African American teachers in schools is unquestionable...but to make improving achievement for students of color contingent only on fulfilling this need is based on a very fallacious and dangerous assumption” (p. 240). Such a belief presumes that membership in an ethnic group is necessary and/or sufficient to enable teachers to impart culturally competent pedagogy effectively (Gay, 2010). This is an alarming problem since the majority of teachers in the United States are White (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013) and in the absence of adequate training in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, these teachers may have a tendency to unfairly evaluate students based on their perceived academic orientation that stems from racial stereotypes (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013).

These ethnic, racial, and cultural differences between teachers and their students can make it difficult for educators to appropriately challenge and teach all students (Edwards & Edick, 2012; Kea & Trent, 2013). One way to support ethnic minority students is through culturally responsive teaching practices (Griner & Stewart, 2011; Kea & Trent, 2013; Ukpokodu, 2011). Proponents of culturally responsive teaching report that it can improve student achievement and engagement, as well as provide an equitable education to marginalized students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings 2006; Lanier & Glasson, 2014; Sleeter, 2011). Public schools across the US consistently continue to struggle to

develop trainings and techniques that ensure teachers are aware of the cultural differences in their classrooms.

### **Preparedness of Teachers**

There is limited research centered on the preparedness of teachers and instructional support staff (special education teachers and English as a second language (ESL) teachers) to instruct increasingly diverse student populations. However, an emerging body of research (Irvine, 2002; Gay, 2010; Parris & Alim, 2014) has recognized the negative impact traditional instructional practices within the American educational system have had on students leading to achievement disparities between Black and Latinx students and White students (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Educating teachers and instructional support personnel to be confident in threading cultural learning experiences through pedagogical practices, reflecting on how they define their personal and professional selves in terms of their beliefs and biases, and determining how to effectively engage learners from all cultural backgrounds and diverse needs, is a challenge school districts and teacher education programs must address (King, Artiles, & Kozleski, 2009). Moreover, the educational future of school-aged children hinges on teachers recognizing the necessary pedagogical shifts and the professional development required in meeting the diverse needs of all students. Gay (2013) stresses teachers who want to effectively meet the needs of culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse students should be knowledgeable of and use culturally responsive teaching practices. While many teachers are well-versed in using best practices, they might be less familiar with how to infuse culturally responsive teaching into daily practice. Educators who understand culturally responsive teaching demonstrate how in-school learning and out-of-school



learning are connected. They promote educational equity and excellence, create community in their classrooms, and develop and empower students (Gay, 2013). However, transferring culturally responsive teaching practices from theory into practice is not always easy.

### **Objective of Professional Development**

The objective of professional development is to increase teachers' growth and development to meet the needs of all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). Education programs prepare teachers to address the academic needs of students, but often do not adequately prepare them to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of all students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Weber et al., 2013) and the standards set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) that requires all CAEP accredited institutions be held accountable for their teacher education programs omits the inclusion of diversity standards that relate to teacher candidates' dispositions. CAEP Standard 5 addresses provider quality and continuous improvement of candidates as:

The provider maintains a quality assurance system comprised of valid data from multiple measures, including evidence of candidates' and completers' positive impact on P-12 student learning and development. The provider supports continuous improvement that is sustained and evidence-based, and that evaluates the effectiveness of its completers. The provider uses the results of inquiry and data collection to establish priorities, enhance program elements and capacity, and test innovations to improve completers' impact on P-12 student learning and development.

Teacher-education programs across the United States must comply with CAEP (2016) standards to provide accountability and improve teacher preparation. The classroom climate is changing as teachers struggle with how to teach culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Durden & Trucott, 2013; Kelly-McHale, 2013). With this change, some teacher preparation programs are now requiring their teacher candidates to take culturally relevant and responsive teaching classes, but mandatory inclusion of these programs has yet to become policy (Keengwe, 2010; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2012; Milner, 2009). Teacher preparation is important for understanding culturally diverse students and the culturally responsive teacher is able to present classroom curriculum from diverse cultural perspectives of the students providing a more meaningful and deeper learning experience (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2014) posits the secret to culturally responsive pedagogy is the ability to link the principles of learning with a deep understanding of and appreciation for culture.

### **New Jersey Demographics, Policy, and Professional Standards**

New Jersey, like neighboring states and the nation as a whole, has experienced a transformation of its student population (Orfield, 2017). According to New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) statistics (2017), White students now make up a minority of overall student enrollment. While the African American population has remained relatively stable, the Latinx population has quintupled. Despite this trend, New Jersey schools remain highly segregated and almost 10% of all students attend schools where 99% of the student body is non-White (Orfield, 2017).

**Demographics.** Five hundred and ninety school districts across New Jersey educate approximately 1.37 million school aged children in grades K-12. Of those, approximately 45% identify as White, while approximately 55% identify as non-White, including African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and Hawaiian Native (NJDOE, 2017). These districts employ 137,201 administrators and classroom teachers. Nearly 84% of New Jersey certificated staff members are White. Only 16% of all teachers identify as non-White and include a racial makeup similar to that of their students.

**Professional standards.** In an effort to ensure all teachers are high quality and effective in supporting college and career readiness for all students, the State Board of Education (2014) adopted eleven updated professional standards for teachers and school leaders that are grouped into four domains. These include (1) the learner and learning; (2) content knowledge; (3) instructional practice; and (4) professional responsibility. One consistent tenet woven within each of these domains is the expectation that educators value diversity and understand and integrate diverse cultures into all learning experiences.

**Policy.** In June 2013, the New Jersey State Board of Education released revised professional development guidelines to align with education reform, TeachNJ, enacted by Governor Chris Christie. Educators are required to engage in 20 hours of professional development of their choosing per year. Additionally, all school personnel must complete state mandated professional development topics not included the 20-hour requirement for (a) reading disabilities, (b) prevention: suicide, substance abuse, harassment, intimidation and bullying, (c) school safety, security, and code of student conduct, (d) health and (e)

interscholastic activities. Regulations do not specifically address a need for teachers to engage in professional development to increase cultural competence or responsiveness.

### **Problem Statement**

The role of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy gains increasing importance in American classrooms with the largest influx in history of immigrant students who speak a language other than English (Howard, 2010). In the nation's largest urban public schools, African Americans, Latinx and Asian Americans make up 75 % of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), yet education reform's standardized curriculum continues to favor the ideologies of the dominant culture and gives little, if any consideration to the cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. This is detrimental because it negatively impacts students who do not see their history, culture, or background represented in textbooks or the curriculum, or they see it distorted (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Inequitable pedagogical practices harm all students, not just those from the marginalized cultures. According to Roseberry-McKibbin (2008), teachers have an obligation to engage in opportunities to learn about different cultures and must consider these values when planning lessons and classroom structure. Moreover, curriculum and materials should acknowledge the life experiences and background of all students so that instruction can be built on a firm foundation.

Many professional development opportunities available to teachers are ineffective at improving teacher knowledge and skills or sustaining change in instructional practice (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). Moreover, most professional development available for teachers involves short, one-time workshops in which information, instructional methods, or resources are disseminated to teachers and largely fail to significantly impact teacher practice (Darling- Hammond et al., 2009;

Elmore, 2002). Staff development is the catalyst to improving the quality of America's teachers (Kent, 2004), yet current professional development models consist of short-term traditional training that are neither successful nor sustainable (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011). Professional development is not changing the fixed patterns of learning and teachers are not transferring information into sustainable instructional approaches (Hill, Beisiegel & Jacob, 2013). Researchers at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2005) noted,

Continuing with business as usual will mean failure or mediocrity for too many students. Data related to racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity demonstrates achievement gaps. Rapidly changing demographics demand that educators engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systematic process of professional development to prepare all educators in the school to function effectively in a highly diverse environment. (p. 16)

Professional development that is job embedded and sustained over time is infinitely more responsive to teachers' long-standing objections to "one-time" workshops and potentially more relevant and meaningful in a way that single session outside workshops or college courses cannot be. There is no evidence to suggest most teachers tried to implement new learning into practice and failed or believed that the practices could not have affected teaching and learning in their classrooms if implemented well. Instead, it appears new practices had little or no effect because they were never really implemented.

What is missing from the literature is an understanding of how professional development can create and sustain an educational environment committed to culturally appropriate practice. Current research supports the contention that developing the role of

the teacher is a critical factor in the successful implementation of any educational program (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). Continuous, consistent learning opportunities for educators about how to best serve the needs of diverse learning communities comprised of students with different cultural heritages and ethnic identities is the catalyst for sustaining this commitment. This study will investigate the role of professional development in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy in a diverse school district in New Jersey.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants received 21 hours of intensive, targeted cultural competency training. Additionally, ten teachers received seven 3-hour mentoring, coteaching, modeling, and embedded training sessions. Participation in the program was voluntary. The professional development was designed to increase the use of culturally responsive instructional practices in this underperforming, culturally and linguistically diverse urban setting in New Jersey. For the purpose of this study, culturally responsive pedagogy is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Further, throughout this study, teachers shared their own perceptions concerning the change in their pedagogy and assumptions after participation in the cultural competency professional development sessions. Finally, teachers were asked to reflect on what in the

professional development contributed to the change or lack of change in their pedagogical practices. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers and support personnel describe their pedagogical practices prior to professional development on culturally relevant and responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators?
  - a. How do educators internalize CRP as it relates to their professional practice?
  - b. What specific strategies and practices do the educators describe as being successful when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?
  - c. How do educators sustain an educational environment that promotes culturally appropriate and relevant teaching practices?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are provided to create a framework for exploring the research questions and to define how they are used within the context of the study:

*Culture.* A complex constellation of values, mores, norms, customs, ways of being, ways of knowing, and traditions that provides a general design for living, is passed from generation to generation, and is used to give meaning and order to all lives (Howard, 2010; Gay, 2010).

*Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy (CLRP).* The validation and affirmation of the home culture and home language for the purpose of building and

bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society (Hollie, 2012).

*Culturally Relevant and Responsive Teaching (CRRT)*. Using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2010).

*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)*. A theory that purposely incorporates the cultural knowledge, experience, and frames of references of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant for students whose cultural ethic, linguistic racial and social class backgrounds differ from that of the majority (Coffey, n.d.; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014)

*Opportunity Gap*. Differences in type and quality of educational opportunities associated with socioeconomic, demographic, and de facto segregation patterns. (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

*Pedagogy*. The art and science of teaching.

*Professional Development*. Formal training to expand content knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers.

*Reflective Practice*. Intentional, systemic, disciplined inquiry that will ultimately lead to implementation of solutions once the individual thinks through the problem (Dewey, 1938).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) argue that reforming our public education system hinges on an exploration of processes that will facilitate changes in the ideas, beliefs, and practices of teachers and reflective practice is one way to achieve this goal. Despite what



we know about good practice, behavior patterns or instructional routines are resolute to change; teachers resist change and they fail to transfer skills and strategies learned during professional development training into classroom practices (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). The concept of reflective practice as a means of facilitating organization change is based on a belief that organizational change begins with individuals (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Reflective practice is beneficial in the development of teachers and the transfer of professional development into instruction (Osterman, 1990). Reflective practice supports the idea of the teacher as change agent. As teachers use a consistent practice of reflection to examine current practices and unexamined assumptions that shape habits, they are able to critically examine their practice, thereby improving their ability to create change, and ultimately improve student learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). By gaining a greater understanding of the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy through reflective practice, the participants in this study can employ the same processes to help students become reflective thinkers, as the very essence of reflective practice, inquiry, problem solving, and analysis, are the underpinnings necessary to prepare students for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century.

Through interviews, classroom observation, and evidence collection, the researcher will take a closer look at how teacher describe their successes in sustaining culturally responsive teaching practices and reflecting on whether these methods are engaging and differ significantly from their traditional practices.

## **Delimitations**

This research will explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize, implement, and sustain the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy in daily practice. However, as with most research, it is not possible to include all aspects of this study that may be relevant to it.

For this study, one limiting factor that may restrict the inferences that can be drawn about the effectiveness and sustainability of professional development is teachers within the district were selected based on their participation in professional development specifically related to culturally responsive teaching. The experiences of these participants may not be reflective of the overarching abilities of teachers across the district to sustain new learning and changes to pedagogical practices that result from other types of professional development. The researcher will make no assumptions about the effectiveness of this and other types of professional development opportunities when presenting findings. While generalizability is not a characteristic of case study (Merriam, 2009) and although participants have been specifically trained in culturally responsive practices, the small sampling of elementary teachers and support staff within one larger district may limit the range of experiences needed to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers use professional development to understand, change practice, and teach culturally diverse students. Consequently, this study will not address questions around professional development not related to cultural responsiveness.

A second limiting factor may be in sustaining participant participation in the study as there are high instances of staff turnover and reassignment rates across the district that may change the composition of participants. Once the research begins, participants may

find the research too intrusive on their practice and opt to be excluded from further study. Additionally, a power differential exists between the participants and the researcher because of the supervisory role of the researcher. This relationship may cause participants to feel targeted and vulnerable to potentially poor evaluations due to their ability or lack of ability to sustain culturally responsive practices.

Researcher bias and subjectivity could have an impact on the analysis of interview responses. The researcher will make every effort to limit personal bias and opinion by using reflective logs to maintain transparency throughout the research process and ensure objectivity in analyzing all responses made by the participants as it may be difficult to ascertain the effect of a sustained professional development model based simply on statements by participants. Teachers' own perceptions concerning the change in their pedagogy and assumptions about culturally responsive pedagogical practices after participation in professional development activities may differ from observed behaviors. In addition to a reflective journal, multiple data sources in the form of observation, artifacts collection, and survey data will also be used to triangulate data and draw meaningful conclusions.

### **Significance of the Study**

While many studies speak to the importance of employing culturally responsive teaching strategies, this study will look for evidence of changes to pedagogical practices after teachers and support staff participate in a series of professional development sessions designed to increase their understanding of the racial and cultural context of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The theoretical and conceptual base of the cultural responsive teaching construct has been clearly articulated in literature. However,

the development of individual teachers in attaining culturally responsive practices is an area in need of investigation.

While many studies speak to the importance of employing culturally relevant and responsive teaching strategies, this study will look for evidence of changes to pedagogical practices after teachers and support staff participated in a series of professional development sessions designed to increase their understanding of the racial and cultural context of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

### **Policy**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015 (US Department of Education, 2017). The ESSA maintains the requirement that teachers and paraprofessionals working in Title I schools meet state certification and licensure requirements. Title II, Part A supports the ESSA by providing funding to support teacher training and to help educators grow professionally.

The ESSA will slowly shift 80% of professional development funds to high-poverty areas and 20% of funds to high-population areas, where funds were previously allocated solely on population size. While the ESSA eliminates the Highly Qualified Teacher credentialing from NCLB, it requires states to report on the number of inexperienced teachers and those teaching on an emergency credential. The law also provides for the integration of professional development into teacher's daily schedules and provides funds for non-teaching staff to receive professional development.

Additionally, Title III, Part A, as reauthorized under the ESSA, aims to ensure that English learners (ELL) and immigrant students attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English. Moreover, it provides funding and

professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals directly responsible for the education of immigrant students. It does not specifically mandate cultural competency training.

### **Practice**

A major concern with the professional development being offered to teachers and educational personnel is the lack of data correlated to these opportunities. Because it is often the case that workshops are stand alone, with no follow-up, the techniques and materials are not always implemented and sustainable over time. Additionally, no data is collected regarding the improvement of instruction and, without the data, it is difficult to determine if the professional development has a lasting effect on schools, teachers, or students.

Another concern that exists is the lack of buy-in from staff members. The teachers rarely have input into the content of professional development workshops, and in turn, the content may not be relevant to their instruction. Teachers are not vested in the material largely because it does not pertain to their needs or they hear from a presenter on a singular occasion. Professional development tends to be isolated to a few remote hours on one day and multiple topics are presented over the school year.

For this study, participants volunteered to attend a 16-hour cultural competency institute and, as such, data will be collected to determine what pedagogical shifts, if any, participants have made because of their participation in the program. The training occurred over two Saturdays during the fall semester.

## **Research**

There is sufficient research suggesting and detailing the necessity for culturally responsive education for teachers as a means to serve diverse students, yet there is little evidence of such transmission into classrooms (Grant, Elsbree, & Fondrie 2004; Nieto, 2004). Increased, improved, and varied training for teachers in cultural competency will result in the success of culturally-inclusive education in public schools and eventually the elimination of the opportunity gap (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay & Howard, 2000; Jordan-Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; National Collaborative on Diversity, 2004; Nieto, 2004).

Future research should examine the ability to sustain changes in pedagogical practices of teachers engaged in professional development. Teacher development must be differentiated to address the classroom teacher's specific cultural composition and strengthen the confidence of teachers to employ theory into daily practice.

## **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the topic of study and presents the purpose for the research and the questions to be investigated, the delimitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter two synthesizes the scholarship around quality PD and the characteristics of and need for culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Chapter three explains the methodological approaches used, including selection of participants, instrumentation, description of data collections methods, approaches to data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Chapter four will present the findings gathered by the researcher. Finally, chapter five will discuss the implications of the findings and propose recommendations for further study.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Much of the literature on professional development and teacher learning is dedicated to the ineffectiveness of the professional development traditionally offered to teachers. It can be argued though that much of what constitutes professional development now, and in the past, has ignored the theories of how adults learn and has been more pedagogical in nature (Kyndt et al, 2016). Research suggests effective professional development is characterized as intensive, ongoing and sustained over time (Hill, 2009; Mancabelli, 2012; Kyndt, et al., 2016) and acknowledges and understands the unique nature of each teacher's working and learning environments by dismissing the one size fits all model (Mancabelli, 2012). Moreover, appropriate conditions and characteristics of professional development increase depth of understanding that leads to change in teaching practice (Stewart, 2014; Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, Donche, 2016; Hill, 2009).

This chapter provides an examination of literature as it relates to the professional development of teachers and the sustainability of culturally responsive teaching practices learned through professional development. The data exposed in this study reveals a deeper understanding of how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development that promotes culturally responsive teaching practices. Additionally, this review includes a discussion on reflective practice and the role reflective practice plays in shaping and sustaining pedagogical change.

The research reviewed in this chapter includes: (a) professional development and the preparation of teachers, (b) characteristics of effective professional development, (c)

culturally responsive pedagogy, (d) characteristics of culturally responsive practices, and (e) reflective practice as a theoretical framework.

### **Professional Development and Teacher Preparation**

One of the most powerful predictors of student learning, more than any other factor, is teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009). Desimone (2009) posits education reform relies on teacher learning and improved instruction to increase student learning and that education reform is often synonymous with teachers' professional development. Professional development is a driving force for improvement of instruction and student achievement and one of the major agendas in federal educational reforms since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. To that end, the U.S. Department of Education's \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTTT) Program encourages and rewards states that develop innovative plans for educational reforms to support improvements in teaching and learning that leads to improved student outcomes (US Department of Education, 2017). In 2016 alone, the federal government spent 2.5 billion on professional development for teachers, thus understanding what makes professional development sustainable is critical to understanding the success or failure of many education reform efforts (US Department of Education, 2017).

Katz and Dack (2013) espouse that when professional development is ineffective, it does not impact teacher learning and the teachers who attend do not reform their practice. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), "no improvement effort has ever succeeded in the absence of thoughtfully planned and well-implemented professional development" (p. 497) making professional learning an important contribution to erasing



the inequities that exist across classrooms and increasing opportunities for all students to succeed (Hirsch, 2009).

### **Preparing Urban Educators**

Over the past 20 years, educational research has changed focus from observing teacher behaviors that benefit student outcomes to studying teachers' beliefs and practices for diverse student populations (Watson, 2012). The current standard by which educators are being held is more rigorous and demanding than it ever has been. Darling-Hammond (2008) affirms, "in response to an increasingly complex society and a rapidly changing, technology-based economy, schools are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before" (p. 91). For teachers to enact the high levels of practice needed for students to learn, they must possess a strong and diverse base of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Building this knowledge begins with high standards for initial teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001) and continues over a teacher's career through effective professional development (Desimone, 2011).

Urban school reforms, like all school improvement initiatives, are primarily standards-based reforms which include high standards, curriculum frameworks, and new approaches to assessments aligned to those standards which generates new expectations for teaching and student performance (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006). Teachers who work in urban settings are faced with higher levels of poverty, lower socioeconomic status, increased rates of violence, outside agencies involved with the children's lives, homelessness, children in foster care, and gang violence. According to Patterson et al (2004), urban schools suffer from far greater complications than rural or suburban

schools since they have to deal with high teacher and student absenteeism, high teacher turnover, high numbers of uncertified teachers and greater numbers of inexperienced teachers.

Although teachers generally support high standards for teaching and learning, many teachers are not prepared to implement teaching practices based on high standards (Cohen, 1990; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996; Grant, Peterson, & Shojgreen-Downer, 1996; Sizer, 1992; Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006). Even more problematic in urban schools is attracting and retaining quality educators (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Graziano, 2005; Haberman, 2005; McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson & Robinson, 2008). According to Darling-Hammond (2000), urban high poverty students are taught by more new, under-prepared, and less experienced teachers, which contributes to the disparities in achievement among majority and minority populations (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson & Robinson, 2008). Professional development in urban schools then, requires even more of a financial commitment to attract, recruit, equip, and ultimately retain quality teachers. Not only is professional development at the core of school improvement efforts, it is the single largest monetary investment in school reform (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006).

### **Context Specific Teacher Preparation**

Racial and ethnic heterogeneity, high concentrations of poverty, large, dense bureaucracies, and the revolving door of teachers plague low performing, urban schools across the nation (Quartz, Lyons, Masyn, Olsen, Anderson, Thomas, Goode, & Horng, 2004) and new teachers are generally underprepared for the complex challenges facing urban schools because university programs typically focus broadly on learners and

learning, subject matter, and teaching children with special needs (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). This practice has been referred to as the generic or universal treatment of teacher preparation programs (Haberman, 2012). Haberman (2012) argues that teacher education programs should emphasize the importance of contextual distinctions in the ways children develop, the ways they learn, and the nature of the content they learn by focusing specifically on a particular context or setting such as urban schooling.

To explore the concept of context specific teacher education, Matsko and Hammerness (2014) conducted a study analyzing three teacher education programs that prepare teachers for specific contexts; urban public schools, urban catholic schools, and Jewish schools. Each of these programs tailor's instructional curricula and practices toward these particular groups of students. The results of the longitudinal investigation indicated that the teaching practices of teachers who graduated from context specific preparation programs were more reflective and thoughtful of instructional decision making and when prepared for particular contexts had higher retention rates (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). The study suggests that this approach to teacher preparation and professional development that values content embedded within the context of the students being served improves teaching practices and help teachers better understand their students and ultimately teach in more powerful and equitable ways (Haberman, 2011; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014).

### **Professional Development**

In a study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009), a meta-analysis of 1300 research studies and evaluation reports

revealed four basic principles of well-designed professional development believed to positively influence teacher practice and student performance. These include professional development that is: (a) intensive, ongoing and connected to practice, (b) focused on student learning and addresses specific curriculum content, (c) aligns with school improvement priorities and goals, and (d) builds strong working relationships among teachers. The researchers found traditional means of professional development, providing teacher learning outside of the context of the classroom, does not show a statistically significant positive effect on student learning (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009). To maximize learning, teachers must acquire knowledge of the culture within their classrooms and recognize the impact of culture on learning (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). Research supports the idea that developing the role of the teacher is a critical factor in the successful implementation of any educational program (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Professional development when designed as a process of activities and supports intended to advance teachers' pedagogical skills, knowledge of students, and methodological approaches has a greater impact on improved student outcomes and boosting student achievement (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). Hence, it is crucial to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students that teacher preparation and professional development opportunities provide teachers with learning experiences that are designed to bring about personal transformation through a deep understanding of culture and pedagogy to allow them to begin the process of becoming culturally competent teachers. It is a challenge for most educators to create learning environments

that maintain the cultural integrity of every child while enhancing the child's educational success (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Preparing teachers to engage and motivate all students, regardless of color, is no easy task. It involves cultivating the ability to understand differences in learning styles and capabilities directly related to cultural diversity (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010). Moreover, culturally responsive teachers must develop the capacity to motivate all students to want to learn, as well make sure the school environment and classrooms are conducive to effective teaching and learning experiences (Gay, 2009; Bales & Saffold, 2011). The role of the teacher is vital to fostering mutual understanding and transmitting multicultural awareness in ways that demonstrate equal regard, respect, and treatment toward all students.

### **Preservice Teacher Education**

Research acknowledges that preservice students come to teacher preparation programs steeped in cultural ethnocentrism that impedes their ability to view values, norms, and behavior from different cultures as viable ways of perceiving reality (Milner, 2006). Blanchett (2006) posits educational resource allocation, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and inadequate teacher preparation contribute to a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy in current and new educators. More important, Blanchett (2006) found that remedies designed to encourage CRP must place the abovementioned structural forces at the center of education research, policy, and practice.

Most students enrolled in teacher certification programs have little to no knowledge or experience for how to teach diverse student populations (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gomez, 2008; Hammond, 2015). Consequently, to effectively prepare pre-service

teachers to engage and teach diverse student populations, teacher education program must first transform the attitudes of pre-service novice teachers towards multicultural education in terms of being more sensitive and responsive. In addition, they must include provisions to expand the cultural knowledge base of pre-service teachers. Finally, programs must equip pre-service teachers with the skills necessary to effectively teach diverse student populations (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

A yearlong study of 16 teacher candidates in preservice education programs revealed that although candidates had a conceptual understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students, they lacked a practical understanding of socially just practices indicating the diversity coursework they engaged in was largely unhelpful in facilitating their ability to make sense of and become intentional about pedagogy that incorporates culturally responsive practices (Daniel, 2016). A similar study conducted in several communities described as the New Latino Diaspora (NLD) in Southeastern Georgia where the Latinx population increased by 694% over ten years, found teacher candidates, of whom 85% are White, lack intensive training and acknowledge the need to expand their knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse learners beyond the training they received in their preservice programs (Taylor, Kumi-Yeboay, & Ringlaben, 2016). The study found the discord between student teachers and K-12 students is primarily due to cultural and linguistic differences that emanates from lack of cultural awareness or knowledge on the part of preservice teachers (Taylor, et al, 2016).

Many culturally and linguistically diverse learners receive much of their instruction from content area teachers or aides who have not had appropriate teacher preparation or professional development opportunities to support improving instruction

for such learners (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). As such, there is a gap in the skill sets of these teachers, particularly when it comes to fulfilling the supplementary needs of these disadvantaged students. District leaders, administrators, and teachers across the United States are assessing strategies on how to respond to this problem effectively. Ensuring a revolutionary change in the practices of educators and teachers entails overcoming traditional teaching norms and redefining their social identities (Echevarria et al., 2004).

Hammond (2015) believes that teacher preparation programs often miss the meaning behind culturally responsive teaching or fail to offer enough support on the topic, “Too often, culturally responsive teaching is promoted as a way to reduce behavior problems or motivate students, while downplaying or ignoring its ability to support rigorous cognitive development” (p. 16). Hammond (2015) offers a framework containing four core components that support culturally responsive teaching and help students build intellectual capacity through the principles of brain-based learning. The core components are: awareness, learning partnerships, information processing and community building.

The first component, awareness, relates to teachers paying attention to their own role in their school, as well as the impact of “their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students’ individual or collective behavior that might lead to low expectations or undervaluing the knowledge and skills they bring to school” (Hammond, 2015, p. 18). The second component, learning partnerships, exemplifies “building trust with students across differences so the teacher is able to create a social-emotional partnership for deeper learning” (Hammond, 2015, p. 19). Hammond (2015) explains the third

component, information processing, as “knowing how to strengthen and expand students’ intellectual capacity so that they can engage in deeper, more complex learning. Finally, the fourth component, community building, is “creating an environment that feels socially and intellectually safe for dependent learners to stretch themselves and take risks” (Hammond, 2015, p. 19). Hammond (2015) believes that while inequity in education has created an epidemic of dependent learners, CRP is a powerful tool toward helping students navigate their way. She defines culturally responsive teaching as:

“An educator’s ability to recognize students’ cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use 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 relationship and having a social emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning” (Hammond, 2015, p. 15).

Gay (2010) adds that educators need to analyze their own cultural attitudes and assumptions that make it difficult for them to teach minority children successfully. Additionally, Gay posits the ideology teachers bring with them to begin their teaching has been shown to determine whether or not they will use their subsequent teaching experiences to become more or less culturally competent. Finally, Darling-Hammond (1997) contends, educators need to unlearn currently held beliefs, reflect on their practices, and develop increasingly in-depth understandings of what authentic learning is and how to respond effectively to diversity.



College coursework may be more effective in changing attitudes about multicultural issues when innovative instructional approaches are used but a single course on multicultural issues is not an adequate substitute for more comprehensive approaches (Barry & Lechner 1995). Teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities must prepare educators with the tools to create a learning environment where students are welcomed, supported and provided with the best opportunities to learn regardless of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Barnes, 2006). To do so, Gay (2000) points to the three dimensions within the culturally responsive framework (a) academic achievement, making learning rigorous and exciting; (b) cultural competence, knowing the range of cultural and linguistic student populations, and (c) sociopolitical consciousness, recognizing and assisting students in understanding that learning does not occur in a vacuum, are the critical learning opportunities essential for teachers to prepare all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students, for success in a global society.

Issues impacting teachers beyond teacher preparation and providing a quality education for all students expand from reform efforts implemented across New Jersey over the past five years. These include the implementation of two new sets of curricular standards, each creating an immediate need to realign or rewrite curriculum, a new educator evaluation system, revisions to standardized assessment as a result of new standards, and tenure reform. Too often poor performing, urban districts reform efforts and changes to instructional practice are driven by a need to improve student achievement on state standardized assessments and focus less on how culture and curricula support and foster student learning (Hammond, 2015).

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)**

Ladson-Billings (1995) identified common traits of teachers who promoted culturally responsive classrooms based on her three-year ethnographic research. Traits included a passion for teaching, seeing their relationships with students as equitable and fluid, and the understanding that “knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by the teachers and the students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). In culturally responsive classrooms, the bonds created between the teacher and students are developed to build a community of learners that encourages students to work and learn collaboratively (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

According to the research, teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication provokes student resistance, while teaching that is responsive prompts student involvement (Olneck, 1995). Culture is central to student learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy respects and uses students’ identities, experiences and backgrounds to create optimal learning (Griner and Stewart, 2013). Teaching methods that use references to a student’s culture help the student to understand mainstream curriculum through a lens of recognition and acknowledgement (Nieto, 2013). The link between culture and classroom instruction derives from the idea that cultural practices shape thinking practices (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Every child deserves to feel welcome, comfortable and see themselves in the learning. When schools distance a child’s culture and language from the culture and language of the school, the child is distanced from future opportunity (Nieto, 2013).

Griner and Stewart (2013) posit schools and teachers who adopt a culturally responsive pedagogy have the ability to act as change agents in their schools to help

bridge the divide and encourage more equitable schooling experiences. Schools that engage in CRP effectively address inequity, and link home and school experiences for students by connecting academia with socio-cultural realities (Griner & Stewart, 2014). A growing body of evidence suggests that while many teachers have a knowledge of multicultural education, many do not display the characteristics needed to fully implement and sustain culturally responsive pedagogical practices aimed at helping students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds learn more effectively (May & Sleeter, 2012).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is student centered in that the students' unique cultural strengths are distinguished and cultivated to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world. In addition, CRP recognizes the importance of including the students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Researchers are calling for a more deliberate and concentrated approach to teaching that will help educators develop and sustain culturally responsive practices essential to advancing student and teacher success (Gay, 2010; Grant & Skleeter, 2011; Milner, 2010; Paris & Alim, 2014). The marginalization, or exclusion, of culturally responsive pedagogies in public school curricula, serves to increase the education debt (Ladson Billings, 2006) that continues to exist between students of color and their White counterparts.

The profound issues that plague the American educational system emerged from an extended history of maintaining the homogenous curricular standards that give minimal attention to the experiences of students from other cultures, ethnic, religious, and racial groups (Banks, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy is pivotal not only in

communicating and receiving information but also in shaping the thinking process of groups and individuals (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 2006). School and district staff, at times, perceive the cultural practices of the home environment as causing students to lack the ability to learn or to be in conflict with school practices. However, we can no longer continue to except this as a primary contributor of poor student performance and underachievement nor as an impediment to teaching and learning.

Researchers argue that CRP is a relatively new pedagogical paradigm for improving the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups (Gay, 2000; Parris & Akim, 2014). Smith (1998) notes that the purpose of CRP is not solely to improve student achievement but also to help teachers understand that they have a deeper commitment to the common good of each child that requires a reconstruction of society to be fair, just and free of oppression. Multicultural education researcher, Sonia Nieto (1999) asserted that CRP must “include *at its center* the aim of preparing students to critique and change societal inequity”. She asserts that true CRP does not prepare students to “merely to fit into an unjust society;” rather it prepares them “to challenge the injustices that undergird that society” (Nieto, 1999, pp. 105-106). As we develop a greater understanding of culture and the individual needs of diverse student populations, we can address inequitable outcomes and develop culturally proficient practices that support all learners.

Teaching methods that use references to a student’s culture help the student to understand mainstream curriculum through a lens of recognition and acknowledgement. Nieto (2013) believes the link between culture and classroom instruction derives from the idea that cultural practices shape thinking practices.

Educators who respect students' languages, cultures, and life experiences follow the principles of communication of high expectations, active teaching methods, teacher as facilitator, positive perspectives on families of culturally diverse students, cultural sensitivity, reshaping the curriculum, culturally mediated instruction, student-controlled classroom discourse, and small group instruction with academically related discourse (Nieto, 2013).

True multicultural education affirms individual students while recognizing the nature of all people, and a curriculum based on cultural similarities and differences will encourage students' deeper understanding of the content (Boyer, 1993). To move education beyond the superficial treatment of diversity (Meyer & Rhoades, 2006), educators must create a vision of teaching and learning with the infusion of multicultural issues through a culturally relevant curriculum before focusing on culturally responsive pedagogical techniques (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Shade, Kelly, and Oberg, (1997) and Banks (2006) consider the teacher as the most important variable in the child's learning environment because the teacher's attitudes and beliefs have a tremendous impact on a student's perceptions, academic ability, self-concepts, and beliefs. Shade et al. (1997) and Banks (2004) also believe that teachers set the learning climate by their verbal and non-verbal messages, personal relationships with their students, and respect for students' cultural differences and cultural styles. In culturally responsive classrooms, the bonds created by the teacher are developed to build a community of learners that encourages students to work and learn collaboratively (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A three-year ethnographic research study conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995) identified common traits of teachers who promote

culturally responsive classrooms. These traits include a passion for teaching, teachers' understanding that relationships with students are equitable and fluid, and possessing an understanding that "knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by the teachers and the students" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). Moreover, such studies indicate that successful schools for minority students integrate aspects of their students' culture, history, and experiences in their programs.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices**

Gay (2000) suggests that culturally responsive teaching practices (CRTP) have several important characteristics such as acknowledgement of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups and fostering home school relationships, while using a variety of instructional strategies. Nieto (1999) claims that CRTP recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments. Ladson-Billings (2009) further extends these thoughts explaining how culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, and emotional learning "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes..." "culturally relevant teachers encourage students to read a variety of perspectives on issues, use research skills to survey others, and create both social science and artistic projects to represent their findings. They understand the desire for students to be able to use the knowledge that they acquire. They also understand that the fundamental role of the public school is to help in the development of citizens for a diverse democracy. (p. 392)" Villegas and Lucas (2008) extend this notion suggesting that CRT is supported when professional development explicitly provides guided opportunities for teachers to examine their own culture, experiences, beliefs, and biases as related to their teaching of culturally and

linguistically diverse students. Being culturally competent is a key aspect of CRT, that can be addressed and supported through effective, embedded and ongoing professional development for teachers.

Responding to the need for more research on culturally responsive teaching, Lanette Waddell (2014) conducted a study of 6 math teachers across three urban middle schools to describe how math teachers rated their instructional practices in relation to culturally responsive teaching practices and philosophies. Waddell (2014) examined 20 instructional practices related to cultural competence, critical consciousness, and academic achievement. At the conclusion of the study, Waddell (2014) determined that it is difficult to operationalize culturally responsive teaching because teachers do not have a fully developed understanding of cultural relevance. The study revealed teachers struggled with identifying which practices that focused on academic achievement were also culturally relevant (Waddell, 2014). Finally, teachers had trouble analyzing and critiquing differences in world views and student life views through and with content objectives because of their hesitancy delving into issues of social justice and questioning societal norms (Waddell, 2014).

### **Professional Development in Education**

The historical roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movements of various historically oppressed groups. The historical and continued marginalization of culturally and linguistically diverse students has led to the creation of this movement. Bennett (2007) posits an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values and beliefs and affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world is crucial to multicultural education whose primary goal is moving

from the monoculture school system to a truly pluralistic school system. Multicultural education argues for a cultural pluralism, characterized by a mutual appreciation, respect, and value for diversity (Bennett, 2007).

Elements of what is commonly identified as professional development in present day are found throughout American history. Horace Mann encouraged a standardized curriculum and promoted teacher training to provide more interaction between teachers and students. In the 1920's, Ralph Tyler made a large impact in the field of education by establishing criteria for curricula evaluation, teacher training, and federal policymaking in the field of education. He initiated the first summer in-service work for teachers and helped develop that National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the 1960's. Up until that time, there was no comprehensive data that measured and evaluated the educational system in the United States.

### **Characteristics of Effective Professional Development**

Year after year, school districts across the country pour resources into professional development, yet evidence for the effectiveness of these programs is uneven. Practical and methodological complications often fail to establish clear relationships among professional development, teacher learning, instructional improvement, and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009). To provide meaningful learning opportunities for teachers it is essential to identify effective characteristics of professional development (Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006). Desimone (2009) argues that effective professional development should include reflection and follow-through; however, how we provide these opportunities and measure their impact remains unclear to researchers and educators.



Over the past decade a recurrent theme has emerged from the literature related to what constitutes characteristics of high quality professional development (Desimone, et al, 2006). Among the most common include a focus on "content and how students learn content; in-depth, active learning opportunities; links to high standards; opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles; extended duration; and the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department" (p. 82). Despite the importance of these characteristics, Desimone et al. (2006) argue that little evidence exists to support the claim that these characteristics are related to better teaching and increased student achievement. "Given the size of investment in professional development and the dependence of educational reform on providing effective professional development, the knowledge base on what works must be strengthened" (p. 82). Scribner (1999) states that "professional development needs to be conceptualized as more than a vehicle for reform; rather, professional development is a reform in and of itself and must become an integral part of teacher work and the culture of schools" (p. 263). Bringing about change in schools requires a significant investment in professional development, but not all professional development is effective at bringing about the desired change (Scribner, 1999).

According to the literature, traditional professional development efforts are proven to be ineffective, yet continue to be the most common forms of professional development offered to teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Guskey, 2000). Traditional forms of professional development include workshops, conferences, summer institutes, and courses. Typically, teachers attend workshops for a short period of time, listen passively, and are expected to go back into the classroom and implement strategies

presented. Traditional professional development usually takes place away from the school setting, is often presented by experts, and presents a universal application of teaching practices, which do not consider development level of students and teachers, nor is it subject area specific (Garet, Porter, DiSimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Schmoker, 2006). Garet et al. described the workshop as the “most criticized” form of traditional professional development in the literature (p. 920).

Bey (2013) interviewed teachers regarding their perception of professional development programs through a focus group discussion with six individuals and found that the negative feedback was more frequent than the positive feedback. Respondents reported low levels of satisfaction with regard to the duration of the professional development programs and to the assistance extended to the teachers following the actual program proper (Bey, 2013). Respondents also cited problems with the software used and the social networking skills to make learning easier for students (Bey, 2013).

Teacher education programs and professional development opportunities require the adaption of curriculum, methodology, and instructional materials that are responsive to student’s cultural norms. Professional development should include practical strategies for classroom teachers to incorporate culturally responsive strategies for instruction. To reach diverse populations of students, teachers must be adequately prepared and acquire cultural competence. In many cases, teachers simply lack sufficient training and experience prior to entering the classroom.

Stance, et al. (2005) describe a professional development model that trains teachers to hold affirming views about diversity in classrooms. In Nieto (1999), the author describes how evidence suggests that many teachers see students from socially

secondary groups from a “deficit perspective.” This can be a hindrance for learning if teachers have low expectations of certain students merely based upon their racial/ethnic background and do not see the full potential that these students have (Nieto, 1996).

Professional development is one way to address these concerns.

Effective professional development has two important elements that make the experience useful and engaging. Most essential is learning for the teachers on an adult level, addressing questions and content of interest to them and the second element involves transfer to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009; Disimone, 2011;).

Teachers understandably want professional development experiences to be relevant to classroom practice, without diminishing the importance of their own learning.

Professional development, which recognizes individuality of teachers and offers guidance, aids in developing rapport, another valuable component of professional development (Hirsh, 2005).

Researchers (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009, 2011; Elmore, 2002; Schmoker, 2006) insist that effective professional development and teacher learning are the key factors that will improve the nation’s schools. Relevant instruction and culturally responsive pedagogical practice calls for teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and predispositions to teach children from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social backgrounds (Gay, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Reflective practice first surfaced in the education arena through the influential writings of John Dewey. According to Dewey (1938), as cited in Gomez (2005), reflective practice is not a coincidence; it is not a passive activity, but one that leads to

action; it is a cyclical process that leads back to the original problem. Reflective practice addresses the issue of transfer, that is, the challenge of implementing strategies learned in professional development training into instructional approaches. To be transformative, initiatives surrounding professional development training must include elements of reflective practice to improve instruction (Seed, 2008). Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) assert that reflective practice is based on the belief that change begins with the individual and many barriers to change are rooted in the unexamined beliefs that shape our behaviors.

Public school teachers across the United States use various forms of reflective practice, but since the influential work of Donald Schön (1983), there is persistent criticism about using reflective practice as a direct link to improving student learning. One goal of having teachers use reflective practice is to guide them toward a double-loop perspective. This means training teachers to focus their attention on the root causes of students' academic problems and teaching them to reflect their teaching and the changes that need to be made in their own attitudes, values, beliefs, and practices to help students achieve academically. Reflective practitioners explore their own leadership and reflect on ways their decision making may influence stakeholders and their educational environment. Reflective practice is a conduit that enables practitioners to stop, look, and discover where they are in the moment and to discover where they need to go in the future (Farrell, 2012). Educators who develop habits of reflective practice can improve the quality of their decision making and the range and scope of their knowledge.

## **Dewey's Intentional Reflection**

Dewey (1938) considered reflective practice as intentional, systemic, disciplined inquiry that will ultimately lead to implementation of solutions once the individual thinks through the problem. Dewey saw reflection as “the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and the further consideration to which it tends” (p. 9). Engaging in reflective practice enables practitioners to articulate what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and the impact it has on decision making (Schön, 1978). A basic notion of Schön's (1978) epistemology of practice is that reflective thought is a dialectic process that incorporates action with experience, which leads to modified action. Reflective practice is a progression of thoughts that links and expands complex elements that contribute to creativity as individuals follow ideas to unexpected conclusions (Farrell, 2012).

Dewey (1938) asserted that teachers should have opportunities for reflection and that what one learns in one situation can help them deal with future situations. Schön (1987) drew upon the work of Dewey and emphasized that when teachers make important decisions during teaching, they base those decisions primarily on knowledge derived from experience. Schön (1987) referred to this as reflection-in-action and characterized it as thinking on one's feet. Reflection-in-action differs from reflection-on-action, which is critically looking back on one's pedagogical practice and learning from it (Argyris and Schön, 1974).

## **Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning**

Reflective practice forms the basis of deep learning from past experiences (Tsingos, Bosmoc-Anticevich & Smith, 2013). It supports the development of critical

thinking, problem-solving, and self-directed learning skills necessary to inform future experiences (Tsingos, Bosnic-Anticevich, & Smith, 2013). Expanding on the work of Dewey (1938), Kolb's model of experiential learning is a form of the reflective cycle that begins with the learning experience, followed by the practitioner reflecting on that experience and concludes with the practitioner developing theories and drawing conclusions which lead to new insights and understandings (Tsingos, Bosnic-Anticevich & Smith, 2013). Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) as a comprehensive theory of learning seeks to provide a foundation for effective instruction that goes beyond learning outcomes and helps to focus students on discovering what specific processes enhance their learning abilities individually (Kolb, 2005).

### **Mezirow's Transformative Learning**

Mezirow describes transformative learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action”. (p. 26) Mezirow (1997) posits adults have acquired a coherent body of experience, which he refers to as a frame of reference, that define their world. These frames of reference are the structures of assumptions that help adults understand their experiences (Baumgartner in Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Adults transform these frames of reference through critical reflection upon which points of view are based and when adults are engaged in communicative learning, the discourse involved in coming to consensus, they become critically reflective as they work together to solve problems (Mezirow, 1997).

In the context of transformation theory, discourse devoted to searching for common understandings and engaging in a critical assessment of assumptions is central

to adult learning. Discourse is the process in which participants have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an experience (Mezirow, 2012). This, according to Mezirow (2012), is what will lead to a clearer understanding of context of transformative learning for adults.

## **Conclusion**

Like children, adults learn best when they are engaged in active learning, when learning relates to current situations, when enough time is provided to assimilate learning, and when allowed to engage in collegial conversations (Knowles et al., 2005; Ozuah, 2005; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Current research reveals that it is beneficial for practitioners to reflect on their pedagogical practices to become equity oriented and to reverse inequality in education (Farrell, 2012). The literature encompassing reflection in education is inconsistent in terminology used to define the practice, however, despite the inconsistency in terms, researchers suggest that teacher reflection can improve instruction which results in increased student learning (Farrell, 2012). Purposeful reflection and deep critical reflection help educators build awareness of the diverse needs of students (Farrell, 2012; Tsingos, Bosnic-Anticevich, & Smith, 2014). Purposeful reflection on thoughts, feelings, and experiences is critical to building teachers' capacity to practice culturally responsive teaching. Deep critical reflection is thinking, problem solving, and responding to an issue by involving active and deliberative cognitive processes—acquire, learn, integrate, and new perspectives—for addressing practical problems before solutions are reached (Tsingos, Bosnic-Anticevich, & Smith, 2014). Early researchers of the reflective process contributed greatly to the current understanding of reflective practice (see figure 1). Their theories and models have been adopted, adapted, or used in

combination to facilitate reflective activities to guide decision making processes for educational practitioners.

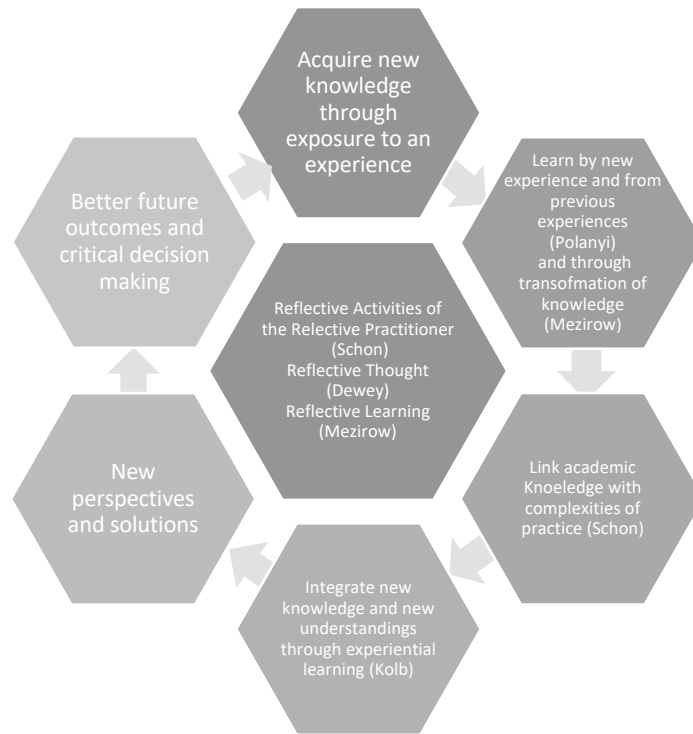
This review summarizes the literature on professional development and the preparation of teachers and the effectiveness of current professional development practices. Further it summarizes culturally responsive pedagogy and effective teaching practices. Finally, it summarizes reflection as a theoretical framework to support and sustain critical changes to pedagogical practices and addresses the need for educators to engage in self-awareness through reflective practice to examine how their perceptions affect students in their care. By guiding educators toward an understanding of fairness and open-mindedness, one can ultimately help practitioners find new ways to teach to students' strengths and capabilities instead of focusing only on their differences or inabilities (Nieto, 1999).

### **Context**

The research for this case study will be conducted in one elementary school in an urban district in Central New Jersey that is comprised of approximately 60% Latinx students and 40% African American. This public-school district has 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools and one early childhood center. Approximately 55% of the total student population in this district is African American, 43% is Hispanic and 2% Caucasian (NJ DOE, 2015). Of the 936 certificated teaching staff members, 49% are white, 37% are African American, 10% are Hispanic and 2% are Asian. More than 98% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

This district has been identified by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) as a district in need of improvement due to a variety of factors that include; poor





*Figure 1. Reflective Concepts Framework: Acquire, Learn, Integrate, New Perspectives*

performance on state standardized assessments, the low number of students participating in Advanced Placement (AP) classes who take and pass AP exams, SAT scores and low graduation rates. Of the 20 schools in the district, 10 have been classified as comprehensive schools indicating they are among the lowest performing schools in New Jersey and five are classified as focus schools which indicates that there are subgroups of students who are underperforming. The seven remaining schools are in a non-categorized status. Schools are non-categorized when they meet annual performance targets established by the New Jersey Department of Education.

The school in which the study takes place is currently classified as comprehensive. This site is appropriate to this study as both staff and students are culturally and linguistically diverse and staff are engaging in ongoing and embedded

professional development on culturally responsive teaching and diversity in the classroom. To fully understand what teachers are experiencing through the professional development, I attended many of the same trainings as the participant sample.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the preparation, understandings, awareness, behaviors, and dispositions about the importance of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy of a sample population of elementary educators who received targeted professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy and who work in an underperforming urban setting. As little is known about how teachers in this setting respond to and synthesize professional development necessary to define and demonstrate culturally responsive pedagogy, qualitative research is the most appropriate approach for exploring the topic and providing a rich detailed picture of teachers' mindsets and actions about teaching and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

This study was viewed through the theoretical lens of reflective practice and nested in the broader context of critical, intentional reflection, that is, thinking, problem solving, and responding to an issue by involving active and deliberative cognitive processes for addressing practical problems before solutions are reached. Reflection directs teachers toward intentional, systemic, disciplined inquiry that ultimately leads to implementation of solutions once the individual thinks through the problems. This research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers and support personnel describe their pedagogical practices prior to professional development on culturally relevant and responsive teaching?

2. How do teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators?
  - a. How do educators internalize CRP as it relates to their professional practice?
  - b. What aspects of the professional development do the educators note as being critical to their pedagogical adjustments?
  - c. What specific strategies and practices do the educators describe as being successful when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?

### **Assumptions of and Rational for Qualitative Methodology**

Merriam (2009) refers to qualitative research as an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and discover the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed and making sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009) and data are collected within the natural setting (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research uncovers respondents' individual experiences and provides a rich, detailed picture for why people act in certain ways and about the feelings and actions of individuals (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, qualitative research can focus on contextualized meaning and extend the researchers knowledge or understanding from the participants' viewpoints (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Rossman & Rallis (2012) contend that qualitative research should have the goal of contributing to improving the human condition and to learn about some aspect of the social world.

The key concern of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) posits the researcher is "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 15) and it is extremely important that the researcher identify biases or subjectivities and monitor how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data (Maxwell, 2013). Rossman and Rallis (2012) assert that one central component of qualitative research is its orientation toward the natural world. Qualitative researchers gather data in the field using humanistic and interactive methods as they talk to people, watch and listen as people go about everyday tasks and document and record details about the physical space (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Since qualitative researchers reflect on who they are and how this shapes their research, they need to be aware of the biases and assumptions that they bring as these can have negative consequences on the research outcomes.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy. Qualitative research was used to examine meanings participants assigned to their professional development experiences and data were collected within the natural setting (Merriam, 2009). This qualitative approach brought understanding to the deeper meaning of culturally responsive teaching and allowed the researcher to experience real life situations as the instrument for data collection (Gay, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the purpose of this study, culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as "pedagogy that seeks to

perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Parris & Amin, 2014; Gay 2010).

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

A single case, ethnographic design was the strategy of inquiry used for this study. Case study is appropriate when a researcher seeks to find meaning as it pertains to an issue in society (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) describes an ethnographical case study as one in which the major data gathering technique is through participant observations that are supplemented with formal and informal interviews and document review. The ethnographic case study focuses on a particular place within an organization, a specific group of people, or a particular activity. The goal of this study was to observe teachers in their natural setting in one urban elementary school and gather data through observation, interviews and document review about teachers and support personnel as they implemented the tenets and strategies of culturally responsive teaching acquired through systematic professional development. This study focused specifically on the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices associated with a series of professional development activities and a teacher’s ability to transfer and sustain these practices through targeted and purposeful shifts in pedagogical approaches.

Case study research is used to gain new perspectives of phenomena and to present information that is difficult to express quantitatively (Yin, 2014). Case studies can be used to describe complex experiences and solutions to practical problems (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Merriam (2009) suggests case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of importance in understanding the phenomenon. Since case studies are anchored in real-life situations, they result in a rich,

holistic account of a phenomenon, and offer insight and illuminate meanings that expand on participants lived experiences (Merriam, 2009).

This design provides a researcher the ability to analyze data within the natural classroom setting. More specifically, this method allows a researcher to explore an issue within one bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). An essential aspect of a case study is the parameters that bound it. Defining the boundaries, or specifying the unit of analysis, is a key point in case study design (Hatch, 2002). This case study is a sampling of classroom teachers identified as culturally responsive and having three years or more of direct teaching experience. The selected teachers teach in a school that has a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. This research seeks to identify effective and consistent methods of professional development necessary to change and sustain pedagogical practices and teacher attitudes and beliefs about culturally responsive and relevant teaching for diverse students.

### **Context and Participants**

This study took place in an urban elementary school in New Jersey where teachers are involved in intensive professional development to support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies.

**Sampling strategy.** Creswell (2011) explains that purposeful sampling in qualitative research means that researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced the central phenomenon being explored in the study. Purposeful sampling was used in this study because the sample was not chosen at random. Participants from one urban elementary school were chosen based on a predetermined set of criteria and the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). All participants attended 16 hours of professional

development related to cultural competency and culturally responsive teaching and each received seven 3-hour job embedded mentoring sessions throughout the remainder of the school year. Purposeful sampling was appropriate to this study because it allowed for the intentional selection of a sample from which the most insight could be gained, and meaningful information obtained (Merriam, 2009).

Homogeneous sampling was also utilized because all participants are educators who work in the same school and received the same series of professional development opportunities. Patton (2002) suggests that homogeneous samples tend to be smaller to allow for in-depth study of their similar experiences. The idea is to focus on this precise similarity and how it relates to the topic being researched (Patton, 2002). Since the goal of this research was to explore teachers' training, understanding, and use of culturally relevant pedagogy as a result of targeted professional development and mentoring, teachers who did not engage in the professional development were excluded from participating.

**Participant description.** School district X has 19 elementary teachers and support staff who participated in the cultural competency institute and 15 teachers who participated in the institute and received mentoring provided through a partnership with a local university. Participants who completed the training, received mentoring, were racially and ethnically diverse, and who had varying degrees of teaching experience were selected. Support staff assigned to classrooms whose teachers who met all criteria were also eligible for participation in the study. All participants were employed by the school district and were implementing and/or supporting the program at some level in their classrooms.



**Recruitment strategy.** Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples selected purposefully (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002). Creswell (2012) asserts a small sample will provide in-depth information about the concepts being explored through qualitative research as opposed to generalizing concepts when the sample size is too large. The sampling for this qualitative study was limited to no more than 15 participants who met all of the criteria identified by the sampling strategy. Moreover, maximum variation sampling ensured selection of teachers whose backgrounds met the criteria of being as diverse as the student population they teach. Merriam (2009) suggests when a researcher considers the number of individuals to include in the study sample, there is no predetermined number. However, sampling should continue until saturation and redundancy is reached (Merriam, 2009) The sampling is terminated when no new information is presented (Merriam, 2009). Since there were only 14 teachers receiving both professional development and mentoring, all were invited by email or face to face interaction to participate. As the final component of the recruitment process, I provided participants with information about the study, the expectations required of them, their rights to terminate at any time, the timeline for completion, and the benefits/barriers to participating in the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods included the use of semi-structured, person to person and/or group interviews, participant journals, observation, and collection of artifacts and materials necessary to provide rich evidence and data to substantiate findings relating to how teachers portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators.

## **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to probe for further information as themes or topics emerged (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This study sought to understand how teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators and how educators sustain an educational environment that promotes culturally appropriate and relevant teaching practices. While most of the interview questions (*Appendix A*) were predetermined, it was necessary to ask clarifying and follow-up questions to elicit a thorough response and ensure the participant had a firm understanding of the question being posed. The questions were open-ended so that each participant was able to share his/her unique experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Interviews provided rich information about the experiences of each participant from which to draw meaningful conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation and informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Merriam, 2009).

## **Participant Observation**

The purpose of participant observation in data gathering is to allow a researcher an opportunity to observe the participant in their natural setting to experience and note events and activities as they occur (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Observation provides a researcher with a way to check non-verbal expression of feelings, to gain an understanding of how participants communicate information, and gain a holistic

understanding of the phenomena under study in an objective and accurate way within the natural setting (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Patton (2002) supports the concept of a researcher's immersion into the participant's world

Each participant was observed at least two times each for no fewer than 30 minutes per session both with their mentor present and without their mentor present. Notations were made via an observation protocol (see Appendix B) that included opportunities to record detailed notes. Through observation, a researcher learns about actions and infers meaning those actions have for participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

### **Document Collection**

Merriam (2009) posits interviewing and observing are two data collection methods that specifically address the research questions. Documents, however, are used to refer to sources of data in the study that cannot be obtained in interviews and observations (Merriam, 2009; Hodder, 2013). Public records and personal documents are two of the most common types of documents collected in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggests it is important to “seek out the paper trail for what it can reveal about the program—things that cannot be observed or that have taken place before the evaluation occurred” (p. 141). Lesson plans, professional development surveys, professional development program materials, school bulletin boards and displays featuring aspects of culture and culturally responsive practices were used to corroborate perceptive data collected through interviews and/or observations. I also examined these documents as a means to obtain an accurate picture of how and where teachers were incorporating into daily practice culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical practices gleaned through professional development.

## **Instrumentation**

Qualitative interviews can suggest new ways of understanding persisting problems and open the possibility for new solutions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). A 10-question interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews. The interviews began with questions aimed at building rapport and generating background knowledge by eliciting information about each participant. Next, I asked questions that led to information aimed at answering the research questions. Finally, concluding questions sought to elicit information that led to transformational change in teacher practice as a result of the professional development institute and mentoring each participant received. Follow-up questions were used to encourage elaboration of responses and for clarifying interview responses.

Face to face interviews were conducted within the natural setting, however I was flexible to meet the needs of each participant. All interviews were audiotaped to allow for transcription and analysis. Some data were collected in the form of audiovisual recordings of participants willing and comfortable participating in this data collection method. The purpose of audiovisual and/or audio data was to protect the integrity of participants' responses and to ensure that the researcher does not bias participant responses (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Additionally, these steps will ensure reliability, credibility, and consistency throughout the research process and protect the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

## **Observation**

As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) and Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) posit is ideal for qualitative data collection, multiple forms of data were collected, and I spent

considerable time among the participants within their classroom and natural setting to gather data relevant to my study. I visited each classroom two times; once with the mentor present and once without the mentor present. According to Merriam (2009), multiple sources of data are needed to provide a comprehensive study as a single source may not be trusted or sufficient. Multiple data sources allowed for validation and cross checking of data findings. During the observations, data were collected in the form of field notes which allowed me to observe participants' actions and behaviors at the site of the research and record responses to ensure authentic analysis. Additional document samples included professional development plans, lesson plans, evaluation data and student work. Measures were taken to ensure the complete privacy of all participants during the data collection phases of the research study.

### **Document Review**

The review of the documents is a process that is unobtrusive but can portray participant values and beliefs (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). However, at the same time, caution should be exercised in making inferences from document content analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Rossman and Rallis warn that documents can often contradict the words and sights obtained through the interviews and observation and thus requires a more objectivist approach toward documenting patterns. During the data analysis process, I interpreted the data by reducing its volume through coding and critically analyzed and identified significant patterns and themes that were portrayed in the textual representations and to also determine what was absent or silenced during the interviews and observations (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These documents were

useful as a means to connect the information that the teachers and support personal attained through professional development sessions and view how they applied that knowledge in their lessons plans and instructional practice.

### **Data Analysis**

Before beginning data analysis, Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) contend that it is necessary to prepare data. To prepare data means to organize data for review and transcribing. Data review begins by reading through the data and writing memos in the margins of field notes and transcriptions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). After preparing the data for coding, I started data analysis. Data analysis is the process of organizing data into meaningful chunks that allow it to tell a story (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Analysis takes a researcher step by step through the raw data of interview and observation to clear convincing answers to research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To prepare my data for analysis, I organized my data to allow me to extract themes and conclusions about the professional development experiences of teachers and support staff.

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were transcribed verbatim and analytical notes relating to participant demeanor that I collected during the interviews were placed within the margins of the transcribed interviews to facilitate thinking and stimulate analytic insights during the coding process (Maxwell, 2013). The interview protocol allowed me to hone in on questions that helped elicit information about changes to teaching practices and teachers ability to sustain cultural responsiveness in daily practice. Follow-up questions that were not part of the interview protocol ensured I had full understanding of how teachers internalize culturally responsive pedagogy and make shifts to their practice as it relates to their students.

## **Coding**

According to Saldana (2013) and Miles, Huberman and Saldana, (2014), codes are labels that allow a researcher to assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during data collection stages. In this study, coding took place in two cycles, First Cycle coding and Second Cycle coding (Saldana, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). First Cycle coding provides an inventory of topics discovered to allow for categorizing and indexing. For this study, First Cycle coding consisted of two coding methods; descriptive coding and in vivo coding. Descriptive coding is labeling data to summarize the basic topic of a passage, a word or a phrase that can be found in field notes, documents and artifacts (Saldana, 2013). It is appropriate for this study as I will be collecting a wide variety of data in the forms of interview transcripts, observational field notes, documents and journals (Saldana, 2013).

The second method I employed in First Cycle coding was In vivo coding. Saldana (2013) describes In vivo coding as that which captures actual language of participants using short words or phrases from the participant interviews. In vivo coding allowed me to honor the voice of my participants to gain a deeper understanding of their cultures and worldviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldana 2013) which is critical to understanding how teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has on their practice.

Second Cycle coding allows a researcher another opportunity to reorganize and reanalyze coding from First Cycle methods (Saldana, 2013). Second Cycle coding will employ pattern coding of the first cycle (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), which allows a researcher to identify themes that emerge (Patton, 1990) that will illuminate the

unique experiences of teachers. The primary goal of Second Cycle coding is to categorize themes and concepts found in First Cycle coding which become the major components of the research and write-up (Saldana, 2013). During Second Cycle coding, I condensed many of the analytical details found during First Cycle coding and organized them into smaller sets (Saldana, 2013). Using Pattern coding, I identified emergent themes in order to develop the major themes necessary to answer the research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Pattern coding helped me find relationships between professional development and changes that occur in teacher practice.

### **Naturalistic Generalization**

Naturalistic generalization is a process that allows researchers to gain insight into phenomena by reflecting on the details and descriptions presented in the case study and allows the researcher to find descriptions that echo their own experiences (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). Mills et al, (2010) assert as readers recognize similarities between the study details and their own experiences, they consider whether the similarities are enough to warrant generalizations. Individuals also learn from the generalizations they make during their everyday experiences as well as from the authors, teachers and authorities in their lives (Trumball & Stake as cited in Mills, et al 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that this form of generalization builds on readers' tacit knowledge and that naturalistic generalizations permit detailed probing of an instance in question rather than mere surface description. In order to exact change in professional practice, the data from this study can be used to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of this professional development model and the sustainability of cultural responsiveness.



## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence one can have in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Guba proposes four criteria he believes should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To maintain the trustworthiness of the data, transcriptions were completed immediately following each interview and analytical notes were gathered to preserve a first-hand interpretation of the recorded data. Additionally, trustworthiness was established through triangulation of the data (Maxwell, 2013). The best strategy to ensure internal validity, or credibility, is data triangulation and multiple methods of data analysis (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). Using triangulation, member checks that entailed taking interpretations and findings back to participants for verification of accuracy and peer review discussions with colleagues all helped to ensure a wider range of application for anyone wishing to duplicate the study.

Credibility seeks to ensure that a study measures or tests what is intended. According to Merriam (2009), the qualitative investigator's equivalent concept of credibility deals with the question of how congruent the findings are with reality and is dependent on multiple means of collecting and analyzing data through triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Using multiple methods of data collection—interviews, observation, and documents—I am able to conduct member checks to rule out the possibility of misrepresenting what participants say and do and their perspective of the

findings. Using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected at different times and in different places (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Merriam (2009) posits that external validity, or transferability, is concerned with the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other situations. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest transferability is ensured through a sufficient, thick, rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected over a period of time and included rich detail of the teacher's and support personnel's experiences implementing the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy. To ensure data collected captured the essence of the study, the findings provide descriptive details of data collection methods to allow readers to have a proper understanding of the research and results to allow for potential duplication of the study for further research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that the processes within the study should be reported in detail to enable a future researcher to repeat the work. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) caution that dependability is problematic because human behavior is not static and personal experiences vary, thus it is more important that findings are consistent with data collected. To ensure dependability of the findings, I assessed the reliability of all documents and personal accounts through various techniques of analysis and triangulation. All data and analysis were cross referenced to provide in full detail from the perspectives of the participants. Additionally, using maximum variation sampling to select participants and member checking to confirm accuracy in the way data was represented served to ensure confirmability, and allowed me to document diversity and identify common patterns that are common across diversity which, in turn, will allow

more readers to apply the findings to their individual situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have been a practitioner in the district where the study takes place for more than 12 years, and I have held various positions—teacher, coach, and supervisor—that have allowed me to observe teaching and learning from multiple perspectives. My research emanates from these experiences and provides me with a desire to develop a deeper understanding of how we begin to reform professional practice through sustainable professional development to address the challenges teachers, and ultimately students, face working and learning in urban public schools.

In my current position as an administrator and content specialist, I plan districtwide professional development that aligns to district initiatives and is data driven. However, the professional development institute and mentoring addressed in this district was the result of a previously established relationship between the district and the university and not a result of my direct influence. This is important to note as this allows me to separate my biases toward the efficacy of the program as it relates to my role as researcher. As a researcher, it was important to me to be reflective and honest with myself about the content being studied to eliminate any predispositions I may have held. As a researcher and administrator responsible for observing teacher practice for evaluative purposes, it was possible for a biased perspective to emerge in relation to how teachers implement the tenets of professional development in their instructional practice.

As a researcher, I took precautions to ensure validity of the data collection, analysis and reporting processes. Throughout the data collection period, I used multiple

methods to triangulate data and verified accuracy of my findings through recurrent member checks.

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Institutional Review Board.** A proposal of this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee prior to the start of participant selection or data collection. The National Research, Act, Public Law 93-348 (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2014) mandates the establishment of a Human Subjects Committee in every institution that receives federal funding and conducts research on human subjects (2014). The IRB reviews all research for the protection of human subjects and animals (Rossman & Rallis, 2014). Miles et al. (2014) remind us that when working with human subjects, as researchers, our first priority to participants is to do no harm and that harm comes in many forms; physical, emotional or social (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The IRB committees assessed the potential risk to participants to ensure risks were minimized. Once approval was obtained from IRB, I contacted potential participants and began the process of participant selection.

**Human subject protection.** To minimize risk for all participants, I concealed the identity of each participant and the name organization where the study takes place. Since this qualitative research takes place in the field with real people who live and work in the setting, anonymity can be a challenge (Rossman & Rallis, 2014). To help to minimize this risk, I kept all conversations with participants confidential and did not share details from the interviews or conversations with anyone within the district who could potentially identify participants through the details.

As is required by the university and crucial for the ethical conduct of research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) I obtained informed consent from all participants and advised each of their right to terminate participation in the study at any time they deemed necessary (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I kept participants as fully informed as possible about the purpose of the research and the data collection processes (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) Data collected in the form of transcribed interviews, observation protocols, analytical notes, lesson plans and student work were also kept confidential.

**Power dynamics.** Interviews and observations should begin with the premise that a power imbalance exists between the investigator and the participants (Creswell, 2014). My position as an administrator within the district requires me to observe staff from an evaluative perspective. It was especially important that that I ensure participants that the data I collected through informal observations and interviews remain separate from formal observations. Participants were advised beforehand that any observational visits were strictly for the purpose of this study. Any staff member who I had previously observed was excluded from the study to ensure credibility of the data collected. I did not perform formal observations on staff during the data collection and analysis process. I made every effort to share findings with participants to ensure no one felt they were being exploited in this study (Creswell, 2014).

**Social stigma.** Participation in the study is strictly voluntary, and confidential to allow participants to speak freely and uninhibited. Since this study has the potential to uncover biases that may make participants uncomfortable, the names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity and the school and district's identity were concealed (Merriam, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Interviews will take

place after school hours at mutually agreed upon times. All participants will be required to sign an informed consent document that outlines the purpose of the research, method of interview and their right to terminate the interview or withdraw their participation at any time without question.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter describes the findings from data analyses in relation to the research questions that guided this study. It includes descriptions of each of the participants, along with their synthesized experiences based on an in-depth analysis of semi structured interviews, observation in action, documents and authentic artifacts. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of each participant and transcribed immediately following the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were provided copies of the interviews for member checking and given an opportunity to correct or clarify responses in the transcripts. The transcripts were analyzed using two coding cycles that allowed me to identify key ideas and repeating patterns that emerged as themes.

### **Description of the Case**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants received 16 hours of intensive, targeted cultural competency training. In addition, teachers received seven 3-hour mentoring, coteaching, modeling, and embedded training sessions. The institute took place in late fall and, at the conclusion of the institute, participants met with mentors and applied the principles of cultural competency daily for the remaining seven months of the school year.

A qualitative strategy of inquiry was used to examine meanings participants assigned to their professional development experiences. This single case, ethnographic design was appropriate for examining the culture of the participants, whereas culture in this instance refers specifically to the group's attitudes and beliefs about professional

development and their desire to be culturally responsive educators (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) Ethnography derives from the field of anthropology and as a research method is helpful when attempting to understand the culture of an organization by learning about the beliefs and attitudes of the group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data collection methods for ethnographic case studies include participant observation, participant interviews and document collection.

This study took place in an elementary school in New Jersey whose population is comprised of predominantly African American and Latinx students and included teachers who were involved in intensive cultural competency professional development. The qualitative approach brought understanding to the deeper meaning of culturally responsive pedagogical practice and allowed me to observe implementation strategies as an instrument for data collection (Gay, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were derived from face to face interviews, field observations, and documents. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview transcripts, field notes, authentic artifacts and reflective memos were collected, coded and organized for analysis. Data were categorized topically and chronologically to create a comprehensive and manageable record during analysis of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Description of Participants**

Fifteen teachers from the same elementary school were initially invited to participate in this study, and 10 of the 15 agreed to participate; Eight women and two men whose teaching experience ranged between four and 32 years were from varying nationality and ranged in age from 26 through 63 (see table 1). Many of the themes revealed through the coding process uncovered similarities between the life experiences



of the participants and those of the students they serve, and since ethnography tends to be descriptive and seeks to understand the attitudes and beliefs of this group as a whole (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014), it is important to consider the historical background of each of the participants that was partially exposed in the interviews. The following participant descriptions provide insight into these similarities.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Nationality	Class Taught / Grade	Overall years of Teaching Experience
Maria	44	Woman	Dominican	Bilingual / 3	7
Rosa	36	Woman	Puerto Rican	Bilingual / 1	8
Nellie	47	Woman	Dominican	Bilingual / 2	19
Ben	58	Man	Ivorian	ESL / K-2	32
Kate	26	Woman	American	Gen Ed / 3	4
Luis	38	Man	Puerto Rican	Bilingual / 3	4
Joanne	47	Woman	African American	Gen Ed / 3	14
Isabella	48	Woman	Cuban	Bilingual / 3	24
Elizabeth	63	Woman	Puerto Rican	ESL / K-2	9
Linda	39	Women	American	Gen Ed / K	17

## **Maria**

Maria is a third-grade teacher who has been working in the district for 13 years. She began her career in education as a paraprofessional and worked in that capacity for several years while she completed her degree in bilingual education. She is finishing up her seventh year as a bilingual elementary teacher. Maria came to the United States from the Dominican Republic as a teenager. She found it difficult to find a balance between the culture she left behind and the new one as she spoke no English upon her arrival to the United States. Since she arrived in the middle of the school year, she was placed in mainstream classes in high school as bilingual classes were full. She lived in a neighborhood with very few Spanish speakers and says she struggled to fit in at school because of her limited language skills. However, Maria noted as she began to assimilate into the American culture, she eventually lost touch with her Dominican roots.

## **Rosa**

Though her parents were born in Puerto Rico, Rosa never lived there. She was born and raised in New York City in a predominantly Spanish speaking household. When she began school as a child, she understood English but did not speak it fluently. She was placed in bilingual classes in her first few years of school but was quickly transitioned into mainstream English classes. Rosa is currently a first-grade bilingual teacher and has been teaching in the district for 8 years. She noted that she has never really considered the importance of culture throughout her career as an educator and mentioned that other than the fact that she speaks Spanish, there is no evidence of her cultural heritage in her home.

## **Nellie**

Nellie came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when she was 12 years old. She started her college years studying accounting but after working in a preschool to support herself through college, she decided to change her major and become a teacher. Nellie started her teaching career in a program for students with behavioral problems and transitioned after one year into bilingual teaching as a push in teacher in a North Jersey public school for students in kindergarten through grade eight. During her second year of teaching she took a position as a third-grade classroom teacher where she remained for several years before transferring to her current district. For the past six years, Nellie has taught second grade bilingual.

## **Ben**

An educator for 32 years, Ben began his teaching career in the Ivory Coast in Africa. From there, he moved to France where he taught for one year before transferring to the United States in 1998. He started in his current district as a substitute teacher and moved into a position as a teacher of French. In 2002, he left New Jersey for several years to study and become certified as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Ben noted that as an ESL support teacher, he became aware of the misconceptions of mainstream teachers when it comes to understanding the cultural experiences and differences that support learning for English Language Learners (ELLs). This awareness lead to his desire to learn how to become a culturally competent practitioner.

## **Kate**

Kate is Caucasian, born and raised in New Jersey. As a child, she loved going to school and playing “school” with her siblings. She knew at a very young age that she

would someday become a teacher and fondly remembers how her admiration and respect for her first-grade teacher also led to her desire to become a teacher. This teacher instilled a love of learning that she claims challenged her to do her very best throughout her educational years. Although Kate is new to teaching and has been employed in her current district for the past four years teaching 3rd grade, she understands the challenges her students face and works hard to ensure learning experiences are relevant for her students.

### **Luis**

Luis was born in Puerto Rico but moved to New Jersey as a small child. Both English and Spanish were spoken in his childhood home. He is bilingual and bicultural and passionately believes that culture drives teaching and learning. His educational experiences were not always positive, but he credits a high school science teacher whose passion for science was so infectious that that she made a difficult subject comprehensible. Teaching is a second career for Luis who initially worked in theater upon graduation from college. He is new to teaching and has been with the district for the past four years teaching 3rd grade bilingual. He recognizes his fortune in being bilingual and bicultural and works diligently to support his students as they become biliterate.

### **Joanne**

Joanne is African American and was born and raised in New Jersey. She hated school growing up because she believed she was “slow” and she felt her teachers treated her differently. She hated her teachers because they did not understand her. She noted that although she was not a fast learner, when she finally got it, she learned deeply. She speaks fondly of a second-grade teacher who made reading so personal and fun that she

developed a love of reading. Because of this teacher, Joanne was convinced that if she kept reading she could prove to her teachers that she was not “slow”. Joanne believes that the influence of her second-grade teacher is what prompted her to become an educator and led to her desire to become a Reading Specialist. She has been teaching for the past 14 years in both public and charter schools across New Jersey. She currently teaches third grade general education students.

### **Isabella**

Isabella was born and raised in Cuba before coming to the United States as an adult. She spoke passionately about her experiences as a child learning in Cuba and how her teachers put music to math and drawing and singing to literature to help her develop a deep understanding of content. Isabella noted that she felt the education in Cuba is more advanced than it is in the United States because integrating the arts and cross-content connections is the “old fashioned” curriculum they used in Cuba when she was a child more than 40 years ago. Isabella spent the majority of her 24 years of teaching experience in pre-school before being involuntarily transferred to 3rd grade two years ago. Because of the district reconfiguration of the preschool program, Isabella was devastated by the change but has since embraced the challenge and does not believe she would ever return to preschool.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth grew up with a deep respect for education. Originally from Puerto Rico Elizabeth and her husband moved to the United States 15 years ago. After attending a teacher education program in the U.S., Elizabeth took her first teaching job nine years ago teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in her current district. She currently

co-teaches in bilingual classrooms and provides ESL support to English Language Learners (ELL's) in grades kindergarten through two. As an ESL teacher, Elizabeth shared that she serves as a “cultural bridge for students, linking a student’s native culture with their new cultural experience in the United States”. She feels her primary responsibility as an ESL teacher is to support students as they learn to recognize the similarities between the two cultures.

### **Linda**

Linda is Caucasian and was born and raised in New Jersey. She has been teaching in the district for 17 years. She has taught at every elementary grade level and is currently the English-speaking Kindergarten teacher for a two-way immersion dual language program aimed at promoting biliteracy for students acquiring a second language. Linda works closely with her Spanish speaking Kindergarten teaching partner to support the acquisition of a second language for all students that are enrolled in the program whose dominant language is English and all students whose dominant language is Spanish. Her work with the dual language program led to her desire to become culturally competent and promote a culturally responsive classroom experience for her students.

### **Findings**

Data were analyzed using two methods of coding: descriptive and in vivo coding (Saldana, 2009). Descriptive coding allowed me to summarize the basic topic of the passage with a word or a phrase and categorize ideas based on similarities and overlaps. From there, I used in vivo coding to capture actual language used by the participants. This process allowed for a deeper understanding of participant experiences (Saldana,

2009). Next, I employed Second Cycle coding to condense many of the analytical details found during First Cycle coding and organize them into smaller sets (Saldana, 2013). Using Pattern coding, I identified emergent themes to develop the major themes necessary to answer the research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Five main themes emerged from the coding process that assisted in answering the research questions.

The first theme that emerged during analysis was connecting instruction to students. For participants, connecting instruction to students is specifically concerned with ensuring educators are aware of what students need instructionally and understanding how it connects personally to students lives to make learning relevant. This is explored via several sub-themes: identity, curricular mandates, and making connections. The second theme to emerge related to defeatist professional development. Participants identified both positive and negative experiences with centralized or mandated PD that were instrumental in shaping their instructional practice. Integrating newly acquired knowledge and current pedagogical practice within the parameters established by curriculum and student learning standards was a secondary concern relating to professional practice among participants. Cultural consideration, the third theme to emerge, illuminated the sense of urgency teachers developed as a result of thinking differently about students and their academic needs and shifting instructional practice to meet these needs. A sense of similitude, having experiences similar to that of their students, and privilege emerged as subthemes. The fourth theme to emerge, integration of culture, developed because teachers actualized and implemented the principles associated with cultural competency into their pedagogical practice.

Participants noted activities associated with these principles increased student engagement and brought parents into the fold as involved stakeholders. The final theme, (un)sustainable support through collaboration, emphasized concerns teachers have with their ability to continue to implement and expand on the principles of cultural competency without the ongoing support of their mentors.

### **Connecting Instruction to Students**

After being asked to share experiences that have informed their teaching the most, participants reflected on their own education as a frame of reference for their responses. Participants personal reflections revealed the first theme to emerge from the interviews; connecting instruction to students lived experiences. The majority of the participants felt they had only superficial knowledge about how best to connect with students to deliver instruction and content that was relevant to students and responsive to students' needs. Participants agree, and research confirms that for teachers to enact the high levels of practice needed for students to learn, content embedded within the context of the students being served helps teachers better understand their students and ultimately teach in more powerful and equitable ways (Haberman, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; & Milner, 2010). Despite a general understanding of the importance of connecting students with meaningful learning experiences, most participants recognized, prior to engaging in culturally responsive professional development, they lacked the ability to effectively integrate culture into daily practice.

**Identity.** While reflecting on personal experiences, the concept of personal identity rarely shaped educational decision making. The professional development experiences of participants prior to cultural competency training did not include culture



as a critical component of teaching and learning and it was evident in participant's responses that teachers whose ethnic backgrounds mirrored that of their students were no more knowledgeable about the importance of cultural identity as critical to making learning relevant than their Caucasian colleagues.

Maria shared that when she came to the United States from the Dominican Republic, over time, she "forgot about her own cultural identity". She noted she "became Americanized" and never really separated herself culturally:

To be honest, it did not occur to me to think about the culture of my students when it came to making choices about teaching. I came to the US to a city where there weren't a lot of Hispanics, it was mostly English, it took some getting used to...I just had to figure it out...so my students, we talk about being bilingual and the blessing of being bilingual and embracing being bilingual but I don't think I ever thought about the bicultural aspect of being bilingual, because I have to admit, up to that point, I didn't understand that it was important, I guess. In my country we have little pockets that are a little bit different and appreciating all of those difference and understanding the similarities and differences just happened. We were just used to the way everyone did things."

Similarly, Nellie noted,

We (my students and I) talk about culture in the beginning of the year when we are getting to know each other, but then I would just go into the curriculum. I wouldn't bring culture into it. I didn't think about it.

While Kate saw value in individualized instruction, she surmised, “I learned how to differentiate, but it never dawned on me that I needed to be more intentional...we talk about learning styles, but not about students lived experiences.” Linda added,

At the beginning of every school year, we do a themed unit called ‘all about me’ and I thought I got to know my students but see now I never used this information to change the way I taught. I never fully understood why it mattered...it was just an activity.

Conversely, Elizabeth noted,

As an ESL teacher I talk about culture from the beginning. I am always trying to make the connection between English words and Spanish words for my students...I don’t want them to forget where they came from...they have a better frame of reference and hopefully retain English better.

Elizabeth explained that because of her TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) training, she has learned to adapt her teaching methods, materials, and classroom activities to the environment and the needs of her learners. She discovered that when students are proficient in their dominant language, they find greater success in second language development.

Teachers shifted their thinking toward the belief that culture and language are assets to child development not detriments, and when classrooms do not incorporate cultural elements other than those of the mainstream culture, the message for culturally diverse children is that their cultural heritage is not valued (Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Educators have the power to impact a child’s identity and self-esteem which occurs when children are provided with opportunities to explore their culturally identity.

**Curricular mandates.** As an English Language Learner and firm supporter of cultural competency, and as an ESL teacher, Ben struggles to balance content and culture, “for me it’s different from the classroom teacher. I have to teach English so it’s hard for me to bring culture into it...I tried to, but I have to teach to the curriculum.” Ben’s acknowledgement reveals that although he understands the importance of culture as it relates to teaching, based on his own personal experiences as an English language learner, he lacks true understanding of the principles associated with CRP and training specific to ESL teachers for modifying content.

Nellie discussed how she did not include culture into her class because “she did not think about it”. She admitted she was so focused on following the curriculum that she never thought of doing something “outside of the district mandate”. Rosa pointed out that as a bilingual teacher she was taught to support students using a transitional bilingual model that focuses on students acquiring fluency in English after acquiring fluency in their native language. She expressed fear of straying from the context of the district approved curriculum. Rosa explained:

I do always English and Spanish, being that this is a traditional bilingual program, but I don’t know how to really go deeper...with culture...with my students it’s more surface. How do I go deep and still stay within the teaching? I thought I have to be strict with the curriculum. I didn’t know if the principal was going to be onboard, so I kept teaching things that maybe aren’t so meaningful to them.

Like Nellie, Rosa’s training as a bilingual educator and concerns about teaching something that was not outlined in the curriculum left her feeling boxed in. Rosa shared that students whose primary language was not English were not only “expected to be

literate in English but in their primary language as well” and pacing guidelines did not allow for extended time that is necessary to teach content in two languages. Participants viewed culturally responsive strategies as an “add-on” to the curriculum rather than as enhancing and were fearful of retribution from administrators for not meeting mandates.

**Finding connections.** Although newer to education and having a teacher preparation experience similar to Nellie and Rosa, Luis sought ways to engage students early on in his career. Coming from a background in theater, he often used arts integration to engage students and encourage them to practice language skills. Luis shared:

For me it’s about keeping it exciting. If the curriculum doesn’t interest them, find a way to make it interesting. I know myself, if I’m bored, then they are bored. So, from the beginning I tried to incorporate drama and performance into lessons as often as possible...So, for example, game shows are big in Spanish culture, right, and one day I dressed up and I pretended I’m the host of a game show. I took on the persona of the host and delivered the content. My energy was something students could relate to. This got them talking so they were practicing English...everybody wants to answer...and it’s relatable because it’s a family pastime. They are having fun and they forget they are learning too.

Luis admitted that his decision to use the game show format was not the result of a deliberate plan to infuse culture, but upon reflection he now recognizes that his choice connected with students. Because the learning was embedded in something relevant to their daily lives, Luis noticed his students were better engaged and had a greater willingness to take intellectual risks.

Kate revealed that as a new teacher and as a Caucasian she feared she would not be able to make learning relevant for her students because she did not know what really mattered to them. She said her first priority at the beginning of each school year is to learn as much as she can about her students and their parents. She shared:

We stand in a circle and I have this globe. I point out where I'm from and I tell them about me, then I pass the globe around and everyone has to find where they are from and say something about themselves. We do this until everyone shares. At back to school night I do the same thing with their parents. I celebrate who they are and where they come from. I think this breaks the ice and is the beginning of a wonderful partnership with parents over the school year. Parents get to know who I am, and I get to know them.

Kate believes that this connection with parents not only helps to build a bridge between home and school, but it gives her an understanding of the family structure and allows her to be aware of and sensitive to family dynamics:

I had a student once who entered the country illegally. He hadn't seen his mother. I don't know how many years... of course I found it out the hard way when I told him I would call his mom and his eyes filled with tears. I didn't know, and I never want a student to feel that way again... Once you understand your kids and what they go through and everything they have to deal with on a daily basis, or what they've come from, it makes it a lot easier to understand the weird different things they do. Like they're really great at this but struggle so much with that. And it helps you teach them in a way that's suitable for them individually.

Kate revealed that her determination to learn more about her students and their parents gave her a greater sense of confidence in her ability to relate to her students on a cultural level.

With limit restrictions placed on outside professional development, as new teachers, Luis and Kate have not had the opportunity to build, through PD, a broad knowledge base for differentiating instruction from the perspective district mandated curriculum. Consequently, they lack a full understanding of how to balance the integration of culture with district curricular mandates.

**Honoring oneself.** Isabella shared how important it is for her to celebrate her Cuban heritage as she honors the opportunity she has been afforded as a US citizen. She spoke about the importance of celebrating students to ensure a positive learning environment that made her students feel welcome:

As a preschool teacher, I always celebrated who they (my students) are, I tell them be proud about who you are and ... I do a lot of activities with them- but it's so different in third grade. I couldn't get the parents involved at first. I try to figure out what to do different, so I decide to honor them. I do an activity called Hopes and Dreams in the beginning of the year and I send out all this stuff to home; a survey of your child, how do you feel about your child, everything about your child. When it comes back, I'll do a big ole bulletin board, the parent hopes and then the child's dreams. That gives me an insight of who they are, how they view their child and what type of goals they have for their child.

For Isabella, these celebrations set the foundation for building a culturally relevant learning environment. Similarly, Linda noted celebrations of students at the kindergarten

level helps them transition from home to school since “many of my students have never been to school before.” She further explained that exposure to quality preschool programs is rare and being thrust into an academic environment creates anxiety for many students. Parent participation in classroom activities and allowing students to share personal experiences helps to smooth the transition.

Although all of the participants use different strategies and opportunities to connect with students and families, it is clear that each recognizes that a deeper understanding of each child allows the teacher to find creative ways to build learning environments that work for every child and further individualize learning experiences.

### **Defeatist Professional Development**

Defeatist professional development was the second theme to emerge. When asked to describe their professional development experiences and explain how professional development has informed and enriched their teaching throughout their careers, participants described how their professional practice evolved from professional development they engaged in and how they learned to modify and adapt pedagogical practice day-by-day through trial and error. Many of the participants agreed that professional learning is key to growing as an educator but not all professional learning leads to changes in thinking or pedagogical practice. Some participants elaborated further and described district mandated PD as superficial and too centralized and/or irrelevant to them individually.

**Key to professional growth.** Nellie talked about the importance of educators engaging in professional learning. She articulated that workshops and professional development have had the biggest impact on her professional growth:

Throughout my career, I have gone to a lot of workshops. I think it is the most valuable resource a teacher has and because I go, I made changes in my teaching and that makes me a better teacher. I always say...and it is part of my resume...that teaching is a gift but it's not something you learn in books. We have to be willing to learn and try new things too. Every time I go, I bring something back and try to incorporate it. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but every time is a valuable experience for me.

Isabella explained that as an educator, it is her responsibility to learn:

I have to figure it out...to be held accountable to say to colleagues, this year we really need to modify ourselves, get fresh, open our minds to this different world that we have to teach in. I will go to the professional development and have a huge portfolio to show I have a lot of skill to teach...

Isabella emphasized "I come from communist Cuba, it's my right to learn, it is my job to develop". Ben shared that over his 32-year career, professional development helped him grow not only professionally but personally too and gave him a deeper understanding of what his students experiences as English Language Learners (ELL's). He expressed, "I spoke only French when I came to this country. Through PD I learned a lot. I like to learn. It helped me to learn English since English wasn't my first language. I got better and better. I know what the children feel." For Ben, reflecting on his own personal experiences and those of his students has benefited him professionally and helped to shape academic decisions.

Maria talked about professional development as her "addiction" as she expressed her belief that educators should never stop learning. She added that the New Jersey



Education Association (NJEA) provides valuable workshops but stressed her dissatisfaction with the district in limiting teachers to only three workshops per year.

I like all PD and that's my problem...every PD I've been to I've learned something...it's my fountain of youth. When you feel like you are getting old and burned out, but then you get this new thing and your like 'Oh, wait a minute, there's something more I can do, there are other ways...now they limit me to only three PD's outside of the district. My favorite district PD was the curriculum training back in like 2012. It was intense. We spent two weeks straight in the summer and I felt like it was specific and clear and cohesive. I had the curriculum in front of me and I knew exactly what I was going to do month to month. I learned new strategies. That was a PD that I have to say I still use even though we got rid of it two years later.

There was an obvious shift in Maria's demeanor as she talked about the move to a new curriculum two years later when a change in administration occurred:

When the new administration came in, the whole culture and climate of the whole educational system...sometimes I feel...sometimes I feel like the system is being structured to keep the bottom at the bottom and the top at the top. I'm like how do I stop this? How do I help my students? We start strong with a vision at the beginning of the year and by the middle of the year we are on to something else. Forget it by the end of the year it's totally different again. ...I'm to the point of regardless of what PD the district wants and what anyone else wants to see, I learned to focus on what my students need and what I have to do in my classroom to get them there.”

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that professional development has been critical to the growth as educators and is essential to staying abreast of current trends in education. The philosophical differences between primary decision makers, resulting from high administrative turnover, of what constitutes effective teaching impedes impactful change and leads to a lack of buy-in from staff.

**Disjuncture.** High turnover of administrators and shifts in educational philosophies over the past several years has created a culture of cynicism among educators across this district. The disjointedness between current instructional practice and PD mandates are at the root of an historical aversion to change among school staff. This sense of disjuncture, or feelings of disjointedness, is evident in Maria’s sentiments about continuously shifting initiatives and forced mandates. Similar concerns were echoed by most participants. Joanne noted, “most PD is a waste of time because the powers that be don’t bother to ask teachers what they need. Everyone is expected to go to the same workshop” Kate added, “We’re expected to differentiate learning for our students, but what about differentiating learning for teachers?” Luis underscored the point further,

We just keep throwing the baby out with the bath water. We do the same thing all the time. We’re making things dumber, and dumber and dumber to suit the individuals in charge, but it ends up hurting our students and society and all because of a test...Oh, hey they didn’t pass the test so let’s change what we are doing again and see if this works. We’re grasping at straws and meanwhile precious time is slipping away. When is someone finally going to get it?

Elizabeth spoke of how most professional development activities are geared toward one subject area and usually one-size-fits all models that are the same from year to year. She shared:

Last year Sondra planned a workshop on co-teaching for ESL and classroom teachers during our districtwide professional development day. I helped her, with some other ESL teachers, put together handout packets for the workshop. It was like the day or two before the workshop that the district canceled all the workshops and made everyone go to the reading workshops. Every year I go to reading workshops, guided reading, readers workshop, running records, centers... every year it's the same thing and our kids still can't read on grade level. Doesn't that tell you that maybe we need to do something different? That's why I have to find my own PD outside of the district.

Many of the participants iterated what Elizabeth shared regarding centralized professional development. Nellie added, "when I go to PD at FEA or at DOE, I get to pick whatever I go to...the district doesn't give me the choice...in the very beginning when I didn't have experience, I relied on people to tell me where to go." Linda confessed:

When we had our winter professional development day last year, I called out sick because I couldn't stomach going to another 'number talk' workshop...If you have any pull, tell them to do something different for seasoned teachers...I get that new teachers need a lot of support, but I want to learn something new and cutting edge that will actually help me grow professionally...that will help my students move.

Rosa, like most, underscored the importance of teacher choice and differentiated offerings when planning professional development at the district level as best practice in ensuring sustained pedagogical change.

Professional development that is relevant to me, that is what will lead to a change in my teaching and student achievement...for me, and I think most of my colleagues, the least helpful PDs is the ones that are mandatory...they make us have a negative attitude before we even go to it...everyone has a bad attitude...I feel sorry for the presenters...they should ask for our opinions when we fill out the evaluation after the workshop.

Participants discovered that when professional development sessions are limited to those mandated by the district, they are often either irrelevant or disconnected from instructional practices and do not relate specifically to their needs. As such, they rarely lead to sustainable change in instructional practice as intended. Each concur that to sustain pedagogical change, professional development should be differentiated by content, practitioner experience, and need to be most effective.

**Program evaluation.** Participants spoke about the importance of gathering teacher feedback following professional development and using the feedback results to develop a professional development plan and drive future offerings. Maria noted, “We are required to complete an evaluation survey after each workshop to get our credit hours, but I don’t think anyone ever reads the surveys.” Luis concurred, “The feedback we give after a PD session should be evaluated...someone needs to look at it or we will continue to waste valuable time in workshops we don’t need.” Kate iterated, “I fill out a (sic)

evaluation survey after every workshop but I don't think anyone looks at them." Ben shared,

I went on My Learning Plan and did the evaluation after my workshop just so I get my credit...it doesn't matter what I write about...I don't know what comes next if I need to know more...I need to know more about the math program...they need to ask in the survey what we need next...what are the next workshops we need to help us in our teaching.

All participants agreed that completing the workshop evaluation following a professional development session was a wasted effort and believed the feedback sought did not lead to substantial change in the quality of offerings, nor did it lead to substantial change in instructional practice. Several participants noted that evaluation feedback is neither reviewed, nor used to improve future professional development and until feedback is valued, they do not anticipate sustainable shifts in pedagogical practice.

### **Cultural Considerations**

The third theme to emerge, cultural considerations, developed as a result of asking participants to share what they learned through the cultural competency PD and to describe how it made them think differently about their pedagogical practice.

Participants' descriptions of their implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices were often accompanied by references to how the workshop influenced their understanding of the importance of understanding diversity and how children learn.

Several participants described how cultural competency training shaped their broader understanding of what students might need in the classroom setting.

Some of the participants made statements such as, “I look at my students differently now,” “I have a different understanding of my students” and “I look at the personal experiences of students in a much broader way” to describe how they have shifted their understanding and began the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2013). Participants described a shift in thinking about students in terms of how they perform on specific tasks to thinking about the students themselves and how personal experiences impact their learning. Participants whose cultural backgrounds were similar to that of their students expressed regret at not being more culturally aware of the needs of their students since they often shared similar experiences fitting in and making sense of academic experiences.

**A sense of similitude.** When asking participants to reflect on what personal or professional experiences informed their understanding of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, many related similar school and life experiences to those of their students leading to a sense of similitude or comparability. Isabella expressed regret when she revealed how coming to a new country as an adult and facing the same challenges as her students in learning another language and culture did not initially influence her instructional decisions. It was not until she engaged in cultural competency training that she sensed similitude with her students. She admitted, upon reflection of her own experiences, she now has deeper appreciation for the academic challenges faced by students every day.

Most of my in-service trainings for bilingual students tells me to use more realia, more pictures and visual representations to help my students make connections.

That's what helped me as a newcomer, too, but I didn't think about how to use students lived experiences.

Ben added, "The curriculum for ESL students tells us to use words with pictures. They have to have another way to remember. Now, as often as I can, I use props and gestures that come from the countries of my students." Isabella and Ben recognized the challenges faced by their students through their own struggles to assimilate into the school community and found ways to intentionally include bits of culture in their classroom practices.

As an African American teacher in a district servicing black children, Joanne spoke of staying true to African culture. She noted that she sets up her classroom at the beginning of each year with personal artifacts she's collected that represent her heritage. She reflected:

Every year I decorate my classroom with African artifacts because I don't ever want my students to forget where they come from. Every chance I get, I try to infuse African history into what we are learning. Most of my students have never been out of the city, though, so I try to bring the cultural experiences to them through reading and history and I share my personal experiences. I've been doing this thing in my classroom called the living museum. I started it by dressing as a famous African American who had to overcome adversity in some way. I'd come to school dressed as that person and I'd stay in that persona all day and every lesson that day would tie into that person in some way. Then I started having all the students research someone in black history and take on that persona and teach the class about that person. Two years ago, I tried to encourage everyone (other

classroom teachers) to come and join in and we do it as a whole school. I felt, and I'm just being honest, a little put off...I got so much push back...'I don't have time' and 'that's too much with everything else I have to do'. Finally, I said, okay, never mind. I'm not going to tell anybody; I'm just doing my own thing. I'm going to shut down, I'm going to close my door, I'm going to stay in my room and we'll just do it as a class.

Joanne admitted, after the cultural competency training, she "was not really prepared to integrate culture across the curriculum and to use culture and language as learning tools." Her living museum was the result of her desire to ensure black children learned black history rather than an intentional attempt at connecting learning and personal experiences of her students to the curriculum. She discovered, after trying to involve her colleagues in the living museum activity, how inadequately prepared most teachers are to work with children whose cultural and language are different from their own. Joanne acknowledged that her own academic experiences in school lacked that connection to her cultural experiences and left her feeling isolated and, through her efforts, she was attempting to avoid having her students feel the same.

**Privilege.** Several participants spoke in depth about an activity conducted during one of the cultural competency professional development sessions that allowed each of them to examine their own life's opportunities around privilege and reflect on the journey of the families they serve. In this exercise, participants were asked to stand side by side and then answer questions about race, language, income, gender, educational experiences, and family composition. Based on their responses to the questions, they were asked to take steps forward or backward to represent how each impacted their



journey. Participants described the activity with words and phrases such as embarrassed, shame, shocked, biases, reality check, culture, and sense of privilege.

Kate and Linda, both Caucasian, expressed the shame and embarrassment they felt as they stood at the front of the line. Kate noted, “I took a few steps backward but most of my responses pushed me ahead of the group.” Linda said, “I won’t lie. I was a little ashamed; I never realized how each of these events impacts one’s life.” Luis, Rosa, and Nellie, each of Latino descent but who have spent most of their lives in the United States, shared how their language and cultural differences sometimes made them feel different in social situations and how this activity surprised them as it showed their experiences as members of the middle class lessened the gap between them and their native born American peers and widened the gap between them and their non-native, culturally and linguistically similar peers from lower socio-economic households. Luis shared:

My parents were both teachers. We didn’t speak Spanish in our house much so in school I spoke English. I think that forced me to become Americanized...I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, but in hindsight, it meant that who I was maybe wasn’t acceptable. I was different or less if I spoke Spanish...I grew up in a suburban middle-class neighborhood. I guess that gave me privileges I wasn’t aware of until this activity. Clearly being Puerto Rican held me back too because I never made it to the front of the line. That’s something to think about.

Nellie spoke of a conversation she had with her students that gave her a different perspective on privilege. She told them:

When I grew up, they didn't have cell phones or iPad or computers. That is a luxury you have in your lifetime. When you came from your country, you didn't have any of it either and now you do. You have to take advantage of it. You'll never know what it's like not to have a cell phone or be able to get ahold of your friends in the second you want to get ahold of them...

She added, how important it is to share these types of stories with students and to let them know how fortunate they are to receive an education.

I told them...hey, if you didn't have it, you are very blessed now that you do. In the Dominican Republic, I didn't have textbooks; my mom couldn't afford them. They didn't give them to us in school, we had to buy them. Don't throw away your opportunity. Once I came to the United States, I didn't have to worry anymore...My parents put a lot of emphasis on education. I was lucky. They (the students) just stare at me, but someday they will understand.

For Nellie, her college education led to privilege that she may not have otherwise acquired had she not chosen to attend college. Ben shared similar sentiments on how education afforded him opportunity. "Education changed me...it made me a better person...I keep going...I like to learn...that's a true teacher...a learner who never stops learning. Ben elaborated further, "I'm a black man with a doctorate...that's something."

Joanne, an African American, looked at privilege from another perspective. In contrast to Luis and his choice not to highlight his bilingual abilities, she approached privilege from the perspective of how being bilingual could provide one with opportunities they may not be exposed to by being fluent in only one language. She expressed:

I love the whole idea of bilingual. I wish I was myself. I wish my brain was wired that way and I'm trying, but I feel we are missing an opportunity here. Those students who have been raised in English all their lives are not given the chance to be bilingual and they should. We are all in this community together. We should all have an opportunity to learn another language. I like that we do say things in English and Spanish when we make announcements here. But people forget, even African American students have their own language. Their language is a second language too but because it's not the Kings English, it's not recognized. It's a different dialect of English. Everyone wants to tell black students to speak a certain way. You could have an amazing classroom if you just allow everyone to express themselves for who they are. I just want all of us to share each other. At the end of the day, we're in an English-speaking country, that's going to require them to know English, okay, but they should never lose their identity.

Participants shared how reflecting on their own experiences, sense of privilege, and prior classroom practices was most instrumental toward shifting their thinking about what students need to be academically supported. For most participants, shifts in pedagogical change extended beyond the cultural competency professional development.

**Integrating culture.** Following the cultural competency institute, all participants in the program received a series of one to one mentoring sessions from program certified trainers and mentors. For the study participants, suggestions made by mentors following classroom visits and debriefing sessions, were often incorporated into classroom routines. Nellie spoke of struggling to get students settled and prepared to learn as they came into class each morning:

My mentor suggested during morning message I should talk more about not just their own culture, but other cultures too and that excites them. For example, in this unit we are learning to compare and contrast two texts, so when I did my lesson plans I thought it would be fun to talk about breakfast around the world. I found a bundle of articles. I told the kids about my favorite breakfast. They were so amazed when I said to them that I never had cereal for breakfast when I was a little girl because in the Dominican Republic, that's not what we eat. We eat hot breakfast...tortilla de huevos (Omelet), arenque con huevo (herring and eggs), plantains and eggnog, oatmeal too, but no cold cereal and milk. Then they shared what they eat for breakfast, we read the articles, and they had to write an essay comparing another country to theirs and what they eat for breakfast...Since we did that, now they put their stuff away quickly and sit down so they can share something. It really has opened them up and they can practice their English language skills too.

Ben shared as an ESL teacher he always uses artifacts and pictures to help students remember words and concepts, but now he plans more purposefully for each lesson. He shared a lesson that he planned with his mentor:

Since going to the training, I try to use artifacts from different countries and I ask the kids to bring things in too. Friday when my mentor was here she gave me an idea to use music. We taught a lesson on festivals. The kids brought drums and musical instruments to represent their country. I brought a drum from my country. I got the music teacher here and we talked about where the instruments came from

and listened to the sounds each made, and then the music teacher taught them to play a few notes with each instrument.

The artifacts from this activity were proudly displayed around Ben's classroom. Ben was excited to show me how he had incorporated cultural artifacts into the classroom environment. Ben concluded, "I leave them out because they remind me that what students have to contribute is just as important as what I teach them." Despite sharing a sense of similitude with students, Ben had to make a deliberate effort to integrate cultural aspects of students' lives in his classroom as a reminder to value culture and language as assets toward their development.

### **Integrating Culture with Learning**

Participants discovered that by being purposeful in planning instruction and being aware of students on a cultural level, students were more academically engaged in the learning and parents took a greater interest in what was happening in the classroom. Several shared that they observed students taking academic risks more often and working more enthusiastically for longer periods of time before engaging in off task behaviors and/or shutting down. Additionally, families were more involved because activities relating to students' cultural experiences often required family members to supply cultural artifacts and/or personally identifiable traditions and history. Participants were becoming increasingly more concerned with their ability to keep up with curricular demands due to the tremendous amount of planning time required during the first year of implementation.

**Curricular decision making.** Participants conveyed that district curriculum was written to align to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and encompasses state mandates set forth by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE). Primary teaching resources and materials adopted for use in the district are developed by well-known educational suppliers who supply materials across the country. Participants believe that many of the curricular decisions are made by department supervisors and the curriculum department with little input from teaching and support staff. Their comments suggested that because the district is categorized by the NJ DOE as in need of academic improvement, there was little opportunity for teacher autonomy when making curricular and/or instructional decisions.

There was a genuine concern among participants that since there were district benchmarks embedded in the curriculum at every grade level and content area, they would not be able to meet the benchmarks if they focused too heavily on infusing culturally responsive instructional methods into daily instruction. Moreover, some participants feared they had limited flexibility for when and how to incorporate culture. Elizabeth shared, “Language arts and social studies are the only two content areas where we have the most autonomy when it comes to topics we introduce.” Maria concurred, “I can incorporate culture in my language arts instruction by selecting high interest reading selections from culturally diverse authors. I don’t think it will work in other content areas as well.” Both feared straying too far from the curriculum and not meeting benchmarks would set their students up for failure on common and/or state standardized assessments.

By contrast, Luis and Isabella found ways to incorporate culture into math and science using food, for example. With the support of his mentor, Luis recalled how he

was able to integrate science and language arts curricula into lessons on the Mayas and plant life. After reading a story about the Mayas in social studies, students discovered that corn was sacred to the Mayas. Since they were studying plant life in science, Luis saw this as an opportunity to make cross curricular connections and to connect to culture by examining how corn is used as an ingredient in meals in different countries. Evidence of student learning was displayed around Luis' classroom. Isabella added:

I remember when Sondra came one day to observe me, and my students asked me if we were in language arts. Another student said, 'no, were in social studies' and then another said 'no, we are in everything...remember we are not separating content areas'. They are right, you don't need to separate it. They learn that way how is everything connected. That's how I'm doing culture too.

Although they did not share specific examples of how they integrated culture into other content areas, Kate and Nellie express enthusiasm for their ability to use culture to catapult any lesson. Kate noted:

I hit everything I needed to teach in the curriculum but I'm taking it to another level and it's amazing to see how much more involved the kids are and the connections they are making. I thought I was doing the right things before, but now I know it's more meaningful.

Nellie confessed, "I took a chance. I didn't know if the principal was onboard, but I was still teaching the same content, just in a different way so I didn't worry. Kids were getting it." As they discovered new ways to include students lived experiences and became more proficient at purposeful planning, student participation increased, work habits improved, and parental involvement increased.



Figure 2. Global village of Puerto Rico

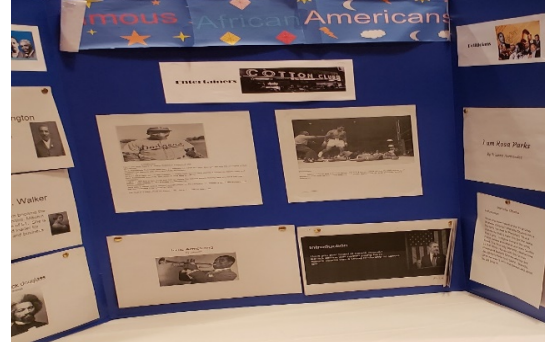


Figure 3. Accomplished African Americans

**Environment.** During the institute, educators learned there are three competency domains involved in transforming a cultural environment. Domain 1 is concerned with classroom design and refers to how cultural artifacts, such as family photos, maps, flags, art work, and fabrics from various countries, are displayed around the classroom to represent children’s cultural background and community. These displays created by students and their families are known as global villages. Nearly every participant involved in the study had multiple representations of culture displayed around their classrooms (see figure 2).

Joanne looked differently at classroom design and instead of creating global villages, the decor in her classroom highlighting accomplished African Americans (see figure 3). Although there were several displays around her room much like the one depicted in figure 3, fewer artifacts representing African American culture were visible. She shared that the institute favored infusing Latinx culture over others and did not deepen her understanding of how to infuse African American culture that represented her student population. However, because of the training, she felt she learned to identify more opportunities that allowed students to share family traditions and history in other



ways that connected content to their personal experiences. Joanne's reflections suggest that she continues to view culture through 'a separate but different' ethnic lens and not as a means of incorporating knowledge, home life, and language into meaningful learning experiences and interactions.

**Student and family involvement.** Through the development of global villages and small literacy moments, another representation of student culture that required family input, participants shared how these activities promoted the school-to-home connection and drew parents and caregivers into their classrooms. Maria confessed that when she was asked to bring a cultural artifact to the PD session to create her global village she panicked:

One thing I learned right away is that I was not aware of my own culture and one of the things they...when they (instructors and mentors from the institute) asked us to bring something that represented our countries, I thought well I'm Dominican, I'm Dominican, I'm Dominican but as I walked around my house I realize there is nothing in my house. If a stranger walked into my house there's absolutely nothing that will jump at them and say 'Oh, this is a Spanish home!' I was like, ok, I need to figure this out so I can teach my students about my rich culture and they will teach me theirs.

Maria expressed that another challenge she had was that many of her parents work and it had been difficult getting them to participate, but after students showed their enthusiasm, parents came around:

I once had only three parents volunteer to participate in the celebration for Hispanic Heritage Day, so I had to cancel it. This time I asked them to send

something from their country and suddenly everyone is involved and coming to school.

Maria discovered how to involve parents in more meaningful ways and parents felt valued for their contributions.

As children grow older, parents begin to develop a hands-off approach to school as is demonstrated in Isabella's experiences with parent involvement. "When I was a preschool teacher, parents came to school all the time. I talked to them every day. Now that I teach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I never see the parents. They don't even get out of their car when they pick them up." However, after sending home the parent flyer explaining the purpose of the global villages, Isabella had parents coming to her daily asking how they could help and what they could bring in. Parents cooked food and brought enough for all students, came and told stories about traditions in their countries during the literacy moments, and sent in numerous artifacts representing their cultural heritage.

Evidence of increased parent and student involvement was visible in the classrooms I visited. Student work and pictures with parents and siblings were posted around classrooms. During classroom visits, participants spoke of parent/caregiver reactions to the classroom environment. Elizabeth shared how one parent commented that the classroom looked "comfortable and cozy" and another "loved the presentation of the many cultures." Joanne told of a mother who was "very happy her daughter was learning about other cultures" and how her child tells me so much more about what she learned when she comes home each day. Overall, participants agreed that parents were more supportive of the school-home relationship and enjoyed contributing in a variety of ways.

### **(Un)sustainability**

The final theme, sustainability of culturally relevant classroom practices, was of particular concern to participants. Each exhibited a sense of trepidation in their ability to sustain the culturally relevant pedagogical practices they learned during their professional development experience due to compulsory district PD mandates, competing priorities, and limited availability of PD connected to cultural competency. Participants previously described how in-district PD opportunities are narrow in scope and staff are restricted in the number of days they are approved to attend out of district workshops. These concerns were renewed as participants were asked to reflect on challenges they may face in implementing the principles of CRP and explain how they will expand on these principles moving forward. Working collaboratively as a school community and reflecting on current practice and future practice were the forefront of these concerns.

**Collaboration.** Nearly all respondents stressed the teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-mentor bonds as an important aspect of collaboration that grew out of their cultural competency professional development experiences. Participants from the same school and grade level usually found it easier to sustain the practices they had acquired through the training sessions.

Joanne expounded on the importance of learning together and working collaboratively with colleagues as a community of learners to ensure success in creating a culturally responsive teaching environment. With teaching experience in both charter schools and public schools, she shared how different the teaching environment in a charter school as compared to the teaching environment in public school with regard to collaboration:

We (teachers) were closer in the charter school than we are here in this particular district. Here, we're all about bureaucracy. That's what I see, worried about ourselves and very little about children. I'm just being honest. There's a constant war of those who want to be about children and those who want to climb the ladder to success using them. In charter school, it's about surviving...we gotta work together to survive...we're so stressed about survival, we worked together, we talked about the kids all the time. Here, we say children come first but I don't know if I really believe that to be true across this district from the top down.

Joanne's belief in the absence of collaboration was reflective of a divisive school culture. She expressed concern that teachers were not supportive of one another and thus she did not fully believe the principles associated with CRP were poised for sustainability.

In contrast, Kate espoused how she and her grade level colleagues (which included Joanne) planned lessons together and shared what was happening in one another's classroom. They shared strategies they learned through the mentoring and, as a team, they looked at ways to infuse culture and by working together, they developed a greater sense of commitment. However, she expressed concern that PD most often fails because there is no follow-through. Teachers learn the concepts and retain the information long enough to try a few ideas in the classroom but without on-going PD supported by the district, the knowledge and drive to continue fades. Luis echoed Kate's concern adding:

When the entire school does not have buy-in, when this isn't the culture of the school community, when the principal doesn't view this as a priority, we tend to forget the importance of why we do what we do. We feel like we are working

harder than the next guy, and no one cares so why kill ourselves. Hell, we don't know if we will have the support we need next year to continue to implement these practices. The past tells us, next year it'll be time to move on to something new.

Rosa and Maria also expressed their concern that without the continued support of the program mentors, they did not feel they would grow as culturally competent practitioners. Maria noted, "my mentor models strategies for me and is full of knowledge." Rosa added, "My mentor helped me develop an action plan to make sure my room was a culturally and linguistically responsive environment. I'd like to expand upon that but I'm not sure how without her support." Their fears about losing the support of the mentors and their belief that the district will not continue to support the program is reminiscent of participants concerns regarding mandated PD and shifting priorities. These attitudes suggest that without changing the culture of the district through committed and consistent professional development, there is genuine concern about the sustainability of culturally competent classroom environment.

**Reflection.** From the inception of the cultural competency institute, reflection has played a major role in shifting participants understanding of culture and the role culture plays on student learning. During the institute, for example, the instructor had participants write daily reflections relating to cultural experiences, while mentors posted reflective questions in online forums and required participants to design reflective questions about their presentations for the other participants to answer. Small teams were brought together to work collaboratively to create a small literacy moment lesson plan using props and materials given to them by the instruction and mentors. After designing

the plan and sharing it with the whole group, participants were asked to reflect on this activity and how they would use it to determine how to balance the culture of their students with what they might need to succeed in class.

Participants observed that reflection on the subject matter and their experiences within the cultural competency training led them to modify their thinking about teaching and learning. Ben confessed that prior to the program, he blindly followed what he was told to do. Elizabeth noted with a bit of sorrow,

It is a little embarrassing that prior to the program I was just kind of going with it. We've had the ESL supervisor and many consultants come in and say, . . . 'Do this' and I would do it. I never asked why, yet I wasn't quite sure what I was doing and why I was doing it. But after the program, I was like, 'Oh, okay so this is why I am doing this'.

For Elizabeth, the training provided by the institute gave her a renewed perspective of her role as a teacher of English Language Learners.

Some participants spoke about the functions and value of reflection. Their most common response touched on what the instructor and mentors considered its major function: the purposeful integration of culture within everyday practice. Kate looked back at previous experiences as a novice teacher and realized that no one had ever actually compelled her to think about the students in the classroom through a cultural lens and consider what that meant about the design of the class, selection of teaching methods, and materials, for example. She concluded, "Now I definitely think about my students first. When I am planning or teaching, I am very intentional about where they sit. I am very intentional about who they are sitting next to. I am very intentional about how I deliver

instruction.” In this short period of time, reflection has allowed Kate to grow as an educator into a more purposeful practitioner.

Isabella compared the successful use of reflection to integrate theory and practice with other staff development experiences and reflected on why some worked, and others did not:

I was getting a lot more PD in the past but not all of it was good. Like, I went to SIOP training, we had SIOP but it wasn't a good training because it wasn't hands on like cultural competency was. They lectured a lot and had us read a section from the book they gave us, then we watched a video but that didn't teach us how to use the SIOP model. When we talked about it during the institute, it made sense, and I could see how it worked, and I understood it. . . it had the practical pieces that I needed to connect the dots. So now I knew how it was supposed to look in the classroom and once I got the pieces, I was like, so this is how it looks in the classroom, this is what you should see, these are the kind of experiences my students should have.

As reflection became a habit for Luis, he realized how useful and important it was for instructional planning. Luis shared, “Every week as I write my lesson plans I noticed using reflection made me start asking myself, ‘What are my students thinking?’ ‘Why are things not comprehensible to them?’ and ‘How can I make things more comprehensible?’ I want this to always be my habit because it's what kids deserve.” It is this form of purposeful reflection and deep critical reflection that help educators build awareness of the diverse needs of students. Engaging in reflective practice enables practitioners to

articulate what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and the impact it has on decision making (Schön, 1978).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the qualitative findings from this study. Descriptions of each of the participants were included to provide a snapshot of their teaching experience, grade level experience and cultural identity. Although participants did not self-identify, gender was determined by the use of title. Nationality was identified by participants based on their home country. Semi structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Five themes emerged that underscore the professional development experiences and cultural competency levels of each participant. The findings reveal overall that participants rely on professional development that supports teaching and learning and encourages practitioner growth. Overwhelmingly, participants agree that culturally responsive decision making is a significant determinant to providing students with learning opportunities that are comprehensible and that they can identify with as meaningful within their lived experiences.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Implications

The chapter that follows presents a discussion of the findings and themes related to the research questions driving this qualitative study. The implications and recommendations for policy, research, practice, and leadership will also be discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

As noted in the literature review, the generic or universal treatment of teacher preparation programs rarely emphasizes the importance of contextual distinctions in the ways in which children develop, the ways they learn, and the nature of the content they learn by, and rarely focuses specifically on a particular context or setting such as urban schooling (Haberman, 2012). Milner (2010) suggests that teachers in urban settings often fail to consider the social context of teaching and learning. Hammond (2015) adds that teacher preparation programs often miss the meaning behind culturally responsive teaching or fail to offer enough support on the topic. Professional development is necessary to fill in these gaps in skill sets of teachers, and to continue to develop the expertise of teachers (Badri, Alnuaimi, Mohaidat, Yang & Al Rashedi, 2016). Hence, it is crucial to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations that professional development opportunities provide teachers with learning experiences that are designed to bring about personal transformation through a deep understanding of culture and pedagogy that will allow them to begin the process of becoming culturally competent teachers.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers and teacher support personnel internalize and implement the tenets and strategies associated with professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy. Data were collected

through semi-structured interviews, informal observation and document collection. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers and support personnel describe their pedagogical practices prior to professional development on culturally relevant and responsive teaching?
2. How do teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators?
  - a. How do educators internalize CRP as it relates to their professional practice?
  - b. What specific strategies and practices do the educators describe as being successful when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?
  - c. How do educators implement an educational environment that promotes culturally appropriate and relevant teaching practices?

By using a single case, ethnographic case study approach to explore this topic, the ten participants provided a rich, detailed picture of their mindsets and actions about teaching and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse settings. Participants engaged in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) through reflective practice and critical, intentional reflection (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Dewey, 1938) to think about and respond differently to the academic needs of their students.

## **Discussion**

The first research question the study sought to answer related to how teachers and support staff describe their pedagogical practices prior to engaging in a cultural competency professional development institute. The study found that for all participants, professional development has been a critical component of their development and growth

as educational professionals. Research supports the idea that developing the role of the teacher is a critical factor in the successful implementation of any educational program (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Desimone & Garet, 2015) and is essential to changing classroom practice, improving schools, and ameliorating pupil's learning outcomes (Postholm, 2018). However, it was discovered that not all professional development leads to change in pedagogical practice, and some new learning and understandings were not sustainable over time. The sustainability of new knowledge and strategies gained through professional development experiences is dependent on follow up and follow through (Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006; Hammond, 2015). For sustainability to occur, it is important to generate impact which enables individuals and institutions to foster change even after the PD is terminated and the resources are exhausted (Zehetmeier & Krainer, 2011).

As participants reflected on their pedagogical practice prior to the cultural competency institute, it was revealed that, most often, participants used their own educational experiences as a frame of reference for their current pedagogical practices. Although many of the participants had similar educational experiences to that of their students, they rarely consider a student's culture, home experiences or personal identity in their instructional decision making. Of the ten study participants, 6 had immigrated to the U.S. during various stages of their lives and education. They spoke of how they too had to endure mainstream curricula, limited language support and limited exposure to some of the life experiences their classmates had. As a result, once they were able to recognize these similarities to their students, they were able to connect culturally with students and their families. The study revealed that participants were not specifically

trained to tailor instruction to the needs of their African American and Latinx population. It was further revealed that the depth of their understanding of cultural competency and the limited amount of professional development participants received on the topic often hindered intentionality. Cultural references often occurred by happenstance. This finding confirms what research presents; teacher education programs do not intentionally prepare teachers for context specific situations such as urban schooling (Haberman, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; & Milner, 2010; ).

This study found that the concept of personal identity was important to all participants, however, it rarely shaped participant's educational decision making. This finding was confirmed by participants (whose ethnic background mirrored that of their students) admission that they never intentionally included culture and did not consider the importance of identity in educational decision making as, over time, they let go of their own ethnic identities and assimilated into American culture. At the center of transformative learning theory is the notion that we assimilate our own values and beliefs as we adopt the dominant ideology as the normal, natural way to think and act (Mezirow, 1991). It is not until we recognize that these beliefs are oppressive that we enter the transformative learning process. Being an immigrant or bilingual teacher and/or possessing an ESL, TESOL, or bilingual certification did not significantly impact instructional decision making. It became clear that the unintentional instructional choices relating to culture were the result of participant's beliefs that as educators it is their duty to try a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of students. Moreover, when participants provided their students with opportunities to explore cultural identity it was

the result of trial and error and not necessarily from strategies learned through professional development.

Most participants described not receiving any training in urban education or cultural competency since they have been in district. For teachers to enact the high levels of practice needed for students to learn, they must possess a strong and diverse base of pedagogical content knowledge (Desimone, 2011; Shulman, 1987) and, regardless of cultural similarities, preparation targeted at culturally relevant practices is necessary (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). It was found that participants were in agreement that building this knowledge continues over a teacher's career and begins with effective professional development (Desimone, 2011). Though they describe themselves as motivated learners with a willingness to learn and grow as educators, they felt the quality of offerings by the district rarely met their individual needs.

This study revealed that participants are frustrated by district imposed professional development opportunities, the limitations placed on out-of-district PD, and by their lack of involvement and understanding of how PD sessions are selected. All participants preferred self-select topics over district-imposed PD opportunities. It was further revealed that despite research advocating for high interest, relevant PD, participants are dissatisfied with most professional development opportunities implemented across the district because most is not relevant to their practice (Badri, et. al, 2016). Teachers learn best through professional development that addresses their needs, is relevant to their practice, respects the teacher as the adult learner with choices, a voice, and time to reflect (Badri, et. al, 2016; Boylan, 2018). Furthermore, most of the PD examples shared by participants describe inconsistent follow through and left participants

feeling that the feedback they provide has not led to a substantial change in the applicability or quality of offerings.

Knowles, et al. (2014) explains that quality learning experiences must be shaped by the specific goals and purposes for adult learning as well as a recognition of individual and situational differences. This study confirmed the research Knowles, et al. (2014) revealed as it was discovered that when PD offerings were irrelevant or disconnected from instructional practices, participants rarely incorporated them into pedagogy and over time they forgot most of what they learned. Teachers learn best through professional development that addresses their needs and quality professional development requires teachers to be included in the selection, research, and evaluation of professional development programs (Badri, et. Al, 2016).

### **Influence of Culturally Responsive Professional Development**

The second research question sought to understand how teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators. Prior to the institute, participants most often described an instinctive ability to understand the connection between culture and learning, yet there was an overall sense of self-doubt due to their lack of intentional planning to provide culturally responsive experiences. After completing the cultural competency institute, participants were more intentional when connecting culture and learning and often reflected on the impact their choices had on student learning and engagement.

The study found that participants' descriptions of their implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices were often accompanied by references to how the cultural competency institute influenced their understanding of the importance of

recognizing diversity and how all children learn. Participants were engaging in what Mezirow (1991) argued is at the center of transformative learning theory; they had assimilated their own values and beliefs within what the dominant ideology defined as the normal and natural way to think and act, but, as a result of their experiences at the institute, by classifying these beliefs as oppressive, they entered into the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1991). Several participants described how the cultural competency institute shaped their broader understanding of what students might need in the classroom setting to see themselves in the learning. Statements such as “I look at my students differently” to “I look at the personal experiences of students in a much broader sense as I plan instruction,” led to their shifts in thinking about students not in terms of how they perform on specific tasks, but rather to thinking about the students themselves and how their personal experiences impact their understandings. Cultural responsiveness stresses the importance of moving beyond isolated opportunities of attending to individual cultural differences in classrooms and schools and instead toward a recognition of how culture impacts teaching and learning (Civitillo, Juang, Badra & Schachner, 2019).

**Participants connections to their students.** Of the ten study participants, seven described similar schooling experiences to that of their students. The study revealed that as this group reflected on what personal or professional experiences informed their understanding of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, they related their similar school and life experiences as immigrants to those of their students which gave them a sense of connectedness to students. Two bilingual, immigrant participants spoke specifically about the challenges their students faced that mirrored their own struggles to

fit in at school and, to support students like themselves, they sought out ways to intentionally include bits of culture in everyday learning. One participant who is African American shared a similar experience with feelings of not fitting in as a child, and as a result, she intentionally included African American history as often as possible into daily learning. These findings are affirmed by the research of Fraise and Brooks (2015) that suggests an educator's personal beliefs and biases significantly impact their approach to curriculum and pedagogy when teaching diverse learners. As such, teachers must reflect on their own values, cultures, and knowledge to gain an understanding of the educational context in which their students learn (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Haberman, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Milner, 2010).

**Internalizing culturally responsive practices.** The first sub question to be addressed by the research seeks to understand how practitioners internalize culturally responsive practices learned through the professional development institute. The focus of the cultural competency institute was to transform the thinking and practices of teachers and support staff to improve interactions and instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The institute provided teachers with a working knowledge of the role culture has in language development and academic achievement. It was noted that during the institute, participants discovered firsthand how culturally responsive classrooms and educators have the power to nurture a child's self-concept and self-esteem as well as provide them with the confidence to explore the world around them (Gay, 2010). The study found that participants used the tenets of transformative learning theory to challenge their previous assumptions about culturally and linguistically diverse students as they came to new understandings during the institute about the experience's students



bring to the classroom. Work on display throughout the classroom generally depicted elements of home and culture situated within the context of the curriculum (Milner, 2010).

**Successful strategies and practices.** The second sub question related specifically to strategies and practices participants found successful while implementing culturally responsive pedagogical practices. The study found that with the help of the program mentors, participants were able to implement a variety of strategies and practices that students responded well to.

One such activity started the transformation of the classroom environment which, according to Mahatmya, Lohman, Brown and Conway-Turner (2016), fosters positive school experiences for students by developing connectedness to school. Students created global villages that represented each of their home countries by bringing items from home that symbolized their country, a special family tradition, or their family history. This activity fostered school connectedness among all student's which research suggests may positively enhance academic performance (Mahatmya, Lohman, Brown, & Conway-Turner, 2006). Mahatmya, et al (2016) suggest that school connectedness is one way to create trusting relationships, communicate norms, and exchange information which are critical components of culturally responsive classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Neito, 2013). The study found that an unintentional result of this activity was an increase in parental engagement. To capitalize on this interaction, during class visits, participants asked parents to share stories or traditions with the class further fostering school connectedness (Mahatmya, et al, 2016).

Research suggests that teaching methods that use references to a student's culture help the student to understand mainstream curriculum through a lens of recognition and acknowledgement (Nieto, 2013). When participants infused music and art from various cultures into routines and rituals and learning activities to provide students with a connection to their personal experiences, students responded positively and were more actively engaged in learning experiences. They were able to make connections and see themselves in the learning. For example, music was used to signal the end of an activity and gather the attention of all students. As students became familiar with process, transitions between activities were quicker which increased time on task and intellectual engagement. This finding is consistent with the concept that culture is central to student learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy that respects and uses students' identities, experiences, and backgrounds creates an optimal learning environment (Griner and Stewart, 2013).

**Promoting culturally competent practice.** The final sub question the research sought to answer related to how educators implement an educational environment that promotes culturally appropriate and relevant teaching practices. The culturally competency of the participants was portrayed through interactions with students, through students' interactions with others, and through interactions with families. It was discovered that participants internalized the needs of students more often than they realized. This was evidenced through dialogue between me and the participants during informal observation. We spoke about practices that either acknowledged students from different places or practices that related to students' cultures. Participants were making intentional choices that were purposefully planned and that recognized the nature of a

culturally responsive classroom where all decisions relate not just to instructional choices, but are also evident in the environment, physical space, and rapport with students and parents (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2013). The link between culture and classroom instruction derives from the idea that cultural practices shape thinking practices and educators who respect students' languages, cultures, and life experiences promote the principles of culturally responsive teaching (Nieto, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed around Mezirow's transformative learning theory through intentional reflection. Transformative learning theory is situated firmly in the literature of adult learning and development. The central focus of this theory is how adults make meaning of their situations and how this meaning making can affect development (Mezirow, 2012). Learning may be intentional; the result of deliberate inquiry, or incidental; the byproduct of another activity involving intentional learning (Mezirow, 2012). The study found that, most often, participants engaged in culturally responsive practices without realizing they were culturally responsive to their student's needs. This is congruent with what Mezirow (2012) refers to as a stage of incidental reflection as noted above.

Reflection on experience is a critical component for learning. Reflective practice, or the capacity to reflect on action and engage in a process of continuous learning, is considered to be a defining characteristic of professional practice (Harper, 2018; Osterman, 1990) and one that easily transfers to students as well. Learners who engage in reflective practice develop problem solving and critical thinking skills (Harper, 2018). Further, research supports the idea that reflective practice cultivates a growth mindset that moves practitioners out of their comfort zone (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2003). Critical

analysis and evaluation refocus thinking on existing knowledge and helps generate new knowledge and ideas (Mezirow, 2013; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The most significant changes in instruction occurred as a result of reflection practice (Schön, 1983) while participants were engaged in collaborative planning or when they shared what was happening in their classrooms. Their desire to ensure their students were included in the learning resulted, in part, from participants own past experiences as members of marginalized populations and in part by engaging in reflective practice (Harper, 2018). By changing how they previously delivered instruction, participants began the process of transformative learning. They were challenging past assumptions and applying their new understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy to learning opportunities (Mezirow, 2012).

During the institute, participants were asked to complete reflective journals which continued after the completion of the institute and throughout the mentoring process. The study revealed that reflective journaling allowed each participant to examine elements of teaching and learning that led to the highest instances of student and parent engagement. It was noted that when students were able to connect with the learning, they were more likely to participate in discussion, complete work independently and take academic risks that they had not attempted previously. Once participants gained a greater understanding of how to weave culture into aspects of teaching and learning, their actions became intentional and they began to think about and share with one another how students were responding to culturally responsive teaching strategies (Mezirow, 2012). These conversations led to purposeful changes to the classroom environment, lesson planning, instructional delivery and parent engagement.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for policy, practice, research, and leadership and are intended to ensure that, through professional development, educators develop a deep understanding of the critical concepts and principals associated with their discipline to advance the learning of all students. Many children enter school lacking the personal, social, and moral traits necessary for academic success (Comer, 2010). As a result, students who have not had adequate support for their development may come to school lagging behind their classmates who may have had an optimal developmental experience beginning with preschool. Hence, it is intended that educators sustain a shift toward culturally responsive pedagogical practices by using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse learners from various cultures and languages to ensure learning is attainable, appropriate, and effective for every student.

## **Policy**

The United States Department of Education (US DOE) allocates nearly 80% of professional development funding to Title I schools that have the highest percentages of students receiving free or reduced lunch and typically the highest population of African American and Latinx students (US DOE, 2017). They authorize, without mandates, states and local educational agencies (LEA) the ability to develop individualized professional development plans that support teacher training and educator growth. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) requires all teaching staff members to accumulate 20 hours of professional development annually. The NJ DOE provides LEA's with a list of mandated training requirements that include topics such as suicide prevention, harassment, intimidation and bullying, and dyslexia training. However,

neither the USDOE nor the NJDOE currently mandate training for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

The results of this study suggest that since this and other studies have revealed most mandated professional development to be defeatist in nature, it is strongly recommended that policy makers develop a professional development model that is steeped in research and proven to be effective at sustaining pedagogical change. Little good would come from mandating another topic as it would effectively be viewed as a requirement for compliance rather than meaningful at affecting change. More consideration should be given to expanding the number of hours teachers are required to accumulate over the course of one academic school year. Traditionally, labor contracts limit the number of days teachers work beyond the state imposed 180-day requirement hindering a districts ability to embed additional meaningful long term professional development throughout the year. As a result most occurs during the first two and/or the last two days of the days of a school year which limits a teacher's ability to effectively plan for and sustain any type of instructional change that was to be derived from the professional development session.

### **Practice**

The purpose of investing in professional development for teachers is to strengthen and develop professional competency (Weber, Johnson, & Tripp, 2013). At its most effective, professional development that matches teacher, school, and district needs, involves teachers in the design and planning, allows for active participation by the teacher, and allows for ongoing, long-term exposure by knowledgeable facilitators with expertise in diversity education. Culturally responsive teacher education preparation, whether it is school-based professional development or a university preparation program,

is necessary, even when teachers are from the same cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background of students (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

This study illuminated the need for multiple stakeholders to be involved in the development of the annual professional development plan. At the district level, it is recommended that the personnel responsible for creating the annual professional development plan include teachers in the planning and preparation of professional development activities. As the study revealed, study participants valued professional development as crucial to their personal and professional growth when it is relevant to what is happening in their classrooms and expands their knowledge and pedagogical skill. To include cultural relevant practices, it is recommended that district curriculum, which is currently aligned to state mandated student learning standards, be revised to include culturally relevant components and curricular decision making be expanded beyond department supervisors and the curriculum department by seeking input from teaching and support staff.

Across the nation, educators are ill prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. This is due, in part, to a lack of policy mandating culturally responsive professional development for educators. Finally, it is recommended that teacher preparation programs begin to develop programs of study for future educators to include coursework and fieldwork exposure in areas where diverse student populations exist. It would also serve future educators if these programs required all students to receive an urban educator endorsement, in addition to their academic major.

### **Research**

This study focused specifically on professional development and the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practice as result of participants

attendance at a cultural competency institute. Future research should examine the ability to sustain changes in pedagogical practices of teachers engaged in professional development. Teacher development must be differentiated to address the classroom teacher's specific cultural composition and strengthen the confidence of teachers to employ theory into daily practice. As researchers concerned with teacher education continue to connect theory and practice, the illusion is that increased, improved, and varied training for teachers will result in the success of culturally-inclusive education in public schools and eventually the elimination of the opportunity gap (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Gay & Howard, 2000; Jordan-Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000; National Collaborative on Diversity, 2004; Nieto, 2004).

Future research should examine the ability to sustain changes to pedagogical practices of teachers engaged in professional development and carefully examine what type and length of professional development is most effective at attaining sustainability. Professional development at its most effective is differentiated to address the classroom teacher's specific cultural composition and strengthen the confidence of teachers to employ theory into daily practice and, as such, teachers should be included in the discussion and development of the district's annual professional development plan (Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016).

### **Leadership**

The fabric of educational leadership is rapidly changing. School administrators are no longer simply managers of an LEA. Instead, they are tasked with being the instructional leaders positioned to promote and support school level reforms (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). As instructional leaders, administrators must lead and direct the educational programs, which, at minimum, include improving teacher performance and



increasing student achievement. However, Khalifa, et al (2016) argue, this must be done within the context of cultural responsiveness. To effectively perform these responsibilities, school administrators need quality professional learning experiences. Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) posit that “culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students” (p. 1275). Research suggests leaders must develop strategies for developing teachers who are not, and may even resist becoming, culturally responsive (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). A concern addressed by participants’ success in sustaining culturally relevant instructional practices directly related to school leadership and their support of this program. It was revealed that too often, shifting priorities tend to devalue current instructional practices. It is highly recommended that school leadership be trained to recognize culturally relevant practices and continue to promote future development of teachers in cultural responsiveness through the implementation of PLC’s and staff meetings that focus on staff development in lieu of information dissemination which is better served through a staff bulletin.

It is recommended that leadership promote more opportunities for staff to receive training during staff meetings and PLCs to ensure buy in of all teachers and support staff alike. As instructional leaders, administrators should model the expectation for all stakeholders. Administrators should create more opportunities to engage parents and community members in this partnership. Participants specifically noted an increase in student and parent engagement when culturally relevant environments were in place. Lack of policy and the inconsistent development of teachers continues to perpetuate a cycle of underperformance and failure in urban settings. Increased scholarship around

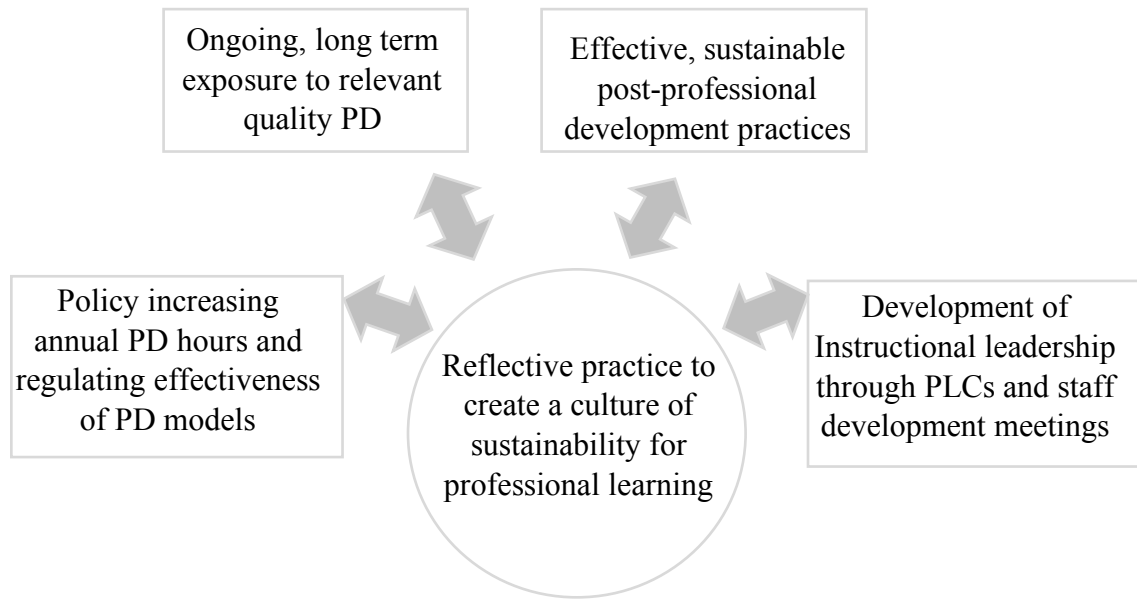
how to prepare educators and policy makers to be culturally responsive is needed if we truly wish to help all children reach their fullest potential as citizens.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this ethnographic, single case study was to explore teachers' insights regarding professional development to gain a better understanding of the role professional development has in educational decision making. This study collected data from a group of teachers and support staff who attended cultural competency training and who received subsequent mentoring.

The study found, overall, that professional development is important to educators and was effective in shaping their understandings of cultural competency and how students learn in environments that are reflective of their experiences. The study revealed that not all professional development leads to shifts in pedagogy as intended. It was further revealed that there are numerous factors that hinder sustainable professional growth of teachers in this district that range from ineffective and irrelevant professional development offerings, due to lack of input from all stakeholders, to competing priorities that shift the district's focus from year to year and limit follow-through and follow-up opportunities.

By reflecting on past practice and engaging in new learning, participants discovered the importance of cultural competency in shaping learning experiences for diverse student populations. Participants expressed how valuable ongoing, embedded mentoring is in supporting them as they began to create classroom environments that were culturally stimulating, developing lessons and activities that promoted engagement through relevant experiences, and engaging parents as partners in education (See figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Relationship of PD to Policy, Practice, Research, and Leadership

There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done though the creation of policy and the preparation of all educators for teaching in a rapidly changing demographic of culturally and linguistically diverse students. However, it is hoped that through ongoing research and applying theory that we learn and grow as educators. Professional development is one channel that has the greatest potential for transforming pedagogy as we intentionally integrate culturally responsive practices with the hope of eradicating cultural hegemony.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

#### Background Information

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

#### Previous Practice (Before CRP Professional Development)

2. Describe your practice.
3. What has informed your teaching the most?
4. How does what you know about your students inform your teaching? Share a Story/example.

#### Professional Development

5. Tell me about your PD experiences.
6. In what ways do you see PD enriching your teaching?
7. In your most recent PD, what did you learn that you didn't already know?
8. In what ways has it made you think differently about your practice? Share a story/example.

#### Implementation (Post PD/CRP)

9. As a result of thinking differently about CRP, provide me with examples of what works and what doesn't work and how you know.
10. What resources did you use to actualize the principles associated with the PD?
11. What are some challenges you face with implementing the new PD principles?
12. Moving forward, how will you expand on those principles?

## Appendix B

### Artifact Data Collection Protocol

Document/Artifact Description \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Research Question	Artifact/Document Evidence	Connection to Interview Data
RQ1: How do teachers and support personnel describe their pedagogical practices prior to professional development on culturally relevant and responsive teaching?		
RQ2: How do teachers and support personnel portray the influence culturally relevant and responsive professional development has had on their professional practice as educators?		
RQ2a: How do educators internalize CRP as it relates to their professional practice?		
RQ2b: What specific strategies and practices do the educators describe as being successful when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?		
RQ2c: How do educators implement an educational environment that promotes culturally appropriate and relevant teaching practices?		
Notes:		