CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH FOR

ADDRESSING DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY

by

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(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

This action research case study considers the causes for discipline disproportionality at Eastside Elementary as examined through the lens of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy requires teachers to address their own biases while also considering the cultural norms and backgrounds of students to inform their teaching and classroom management techniques. In this research, participants are engaged in a teacher learning community as a method for preparing teachers to equitably teach all students. In order to gain a deeper understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and its impact on school and classroom environments, this research asks the following questions:

1. How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?

2. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?

3. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?

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DEDICATION

To

My forever true love and best friend, my husband, Larry D. Scott

Thank you for always being the supporter and encourager I needed. Your confidence in me gave

me the drive to remain steadfast and focused.

and

My sons, Tre and Jenson Scott

You provided me with encouragement in ways that you probably didn't even realize, from the

study sessions at Panera to the genuine interest, or so it seemed,

in hearing about my research progress.

and

The most loving and supportive parents, the late Walter and Cathy Richards

You always set a precedence of the importance of education. With each degree earned you

celebrated with me and encouraged me to begin planning for the next one. When I was doubtful

of my path you prayed for me and patiently guided me. Although you are not here to celebrate in

the joy of this milestone, I know that you are smiling down on me with great pride and love.

and

My mother and father-in-law Larry & Betty Scott

You have always been there to celebrate each milestone. Your faith and pride in me inspires me

to work hard to make you proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Furthermore, thank you to my pastor, Bishop James Washington, Jr. for the many progress

checks, words of encouragement, prayers, and reminders of whose I am, knowing as a child of

God there is no room for fear or doubt when faith and hope are ever present.

Finally, to all of my family and friends I love each of you for the role you play in my life.

Our bonds are spiritually ordained and exist for a purpose.

I am thankful for the blessing you are to me, blessings seen and unseen. I pray for continued

blessings and favor for each of you.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm

you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

My God is faithful. My God is loving. My God is merciful.

I believed and therefore I am!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

When I made the decision to complete a doctoral program I knew that I would focus my

research on African American males. With 20 years in the education profession I have witnessed

the struggles African American males face when seeking to successfully matriculate through the

education system. A critical analysis of data within my own school led me to explore and

research the relationship and behavioral dynamics of my school. As a school principal, I hold a

responsibility to create and support a learning environment, which benefits all students.

Problem Framing

In January 2014, the United States Department of Justice and the United States

Department of Education issued guidance to elementary schools to address potential

discriminatory practices in the ways schools handle discipline. This document was released in

response to discipline data, which showed African American students were subject to more

frequent and more severe disciplinary actions than their non-African American peers. Upon

review of discipline data at Campbell County's Eastside Elementary School[1], a significant

disproportionality ratio was noted, which substantiated the potential for discriminatory practices

noted by the Department of Justice and Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education,

Office of Civil Rights, 2014).

Students, visitors, and parents have described the climate of Eastside Elementary School

as welcoming and peaceful. The climate of an organization is perceived based upon the totality

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[1] Pseudonyms are used for the district and school names.

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of all units of that organization. For a school those units include the classrooms, which make up a school. Climate can be equated to atmosphere and defined as summary concepts dealing with the total environment quality within an organization (Anderson, 1982). "School climate refers to the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community," (Haynes, Emmons & Avie, 1997). Haynes, et al (1997) conducted a review of studies showing a correlation between student perceptions of school climate and student behavior. Additionally, Haynes, et al (1997) found schools are perceived to have a positive climate when behavior is managed through the use of clear, consistent and fair rules and disciplinary practices.

Behavior data shows a low number of discipline referrals in relation to the total number of students enrolled. A review and analysis of the discipline data by demographic group has shown disproportionality in discipline referrals among students. In 2013 Eastside showed a risk ratio of 3.19 for African American students and 4.97 for African American students with a disability. This risk ratio rate is higher than the state target, which expects 3.00 or lower. The disproportionality of discipline referrals for African American students is not unique to Eastside. Research findings show that this issue spans much wider and has been pervasive for decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Disciplinary measures and procedures are a necessary component of any school in order to ensure safety, order, and structure. Teachers and school administrators hold as a primary responsibility the establishment and maintenance of a learning environment that is safe and conducive to learning. Teachers want to be able to provide quality instruction in an environment free of disruptions. To that end, Eastside Elementary has an established school-wide plan, which follows Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) guidelines. PBIS is a proactive discipline program that provides positive behavior interventions and supports for students. PBIS is a three-

tiered program, which is differentiated to address the specific needs of students (Netzel & Eber, 2003; Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Expectations and procedures are established and shared with students outlining the expected behaviors throughout the school, including non-core classroom areas such as hallway, restroom, cafeteria, and playground. Tangible rewards and incentives for compliance are communicated to students. These preemptive measures are designed to discourage and prevent unsafe and disruptive behaviors.

Disciplinary practices within the school have been an ongoing discussion and an element included in the School Improvement Plan. Initiatives to promote student engagement in the instruction as well as initiatives promoting self-efficacy are written into the plan as a means for decreasing disruptive behaviors. Current initiatives included in the School Improvement Plan are:

- Build positive relationships with students through researched based strategies including Gary Alderman and 2x10 strategy in order to promote positive student-staff relationships.
- Promote intrinsic motivation through discussion, morning meetings, think alouds, social stories. Use student council representatives and digital tools to develop modules for appropriate social interactions and problem solving strategies.
- Promote social-emotional problem solving among student peer groups through modeling and teaching the Seven Habits of a Happy Kid in weekly grade-level morning meetings.
- Implement Class Dojo school-wide to reinforce and track positive behavior and communicate with families.

The data in Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the discipline referrals during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school year by ethnicity. A discipline referral at Eastside Elementary is any behavior that has persisted throughout the day or is deemed severe, thereby warranting the attention of an administrator. These incidences are placed into the behavior system, Infinite Campus, used by the school district and reported to the state annually. The state uses this information to calculate discipline risks for each school. Using the number of referrals made as its base, the relative discipline risk for each demographic group was determined. Risk ratio formulas are used to determine the likelihood of a student in a given demographic group receiving a discipline referral. To determine the discipline risk for a demographic group one would first divide the number of discipline referrals for students in that group by the total number of students in that group enrolled to get the event per student risk ratio for that demographic group. The total number of discipline referrals for all other students is divided by the total number of all other students enrolled to calculate the event per student risk ratio for all other students. The final step to calculate the risk ratio is to divide the event per student risk ratio for that demographic group by the event per student risk ratio for all other students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014).

Figure 1

Race/ Ethnic Group	Number	% of ALL Students	# of Students with Behavior Referrals	# of Behavior Events	% of Total Population with Behavior Referrals	% by Ethnicity with Behavior Referrals	Relative Discipline Risk
All	558		45	66			
Asian	30	5%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
African American	264	47%	37	49	7%	14%	3.19
Hispanic	56	10%	1	1	0%	2%	0.14
Multi	25	4%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
White	180	32%	7	16	1%	4%	0.67

2013-2014 Discipline Data By Ethnicity

Figure 2

Race/ Ethnic Group	Number	% of ALL Students	# of Students	# of Events	% of Total Population	% by Ethnicity	Relative Discipline Risk
All	582		63	108			
Asian	27	5%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
African American	284	49%	44	76	8%	15%	1.93
Hispanic	59	10%	2	7	0%	3%	0.56
Multi	32	5%	5	12	1%	16%	1.96
White	178	31%	12	22	2%	7%	0.52

2014-2015 Discipline Data By Ethnicity

The data shown in Figures 1 and 2 represent a large discrepancy in discipline referrals for African American students and white students. In the 2013-2014 school year the relative discipline risk for African American students was significantly higher than for white students. The risk for African American students decreased in the 2014-2015 school year. However, this decrease was only due to the fact that more Hispanic and multi-racial students were referred for discipline concerns, which decreased the risk in relationship to all non-African American students. The actual number of African American students referred for discipline concerns and the number of discipline events increased from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015. Breaking Rules, Physical Aggression, Minor Fight, and Unsafe Behavior were the most common infractions. Breaking rules encompasses a number of possible infractions including: non-compliance, use of profanity, disrespect, and disruptive behavior. Physical aggression is considered any deliberate act against another student, which has the potential to cause or has caused physical harm to the student. Minor fight is any physical aggression displayed by two students against one another, but does not result in injury of either participant. Unsafe behavior is considered any behavior not directed at another person, but has the potential to result in or has resulted in harm to others. Breaking rules is the most subjective and the most frequently used descriptor of these common

infractions. This calls to question the interpretation of student behaviors by the teacher. "The cultural backgrounds of low-income students of color often differ significantly from the institutional norms of the school. As a consequence, the actions of such youths often are misinterpreted and penalized by school officials" (Monroe, 2006, p.163). A lack of awareness of these differing backgrounds and norms makes it difficult for teachers to address the needs of students.

Behavior referrals are tracked and recorded in the Infinite Campus system. Infinite Campus is a computer database used by the Campbell School District to maintain student and school data including: attendance, behavior, programming, and assessment data. Information maintained in Infinite Campus can be isolated by teacher, student, incident type or resolution type. Figure 3 shows the number of behavior referrals by teacher years of experience during the 2014-2015 school year. The chart is segmented in five-year intervals. This information can be used to determine if teacher years of experience can potentially have an impact on the number of discipline referrals.

Figure 3:
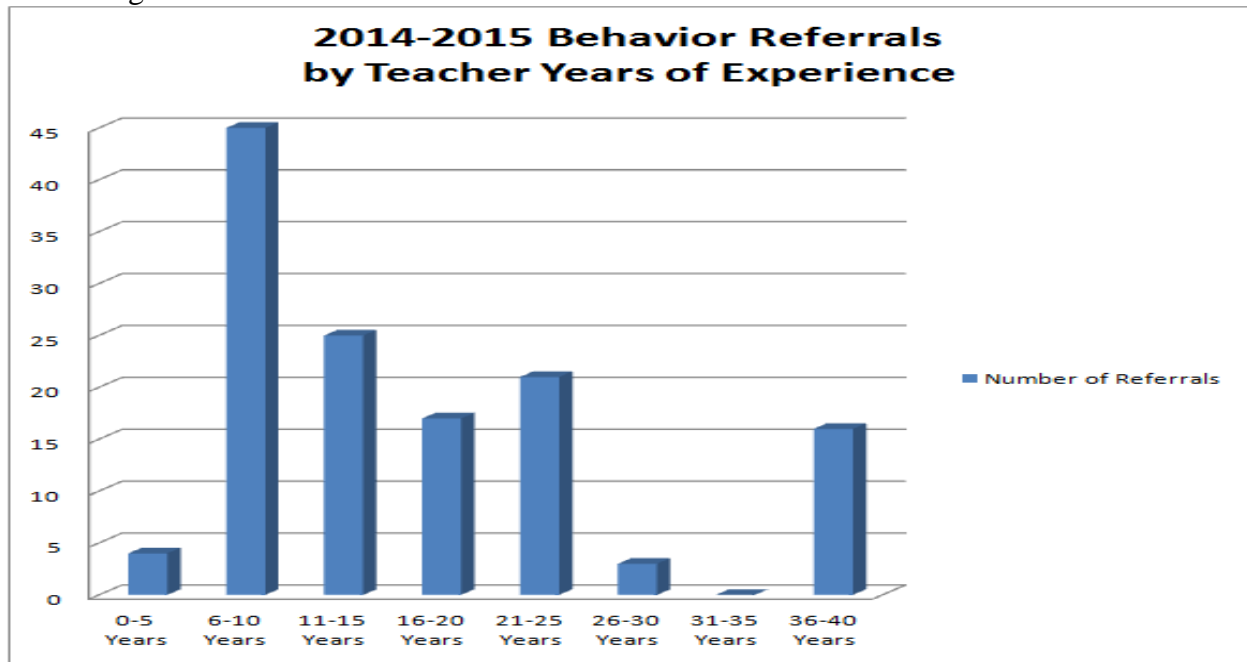
2014-2015 Behavior Referrals By Teacher Years of Experience

      The largest number of discipline referrals was 45 made by teachers with six to ten years of experience. There are nine teachers in this experience band, six of whom made at least one referral during the 2014-2015 school year. With their years of experience, these teachers would not be considered novice. It is assumed that they would possess a variety of tools and strategies to meet the varied needs of their student population. The assumption is that teachers in their early years lack the skills and knowledge to effectively manage their classroom. First-year teachers spend a great deal of time addressing and managing behavior, which leads to frustration and departures from the profession (Herbert & Worthy, 2001; Olson & Osborne, 1991). The data here contradicts the research. Teachers in their first five years of experience accounted for only four of the discipline referrals. The years of experience does not appear to be a contributing factor to the discipline rates seen in this data.

Figures 4 and 5 show the number of discipline referrals and the relative discipline risk for students with disabilities by ethnicity during the 2013-2014 school year and the 2014-2015 school year.

Figure 4

Race/ Ethnic Group	Total Number of SWD	% of SPED Students	# of SWD w/referral	# of Events	% of Total Population	% by Ethnicity	Relative Discipline Risk for SWD
All SWD	92		11	23			
Asian	2	2%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
African American	44	48%	9	19	10%	20%	4.97
Hispanic	6	7%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
Multiracial	2	2%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
White	36	39%	2	4	2%	6%	0.32

2013-2014 SWD Discipline Data By Ethnicity

Figure 5

Race/ Ethnic Group	Number	% of SPED Students	# of Students	# of Events	% of Total Population	% by Ethnicity	Relative Discipline Risk for SWD
All SWD	95		24	46			
Asian	2	2%	0	0	0%	0%	0.00
African American	43	45%	13	21	14%	30%	0.87
Hispanic	10	11%	1	6	1%	10%	1.16
Multiracial	4	4%	1	5	1%	25%	2.53
White	34	36%	9	17	9%	26%	0.92

2014-2015 SWD Discipline Data by Ethnicity

The data shows that during the 2013-2014 school year African American special education students experienced a high risk for discipline referral. As noted previously, with all students this risk decreased significantly during the 2014-2015 school year. Once again this decrease is attributed to the increase in referrals for non-African American special education students. The actual number of referrals increased for African American students. The discrepancies found in this data call into question teachers' ability to recognize and understand the diverse cultures represented in their student population. "As our society increases in diversity, teachers and other school personnel have a corresponding need to increase in their understanding of the integral relationship between culture and social behavior and the need to view students' behaviors within a cultural context" (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008, p.352). Additionally, one would conclude that teachers lack an awareness of their own biases, which may contribute to the misinterpretation of student behaviors. People do not always recognize that their reactions or treatment of individuals is linked to their perceived notions about that individual due solely to their race. In the classroom teachers must constantly and quickly make judgment calls regarding various situations and interactions. If they are not aware of their own cultural biases their actions may be presumptuous in nature and discriminatory. This is especially true when addressing discipline.

If we are to provide educational experiences that are equitable for all students we must create learning environments, which are reflective of the needs of students. "Too many students in P-12 institutions have not been provided an opportunity to develop into successful students because our educational system has not been structurally designed to do so. Opportunity is at the core of success and failure in society as well as in schools," (Milner, 2010, p. 8). The initiatives implemented at Eastside Elementary have not adequately addressed the discipline concerns that

have persisted. Having an in-depth understanding of potential antecedents, will enable this research team to identify appropriate interventions.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this Action Research is to address a potential antecedent, which causes African American males to be referred to the office for disciplinary reasons at a higher rate than their peers. By identifying the root causes an appropriate and effective intervention can be applied to decrease the discipline disproportionality seen at Eastside Elementary School. At this stage in the research, the discipline disproportionality will be generally defined as the rate at which African-American males are referred to the office in comparison to non-African American males.

This action research study will focus specifically on disciplinary practices at the elementary level. Through this action research I aim to engage teachers in the exploration of culturally relevant pedagogy as a tool for addressing the disproportionality currently evidenced at Eastside Elementary. The research team will identify the barriers to cultural proficiency and prescribe an intervention, which will allow us to overcome these barriers. The research questions to be answered through this study are:

1. How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?

2. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?

3. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?

Conceptual Framework

Figure 6 presents the conceptual framework developed as a representation of the work and intended outcomes of this action research. The variables collaborating to achieve the goal of this research, which is to decrease the rate at which African American males are referred to the office for disciplinary reasons, include: Social Constructivism, professional learning community and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Figure 6
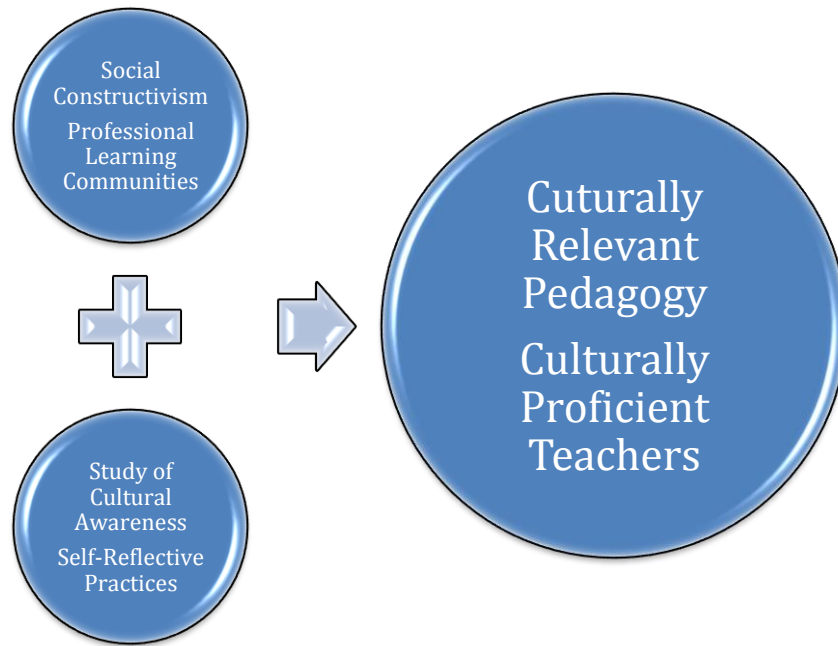
Conceptual Framework

Social constructivism is presented as a theory upon which to guide the work of the action research team. Social constructivism is a model developed by Lev Vygotsky, which focuses on collaboration and social interaction. As noted by Powell and Kalina (2009), Vygotsky believed cooperative learning to be an integral part of creating a deeper understanding. Dialogue amongst

colleagues allows them to critically consider the material and internalize the knowledge gained. The structure of this dialogue can take the form of a professional learning community.

Professional learning communities as a tool for impacting teaching practices and improving student performance will be the suggested format of engagement for the intervention. As indicative of what the words state a professional learning community allows educators to learn deeply with colleagues about an identified topic, to develop shared meaning and identify shared purposes related to the topic (Hord, 2009). According to DuFour (2004), professional learning communities ensure students learn, establish a culture of collaboration, and focuses on results. Working collaboratively as a professional learning community, the action research team will investigate the tenets and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy as an intervention for addressing the discipline gap at Eastside Elementary.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the discipline disproportionality, a variety of empirical studies, journal articles, books, and documents have been acquired and reviewed to be included as a part of this literature review. A review of literature focused on discipline in schools was conducted to identify the current state of schools as it relates to structure and order. The review revealed concerns for school safety, which has led to recommendations for the development of systems to prevent violence. This review included an analysis of discipline practices, which may lead to disproportionality. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is reviewed through this literature review as a possible explanation for the discipline disproportionality and as a tool for addressing the disproportionality. The history and development of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was reviewed along with processes for implementation.

Discipline Disproportionality

Highly publicized accounts of violence in schools in recent years has brought the issue of school discipline to the immediate attention of society. As identified by Cornell & Meyer (2010), school violence has been a political discussion for many decades as evidenced by legislations such as; the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act of 1986, the Gun-Free School Zone Act of 1990, and the modified Gun-free School Zones Act of 1996. In response to the increased violence, in 1998 the Secretary of Education provided guidance through the distribution of a document entitled *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (Sugai, Sprague, Horner &Walker, 2000). Schools administrators and teachers are given the burden of eliminating school

violence; this leaves them to consider a plethora of research aimed at providing interventions to address the discipline concerns. Sugai, Sprague, Horner & Walker (2000), suggest the use of a tiered system for tackling school discipline. This tiered system involved the use of a school-wide program, a specialized program for the at-risk students, and an individualized program for specifically identified students based upon office referrals. These programs provided at tiers 2 and 3 would include an increase in school resources to include wrap around services from the school counselors, school psychologist and special education. The tiered system suggested is very closely akin to the Response to Intervention (RTI) system that is already in place in schools. The RTI tiered approach to addressing academic concerns has been implemented and studied pervasively, however the utilization of RTI by teachers and administrators as a tool for addressing behavior has not received the same momentum (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, Lathrop, 2007).

According to Gregory, Skiba & Noguera (2010), school disciplinary interventions are utilized as a tool for preserving safety and removing students who violate the school rules and norms, by using these students as an example others will be deterred from committing the same infraction. Exclusionary practices, removal from classroom, suspension and expulsion, are frequently used as a disciplinary consequence aimed at creating safe and orderly schools (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, & Peterson, 2000). The use of exclusionary practices as a disciplinary intervention is especially prevalent among minorities and low achievers (Noguera, 2003). "Often, it is the needs of students and the inability of schools to meet those needs that cause them to be disciplined" (Noguera, 2003, p.342).

The Children's Defense Fund (1975) identified the disproportionality of suspension rate in its research as early as 1975. The study showed that at that time African American students

were suspended at twice the rate of those from other ethnic groups. This disproportionality was found to be the results of discriminatory practices of schools throughout the nation. These discriminatory practices were seen as a result of tensions arising from desegregation, which was taking place. Some disciplinary infractions were instigated and escalated as a result of teacher discriminatory behavior. These disparities have been studied both quantitatively and qualitatively since this report. Some quantitative studies have shown that African American students are two to five times more likely to be suspended from school than their white peers (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Townsend, 2000; Raffaela-Mendez, 2013; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Some qualitative studies have found that behaviors teachers reprimand African American students for are often disregarded for their white peers (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004; Monroe, 2006; Howard, 2008; Reynolds, 2010). The disproportionality implies the use of discriminatory practices infringing upon the students' right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

In January of 2014 the United States Department of Justice and Department of Education jointly issued guidance to elementary and secondary schools in meeting their obligations under Federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Civil Rights Data Collection conducted by the Office of Civil Rights found that 15% of the students represented were African American, but they make up 35% of the students suspended once, 44% of those suspended more than once, and 36% of students expelled. This data implies that discriminatory disciplinary practices are taking place in a widespread manner (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Further exacerbating the discriminating disciplinary practices is the low academic achievement exhibited by African American students in comparison to non-African American

students. "Racial and cultural background continues to be a critical factor in academic achievement in the United States. Recent surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that, on average, minority students lagged behind their white peers in terms of academic achievement" (Sirin, 2005, p.420). The use of suspension and expulsion in the elementary school setting can be highly detrimental to a child's intellectual development. A child's early years set the trajectory for the successes they will have in the future. During their early elementary years they are not only experiencing rapid brain development but this is also the time to learn and develop the foundational skills that will be used as they get older and experience more complex and abstract learning situations. Repeated suspensions result in a child losing critical hours of instruction. This disengagement results in low student achievement (Skiba, Horner, Chang, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Kinsler, 2011; Mendez, 2003).

Research shows that race plays a role in the disciplinary decisions made in schools, resulting in African American boys being disciplined more harshly than their white peers (Reynolds, 2010; Howard, 2008; Skiba et al, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010; Monroe, 2010; Mendez, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2014; Hinojosa, 2008; Reynolds, 2010). Societal impressions and portrayal of the young African American male have impacted the perceptions and beliefs of people. The media accounts would have one to believe that young African American males are angry, aggressive individuals who lack moral fiber and have no desire or motivation to excel and be productive members of society. African American males are presented as individuals to fear and avoid less risk the chance of being victimized by them. These stereotypes have severely impacted an African American male's capacity to have an educational experience free of biases and misjudgments. In two separate studies conducted by

Reynolds (2010) and Howard (2008), they both found that interactions between African American boys and school officials were rife with microaggressions. Microaggression is defined as "stunning acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of African American inferiority" (Reynolds, 2010). African American students are often addressed and dealt with more harshly than their White counterparts for exhibiting the same behaviors.

Color-blindness is yet another form of inequality to which minority students are subjected. Delgado and Stefancic (2012), define colorblindness as the belief that one should treat all people equally, without regard to their race. Interacting with individuals without regard for their race or ethnicity implies that one is color-blind. Some may assert to being color-blind with great pride and indignation as proof that they neither possess nor project any racial bias. Those who profess to be color-blind as educators are doing a disservice to students of color. Color-blindness implies that one sees no color when interacting with students and making decisions, which adversely effect students. They claim to see all students as being the same. The drawback to being color-blind is that all students are not the same. "These attempts at color-blindness mask a "dysconscious racism" an "incritical habit of mind" that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Students are individuals who bring with them their own personalities, experiences, beliefs, and cultural norms. Seeing students as the same would require a frame of reference upon which to deal with them. The default frame of reference would be that of the majority or dominant race, White. Milner (2007), purports adopting a color-blind epistemology leads to the misrepresentation and exploitation of students of color. This would hold them to maintain and operate under the norms of the majority race, not taking into account how this might be in conflict with the beliefs,

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practices, and norms of their own cultures. This would also suggest that the educator would expect everyone to conform to these norms. A teacher cannot meet the specific needs of students if they fail to see the racial and ethnic differences. African American students are often not equipped to meet the expectations because their cultural norms, experiences and belief systems may not directly correlate with expectations, nor are they given the proper guidance or support to meet the expectations. By failing to see color researchers overlook discriminatory practices such as higher suspension rates for African American students (Johnson, 2002; Milner, 2007).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1994) provides a descriptive examination of eight teachers who have successfully educated African American children in her book *Dreamkeepers*. Her study of these teachers revealed commonalities in their practices to which could be categorized as culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally relevant pedagogy empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Culturally relevant teachers see themselves as competent professionals as well as maintain the belief that all students can succeed. Social relationships among teachers, students and the community promote and enable the collective work and progress of the class as a group. Each students' worth as a member of the group is acknowledged and valued. Finally, culturally relevant teaching helps students understand and participant in the knowledge building (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Creating a supportive and welcoming school climate requires an awareness and recognition of the diverse cultures, which make up the school community. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Monroe, 2005) requires teachers and administrators to consider cultural differences when making decisions related to academics and behavior. Gay (2002) identifies three

components of the knowledge base of culturally responsive teaching. The first is an awareness of ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns. Beyond this awareness, the second requirement is acquiring detailed factual information about cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups. This awareness allows teachers to create classroom experiences that are more meaningful and stimulating in an ethnically diverse classroom setting. Some teachers may be reluctant to build multi-cultural experiences into the curriculum feeling that it may not have a place in all subject areas, particularly math and science. Knowing and understanding the contributions that ethnic groups have made to the different subject areas increases teachers' ability and willingness to deliver a multicultural curriculum. Acquiring a deeper knowledge of multicultural theory and practice is the third component of culturally responsive teaching. This goes beyond the basic rote knowledge that may be gained through pre-service courses, which only provide an introductory or summarized study of multicultural education. These three components are a guide for providing a multicultural educational experience. This same school of thought can be applied to classroom management practices (Gay, 2002).

A study conducted by Wallace & Brand (2012) examined the practices of two culturally responsive teachers. The findings showed that both teachers had an awareness of their students' home and community environment. They both felt a responsibility to remove or alleviate environmental factors, which would prohibit the academic achievement of African American students. Three themes emerged from their sociocultural awareness: (1) Teachers' background experiences provoked a critical awareness of societal constructions of race; (2) Teachers' critical awareness of the influence of societal constructions of race influenced their teaching

philosophies; and (3) Teachers' sociocultural awareness informed their perspectives of students' needs and behaviors.

Culturally responsive pedagogy also informs classroom management. Culturally responsive classroom management has as its primary goal to create opportunities to build self-efficacy among students. Once self-efficacy is built students will comply with behavioral expectations for innate reasons rather than to avoid punishment or for a reward. "Culturally responsive classroom managers recognize their biases and values. They reflect on how these influence their expectations for behavior and their interactions with students. They recognize that the ultimate goal of classroom management is not to achieve compliance or control but to provide all students with equitable opportunities for learning" (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Campbell, & Curran, 2004, p.27). There are five elements of culturally responsive classroom management that Weinstein et al. (2004) have derived from the components of culturally responsive teaching: (1) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases; (2) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (3) understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context of our educational system; (4) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate classroom management strategies; and (5) commitment to building caring classroom communities. The ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies constitutes creating a physical setting that establishes and maintain expectations while keeping students motivated through the use of appropriate interventions that address the identified needs of students. "To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways" (Howard, 2003, p.197). A reflective focus on the cultural context becomes

imperative in the education field where the majority of teachers are white females teacher teaching in increasingly diverse schools across the United States (Milner, 2003).

This literature review shows there is a substantial amount of research focused on the impact of discipline and disproportionalities found in disciplinary practices at the middle and high school level. This research identifies correlations among discipline and academic achievement showing that academic achievement is adversely affected by the disciplinary rates given the amount of missed instruction due to exclusionary consequences. Culturally responsive practices have also been studied in correlation to disciplinary practices at the middle and high school level. There is however, a gap in the literature in the study of the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy as an antecedent for the discipline disproportionality at the elementary level. As we are beginning to see more disruptive and violent behaviors occurring at a younger age, it is necessary to intervene earlier if we are to successfully prepare students to meet the demands and expectations of middle and high school.

Table 1 is an Empirical Findings Table highlighting ten studies that have been conducted to examine disciplinary practices in schools and the levels of cultural proficiency demonstrated by teachers who have successfully met the needs of minority students and the struggles teachers face in the development of their cultural proficiency.

Table 1: Empirical Findings Table

Author(s)/Date	Theories/Description	Method(s)	Sample	Findings	Implications/Shortcomings
Gere, A. R., Buehler, J., Dallavis, C., & Haviland, V. S. (2009). A visibility project: Learning to see how pre-service teachers take up culturally responsive pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*(3), 816-852.	Critical Race Theory Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Positioning **Objective(s):** Examine how the raced consciousness of pre-service teachers impacts their views of themselves and others as they seek to develop culturally responsive teaching stances Examine how race – both of instructors and students – inflect responses to an understanding of the cultural competence dimensions of CRP?	Qualitative case study that included journaling, class discussions course work, interviews and focus groups	15 pre-service teachers (12 white and 3 students of color)	Four themes emerged as a result of this analysis which were related to and shaped by raced consciousness; the ways in which students positioned themselves in classroom interactions and interviews, an awareness by students of how they were being read racially by others, students' responses to position-taking assignments and readings and students' processing of cultural responsiveness.	More discussions centered on race are needed in teacher education programs if pre-service teachers are expected to provide culturally responsive pedagogy. Position taking assignments create an awareness of ones own raced consciousness. The development of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is a transformation. The subjects in this study were students in a course. Their responses may have been impacted by their desire to earn a good grade. Did participants respond in an effort to give the instructors/researchers the information they thought they wanted to hear.
Hinojosa, M. (2008). African American-white differences in school suspension: Effect of student beliefs about teachers. *Sociological Spectrum, 28*(2), 175-193.	Self-Fulfilling Prophecy **Objective(s):** Documenting race differences in the probability of suspension and the decrease to which a student's about teachers can predict future suspension.	Quantitative –Student questionnaires were used to collect data Regression analysis of suspension rates and student perceptions of their teacher	Sixth and eighth grade students in a large urban district in the Midwest	When students feel that their teacher holds high expectations for them their chances of being suspended decrease. The student's beliefs about a teacher's fairness and caring have no impact on out of school suspension.	Teachers play a role in the suspension of outcomes of students. A focus group to interview students would have given a greater perspective of the factors that influence students to behave the way that they do. Because there were contradictive findings it left some unresolved questions.
Howard, T. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in preK-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *The	Critical Race Theory **Objective(s):** Examine the schooling experiences of African American males.	Qualitative – Case Study Counter-storytelling as a tenet of critical race theory is used as a methodology in this	Two hundred African American middle and high school males were surveyed Ten of those	The ten participates shared explicit attempts to not reinforce widely held beliefs and stereotypes about African American males. They attributed their academic success to their desire to	This research serves to reinforce the idea that the treatment of African American males in school is highly influenced by societal stereotypes of how African American males behavior as well as the learning capacity of African American males.

		research.	were interviewed to gather their stories.	counter the negative stereotypes. Many of the participants provided accounts of discrimination or racism that occurs at their school with regularity. Instances of racial microaggressions were reported associated with African American inferiority, low-expectations and disciplinary practices.	Teachers and administrators must examine their interactions with African American males to ensure they are not laced with racial microaggressions. Future research and study using critical race theory as a theoretical framework is needed in the area of standardized testing. Critical race theory can also be used as a vehicle for evaluating policies and practices, which disproportionately punish African American males. The interpretations of teens can sometimes be distorted especially if they see themselves as the victims. There is no way to guarantee that the accounts given by the teens are representative of all perspectives of a situation.
Teachers College Record, 110(5), 954-985.	Examine the role that race plays in the pursuit of an equitable education for all students.				
Hyland, N. (2009). One white teacher's struggle for culturally relevant pedagogy: The problem of the community. *New Educator, 5*(2), 95-112.	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy **Objective(s):** Examines the challenges a teacher may face trying to implement culturally relevant pedagogy, specifically the difficulty building relationships with students who are culturally different from themselves.	Qualitative-Action Research. A case study that included professional learning sessions, observations and interviews	One novice teacher	The teacher gained an awareness and appreciation for the cultures of her students, which allowed her to make adjustments in her teaching and experiences she created for her students. She demonstrated a comfort with the classroom components of culturally responsive pedagogy. She struggled however, with the community-based aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy.	Novice white teachers are able to be effect teachers of students of color. Support systems must be in place to help teachers develop their skills as a culturally relevant teacher. Attention must be given to the development of relationships across racial lines. What can teacher preparation programs do to help prepare teachers to teach in diverse settings? Did the fact that the subject was a novice teacher impact her ability to build the relationships? As a new teacher there is a great deal of pressure to learning the curriculum while also mastering instructional practices.
Raffaela-Mendez, L. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative	**Objective(s):** Identify disproportionalities in suspension practices.	Correlation/Regression Analysis of student surveys, teacher	8,268 students of an urban school district followed	Low income African American males who are in special education programs are	Interventions are needed to prevent the behaviors. This starts with performing a functional behavior

school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2003*(99), 17-33.	Identify variables that predict school suspension Establish a relationship between suspension experiences of sixth graders and their academic achievement.	surveys, demographics data, student achievement data, suspension data	from kindergarten to 12th grade	suspended more often than would be expected. The frequent use of suspension is ineffective in improving student behavior. The excessive use of suspension in sixth grade is an indicator of school failure later.	analysis to identify the function/purpose of the behavior. Teacher ratings of behaviors in late elementary are a predictor of school outcomes later. The study did not take into account any other variables other than suspension as a cause for low academic achievement.
Reynolds, R. (2010). They think you're lazy" and other messages African American parents send their African American sons: An exploration of critical race theory in the examination of educational outcomes for African American males. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *1*(2), 144-163.	Critical Race Theory **Objective(s):** Examine the experiences and level of engagement of African American middle class parents with school teachers and administrators.	Qualitative – Case Study Individual and focus group interviews	Ten secondary schools in Coolwater, Los Angeles 16 middle class parents of African American boys	The experiences and interactions shared by parents revealed interactions between their sons and school officials rife with microaggressions.	There is limited research, which provides a firsthand account from African American parents regarding their experiences with school officials. Researchers can continue to give African American parents a platform for sharing their counter-narratives in order to better understand the educational experiences of African American males in American schools. Professional development which aims to bridge the disconnect between school and families is needed. African American parents must promote education at home. It is necessary for them to diligently have conversations with their sons to give them the tools needed to combat or elude potential racism they may experience in their schooling. The experiences of these middle class families cannot be applied to low-income families. Although there may be some similarities in the experience I believe there are many other stereotypes applied to these students.
Santamaria, L. J. (2009).	Differentiated Instruction	Qualitative	Two elementary	An analysis of the data showed	This research identifies ways in

Culturally responsive differentiated instruction: Narrowing gaps between best pedagogical practices benefiting all learners. *The Teachers College Record*, *111*(1), 214-247.	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy **Objective(s):** Identify features of differentiated instruction and culturally relevant teaching.	longitudinal case study - Classroom Observations, recorded conversations among teacher, administrators, students and parents	schools in a North San Diego County, California school district.	five areas of differentiated instruction that were present in the instructional strategies at both schools; clarifying key concepts, emphasizing critical and creative thinking, engaging all learners, balance between student and teacher selected tasks, and using assessment as a teaching tool.	which differentiated instructional and culturally responsive teaching can function as complementary teaching practices. It reinforces the necessity for instruction, which addresses the individual needs and backgrounds of a diverse population.
Souto-Manning, M. & Mitchell, C. (2010). The role of action research in fostering culturally-responsive practices in a preschool classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*(4), 269-277.	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy **Objectives:** Examine the elements of the curriculum and practice in a preschool classroom that would reflect culturally diverse characteristics Study a teacher's perceptions of culturally relevant teaching.	Qualitative Action Research – Case Study that included classroom observations, journaling and discussions	One Pre-school teacher	The teacher shifted from a focus of recognizing cultures through a holiday approach to purposefully making it a daily practice in instruction. This allowed her to building lessons based on children's strengths and experiences. The instruction was more supportive and inclusive of all students.	Teachers must position themselves as learners in order to value the contributions that students and their families can have on the classroom throughout the year. Parents and families must be welcomed as experts in the classroom. This action research team was small, only two members. The only measures of her effectiveness were the analysis of her journals entries and the observations of the researcher.
Wallace, T., & Brand, B. R. (2012). Using critical race theory to analyze science teacher's culturally responsive practices. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 7*(2), 341-374.	Critical Race Theory Grounded Theory **Objective(s):** Is a critical awareness of societal constructions of difference or characterizations of race pivotal to teaching African American students?	Qualitative Study – Case Study that included classroom observations and interviews. Open coding, axial coding and selective coding were used to establish categories, identify patterns between the teachers and identify core coding	Two middle science teachers deemed culturally responsive teachers	The findings showed that both teachers had an awareness of their students' home and community environment. They both felt a responsibility to remove or alleviate environmental factors, which would prohibit the academic achievement of African American students.	Three themes emerged from their sociocultural awareness: (1) Teachers' background experiences provoked a critical awareness of societal constructions of race; (2) Teachers' critical awareness of the influence of societal constructions of race influenced their teaching philosophies; and (3) Teachers' sociocultural awareness informed their perspectives of students' needs and behaviors These finding suggests that pre-service science teachers must have an awareness of the exclusivity science is afforded in society, generally whites and males. Pre-

				service teachers must adopt fair and socially just teaching practices. This will require self-reflection and examination of ones own personal, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic experiences in order to understand how societal norms impose privilege and discrimination. The subjects in this study had life experiences that allowed them to easily relate to the students they were teaching. This gives them an advantage in building relationships that most teachers don't have.
Young, E. (2010). Challenges to conceptualizing and actualizing culturally relevant pedagogy: How viable is the theory in classroom practice? *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(3), 248-260.	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy **Objective(s):** Examine the understanding and utilization of culturally relevant pedagogy by teachers and administrators. Examine the challenges of culturally relevant pedagogy.	Action Research-Through a course-like structure that included open discussions Collaborative Inquiry	Eight member elementary school leadership team (seven white, one African American)	Some of the participants expressed discomfort discussing race and were not equipped to implement socially conscious instruction. The teachers in this study found culturally relevant pedagogy to be more appropriate for teachable moments than a part of the core content. The teachers found culturally relevant pedagogy to be extremely difficult if not impossible to enact due to the time constraints they faced in their responsibility to cover the required curriculum.	Three challenges that are faced in social justice education. These include the need to (1) raise the race consciousness of educators and encourage them to confront their own cultural biases, (2) address systematic roots of racism in school policies and practices, and (3) adequately equip pre-service and in-service teachers with the knowledge of how to implement theories into practice. Teachers in this study seemed less committed to the work that is required for the effective implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Hence, the complaints centered on the time it requires. Ultimately if it positively impacts student achievement it is time well spent.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This action research case study sought to understand and explain how participation in a professional learning community can impact a teacher's culturally relevant practices. In order to do this, interpretations were made of discussions and journal entries provided by teachers who have engaged in activities aimed at increasing their own understanding and ability to develop and sustain a culturally relevant classroom and school environment. "Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's 'lived experience,' are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them" (Miles & Hubermans, 1994, p. 10). Key features of qualitative research as identified by Miles & Hubermans (1994), include the use of words to compare, contrast, analyze and identify patterns and the ability for the researcher to capture data on the perceptions of research participants.

Action Research Approach

Action Research was selected as the method for this research because it allowed me to examine and better understand an identified problem of practice in my organization. Coghlan & Brannick (2014), define action research as "a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview" (p.5). Action Research served as a mechanism for dissecting the elements, which may influence the identified problem. Through a review of the current data and

practices action research gave insight into the root causes and guided the discussion for possible interventions to address the problem. The goal of action research, as described by Coghlan & Brannick (2014), is to improve the practices of the organization and ultimately contribute to the overall knowledge base and productivity of the organization.

Action Research is conducted by a team made up of the organization's stakeholders. The research team members include those who share in the desire to create a more productive organization. Team members were volunteers who are committed to the goals and mission of the research. As the researcher, I served as the facilitator of the discussions and the work the team completed. The researcher was not the decision maker for the group. All members shared the responsibility for determining any course of action.

Action Research is a cyclical process, which takes place in phases. Each cycle includes the collection and analysis of data in order to formulate a diagnosis, development of a plan of action to address the problem, and reflection upon the effectiveness of the intervention, creating a Look, Think, Act routine (Stringer, 2014). The cycle is repeated as many times as needed in order to accomplish the positive change that is sought. Continuous and thorough monitoring of the implementation of the intervention and the review and analysis of the data is necessary in order to properly assess the effectiveness of each cycle.

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study because it engages key stakeholders as active participants and change agents to address a problem we all believe warrants attention. As a scholar practitioner, I hoped to engage teachers in my organization in the generation of actionable knowledge in order to enact change within our school (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This action research took on a planned change approach. "Planned change is where there is a clear goal and vision of the future – the leadership devises a road map to reach

it, and influences how it is reached," (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p.78). A need for change had been identified. Using the historical behavior data of Eastside I was able to establish a pattern of disciplinary procedures, which failed to eliminate or even significantly decrease disruptive behaviors and disengagement of students. As the school leader I envisioned Eastside as a school where students were actively engaged in the learning and positively responsive to teacher direction and redirection. The classroom and school environments would flourish with a climate where all students felt they were valued and belonged. Based upon this vision, changes in how teachers viewed students and related to students was necessary. Building teacher's cultural proficiency was the vehicle chosen to bring about this change.

Action Research Process of Engagement

A team consisting of Eastside Elementary stakeholders was assembled to serve as the action research participants. Initial contact was made through a presentation given during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. During this presentation all staff members were given a general overview of the purpose of the research and expectations for participation. A handout detailing the responsibilities of participants and the time commitment was distributed. Staff members were given a two week time frame to express their interest in serving on the action research team. As the principal, I have a degree of influence that I had to be cautious not to enact. For this reason, I was very deliberate in my expectation that all participants had to be willing to openly share their perspective. Individuals had to be fully engaged in the work providing their own critical analysis without a need to simply display common consensus to gain favor with me as their immediate supervisor. Table 2 is a listing of all research participants and the position they hold at Eastside Elementary.

Table 2: Action Research Participants[2]

Member	Position
Tracy Palmer	Academic Support Specialist
Lynn Smith	Classroom Teacher
Angie Sloan	Classroom Teacher
Amy Ware	Classroom Teacher
Melissa Patman	Classroom Teacher
Patrice Clark	Classroom Teacher
Diane Jones	Classroom Teacher
Christina Atkins	Special Education Teacher
Sally Walker	Gifted Education Teacher
Candice Hicks	Gifted Education Teacher

Research Plan

With the identification of a problem to be addressed at Eastside a plan for implementing change was developed. The plan of inquiry was framed around the research questions:

1. How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?

2. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?

3. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?

The following table connects the research questions, interventions, and anticipated outcomes:

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[2] Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of participants.

Table 3: Action Research Plan

Research Question	Data Collection from Interventions	Analysis Method	Trustworthiness
How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?	Three professional learning community focus group sessions were held during which participants discussed at length the information and teachings found in the assigned text.	Transcripts from these focus group sessions were coded to identify themes.	The pre and post assessments and reflective journal question two: What impact has participation in this focus group had on your views of your own culturally relevant practices? served as sources for triangulation. Member checking with the action research team took place with feedback provided to address potential researcher bias.
How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?	The pre and post self-assessments were administered to measure levels of proficiency for each participant.	The rating scales were tallied to determine if growth took place	The reflective journal question two asked What impact has participation in this focus group had on your views of your own culturally relevant practices? Responses to this question were reviewed to triangulate.
How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?	The reflective journal questions were provided following focus group sessions. Entries were submitted anonymously to promote forthright responses.	Reflective journal entries were coded to identify themes and reveal any conflicting thoughts not shared during focus group sessions.	Triangulation with focus group transcripts ensured that the themes identified through the coding were further substantiated. Member checking with the action research team took place with feedback provided to address potential researcher bias.

Data Collection

A variety of data sources have been used to explain and analyze the disciplinary practices of Eastside Elementary. Behavior data was gathered to demonstrate the disproportionate practices currently occurring at Eastside. Behavior referrals are tracked and recorded in the Infinite Campus system. Referrals are entered into the Infinite Campus system by school administrators if it is determined that the behavior has impeded the teaching and learning in the classroom or when the behavior posed a danger or disruption to the learning environment of the school. This data was aggregated and disaggregated for analysis purposes in order to explain the significance of this research. Table 3 outlines all data used to track the effectiveness of interventions used throughout the research process. Multiple data sources are used in order to provide the triangulation needed to ensure an accurate interpretation of the qualitative data gathered. "Impressions can be good data, but good researchers want assurance of what they are seeing and hearing," (Slate, 2006. p.33).

Table 4: Data Source

Data Source	Timeline
Eastside Elementary Discipline Data Reviewed by Action Research Team	June 2015-December 2015
Pre Self-Assessment Completed by Research Participants	May 2016
Professional Learning Community Session	June 2016-September 2016
Professional Learning Community Members Complete Reflective Journals	June 2016-September 2016
Professional Learning led by Dr. Richard Milner (All members of the faculty participated)	August 8
Researcher Notes	Ongoing
Post Self-Evaluation	September 2016

Self-Assessment

      A cultural proficiency self-assessment was completed by all research team members prior to engaging in research activities and at the conclusion of the research activities. The self-assessment survey was adopted from the Albermarle County School District Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey. The survey has three areas of focus: Teacher Knowledge of Various Cultures, Multicultural Instruction for Relevance and Rigor, and Building Relationships with Students and Families. It is anticipated that this data will provide a gauge for measuring teacher levels of cultural proficiency prior to the intervention and after the intervention. This is a self-assessment, therefore the accuracy of the data is contingent on teachers providing forthright responses to the rating scale.

Professional Learning Community Focus Group Sessions

      "A focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research" (Powell & Single, 1996, p.500). Focus group as a method for data collection promotes and supports the use of teacher learning community and social learning theory as the intervention. "The major advantage of focus groups is that they offer the chance to observe participants engaging in interaction that is concentrated on attitudes and experiences which are of interest to the researcher" (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). The professional learning sessions with the focus group were the center of this research study. During that time participants engaged in discussions of cultural proficiency. Participants shared their thoughts and beliefs associated with cultural proficiency, culturally relevant instructional practices, transitions made as a result of gaining a deeper understanding of cultural proficiency, and overall impressions of the information shared in *Start Where You are But Don't Stay There.*

The richness of the data collected during the professional learning community's focus group sessions was dependent upon teacher depth and breath of discussion. Is participants were not willing to engage in the discussions revealing personal experiences and opinions the data would lack the detail needed to code for categories and themes. The questions I was seeking to have answered through this action research study would require participants to be critically reflective upon learning and understandings of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Reflective Journal Entries

Research participants completed reflective journal entries twice throughout the intervention period. The reflective journals were submitted electronically through Google Forms and are completely anonymous. Participants assigned a pseudonym to themselves, which were used to connect responses submitted across the course of the intervention period. Participants were asked to provide responses to the following prompts:

1. How do you, as an educator, situate yourself in the education of students, and how do you negotiate the power structure in my class to allow students to feel a sense of worth regardless of their racial backgrounds?

2. What impact has participation in this focus group had on your views of your own culturally relevant practices?

3. What impact has participation in this focus group had on how you have or would go about building relationships with students/families/community?

The journal responses served as a mechanism for participants to share additional thoughts and personal interpretations they may have been hesitant to share during the full focus group discussions. Journal entries were included in the data analysis as a data source for affirming or challenging themes and ideas gathered through the focus group discussions.

Data Analysis

Stringer (2014) identifies two processes for analyzing data: categorizing and coding, and key experiences. Categorizing and coding involves the identification of the significant features and elements that make up the experience and perception of the people involved in the study (Stringer, 2014). The purpose of the key experiences approach to analysis is "to focus on events that seem to have a marked impact on the experience of major stakeholders," (Stringer, 2014, p. 144). Coding was selected as the most appropriate method of analysis for this research study. "To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize," (Saldana, 2016, p.9). This study sought to identify the ideas and themes correlated to facilitating teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners through the use of a professional learning community.

Coding can be done by hand or using a computer based data analysis program. As noted by Creswell (2014) hand coding can be time consuming. For this reason Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has gained popularity. Some CAQDAS reviewed and considered for this research analysis were: Atlas.ti, NVivo, HyperRESEARCH and Dedoose. CAQDAS allows easy storage and easy access to large amounts of language and other types of data making, as well as the easy manipulation of categories, themes and codes (Rademaker, Grace & Curda, 2012). After much consideration it was determined that hand coding would be the most appropriate method of coding for this research. As the transcriber of all focus group sessions, I found it informative to complete pre-coding concurrently while transcribing using highlighting and bookmark flagging to note connecting themes in focus group discussions and reflective journal entries. This provided a more structured and fluid movement into the coding and analysis phase.

The data for this research study consisted of a pre- and post- self-assessment, reflective journal entries and professional learning community discussion transcripts. The pre- and post- self-assessments were used to measure how teachers viewed their level of cultural proficiency as it relates to having an awareness of cultural backgrounds, building a diverse classroom learning environment and building relationships with students and parents. A collective review of all self-assessments provided a measure of the impact the teacher learning community had on teachers' self-measured levels of cultural proficiency.

The reflective journals included three prompts provided to the participants. Entries were anonymous and submitted electronically. Participants used self-assigned pseudonyms enabling entries to be matched. The reflection journal was analyzed to identify themes related to each participants beliefs centered around cultural proficiency as well has identify correlations to themes which emerge for the analysis and coding of professional learning community discussions.

Professional learning community focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed facilitating the coding for specific themes. All transcriptions were completed using Microsoft Word as the software for entering and editing content. The sessions of the professional learning community were the substance of the data analysis. The discussions were generated from the content of the book *Start Where You are but Don't Stay There* (Milner, 2010). A thorough analysis of the transcripts allowed for the identification of shifts or reinforcement of teacher perspectives and beliefs centered around cultural proficiency. The professional learning community sessions provided a space for teachers to share if and how they planned to or had modified their own practices and the results within the classroom of these modifications.

First and second cycle coding were used to analysis the data and identify themes. "First

cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data and are divided into seven subcategories: Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory, Procedural, and a final profile entitled Themeing the Data," (Saldana, 2016, p.68). The first cycle coding took on the Theming the Data method. Themes centered around cultural proficiency were explored and compared in relation to the research questions. For example research question one looks at how this professional learning community influences teachers views of their own practices and beliefs. Themes for this question centered on teacher reflectiveness considering phrases and anecdotes noting cultural conflicts, levels of awareness, and revelations. Clear themes revealed themselves in the first cycle of coding but it also brought about more questions and considerations.

"Coding is a cyclical act. Rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted. The second cycle (and possibly the third and fourth, etc.) of recording further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and or building theory," (Saldana, 2016, p.9). Taking the larger themes found in the first cycle coding, pattern coding was used to identify more detailed and specific units of analysis.

Validity of Research

This qualitative research used an action research approach. This requires the interpretation of data gained while implementing a change within one's own organization. It was vital to the integrity of the research that I not allow my own bias or assumptions to influence the interpretation of the data. "The notion of triangulation, or the inclusion of multiple perspectives, guards against viewing events in a simplistic or self-serving way." (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 68). Triangulation was used throughout this study to build in multiple opportunities to compare

and contrast participant data. Focus group transcripts and reflective journals coding was compared to check for conflicting themes. Pre and post assessment data provided evidence to support or reject the outcomes derived from the focus groups and reflective journals.

An additional step to ensure validity was the use of member checking. "Participants are given opportunities to review the raw data, analyses, and reports derived from research procedures," (Stringer, 2014, p.93). The action research team reviewed the coding processes and outcomes, survey results and findings to provide their own overview and interpretation of the data collectively.

Researcher Positionality

As an action research study, I was a researcher/participant holding an equal level of authority as the members of my action research team. This required me to set aside my role as the administrator while acting as the researcher. In my current role as principal, I am able to make disciplinary decisions autonomously, should I choose, but within the guidelines of the district. As a democratic leader who strongly believes in shared decision-making, I make it a practice to discuss discipline decisions with my assistant principal and teachers in an effort to ensure that we are all of one accord regarding the direction and outcome we were seeking.

In my role as an action researcher, I had the responsibility of providing the data and evidence, which would compel Eastside stakeholders to actively engage in the action research as members of the research team. I anticipated having some difficulty getting all members to openly engage in conversations centered around race, as this can be an uncomfortable and sometimes taboo topic. It was necessary to provide a clear outline of the research, which supports the use of culturally responsive pedagogy as a valid means for addressing and eliminating the

disproportionality observed in the ways we were currently seeking to resolve student behavioral concerns.

When interacting with the action research team it was necessary that I remained open to the ideas and suggestions of the action research team. This meant being open to the possibility of having to give strong consideration to suggested actions, which may have been in direct conflict with current practices. As the school leader, I must assume responsibility for the school-wide practices. If the impact of our policies and practices are found to have a negative impact on student success, I must be willing to step back and reevaluate how we operate. Ultimately, I had to maintain authenticity in order to protect the integrity of my research. "Authenticity is characterized by four process imperatives; be attentive (to the data); be intelligent (in inquiry); be reasonable (in making judgments); and be responsible (in making decisions and taking action)" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 29).

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY

I came to Eastside Elementary in July of 2011 to serve as its Principal. I left a school where I had spent 13 years of my career and at the time was serving as the Assistant Principal. It was a school which I truly loved and considered my family. The move was very emotional for me, but I felt it was the right time to make the transition. I immediately noticed a stark difference between what I was used to and what was now my new family. Upon initial glance, these differences made me question my logic and viability to stay at Eastside Elementary. As I dug deeper and fought to build relationships and position myself as an instructional leader, I garnered a great deal of respect from and for all of those who make up the great educational environment which is Eastside Elementary. I am fully vested and proudly boast my pride and love for Eastside. It is for this reason that I want nothing more than to support and see the continuous growth of my teachers as education professionals and my students as lifelong learners. This research is designed to support that growth and further foster an environment of cultural awareness and appreciation for all students.

The Context

Eastside Elementary is located in eastern Campbell County, Georgia, and is a part of Campbell County School District. The facility is located in a primarily residential area. Eastside opened in 1966 and has been a pillar in the community since its inception. In August 2016, which coincidentally marked its 50th anniversary, Eastside moved into a new state of the art facility. Eastside Elementary School has a mission statement, which is reviewed annually by

staff with revisions made if deemed necessary. The mission statements reads: "Eastside Elementary strives to empower lifelong learners by providing challenging academic experiences, fostering independence, and working collaboratively with parents, staff, and our community to engage and support students." Eastside Elementary's Belief Statements read as follows:

- Every child can learn.

- It is our responsibility to make the most of each child's potential.

- Our school gains strength from its cultural diversity.

- Parents are an integral component in their child's education.

- Children learn best in a safe, emotionally secure environment.

- Learning flourishes in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

- Eastside Elementary is a reflection of and is responsible to the greater Campbell County community.

Eastside Elementary has consistently maintained a student enrollment ranging between 500 and 525 over the past three years. It serves students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Eastside is designated as a Title I school with 69% of its families receiving supplemental government assistance in 2015. The student ethnic breakdown for the 2015-2016 school year was four percent Asian, 45% African American, 10% Hispanic, 36% White, and five percent Multi-Racial.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the teacher years of experience and teacher levels of certification for the current Eastside Elementary Staff. This data was gathered from Human Resources files maintained by the school principal. In addition to classroom teachers, the schools Administrative Team consist of a Principal, Assistant Principal, Professional School Counselor, Academic Support Specialist and a part-time Family Engagement Specialist.

Figure 7:
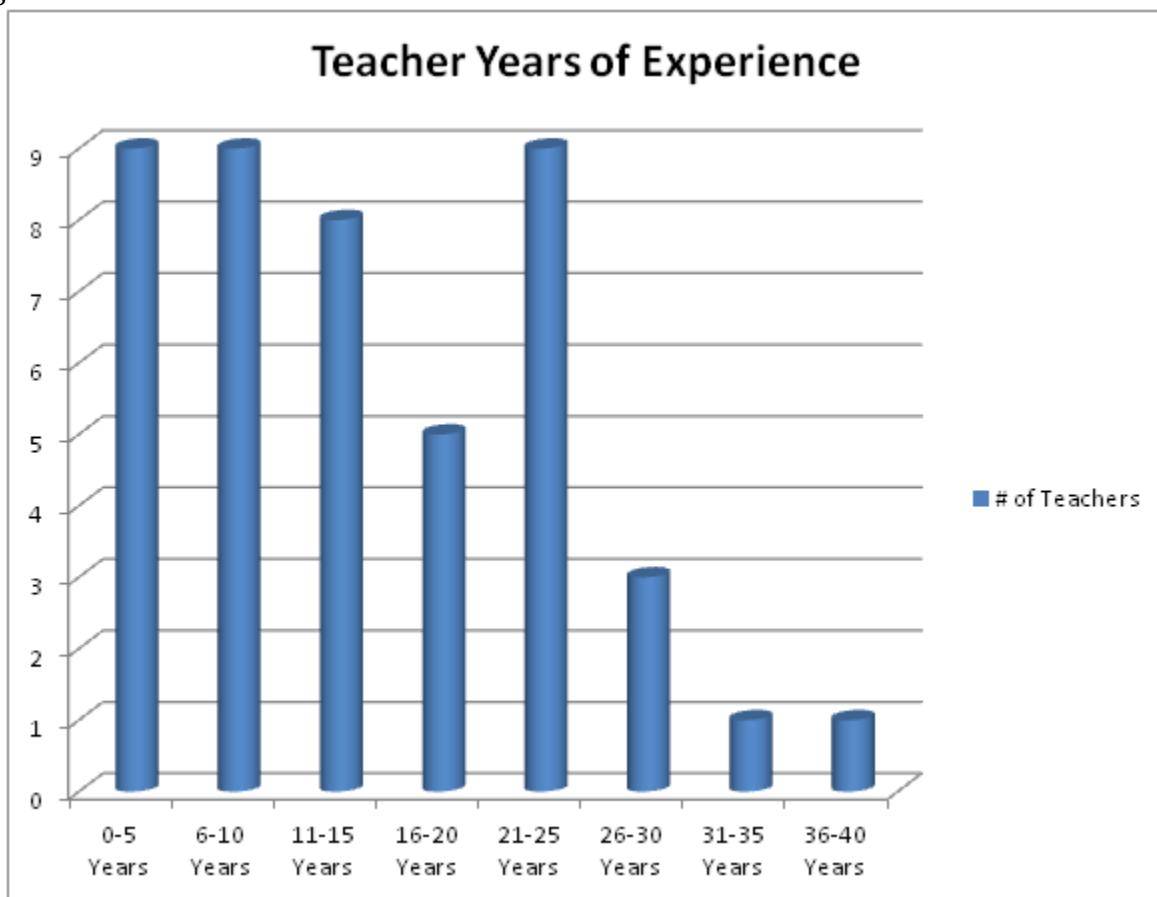
Teacher Years of Experience

Eastside Elementary employs 49 certified staff members and 14 paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals are assigned to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and special education classrooms. The average experience of the staff is 14 years. In addition to the pre-kindergarten through fifth grade general education classrooms, Eastside has three self-contained classrooms designed to serve students with autism who are identified as low functioning. Teachers serving in this capacity must hold an adaptive certification. As a result of having this specialized program the special education population at Eastside Elementary is higher than the typical elementary school.
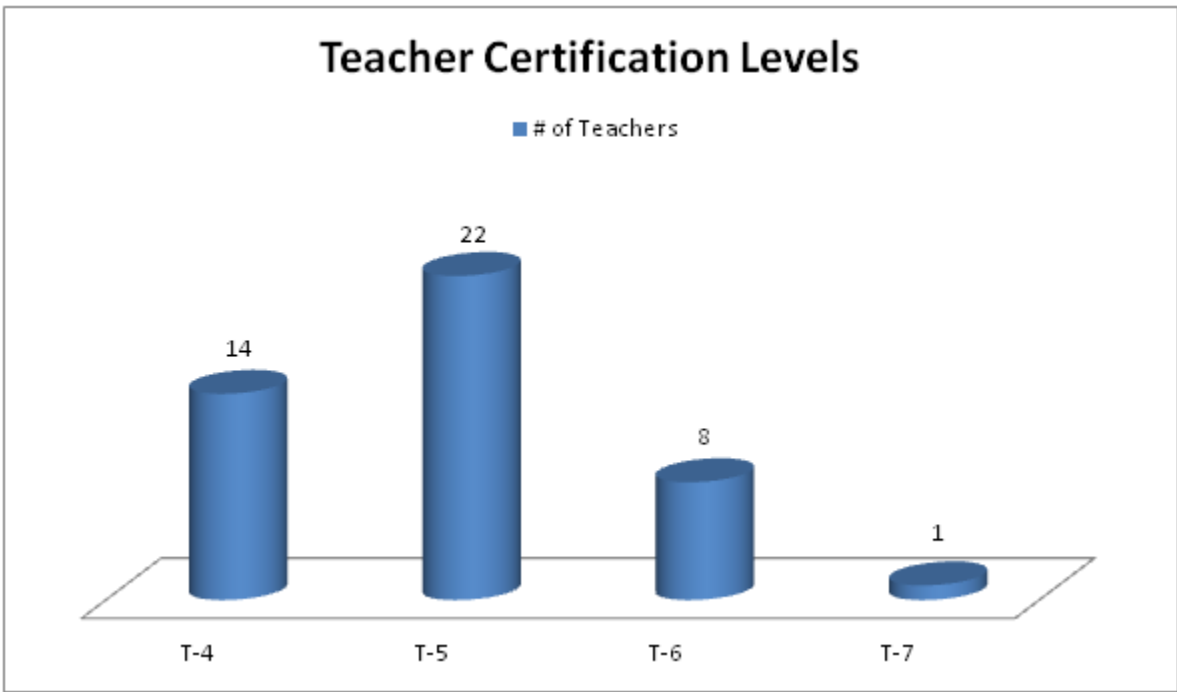
Teacher Certificate Levels

Eastside Elementary has 100% of its staff as highly qualified, meaning all teachers are teaching within their certified field. The majority of teachers hold a higher level degree with 48% holding a master's level certificate and 18% holding a specialist certificate. This indicates that staff members are highly trained and educated in research-based practices that would allow them to effectively implement standards-based instruction.

As the principal of Eastside Elementary, I am responsible for the education of each of my students. I believe that every child, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, or cultural background, has the ability to learn and has a right to an education that is appropriate and fair. I strive to provide my teachers with the support and resources needed to effectively provide an engaging and fulfilling educational experience for all students. This educational experience must be equitable for all students if we are to effectively and successfully fulfill our duties as educators. In order to be equitable we must have an awareness of the needs of our students. To provide

equity access to materials and human resources are in proportion to the identified needs of students (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). As a transformational leader, I seek to provide my staff with the information and motivation to actively seek and implement change that will allow us to provide an educational experience that is equitable for all students (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Kowalski, 2010; Marshall & Oliva, 2010). "Transformational leaders are proactive, raise awareness levels of followers about inspirational collective interests, and help followers achieve unusually high performance outcomes" (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p.449). With that in mind, this action research gives me an opportunity to lead my teachers in an in-depth study of our current practices, which may contribute to the discipline concerns we are facing.

Action Research Participants

This chapter serves as the introduction of Eastside Elementary but it also introduces the action team members and members of the professional learning community. Within this chapter I have provided a detailed description of the case study implementation at Eastside Elementary outlining the work of the action team and the professional learning community. An action team made up of myself as the school principal and researcher, my assistant principal, who serves as the discipline coordinator for the school, the school counselor, who handles the social emotional aspect of behavior and the teacher-leader who serves as the coordinator for our school-wide PBIS plan and chair of our Positive Behavior Team was formed. All action team members play an active role in reviewing and analyzing the behavior data for Eastside Elementary on a consistent basis in order to identify professional learning needs, revisions to the PBIS plan and individual student needs.

The Professional Learning Community

The professional learning community consisted of those teachers who consented to take part in the intervention. The detailed description of each participant provides an overview of their position in the school and contributions to the research process.

Tracy Palmer [3] a member of the Action Research Team, participated in the intervention as a member of the focus group. She is in her eleventh year as an educator and in August 2016 took on the role of Academic Support Specialist. Her previous experience includes Pre-Kindergarten teacher and third grade teachers. She has taken on many teacher leader roles in her years at Eastside. One role was as the coordinator for the Positive Behavior Team, which oversees the school-wide discipline plan (PBIS). As one of the original authors of the plan, she holds first hand knowledge of the elements of the plan as well as the history of challenges and revisions. Additionally, she is well versed in the historical behavior data for Eastside. She has studied the data in order to lead teachers in monthly Positive Behavior Team meetings and professional learning. As of November 2016 she began serving as the Interim Assistant Principal at another school in Campbell County.

As a participant Ms. Palmer actively engaged in the discussions. She offered personal anecdotes to support her thought processes. She shared many lived experiences, as an African American female, which allowed her to relate to and connect with the ideas expressed by Dr. Milner (2010) in the assigned text. She was not hesitant to challenge others in their thoughts and ideas, providing a counter narrative to allow a deeper understanding of the ideas and concepts brought about through the reading. She offered ideas and recommendations to support the overall growth and implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy at Eastside Elementary.

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[3] Pseudonyms used to protect the identity of participants.

Lynn Smith is a Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) teacher with previous experience at third and fifth grade. Ms. Smith is in her tenth year as a teacher and is the longest standing Pre-K teacher in the district. Pre-K teaching positions have a very high turn over rate because the pay is lower than a K-5 teacher pay and state regulations are much more arduous than K-5 regulations. Her long stand at the Pre-K position has allowed her to take on a leadership role among her Pre-K colleagues. This has provided her with a boost of confidence she has needed as she experienced difficulty being effective in other grade levels. Ms. Smith has sought and expressed a need for frequent positive affirmation from administration to feel good as a teacher. Her comfort level and sense of pride as a white female were fractured as she struggled with feelings of shame and guilt during discussions. The friendships and familiarity of the members of the professional learning community allowed her to feel comfortable being vulnerable and honest about her feelings.

As a member of the professional learning community, Ms. Smith provided many emotional anecdotes of her experiences as a, child, teacher and mother. She displayed the highest level of sensitivity to race related issue and explored a sense of blame being placed on white teachers. She argued for the necessity of colorblindness and issued interactions with her Pre-K students as evidence for why she believes colorblindness allows her students to build relationships. When challenged by other participants on her ideas and thoughts she would sometimes shut down and withdraw from the conversation for a period of time until discussion would shift to another topic. Given her self-confessed need for affirmation it was not surprising that she found it difficult to move forward when her ideas and arguments were rebutted.

Angie Sloan was indubitably the most active participant in professional learning community sessions. Ms. Sloan is a kindergarten teacher with 12 years of experience. Among teachers in the school she is considered a teacher leader. She has been an active member of

various school and district committees. She has demonstrated a deep passion and commitment to teaching. She has sought out opportunities for professional growth through self-studies of education trends and voluntary participation is professional learning course. Her eagerness and enthusiasm has not always been well received by all grade level colleagues. For this reason, she has expressed frustrations with moving forward as a grade level, being innovative in their thought processes. With some recent changes to her grade level and the addition of two novice teacher there is a greater acceptance of her as a team leader.

Ms. Sloan spoke confidently and frequently sharing her growth as a culturally proficient educator. Her sharing brought about many emotional moments as she recollected examples of marginalization and discrimination she witnessed perpetrated by members of her family. As a white female there were times when she express feeling targeted by portions of the book or focus group member comments. She struggled with grasping and accepting general statements as general. Her long standing positive relationships with other members of the focus group helped her move beyond and release feelings of blame or guilt.

Amy Ware is a second grade white teacher in her tenth year as an educator. She has served as a teacher at Eastside Elementary for nearly six years. Every year she has served as the general education teacher in a co-taught classroom with a special education teacher. To be successful in this teaching setting it requires her to have a strong ability to work with students with disabilities and be keenly aware of their academic and social emotional needs. She has consistently demonstrated great success in this role as evidenced by building and district administrator observations and her annual evaluations. Prior to coming to Eastside she served as a Pre-Kindergarten teacher at another school in Campbell County.

Ms. Ware was by far the least vocal member of the professional learning community. It was difficult to decipher her thoughts through non-verbal cues such as nodding, frowning, smiling, or facial expressions. Her body language was non-existent or hard to read during most of the sessions. This was surprising as she is typically a teacher who is comfortable having the hard conversations and has freely shared thoughts and ideas. She became the most vocal during session two's discussion of how to impress upon those reluctant staff members the importance for utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy. It became evident then that she felt much of what was being discussed was a frame of reference to which she had already embraced prior to engaging in the professional learning community. She however, did not seem comfortable sharing her own experiences and thoughts generated from reading the text.

Melissa Patman is a third grade teacher with ten years of experience. In her years of experience she has worked closely with special education teachers in a co-taught setting. As a member of the School Improvement Leadership Team she serves as a teacher leader actively participating in the development of goals and initiatives for the school. She initiated the implementation of Class Dojo as a tool for reinforcing positive behavior school-wide. As one of the first teachers in the school to utilize Class Dojo, she shared this online behavior reinforcement and monitoring tool with colleagues. It is now a part of our PBIS Plan.

Ms. Patman is a teacher who works to build relationships with students, staying abreast of pop culture and engaging students in personal conversations aimed at learning more about her students. During the professional learning community sessions she shared her own experiences of being judged by false stereotypes based upon her identity as a white woman and where she lived.

Patrice Clark is an 11 year veteran teacher currently teaching first grade. Ms. Clark teaches in a co-taught classroom with a Special Education teacher. She is the team leader for her grade level overseeing the collaborative planning process and programming for her grade level. She has voluntarily taken on roles beyond her grade level which support school-wide programs and initiatives.

As a member of the professional learning community she did not shy away from countering her colleagues with dialogue centered on understanding the role that culture plays in the classroom. She shared many of her own experiences as a African American woman and as a mother of an African American male, which demonstrate the perpetual nature of societal stereotypes and the threat these stereotypes can pose to an individuals psyche and overall sense of worth in society.

Diane Jones is a 16 year veteran teacher of Asian decent. Her personal experiences adapting to various cultures, having lived in several different countries prior to coming to the United States, allowed her to share a very unique perspective. Coming to America she herself had to adapt to American culture and shared that there are times when she struggled to build relationships with colleagues who were not open to understanding her culture and perspective. She is an extremely skilled teacher with an exemplary work ethic. She struggles however, with building relationships with colleagues and sometimes finds herself in conflict with them. Ms. Jones fully participated in the discussions and shared that she felt a strong connection to Ms. Johnson, the teacher in the predominantly white suburban middle school stating "I could relate to Ms. Johnson and the hard time she had with her colleagues who questioned why she did things the way she did. It made me sad."

Christina Atkins was the quiet listener of the group. While her contributions to the conversations were sporadic she could be observed thumbing through her book to find references being made by group members or nodding her head in agreement with something that had been said. This is not uncommon of the African American Special Education team leader in her sixth year of teaching. Ms. Atkins started at Eastside Elementary in August 2011, the same year I arrived. While she is an extremely active member of the faculty at Eastside Elementary she tends to participate quietly while offering very specific and concise comments or feedback in meetings. As team leader she must provide guidance and support to the Special Education teachers as they carry out their duties and responsibilities. She effectively does this through one on one conversations and written communication. As she has taken on more leadership responsibilities her comfort level for contributing in larger group settings and presenting has increased.

Sally Walker is a gifted education teacher serving students in grades two and four. In her twenty-two year as a teacher she has served at numerous grade levels and positions in Campbell County. While at Eastside she was the Instructional Coach and a fourth grade classroom teacher prior to moving into a gifted teacher position.

Ms. Walker remained very honest and forthcoming throughout the professional learning communities sharing her own struggles with self-awareness, which came about while reading the text. Chapter one in particular was difficult for her to read and receive as a white woman. Many of the stories shared by Ms. Walker, revealed her level of cultural proficiency and demonstrated her willingness or capability of building culturally relevant learning environments and positive relationships with students. She referenced other text such as *Teaching With Poverty in Mind* by Eric Jensen as tools for understanding her students' needs. As an eager participant in the

professional learning community discussions she fully engaged and willingly shared personal experiences, which allowed her to connect with the text.

Candice Hicks is a white gifted education teacher. She has been a teacher for six years with all of her years of experience at Eastside Elementary. Prior to being a gifted education teacher she was a second grade teachers and an Early Intervention Program teacher. As an Early Intervention Teacher the majority of her students were African American. Providing engaging and creative learning opportunities was a skill she easily mastered.

In understanding the various aspects, which make up culture she shared a very emotional testimony to her own acceptance within her family and community, as a woman in a same-sex marriage. She brought an enlightening perspective to the conversations sharing her developmental awareness and understanding of societal issues such as white privilege and stereotype threat. Her contributions to conversations were very thoughtful and thought provoking. She would often take the comments of the group members and provide a summative analysis of the shared or varying perspectives. During session two she expressed her concern with how to spread the awareness and desire to build culturally responsive pedagogy outside of this professional learning community to other colleagues at Eastside Elementary. This led to a discussion on building closer relationships of trust and collaboration across grade levels and cultural groups among the staff.

Constructing Meaning & Planning Action: July 2015-February 2016

In July 2015 members of the Action Team were presented with discipline data for Eastside Elementary. Campbell County district leaders presented this data to the Assistant Principal and myself during the annual Leadership Retreat. This data as presented in Figure 1, 2, 4, and 5 was then shared with members of the Eastside School Improvement Leadership Team,

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which included all members of the Action Team. This data has been revisited and discussed throughout the planning process. Initial discussions of the Action Research Team focused on identifying the root causes for the disproportionality. Discussions led to current practices we were observing throughout the school as it related to the interactions with African American male students. Data focused on current disciplinary practices had been shared with the staff as a whole. The need for change had been established.

Professional learning in the form of workshops led by one of the Campbell School District Behavior Specialist had been used to broach the subject of race and culture at Eastside Elementary during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Student achievement scores, which showed a significant gap across ethnic and socio-economic lines, and behavior data were the evidence used to warrant the need for this professional learning. These workshops were all presented whole staff and had minimal impact on changing thought processes and building culturally relevant pedagogical practices. As the Action Research Team commiserated on the lack of receptiveness and sometimes contentious atmosphere of the whole staff professional learning sessions related to culture, I presented the idea of a book study as a possible method for engaging a smaller professional learning community. There was discussion centered around the usefulness of book studies in the past at Eastside Elementary. Although I was not a member of the Eastside Elementary faculty when the "Dinner and Dialogue" book study series was implemented all other Action Team members were. They all agreed that staff members were highly receptive and engaged with this professional learning delivery method. Given the effectiveness of the book study model, I suggested the book *Start Where You are but Don't Stay There* by Richard Milner (2010) as an appropriate resource. Within his book Milner addresses the need for teachers, both pre-service and in-service, to be better prepared for educating student

populations in culturally diverse settings. As the educational system is structured now it impulses opportunity gaps, which can leave students from minority cultures disadvantaged. He provides specific case study examples of the ways educational professionals developed their own cultural proficiency. The Action Team agreed that this book was appropriate as a tool for guiding the focus and discussions for the intervention.

Taking Action: May 2016-September 2016

The first meeting of the professional learning community took place in May 2016. During this meeting research participants were given an explanation of the data, which supports the need for this action research study. They were provided with an overview of their role and responsibilities. All participants agreed with the use of each element of the intervention and expressed that they were comfortable with the purpose and intended outcomes of the intervention. Research participants completed their Cultural Awareness Pre Self-Assessment. After completing the self-assessment participants received their books and began the reading of the book in preparation for the professional learning community meetings to follow.

The next meeting of the professional learning community was held in June 2016. This meeting focused on Chapters 1-3. This was by far the most emotional and difficult session. Chapter 1 invoked feelings of guilt and frustration for many of the white members of the professional learning community. Chapter 1 entitled "A Diversity and Opportunity Gaps Explanatory Framework" lays out a framework for explaining the barriers, which prevent educators from building educational environments, which seek to diminish the diversity and opportunity gap. "This explanatory framework…is meant to challenge educators to broaden their belief systems, shift their mind-sets, and transform their practices in order to better address opportunity gaps that persist in P-12 educational contexts," (Milner, 2010, p. 13). The framework

include five elements: (1) rejection of color blindness; (2) ability and skill to understand, work through, and transcend cultural conflict; (3) ability to understand how meritocracy operates; (4) ability to recognize and shift low expectations and deficit mind-sets; and (5) rejection of context-neutral mind-sets and practices (Milner, 2010). As we talked through each of these elements Sally, Melissa, Angie and Lynn all expressed how hard it was to get through the Introduction and parts of Chapter 1 because they felt attacked in some instances and guilty in others. As they continued to read they reported a greater level of comfort especially with the realization and understanding that this is not an attack on white teachers. The purpose of the book is to bring attention to opportunity gaps, which exist due to an educational system, which is not structurally designed to offer opportunities for success for all students.

Chapter two, entitled White Male Teacher, Diverse Urban School: Relationships and Race Matter – Even in the Science Classroom, introduced Mr. Hall a white male novice teacher in an urban middle school. This chapter chronicled his journey to being accepted and respected by the students he taught. As a young teacher he entered to the field with enthusiasm and optimism. He quickly realized the necessity for relationships and trust as he was challenged by students who were openly disengaged and uninterested. Mr. Hall used shared experiences and stories of his past as the catalyst for building relationships with his students. Students quickly came to accept that even as a white male he could relate to their current situations. His willingness to take the time to build relationships was attributed to his success in the classroom. Some of the participants expressed a kinship to Mr. Hall having found themselves in situations where they felt they had to work hard to build the trust and connections with students.

Dr. Johnson is the exemplar shared in chapter three, Black Female Teacher, Suburban White School: Addressing and Transcending Cultural Conflict. As a veteran African American

language arts teacher in a suburban high school, Dr. Johnson consciously integrates race, culture and diversity into her curriculum. Although the population Dr. Johnson served was not diverse she felt it was important to provide her students with a curriculum, which promoted an awareness of the various entities, which contribute to and make up our world. Dr. Johnson shares the challenges she faced when her curriculum choices were questioned.

In July 2016 the professional learning community met for a third time to continue the discussion of culturally relevant pedagogy with a focus on chapters four, five and conclusions. Chapter four entitled: Black Male and Female Teachers, Diverse Urban School: Recognizing Assets in Unexpected People and Places, introduces Mr. Jackson, a black male teacher and Ms. Shaw a black female teacher, both of whom teach at the same urban, diverse middle school as Mr. Hall, the white male teacher featured in chapter two. Mr. Jackson attributed his success to his ability and willingness to build relationships and immerse himself in the world of his students. Mr. Jackson educated himself on pop culture and remained vigilant in his efforts to use this knowledge to build connections both inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

Ms. Shaw was a thirty-five year veteran teacher who saw it as her mission to ensure students knew and understood their purpose in life. Ms. Shaw recognized and accepted the multiple roles she needed to play in order to care for and teach her students. When student recognize that she was not only there to provide their academic needs but their social and emotional needs as well she was able to build their trust. Students sought comfort and advice from Ms. Shaw when dealing with adverse situations in school. Ms. Shaw was aware of community issues outside of school and the influence the community might have on her students. She held her students to a standard and did not allow a lack of resources or outside influenced to deter them from their purpose.

White Teachers Learning to Teach: Bittersweet Challenges – and Possibilities – in Teacher Preparation is the title for chapter five which features six white teacher candidates. These teachers were hesitant to acknowledge the need to address culture and diversity as a part of their jobs. They felt to do so would be making an issue where there was none and feared offending other teachers in the education program. Through professional learning provided by Dr. Milner they came to realize and accept their role and responsibility for providing diversity rich learning experiences for their students. With white teachers making up over seventy percent of the teaching population across America, they realized they could not hold teachers of color solely responsible for addressing the diverse needs of students.

Within the conclusion of the book Dr. Milner offers suggestions and recommendations for practice. The teachers discussed this portion of the book extensively during this session as they began to reflect on their own practices and hone in on ways to improve their practice. Additionally, this section was discussed in relation to considerations for extending this learning beyond the professional learning community. It is during this session that the research participants dubbed themselves as the "Culture Team" for Eastside Elementary.

The final focus group session for the professional learning community took place September 2016. This session came after the professional learning provided by Dr. Richard Milner in August 2016 and eight weeks into the school year. This session gave participants an opportunity to share their successes and challenges in constructing culturally relevant learning environments. Most prominently discussed during this session was the building of relationships. Teachers shared the ways in which they have sought to learn about their students and build a classroom where students respect and value one another. Teachers shared the challenges they face when the time constraints of the school district curriculum map cause them to rush through

the building of a classroom community or feel guilty for taking the time and thereby lagging behind on the curriculum. Teachers offered one another support and assurances that this was time well spent.

Evaluating Action: October 2016-February 2017

At the conclusion of the action research cycle an analysis of the data sources was conducted. This analysis included the coding of the professional learning community sessions and reflective journal entries and a comparison of pre and post self-assessments. Clear themes emerged through the first and second cycle coding. The self-assessments showed growth in teachers' knowledge of student cultures, increased used of multicultural instructional materials, and better relationships with students and families.

The Action Team reviewed the themes generated through coding and assisted with the refining of findings I derived from the data and developed additional key elements to be included in the findings. Due to the sensitive nature of addressing cultural conflicts and specifically racial issues within your organization I relied heavily on my Action Team to provide feedback and guidance in the interpretation of the data. The replication of this action research extensively throughout our school and district is a goal of mine. Protecting against alienation of white teachers, while also acknowledging that the coding showed a distinct difference in how white teachers and teachers of color internalize the tenets of cultural proficiency, was necessary. White teachers most often needed time to process and receive the information without experiencing feelings of guilt, blame or inadequacy. Reassurances were provided and teachers were often reminded not to view cultural proficiency as an attack on white teachers. Therefore, in response to the research questions: How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs? and How does

participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?, the use of a small professional learning community has been determined to be extremely effective in providing that safe place for teachers to express their true feelings and sometimes place themselves in vulnerable positions. Additionally the professional learning community provided teachers with the feedback and tools to build on their knowledge and application of culturally proficient practices.

Action Research Outcomes

Within this chapter I have provided a detailed description of the action research process used to address the need to change the ways in which teachers engage students and build a greater awareness of and appreciation for the cultural diversity found in schools. Given a lack of receptiveness in the past to professional learning workshops provided by district professionals the Action Research Team determined a smaller professional learning community would be a more appropriate and effective means for supporting the development of teacher cultural proficiency. The evidence and findings presented in the forthcoming chapter will show that a professional learning community is an effective method for growing culturally proficient practitioners.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This action research study sought to identify an intervention, which would address the discipline disproportionality currently evidenced at Eastside Elementary. The development of culturally relevant learning environments was identified as a viable solution to address this problem. A professional learning community model was applied as the intervention to enact the changes necessary to support practitioners' growth in knowledge and skills. The research questions to be answered through this study were:

1. How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?

2. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?

3. How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?

Table 5: Research Findings

Research Question	Findings
How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?	• The professional learning community influenced teachers to be reflective in their practice leading to critical conversations about cultural proficiency. • The professional learning community can influence teachers to own the biases they may hold. • The professional learning community served as a mechanism for allowing teachers to share their diverse perspectives and experiences.

How does participation in a professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?	• By participating in the professional learning community teachers engaged in conversations, which built a greater understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to build a culturally responsive classroom environments. • By participating in the professional learning community teacher felt empowered as leaders for culturally proficient pedagogy among their colleagues?
How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?	• In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must understand that dialogue centered around culturally relevant pedagogy is not an attack on anyone's character. • In order to build culturally responsive classroom environments teachers must be willing to devote the time inside and outside of the classroom. • In order to build culturally responsive classroom environments teachers must understand that culture is encompasses more than race. • In order to build culturally responsive classroom environments teachers must maintain a spirit of collaboration with colleagues, students and families.

Research Question 1: How can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?

This action research sought to bring about a change in how teachers structure and foster their classroom environments. In order to bring about change, those you are seeking to change must believe there is a need to change. If teachers believe the current state of their classroom environment is conducive and suitable for all students the change process will be hindered. Active participation in the research intervention required teachers to critically examine their practices and beliefs in relation to those identified as best for creating a culturally responsive classroom environment. Three themes emerged out of this research question:

1. The professional learning community influenced teachers to be reflective in their practice leading to critical conversations about cultural proficiency.

2. The professional learning community prompted teachers to address their own biases and have a greater awareness of the impact of these biases on their students.

3. The professional learning community served as a mechanism for allowing teachers to share their diverse perspectives and experiences.

The professional learning community influenced teachers to be reflective in their practice leading to critical conversations about cultural proficiency.

Professional learning community discussions were heavily rooted in stories of teachers' experiences both as an educator and life outside of the school. Teachers drew on these experiences as a way to connect with the context of the discussions. It became evident that many of their own classroom practices were influenced by their life experiences and personal cultural norms. These reflective moments allowed for rich conversations around beliefs and practice. I call them critical conversations because teachers asked questions and pushed their colleagues to think critically about their own experiences. Reflection was necessary in order to identify areas for continued practice and growth.

Dr. Milner (2010) presented five areas: color blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, low expectations and deficit mind-sets, and context-neutral mind-sets, as critical in helping teachers. The first learning community sessions included a review and discussion of each of these areas. Teachers called on their own teaching experiences to explain and better understand each area in relation to their beliefs and practices. Melissa Patman, Lynn Smith, Angie Sloan and Sally Walker shared that they found it difficult to read through the first chapter because they found themselves feeling defensive and targeted as white teachers. It was vital to the development of this learning community to establish a safe place where participants could

freely share their thoughts. The critical conversations held throughout the professional learning sessions showed that a level of comfort had been established.

We first addressed color blindness. In past professional learning sessions Eastside teachers have openly and with pride declared themselves as color blind. Color blindness has been a reality for many members of the professional learning community out of what they felt was an appropriate way to ensure their actions or words were not offensive as Melissa Patman explained:

> "That's the one that stood out the most to me when I first started reading it. I was like oh my gosh that's exactly what I've been saying and I feel horrible now knowing when I said "Hey I don't see color" I didn't realize how offensive that could be because that's not what I meant by it."

Hearing the explanations for why this serves to marginalize people of color, teachers better understood why it is necessary to see color. Teachers felt that to say they consider students color meant they were passing judgment on students based upon their ethnicity. Angie Sloan went on to explain that perhaps it is not color that we must see but culture. The professional learning community facilitated this discussion, allowing it to be productive and a learning opportunity for the participants. Minds were changed and attitudes shifted as a result.

This brought on a discussion of culture versus race. The terms race and culture cannot be used synonymously. All of those who share the same race may not hold the same culture traditions and norms. It is also true that those who may have common cultural traditions and norms may not share the same race. Race however, is a prominent characteristic, which can be easily recognized. Beyond that, teachers must make the effort to better understand the culture of their students. Teachers shared the dangers of not recognizing that race does not dictate culture.

Lynn Smith shared the story of a cousin who moved from a northern state to a metropolitan city in Georgia. The area in which she lived included a large population of African American people who owned brightly custom colored cars. From this she drew the conclusion that black people liked bright colored cars. This is one innocent example of how assumptions of this type can lead to stereotyping. In a school setting, this can be detrimental to a teacher's ability to building relationships with students. Professional learning communities provide the space and opportunity to address misconceptions and build a greater knowledge.

The professional learning community can influence teachers to own the biases they may hold.

Conversations flowed easily during all professional learning sessions. Teachers were willing to share stories of growth and awareness. Stereotypes and biases were discussed by teachers, but most often taking a perspective of an outsider looking in, but not fully acknowledging their own biases. Participants recognized that we all hold biases which shape our perspectives and examples of what this might look like were shared. I shared a bias of my own related to feelings of discomfort and some times fear I have when traveling in various areas of the county in which I live. There is a history of a significant presence of white supremacist groups in my county. This causes me to sometimes be quick to judge and make assumptions about people if I am traveling through certain areas of the county. I hoped by sharing my own bias others would feel comfortable with sharing as well. Zardoya (2017) shared that a critical step toward building cultural proficiency is being consciously aware of one's own biases, which develop as a result of life experiences and understanding how they have affected interactions with students, families, and teachers, as well as their leadership decisions. Angie Sloan shared an experience of needing to go to a student's home to talk with a parent. In preparation for the visit

she asked other staff members to go with her. When she was faced with limited luck finding anyone who was willing or able to go with her she made the decision to go by herself. Just as she was ready to leave to head to the students home a staff member agreed to go with her. When we look at this example we must consider why she felt she needed to have someone with her. This student lived in a predominantly African American government assistant housing complex, where there was a perceived notion that it could be dangerous. While her account was shared to demonstrate that she was willing to take the risk in order to make contact with the parent, her initial need for support demonstrates that she held a bias associated with what goes on in that housing development and felt as a white woman she would not be welcomed. Getting teachers to understand that an awareness of our own biases helps us to better understand why we react to students in different ways is critical to truly building cultural competency. There are many assumptions people make about others based upon their race. This leads to stereotypes and biases, which can impact how we respond to and interact with one another.

The professional learning community served as a mechanism for allowing teachers to share their diverse perspectives and experiences.

An aspect of a professional learning community is learning from one another. Participants are able to share ideas and perspectives, which give insight to their colleagues. This requires participants to openly and honestly share their thoughts. But it also requires participants to hear, acknowledge and receive feedback from colleagues. This professional learning community consisted of teachers with diverse backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. Experiences and beliefs varied as was evident by an account shared by Angie Sloan of an interaction she had with Patrice Clark one afternoon.

"When I went into your room and you were getting your girls ready for gymnastics

and I'm trying to figure out why are you taking all this time to spritz them up and clean

them up just to go sweat and you said because I will not have my children walking around in

public looking a mess. I can't give them anything else to be judged on. "

Ms. Clark went on to explain that she is cautious to ensure that her children always present

themselves as well cared for, by having them dressed nicely and their hair neat and orderly. As

an African American mother she shared her awareness of how she and her children might be

viewed based upon negative stereotypes, which persist in society. Ms. Sloan admitted this is not

anything she ever considered as a white mother raising her two daughters. Candice Hicks

responded saying, "When you are in a culture of power you don't recognize those things." This

was a powerful statement to help move the conversation toward an understanding of white

privilege. Members of the professional learning community struggled with acknowledging

culture of power and white privilege without feeling a sense of guilt. The conversations in this

controlled and supportive environment allowed teachers to express their feelings and gain insight

and feedback, which led to a greater understanding, which diminished mindsets of guilt. This

was easier for some members of the group than others based upon their experiences and exposer

to constructive rhetoric. Candice Hicks had learning opportunities through college courses which

gave her a different perspective as a white teacher than some of the other white teachers in the

group. She summed up her thoughts and beliefs best in the following statement:

"I think one really important and really different thing to acknowledge are the concepts

of culture of power, white privilege. Like those are real things. Those are things that

shape your mindset. You have to acknowledge that that's real and you have to

acknowledge how that impacts your life especially when you come from the culture of power But like I said its harder to see it when you come from the culture of power."

A professional learning community provides an opportunity for teachers to openly and collaboratively work through those elements of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Research Question 2: How can participation in a professional learning community impact teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?

Richard Milner's book *Start Where You are but Don't Stay There* was selected as the text to guide the professional learning community discussions because it clearly and directly presents the case for why culturally relevant pedagogy is necessary. Additionally it provides a detailed description of the struggles and successes of practitioners who have worked to provide culturally relevant environments for teaching and learning. By conducting this action research I not only wanted to teachers to recognize the need to develop culturally proficient learning environments I wanted then to grow in their ability to develop and foster these environments. Ongoing discussions of the text in a professional learning community provided the venue for teachers to share ideas and practices as well as draw connections between the experiences of the teachers featured in the text and their own lived experiences. Participation in a professional learning session led by Richard Milner provided additional tools and insight into the need for culturally relevant pedagogy if we are to positively and effectively impact the opportunity gaps which exist.

Research participants completed a pre and post self-assessment, rating their level of cultural competency. Participants rated themselves on questions related to their knowledge of various cultures represented in their classrooms, use of multicultural materials in daily instruction and the development of relationships with students and parents. Table 7 shows the

results. There were ten teachers who completed the pre-assessments and participated in the

intervention, however only nine completed the post assessment. Because all assessments were

submitted online anonymously I am not able to match pre and post assessments.

Table 6: Pre/Post Self Assessment Results

Cultural Competency Pre/Post Self Assessment		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I recognize and value the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.	Pre	6	4			
	Post	8	1			
I am knowledgeable of the various cultures represented by the students in my classroom	Pre	5	3		2	
	Post	4	5			
I take time to learn about the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.	Pre	3	6		1	
	Post	6	2	1		
I recognize and consider my own cultural influences and how they affect the way I communicate, my expectations and how I teach.	Pre	1	9			
	Post	8	1			
My classroom is decorated in ways that represent multiple cultures and global awareness.	Pre		4	2	4	
	Post	2	5	1	1	
The books, handouts, and other materials I use to teach reflect multicultural and global awareness.	Pre	6	1	1	2	
	Post	4	4	1		
I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultural experiences.	Pre		4	4	2	
	Post	5	3	1		
I plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped my students' learn.	Pre		2	3	5	
	Post	3	4	1	1	
My teaching approach varies in ways which accommodate the cultural differences in my classroom, including student groups and students helping each other.	Pre	3	7			
	Post	7	2			
I communicate with the parents of my students in positive ways, not just when there is a problem.	Pre	8	2			
	Post	8	1			
I make an effort to educate families about our school.	Pre	5	5			
	Post	7	2			
I build strong, positive working relationships with the parents of my students.	Pre	2	8			
	Post	7	2			
I know my students and build positive working relationships with them.	Pre	4	6			
	Post	8	1			

Creating a sense of community in my classroom is key to student success.	Pre	8	2			
	Post	9				

This data show an overall increase in all areas of cultural competency. A significant shift can be seen in teacher consideration of their own cultural influences. The statement *I recognize and consider my own cultural influences and how they affect the way I communicate, my expectations and how I teach* went from one "strongly agree" rating to eight "strongly agree" ratings. A shift in teachers' efforts to learn about the cultures represented by students was seen as well. In the pre-assessment three participants rated this as strongly agree and in the post-assessment six participants rated it as strongly agree. This shows a growth which supports the development of cultural competency among those who participated in the research intervention.

Another area of significant growth can be seen related to use of multicultural curriculum materials. Teachers embraced the information learned through the reading and discussions to create classroom décor, and locate materials, which reflect a more diverse setting. Two themes emerged out of this research question:

1. By participating in the professional learning community teachers engaged in conversations, which built a greater understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to build a culturally responsive classroom environment.

2. By participating in the professional learning community teacher felt empowered as leaders of culturally proficient pedagogy among their colleagues?

By participating in the professional learning community teachers engaged in conversations, which built a greater understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy and how to build a culturally responsive classroom environment.

Building teacher knowledge and understanding is a necessary element to move toward cultural proficiency. Teachers must understand the value and impact of this knowledge and use this knowledge in order to impact the work they do each day with students. Using that knowledge to change how you interact with and teach students can result in greater levels of engagement for students and better relationships between teachers and students. Conversations during focus group sessions addressed the mindsets, which lead to opportunity gaps and how to combat and overcome these mindsets individually and collectively.

In response to the reflection journal question: What impact has participation in this focus group had on your views of your own culturally relevant practices? one teacher wrote:

"Participating in this focus group has shined a light on an area of importance that I had never considered before. Being culturally relevant in regards to my teaching practice is something that had not been taken into account when it came to my teaching practices. Now that I have participated in this focus group I have developed a better understanding of how my actions in the classroom, in regards to be culturally relevant, can have a positive impact on the success that my students obtain. Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning. I have learned that by actively engaging in culturally relevant teaching I can create a bridge between my students' home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations set by curricular requirements by utilizing the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to help drive my instruction."

By participating in the professional learning community teachers felt empowered as leaders of culturally proficient pedagogy among their colleagues?

This action research sought to identify ways to build culturally proficient practitioners within Eastside Elementary, with the hope that interventions implemented with this small focus group would be successful and replicable throughout our organization. There were many times when discussion led to how to best address the deficient and unproductive mindsets of colleagues who were not a part of the focus group. Group members concerns centered around the receptiveness of colleagues if they felt targeted by some conversations, as some group members initially felt, were not willing to devote the time needed or did not believe cultural proficiency was an issue they personally need to address.

To the change the culture of a school it is not enough for a small group of teachers to have the knowledge and skill to promote cultural proficiency. The teachers in this professional learning community saw themselves as the leaders for build a culturally responsive school environment. They identified themselves as the "Culture Team", serving as advocates for students and a support system for their colleagues in building a greater awareness and comprehensive culturally responsive school program. As Tracy Palmer stated: "It would be so much more powerful when we have more of our school faculty and community, our school family to be a part of it. I think us continuing this outside of here with us as the cultural team and really doing some things like that. I think it would help in helping our school."

As a school we have held professional development sessions led by professionals within our district. This whole group setting was not effective in fostering change pervasively throughout the faculty. It did however start the conversations centered around the data, which shined a light on the gaps, which exist in academic achievement and behavior referrals.

Continuing these conversations in a constructive manner in smaller groups may lead to teachers embracing and receiving feedback from colleagues aimed at assisting them in finding ways to build classroom environments, which are inclusive and engaging for all students. Sharing stories of success provides the reinforcement needed to give leverage to devoting the time needed to build cultural awareness.

Research Question 3: How does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management?

Extending the work of the team beyond this research is paramount. In order to do so effectively we must examine those things, which support teachers' continuous growth. "Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being purposefully wrong," (Fullan, 2001, p.67). Within each professional learning community discussion we examined those things which hinder cultural proficiency and those things which promote and foster growth as culturally proficient practitioners. These discussions took into account the key factors of success for the subjects in the text as well as participants' experiences. From the exploration of this research question, there emerged four themes:

1. In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must understand that dialogue centered around culturally relevant pedagogy is not an attack on anyone's character.

2. In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must be willing to devote the time inside and outside of the classroom.

3. In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must understand that culture encompasses more than race.

4. In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must maintain a spirit of collaboration with colleagues, students and families.

In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must understand that dialogue centered around culturally relevant pedagogy is not an attack on anyone's character.

During sessions one and two conversations led to discussions of white privilege and how this impact perspectives and levels of awareness. Lynn Smith expressed feelings of guilt aligned to white privilege. **"**I actually feel guilty about it. I feel so many times like when people talk about white privilege and things and I think don't be mad at me." She was not the only person who felt personally impacted by the text. Sally Walker stated "The introduction and first chapter overwhelmed me and in the end I just felt like somebody was telling me I can't teach children of color."

Building cultural awareness is necessary for all teachers, white teachers and non-white teachers. Sharing the same race does not guarantee an awareness of or understanding of the culture of students. Culture involves so much more than race. There are many elements of our society, which create barriers for many students of color because many times their culture is seen as inferior to the culture of mainstream America. A study of cultural awareness brings these elements to light, presenting some mindsets and societal norms as causes for the perpetuation of the opportunity gaps and difficulties students may face in school. If we are to move forward and change the face of education teacher must lay aside tendencies to react defensively and be

receptive to conversations coming to the table ready to have productive collaborative conversations.

In order to build culturally relevant learning environments teachers must be willing to devote the time inside and outside of the classroom.

Effective teaching practices require a great deal of planning and preparation. Teachers must have a sound awareness of grade level standards, student achievement expectations and research-based instructional practices, which will lead to student success. Teaching is not an eight hour a day job. Culturally relevant pedagogy is another aspect, which must be taken into consideration if all students' learning needs are to be addressed. This requires a time commitment.

Within the classroom teachers must devote time to building relationships with students at the very start of the school year. During the sessions of the learning community there was discussion related to how to work these opportunities to learn about one another into an already crammed day, week, month, quarter and year. Focus group members reminded one another that although it is not built into the curriculum it pays off to take this time because having relationships with students, understanding how to provide an environment which is inclusive of their interest and learning needs will promote engagement and minimize disruptive behaviors associated with disengagements and academic frustration.

Beyond the classroom there are things teachers can do to gain insight into a student's culture and build relationships with students and their families. Sally Walker shared that when she taught Pre-Kindergarten there was a requirement for all teachers to make a home visit to every child's home prior to the beginning of the school year. She described this as one of the most eye opening and inside views to a child's world outside of school she has ever experienced.

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This is no longer a requirement in the pre-kindergarten program but that does not stop us from making the effort. Sally Walker, Diane Jones, Patrice Clark and Tracy Palmer shared text they have read, which have provided perspective to them regarding issues and barriers some students may face as a result of their cultural circumstances. Spending time with students outside of school in their environments of comfort can exponentially build on a teacher's awareness of the student's culture.

In order to build culturally relevant learning environments, teachers must understand that culture encompasses more than race.

Race is the obvious part of a person's culture. For many people you can identify their race by looking at them. We must be careful that this is not all we use to define a students culture. Race does not define one's culture. Candice Hicks in her ability to summarize discussions of the learning community offered a succinct and thoughtful closing to our discussion on race versus culture:

> "What I keep hearing is a lot of times when you hear culture we are thinking of an ethnic culture, like culture that you can see a little bit more and really what we are all taking away from this, and I think we know but really when you do this kind of thing it strengthens this belief and makes you consider it again, is that a family culture is really something that's so important. You don't see a culture just by looking at a kid. We're talking about the culture that makes each kid an individual and we have to make sure that we are always tailoring our instruction, reactions and interactions to meet that kid's individual needs."

Teacher must be careful not assume they know a student's culture based upon their experience with students in the past who share the same race. This makes it important for

teachers to start fresh each year build their knowledge base and build relationships with students in order to gain a true understanding of a student's culture. Once again this requires a devotion to putting forth the time and effort.

In order to build culturally relevant learning environments, teachers must maintain a spirit of collaboration with colleagues, students and families.

The time commit for building culturally relevant learning environments calls for the use of collaborative practices. Maintaining a collaborative mindset positions a teacher to more efficiently and effectively gain the knowledge needed to have a cultural awareness of their students. Collaboration is necessary with colleagues, students and families. Each stakeholder has something they can contribute to the establishment of a classroom and school environment, which is representative of all cultures.

"I don't know that all teachers are alright with saying this teacher has a better relationship with this kid. I'm going to need their help." This statement from Tracy Palmer brings to light just one thought process, which hinders teachers from effectively building relationships with students and truly understanding their students. Receptiveness to the information a colleague can provide in building your awareness must be maintained. Sally Walker shared how her willingness to collaborate with colleagues has positively impacted her ability to gain an understanding of students and how to best address their needs as children and learners:

"I go to Candice about those kids she had last year. There was a student at the beginning of the year where I was like I just don't get this kid, I just don't get this kid. Now I totally get the kid I mean he is so much fun. But at the beginning of the year I was just, I totally did not get this kid. But because I was open to going and saying please tell me what I'm missing. "

Students are a source of knowledge for teachers, which may go untapped if teachers are not open and receptive to learning from their students. Angie Sloan said it best, **"**Its kind of like you are the expert in yourself. So these children they are the experts in themselves as long as we give them a little bit of oomph and confidence in being the experts in themselves and us being receptive to them telling us how they learn best and what they need from us." Learning from students is sometimes done reflectively. When teachers take the time to reflect on their practice and the responses students had to their instructional styles or interactions teacher are able to gain insight into the students. Having conversations to engage students in dialogue regarding their interest supports the development of lessons, which incorporate this knowledge. In my years of practice as an educator in the classroom as a teacher, and outside of the classroom as an administrator, students have always eagerly shared and interacted around things they are interested in: sports, music, video games. Knowing this information helps in those times when a student may be agitated or may need to be deescalated or distracted until they can get back to a learning mindset. This can eliminate the need for an office referral. Teachers also shared how knowing this information helps them build relationships with students.

We must not forget the value parents bring. This is a direct link to a child's culture. Welcoming parents as a part of the school community opens the door to building relationships. During the first learning community session teachers shared experiences where they have invited parents in as guest speakers to share information regarding their culture. Tracy Palmer reminded us that these presentations of culture should not be the only ways we incorporate culture:

> "I think one of the bigger issues is that we think we do give the culture of these students
>
> attention by just merely brushing over it or just identifying the holidays and things like
>
> that. I say that because there is so much more to it. It is also in the way that you teach

certain cultures and things that may appeal to you and heighten your senses as certain

way versus this group of students and how I'm going to appeal to you. I think we have to

do a better job as a school of relating to the cultures so that we can integrate the culture

into our instruction in a way which makes our children want to retain the information and

retain is better."

A multicultural curriculum throughout the year is necessary. Parents can provide the information and resources to help build this multicultural curriculum.

There are times when the home culture might conflict with the school culture. These conflicts are easier to address when the teacher has an established relationship with the parent. Angie Sloan provided a story of a culture conflict she faced when teaching writing to a kindergarten student. The language the student used included a large amount of slang and broken English. His writing, although phonetically correct, was based upon the way in which he pronounced words at home. Ms. Sloan was able to have a positive conference with his mother to address the concern to which the mother quickly recognized was a result of her own interactions with him.

Summary of Findings Relative to the Research Purpose

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is not a new concept. It has been researched and studied to show that it is an effective means for addressing opportunity and achievement gaps. Culturally relevant pedagogy is not a policy requirement within district curriculum development and teacher practices. It is not pervasively included as a part of courses taught by teacher preparation programs. Creating a culturally responsive environment involves changing the culture of the school and changing teacher mindsets. This action research sought to identify effective methods for building culturally proficient practitioners.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

Figure 9
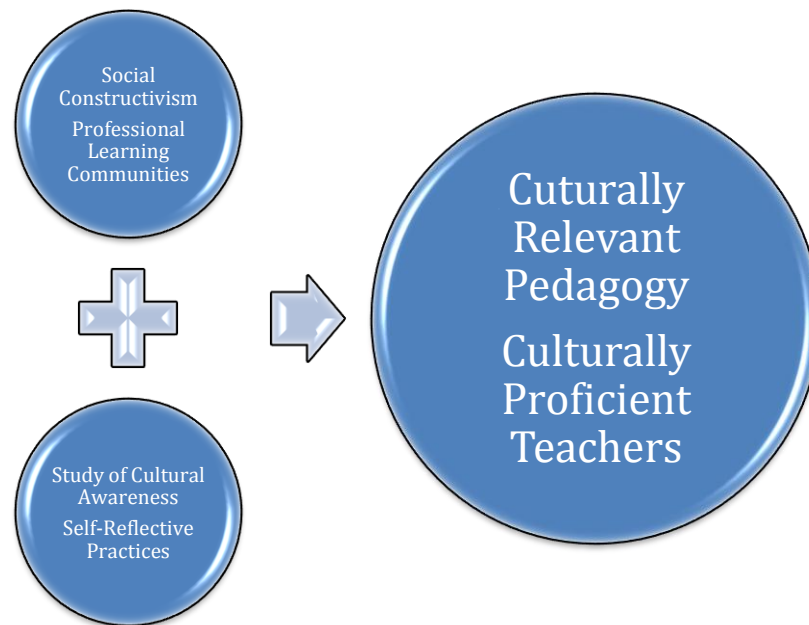
Conceptual Framework

This action research was guided by the Conceptual Framework above, which outlines the intervention process and desired outcomes. Starting with the end in mind, I developed this visual model to layout the elements of the action research and path for implementation. One aspect of building cultural competency, which may not be displayed in this visual is the ever-evolving level of proficiency and need for continuous growth in knowledge and skills. A teachers proficiency levels will be challenged with the introduction of new students and cultures each year.

A professional learning community was assembled of Eastside teachers. Recruitment of these volunteers was through a brief presentation made at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. Teachers were provided with an overview of the purpose of the research and the participation requirements and estimated time commitment. Ten members of the Eastside faculty signed up to participate. All ten members remained as members of the professional learning community

throughout the intervention period. As members of the professional learning community participants maintained a shared vision, engaged in collaborative inquiry, and sought action steps recognizing this was a process for continuous improvement. The size of the group supported productive and meaningful dialogue amongst colleagues. Personal experiences and perspectives were openly and freely shared during each session. Participants were open to exploring ways to change or improve upon their practices, remaining receptive to feedback and encouragement from colleagues. A professional learning community proved to be a successful method for engaging teachers in the development of culturally relevant pedagogy and increasing their cultural proficiency.

The selection of the right tools to teach and inform the members of the professional learning community was important to the fulfillment of the desired outcomes of the intervention. Richard Milner's book *Start Where You Are But Don't Stay There* proved to be an excellent choice for generating the discussion needed to promote reflection among the learning community members. The five constructs: color-blindness, cultural conflicts, myth of meritocracy, deficit mindset and low expectations, and context neutral mind-sets, clearly defined practices, which are counter-intuitive to cultural proficiency. Additionally it provided a historical view of why cultural proficiency is needed in education and used concrete examples of how culturally relevant practices have positively impacted the work of teachers.

A lack of cultural proficiency was identified as a potential cause for the lack of relationships among teachers and African American males at Eastside. This lack of relationship led to the disproportionate rate at which African American males were referred to the office for discipline infractions related to insubordination, and disrespect. Building cultural awareness provides teachers with the knowledge and tools to better understand and connect with their

students. The desired outcome of this action research was to develop cultural awareness and proficiency among teachers at Eastside.

> "Cultural Proficiency embodies a worldview that hold cultural differences as human made and recognizes that cultural differences are often used to justify the enforcement of superior-inferior relationships…the culturally proficient educator commits herself to the elimination of human-made barriers to student learning and achievement," (Lindsey, Martinez & Lindsey, 2007, p. 16).

Cultural proficiency is an ongoing process, which requires continuous learning by practitioners. Research participants quickly realized their learning must continue throughout their career if they are to truly say they are proficient.

The findings from this research demonstrate that the use of professional learning communities is an effective intervention for building teachers' understanding of what culturally relevant pedagogy is and is not, the impact and benefits of seeking to build one's cultural proficiency, and providing teachers with the tools, resources and support for increasing their culturally relevant practices.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this Action Research was to address a potential antecedent, which causes African American males to be referred to the office for disciplinary reasons at a higher rate than their peers. The research questions to be answered through this research were: (1) how can a professional learning community focused on cultural responsiveness influence teachers' views of their own practices and beliefs?, (2) how does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' growth as culturally proficient practitioners?, and (3) how does participation in the professional learning community influence teachers' understanding of key factors and enduring understandings of culturally responsive classroom management? Within this chapter a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the findings and implications for the field of education will be discussed.

Summary of Findings

The perpetuation of disciplinary practices, which disengaged and further expanded opportunity and achievement gaps for African American students at Eastside propelled the development of this action research study. Something needed to change if we were to live out our mission to empower lifelong learners by providing challenging academic experiences; fostering independence; and working collaboratively with parents, students and our community to engage and support students. There was and continues to be a commitment from teachers, as a whole, at Eastside to address the needs of all students. There lacked, however an awareness of how best to do this. Our school's PBIS plan guides teachers in how to proactively teach

expectations and provide positive, meaningful and specific feedback to students as they interact with teachers and peers. The PBIS plan does not outline the importance of knowing and understanding students as individuals in order to build relationships and a classroom environment, which is inclusive and representative of all cultures recognized in the classroom.

This action research study successfully engaged teachers in the exploration of culture in an environment where they were encouraged to be reflect and think critically around their own practices. This exploration led to a shift in mindsets and refinement of ways of doing for many participants. The research participants came into the study with a general awareness of culture and a belief that it is an important aspect within the field of education. As a result of this action research the depth of knowledge for teachers has been increased to better understand the place of prominence culture must have in the development of classroom environments and curriculum. Data gathered from this study offer a model for building cultural proficiency and culturally relevant pedagogy within classrooms and schools.

The professional learning community was an effective means for engaging teachers in critical conversations on cultural proficiency. Dialogue among teachers was reflective, leading teachers to critically examine their classroom practices in relation to those shared in the text as well as those shared by colleagues. This opened the door to realizing one's own biases, which impacted beliefs, classroom practices, and interactions with students. Hearing the perspective and experiences of colleagues teachers were better able to understand the impact culture has on the things people say and do.

Teachers experienced growth overall in their cultural proficiency levels as a result of their participation in the action research. As stated before, the professional learning community provided the space and opportunity for teachers to engage in conversations centered on culturally

relevant pedagogy. With the text *Start Where You Are But Don't Stay There* as a guide for the conversations teachers were able to probe the elements and key components of culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers shared their own successes and challenges as developing culturally proficient practitioners. Most importantly, teachers felt empowered as leaders among their colleagues in pushing for and promoting the further growth and development of culturally relevant pedagogy pervasively throughout Eastside.

Factors and enduring understandings necessary to support the development and growth of culturally proficient practitioners revealed themselves vibrantly through the data. Teachers, especially white teachers, had to grow to understand and believe that cultural responsiveness is not an attack on teachers. Teachers had to lay aside feels of guilt in order to embrace the knowledge they were gaining. Building cultural proficiency is not an easy or quick information gathering process. There are many layers and elements of cultural proficiency, which require an ongoing time commitment. Gaining an understanding of culture means realizing culture encompasses more than ethnicity or race. Race is only one characteristic, which may be used to define or describe a person's culture. Collaboration is a necessary and critical component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers must communicate and work collaboratively with colleagues, students and families if they are to grow as culturally proficient practitioners. Through these collaborative relationships teachers gain knowledge, insight, and support for building a multi-cultural classroom and school environment.

Conclusions

After a review and examination of learning community transcripts, pre/post self-assessment ratings, reflective journal entries, and researcher field notes three conclusions aligned to the research questions were identified.

Conclusion 1: A professional learning community, which is free of judgment and a safe place to critically reflect, is necessary in order to support the growth and development of culturally proficient practitioners.

Established within Eastside Elementary is a collaborative planning model, which holds a set of norms and practices for working together to plan and implement instruction. These professional learning communities take place throughout the week during grade level common planning time as well as during after school hours. This has had a positive impact on building effective standards-based lessons. Regular walk-throughs and observations have generated data, which supports the use of collaborative planning time. In order for these collaborative planning meeting to be effective it was necessary for district and school leadership to set expectations and provide the resources and support for teachers to meet these expectations. "True collaboration is a discipline – a fragile, high-maintenance set of practices and attitudes that need constant care and attention. We can never presume that productive collaboration is a foregone conclusion. We can assume that it will never be a natural, easy process for teachers to engage in automatically," Schmoker, 2001, p.11). Professional learning communities focused on building cultural proficiency are a powerful tool for improving teacher development.

A teacher professional learning community can positively impact a teacher's ability to build their cultural proficiency when they are willing to engage in the conversations. "Structuring time for collaborative learning opportunities alone will not improve student achievement. However, developing professional skills and organizational resources do support a positive school climate and cultural shifts that allow educators to focus conversations and communication on student progress," (Lindsey, Martinez and Lindsey, 2007, p.11). Discussion of race and culture can sometimes become uncomfortable especially in groups of diverse people. As many of

the white teachers in the learning community shared, portions of the text were hard to read and absorb because they experienced feelings of guilt, defensiveness and sometimes anger. Even with these feelings they were still committed to pushing through those tough sections in order to gain a better understanding. They provided critical accounts of their growth and understanding. If a professional learning community is the tool to be used to build cultural proficiency, all participants must be willing to critically reflect and act on the knowledge they are receiving.

A professional learning community, which is diverse, offers the greatest opportunity to hear and explore varying perspectives. With six White participants, three African American participants and one Asian participant the learning community for this action research was diverse by chance. If not for this diversity the group discussions could have been very one sided and limited in depth. A purposeful development of the professional learning community is necessary in order to build diversity.

Another contributing aspect to the success of the professional learning community as a model for build cultural proficiency was the establishment of an environment where teachers felt safe to share their thoughts and ideas, without judgment or ridicule. As Milner (2010) shared, teachers are not always willing to recognize that race plays a part in situations they may face in the classroom. Teachers are not always willing to engage in conversations on race out of fear of saying things which may be perceived as offensive or racist. The participants of this professional learning community were all familiar with one another, many of them sharing friendships and interactions outside of the work place. This made it easy to build a safe place to talk and express opinions. In establishing professional learning communities it may be necessary to build to a community of trust over time. Norms must be in place and followed to protect the integrity and progress of the group.

Conclusion 2: The development of culturally proficient teaching is an ongoing process, which is predicated on relationships.

A teacher's classroom make-up and demographics changes each year and many times throughout the year as students transfer to and from the school. With these changes comes the need to get to know students and their families. An awareness of students and a demonstrated appreciation for the individual contributions they bring to the classroom environment support the development of positive teacher-student relationships.

Teachers must be prepared to facilitate the development of these relationships. As Mr. Jackson, the exemplar from the text, revealed, having a working knowledge of those things which interest students is necessary in order to make connections and support the development of relationships. This requires the willingness to devote time to learning about and staying abreast of those things which interest students. As relationships are built they must be nourished if they are to be sustained. This is done over time.

Teachers must always remain vigilant in building meaningful learning opportunities throughout the year for students, which challenge them in a supportive environment. Hold students to high expectations but give them a viable chance at meeting those expectations by providing the tools and instruction needed. But you can't know what may be needed if you do not know the student. Milner (2010) speaks of cultural conflicts between teachers and students "When the teacher operates primarily from their own cultural ways of knowing, the learning milieu can be foreign to students."

Teachers must also know and accept that what worked one year for one group of students may not work the next year for another group of students. You cannot make the mistake of assuming students with similar characteristic will respond the same. Each year start a new

journey of exploration and development of relationships. The time and effort must be made to develop relationships with students each year. Even in a year when a teacher has the sibling of a former student, I would caution them not to assume they know this student. Their positioning in the family may be completely different. Their personalities and interest may be completely different. All students must be treated as individuals and given to opportunity to reveal themselves.

Conclusion 3: Growth cannot take place without a willingness to remain open minded, honest, and changeable.

If the participants in this action research study had not come with a willingness to learn and grow as professionals they would still be holding on the colorblind mindset. To maintain a colorblind mindset is doing a disservice to those students who are not a part of the mainstream culture. If you don't see color what is the norm, which governs how you view individuals? "Teachers with a color-blind mind-set may not recognize how their own race and racial experiences shape what they teach, how they teach it, and how they assess what they have taught," (Milner, 2010, p. 17). So, it ends up deflating, de-emphasizing, and de-valuing those students who conform to what teachers know as their normal. But when people are not comfortable talking about race it is easier to say I am color-blind. That empathy within us makes it difficult for us to brooch those subjects that might be taboo or might in any way be offensive.

Teachers must remain open-minded and willing to change their ways of thinking and doing if they are to grow as culturally proficient practitioners. Some aspects of this growth might conflict with their own beliefs and cultural norms. A willingness to work toward an understanding of the role culture plays in how we respond to and interact with students will result in a productive convergence of the many cultures found in a classroom.

"Educators need to learn about the social context so that they are able to grasp how communities are classified and what they might encounter; concurrently, educators need to be deliberate in their efforts to locate the "good" in social contexts that others have written off as hopeless." (Milner, 2010, p. 41).

Research participants shared their many experiences with building their cultural knowledge. Although experiences and knowledge gained may have been varied they all shared a common aspect of collaboration. These teachers gained much of their knowledge from interactions with colleagues, students and parents. This knowledge was most often solicited when they recognized others held first hand knowledge, which would benefit their growth. This requires being honest about one's own areas for growth. Through collaboration teachers are able to give and receive information and guidance.

"…One assumption of collaborative practice is that individual teachers will engage with colleagues in reflective dialogue to insure that new strategies are practiced and improved." (Lindsey, Martinez, Lindsey, (2007, p. 13). Reflection, formally and informally, must take place daily if we are to grow as practitioners. This reflection may take place collaboratively with colleagues as it did in the professional learning community sessions.

The reflective part of teaching is sometime overlooked and forgotten especially in those instances where assistance may not have been solicited. There is so much knowledge to be gained by simply reflecting on situations and interactions and considering them from the differing and varying perspectives. What can you infer from an interaction with a student? What did you notice from watching an interaction between another teacher and a student? What insight did you gain about a student's family during a parent-teacher conference?

Implications

The findings and conclusions realized through this research leave implications, which impact teachers, administrators, schools, and districts. This section details the implications as determined by the action research team for those seeking to implement culturally relevant pedagogy within their classroom, school or district.

For Teachers

Having active participation from the members of this research team was not difficult because they volunteered to be a part of this research. All participants demonstrated a willingness to address the cultural issues at Eastside Elementary because they believed a change in teacher practices was necessary in order to realize a change in student behavior. Through meaningful and focused professional learning communities to build cultural proficiency teachers have the potential to minimize behavioral disruptions within their classrooms. Committing the time to increase their cultural proficiency and demonstrating that proficiency in the way they build their classroom community and instruction, environments of trust and mutual respect will be established. This also requires teacher to acknowledge and overcome their personal biases, which impact the ways in which they relate to and interact with others.

The impact cultural proficiency can have on teacher effectiveness will be evident in performance evaluations as well. The state of Georgia rates teachers on ten performance standards: Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Strategies, Differentiated Instruction, Assessment Strategies, Assessment Uses, Positive Learning Environment, Academically Challenging Environment, Professionalism, and Communication. Culturally Proficient Pedagogy would provide an instructional environment, which incorporates a variety of instructional strategies to meet the learning modes and needs of students. Student

engagement is promoted when students are able to relate to the learning, which is connected to their interest, culture or past experiences. The learning environment is positively impacted by the relationships teachers are able to build. An atmosphere, which promotes respect and understanding of students' diversity, is evident. The effective and reciprocal communication between teachers and parents creates a climate of accessibility and demonstrates an appreciation for the contributions parents can make to their child's learning experiences.

For Leaders

School leaders set the climate and culture of their school. If teachers are expected to be culturally proficient so should school leaders. School leaders serve as models for their teachers on the expectations for student and parent interaction. This requires leaders to address their own biases and serve as a coach for their staff in the development of their cultural proficiency. Having an awareness of the families they work with gives leaders the information needed to make the best decisions as well as provide supports as needed.

School leaders must make cultural proficiency a priority within their schools if they hope to create environments of learning, which are inclusive of all students. This means providing opportunities for professional development for all staff members. School leaders must actively plan for and strategically develop professional learning communities within their schools. Most importantly leaders must engage as members of these professional learning communities.

For Schools

"Would it not be refreshing if schools were places where students yearned to be and eagerly anticipated what was coming next?" (Milner, 2010, p.129). This is a reality I yearn to see at Eastside Elementary. There is an unbelievable level of excitement I internalize when envisioning a school atmosphere where all students are positively engaged as valued members of

the school community. This requires an awareness of students as individuals with unique talents and skills. It takes a long-term whole school commitment to building cultural proficiency if schools are meant to be places for equitable educational opportunities. To experience an immediate impact of greater levels of engagement in the learning, decreased behavioral disruptions, and increased parental involvement school must establish a support system, which promotes teacher proficiency.

As demonstrated through this study, a professional learning community offers the model and support needed to construct opportunities for increasing teacher cultural awareness. Schools must be established as a place for learning not only for students but for teachers as well. A common understanding that professional learning communities remain safe places to share and explore new ideas and understandings as teachers seek to become culturally proficient is necessary.

Schools must consider how they incorporate culture in the day to day operation of the school. Cultural proficiency is more than recognizing cultures during specific holidays. All students need to feel a connection to the learning in order for the learning to be meaningful. This starts with basic things such as displays throughout the school. Posters and signs should reflective a multicultural theme.

For Districts

Under President Barack Obama's administration the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed, replacing No Child Left Behind. As a part of this act an emphasis was placed on providing an equitable educational opportunity for all students. School districts have an obligation to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students. This is not possible if district do not understand who they are serving. A planned and systematic approach for gaining

an understanding of the students and their needs must be established. Districts must lead the way in building culturally relevant pedagogy if an equitable education is to be provided.

As the authors of the curriculum to be used to teach state mandated standards, districts hold a responsibility to write curriculum, which is meaningful and relevant to all students. Districts must review and revise its curriculum to include multicultural content and resources. This includes addressing multiple and conflicting points of view when teaching subjects such as history, utilizing literature written by and featuring people of color, utilizing pop culture resources and trends as guides for lesson development. By including these elements in the curriculum teachers are not tasks with figuring out ways to blend multicultural elements in the provided curriculum. Nor are they held responsible for locating and procuring multicultural resources. This curriculum development from the top down frees up much needed time for the teacher.

Time or lack of time is an every present concern for teachers when considering how to effectively address all curriculum requirements throughout the year. Time constraints often lead to the elimination of activities deemed less important or non-instructional. The time designated to effectively establishing a classroom community is limited if reserved at all. Teachers need the opportunity to devote time at the beginning of the year for building relationships with students as well as allowing students to build relationships with one another. This is not possible if the curriculum timelines require standards-based instruction start the first day of school. Planned opportunities for learning about one another and establishing a classroom culture aids in the development of meaningful relationships and a respect and appreciation for one another. Taking these preemptive steps can lead to increased levels of engagement when teachers are able to build lessons, which capture students' interest. This can also support an expeditious resolution to

conflicts or behavioral concerns when teachers and students have had the opportunity to build

positive relationships. This can only be realized if adequate time is allowed and a valiant effort is

made by teachers and administrators.

Knowledge Created From the Action Research

Culturally relevant pedagogy is not a new concept or idea. It has been widely studied and

researched to illustrate its significance in the field of education. Many education scholars and

experts have published books and articles outlining the elements and characteristics of culturally

relevant pedagogy. In order to gain greater insight and understanding I studied the works of

many of these scholars. This allowed me to better understand the barriers, which were preventing

Eastside from experiencing higher levels of cultural proficiency.

This research served as a catalyst for building a platform to guide the process for building

the cultural proficiency needed to implement culturally relevant pedagogy throughout Eastside

Elementary. Teachers have the desire and drive to provide the most equitable educational

opportunity for students. They need the knowledge, skills, and support to make this happen.

<div align="center">Impact on Future Research</div>

This study focused on building cultural proficiency among teacher in order to influence

and support teachers as they embrace the philosophy of culturally relevant pedagogy and seek to

create classroom environment which reflect the tenets of this philosophy. The long-term outcome

is a decrease in behaviors, which result in a referral for disciplinary actions, specifically for

African American males. The disciplinary data for Eastside Elementary and revelation of

disproportionalities in this data guided the direction of this research. This action research study

proved professional learning communities are an effective method for gaining an understanding

of culturally relevant pedagogy and building one's cultural proficiency. The professional

learning community impacts the ways in which teachers view themselves and students and seek to build relationships of trust and mutual respect. The next steps would include an in-depth look at the impact cultural proficiency has on curriculum and instruction, relationships, and behavior.

Building one's cultural proficiency includes acknowledging and appreciating the role and benefit of multicultural curriculums. Within the learning community sessions, participants shared many ideas for creating and implementing instruction, which was inclusive of multiple cultures and perspectives. The ideas provided were excellent and well aligned to the tenets and ideals of culturally relevant pedagogy. Future research would focus on how effective and extensively is multicultural curriculum and instruction implemented within classrooms. A study of student engagement and receptiveness to the instruction would compliment this research as well. Does the instruction planned by teachers truly address what students feel is relevant and meaningful to them?

Does cultural proficiency alone give teachers the tools they need to building meaningful relationships with students and families? A study focused on the development and depth of these relationships will give insight into the impact of student-teacher relationships. This research would also seek to gauge teacher, student and parent expectations and perceptions of the relationship.

Future research focused on the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy on student behavior is appropriate to further explain and understand the impact of cultural proficiency. Once it is determined that cultural proficient is demonstrated with fidelity correlation can be made between culturally relevant practices and behavior data. If the ultimate goal is to positive impact student behavior, decreasing behavior referrals future research must include a study and comparison of behavior data.

Final Reflections

In preparation for this action research study I contemplated and considered the role racism might play in the discipline disproportionality evidenced at Eastside. As a result I researched Critical Race Theory as a possible explanation for the actions and thoughts of teachers. As difficult and disturbing as it might be to talk about I was committed to digging deep and addressing those biases and assumptions.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was formed out of a legal movement called critical legal studies (CLS), which challenged mainstream legal ideology and societal structures of the time (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Delgado & Stefancic (2012) identified tenets of CRT, the first being the normalcy of racism. People of color in this country are conditioned to the usual way that society does business, making racism commonplace. Racism is often not acknowledged or addressed. The second tenet brings to attention the use of racism as a mechanism for advancing the interests of professional and working class whites. Racism works to the benefit of a large segment of the population and therefore has little backing or incentive to be eradicated. Societies creation of racial categories is the third tenet. Race categories are created by society only taking into consideration surface traits such as skin color, hair texture, and nation of origin. Society applies pseudo-permanent characteristics to the races they have created. These characteristics are generalized across all of those who fit the surface traits, thereby creating stereotypes. Taken together these tenets bring to attention the ways in which racism has supported the growth and advancement of the majority race.

Racism involves the marginalization of a group of people based upon their racial ethnicity. It is the belief that one race is superior to another. Racism can be overt and obviously recognizable by those who participate in blatant acts of racial discrimination or hatred. Racism in

education is often covert or less obvious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Those who are the enactors of racially motivated actions may be unaware of their actions. People don't always recognize that their reactions or treatment of individuals is linked to their perceived notions about that individual due solely to their race. In the classroom teachers must constantly and quickly make judgment calls regarding various situations and interactions. If they are not aware of their own cultural biases their actions may be presumptuous in nature and discriminatory. This is especially true when addressing discipline. When viewed through a critical race theory lens the disciplinary actions black boys face is a direct result of the beliefs and prejudices held by those making the decisions.

I had to consider if Critical Race Theory was the appropriate lens upon which to explain the phenomenon at Eastside Elementary. Were the black boys intentionally or unintentionally being unfairly targeted based upon their racial identity? While critical race theory brings to attention the role racism can play in how we view and respond to individuals, upon critical examination I did not feel it could serve as a framework for address the concerns at Eastside. Race was an issue, but it was the lack of understanding and inability to connect with and relate to African American boys, which led to the inflated discipline referrals. The study of critical race theory gave me the basis from which to understand and apply culturally relevant pedagogy to the identified problem at Eastside Elementary.

The work of this action research team and research participants has given me the foundation for developing an extensive plan throughout Eastside to create a sustainable school environment ripe with experiences, interactions, and opportunities hinged on providing an equitable education for all students. The excitement and determination displayed by the teachers in the professional learning community reinforced my belief that there are teachers at Eastside

who are ready to serve as exemplars for building and maintaining positive and culturally relevant environments. While I recognize all teachers may not have the same level of enthusiasm, I do believe with guided practice, coaching and support a significant shift in mindsets and classroom cultures can be realized.

One of my passions and missions as an educator is to advocate on behalf of the disenfranchised and marginalized students, African American boys, who are often written off as the troublemakers and not worth the effort. I need these students to know they are valued and appreciated and have worth, which contributes to the overall health and excellence of our school. If the significance of their interactions at school is negative and punitive at this very early stage of their education, how do we expect them to view school in other manner other than undesirable? It is my mission, to equip and empower teachers to see and embrace these students as worthy and valuable members of our school family. We must be prepared to build students up and provide them with the reinforcement and reassurance to counteract the stereotypes mainstream America would like to place on them. At Eastside Elementary School they are valued and appreciated.

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Action Research Approach for
Addressing Discipline Disproportionality

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sheneka Williams
Lifelong Education Administration and Policy
706-542-1615
smwill@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this Action Research is to identify potential antecedents, which cause African American males to be referred to the office for disciplinary reasons at a higher rate than their peers. By identifying the root causes an appropriate and effective intervention can be applied to decrease the discipline disproportionality seen at Barnett Shoals Elementary School. Through this action research I aim to engage you in the exploration of culturally relevant pedagogy as a tool for addressing the disproportionality currently evidenced at Barnett Shoals Elementary. As a research team we will identify the barriers to cultural proficiency and prescribe intervention that will allow us to overcome these barriers.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …
- Complete a pre and post self-assessment designed to rate your level of knowledge and use of culturally responsive teaching practices. Questions are grouped into three categories: Teacher Knowledge of Various Cultures, Multicultural Instruction for Relevance and Rigor, and Building Relationships with Students and Families.
- Participate in research team meetings to be held on May 26, 2016, June 30, 2016, July 21, 2016 and September 29, 2016. All meetings will be 4:00PM-6:00PM.
- Read and discuss *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There* By Dr. Richard Milner
- Participate in a Professional Learning workshop led by Dr. Richard Milner on August 8, 2016 8:30AM-12:30PM.
- Allow for the audio recording of all research team meetings

Risks and discomforts
- We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits
- Education and enlightenment on equity and diversity issues
- Build upon your skills as a culturally responsive teacher
- Increased academic achievement of all students
- Decreased behavioral disruption

Audio/Video Recording
An audio recording of all research team meetings will be made. This audio recording will be transcribed and analyzed as a part of the research study. No identifiers will be used. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants in the transcriptions. All audio recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Privacy/Confidentiality
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Subject identities will be kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms when discussing information gathered through research team meetings.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Sheneka Williams, a professor; and Jennifer Scott, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Sheneka Williams at smwill@uga.edu or at 706-542-1615. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date
_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date
                    Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX B

PRE/POST SELF-ASSESSMENT

Cultural Competency Pre/Post Self-Assessment
Survey will be administered in an online format

Confidentiality Statement: All assessments are anonymous. No identifying data will be collected during the completion of this assessment.

Directions: Use the rating scale to indicate where your current practices fall for each statement.

Section 1: Teacher Knowledge of Various Cultures

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I recognize and value the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.					
I am knowledgeable of the various cultures represented by the students in my classroom.					
I take time to learn about the cultures represented by the students in my classroom.					
I recognize and consider my own cultural influences and how they affect the way I communicate, my expectations and how I teach.					

Section 2: Multicultural Instruction for Relevance and Rigor

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My classroom is decorated in way that represent multiple cultures and global awareness.					
The books, handouts, and other materials I use to teach reflect multicultural and global awareness.					
I plan my lessons to capitalize on my students' cultures and experiences.					
I plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped my students' learn.					
My teaching approach varies in ways					

which accommodate the cultural differences in my classroom, including student groups and students helping each other.					

Section 3: Building Relationships with Students and Families

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I communicate with the parents of my students in positive ways, not just when there is a problem.					
I make an effort to educate families about our school.					
I build strong, positive working relationships with the parents of my students.					
I know my students and build positive working relationships with them.					
Creating a sense of community in my classroom is key to student success.					

APPENDIX C

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Professional Learning Community Discussion Questions
Adopted from Harvard Education Press

- In *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There*, Milner stresses the importance of teacher-student relationship building. He offers ways for teachers to build relationships with students. Identify and discuss some strategies and practices that Mr. Hall, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Jackson, and Ms. Shaw used to build relationships with their students. Which practices do you find to be applicable and relevant to your own work? How have you been able to develop relationships with your students? Did the relationship building make a difference in student engagement and achievement? How do you know?
- At the core, the teachers in *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There* are establishing relationships with students to address the achievement gap and what Milner calls the opportunity gap. How does he define the opportunity gap?
- In chapter 1, Milner outlines five central tenets to assist teachers in closing the opportunity gap regarding diversity, especially for the classroom. These five areas are: (1) rejection of colorblindness, (2) understand and transcend cultural conflicts, (3) recognize the limits of meritocracy, (4) reject deficit mindsets and low expectations, and (5) reject context-neutral mindsets. Define and discuss each tenet. What are or might be some challenges to each of these in practice? What are or might be some benefits of each in practice? How have these five tenets shown up in your own practices as a teacher?
- In chapter 1 on pages 42–44, Milner provides a chart that summarizes the five tenets mentioned above. Consider the instructional consequences that he links to each of the five. Which instructional practices identified have you seen at your school?
- When Mr. Hall (chapter 2) began teaching, he intended to "just teach science" and not acknowledge or worry about the influence of race and diversity of his students.
- His mind-set and its accompanying practices frustrated some of his Black students, who urged him to "get to know" them. What does Mr. Hall do to "get to know" the students and how does that inform his practices with them?
- The importance of sharing powerful stories with students is a theme that was consistent throughout the book. Mr. Hall (chapter 2), for instance, shared personal stories with his students that seemed to resonate with them. He shared experiences about his wife and children and even about his past childhood experiences related to having grown up living in poverty. Do you believe sharing personal stories and experiences with students is inappropriate? Why or why not? What personal stories could you share with your students to help them connect with you and see you as a real person?
- Unpack and discuss the difference between equity and equality. Discuss Mr. Hall's practice of equity on pages 58–62. What are some pros and cons to how he adapts his practices to different students based on their needs? What do you think about his decision to provide "multiple opportunities" for student success?
- Review, reflect, and discuss the questions regarding race in the charts on pages 73 and 74 (chapter 2). What did you consider or think about that you had not in the past? What did you learn from and through the reflection about race?
- What did you learn from Mr. Hall (chapter 2) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in

your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.

- In chapter 3, Dr. Johnson discovered that her colleagues, parents, and even many students did not believe issues of race or diversity were important in her mostly White and affluent school. Do you believe that race and diversity are critical aspects to understand in mostly White schools and classrooms? Why or why not?

- Have you or any of your students, colleagues, or parents been confronted with or concerned about any of the bulleted points on page 81 (chapter 3) regarding how issues of diversity emerge in predominantly White schools? If so, what was the concern and how did you or they address or respond to it? If they did not respond to the concern, what could they do to respond or address it?   2

- Teachers and society in general tend to have a difficult time discussing issues of diversity and especially race. Why? What are some benefits of having open dialogue regarding race (and diversity)? What are some challenges to these discussions? How might these discussions influence, benefit, or hinder student learning opportunities?

- What are some "cultural conflicts" that Dr. Johnson (chapter 3) experiences? How does she work through these conflicts?

- Dr. Johnson (chapter 3) used her identity and experiences to establish connections with her White students. By showing differences and similarities, Dr. Johnson created safe and welcoming spaces where students reflected on social realities regarding opportunities and privilege. What has your experience been creating welcoming spaces to facilitate student reflection? What are some of your strategies?

- On page 95 (chapter 3), read the section "Snapshot of Dr. Johnson's Teaching of Multiple Texts." What do you learn about Dr. Johnson's teaching approach? What are the strengths and weaknesses of her teaching style? What would you adopt and adapt from Dr. Johnson's practice to your own?

- Readers learn that Dr. Johnson's (chapter 3) freshmen English classes were "taken" from her when she first began teaching at Stevenson High School because her White students complained to the principal that she was a racist. Do you agree or disagree with the principal's decision? Why or why not?

- What did you learn from Dr. Johnson (chapter 3) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.

- Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw (chapter 4) both recognize assets that their students bring into the classroom. What are some of the assets that they identify and recognize in their students? List some assets that your students bring into the classroom. How do you know that they have these strengths?

- Mr. Jackson (chapter 4) stressed that he had found that race was and was not important in his work with his students. In what ways did he believe race was significant and in what ways did he believe race was insignificant? Why? Do you believe race is significant or insignificant at your school and in your classroom? Why?   3

- How does Mr. Jackson (chapter 4) describe the power structures among students at his school? Have you found a similar power structure at your school?

- Have you found that some African American students do not achieve because they fear that they might be perceived as "acting White" or that they may be seen as uncool? Provide examples to either support or refute the "acting White" thesis. See pages 114–116.

- Do you believe Mr. Jackson (chapter 4), as an African American male, is at an advantage at Bridge Middle School because the majority of his students are African American? Why

or why not?
- Mr. Jackson (chapter 4) incorporated aspects of popular culture into his work as a teacher in order to develop curriculum, teach, and build relationships with students. On page 125, Milner outlines six aspects of popular culture that students may have interest in. Which, if any, of these do you also have interest in? How might these be used to either (1) develop the curriculum, (2) teach, and/or (3) build relationships with students?
- How does Mr. Jackson (chapter 4) learn about student interests in popular culture? How would/have you learn(ed) about student interests in popular culture?
- What did you learn from Mr. Jackson (chapter 4) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.
- Although Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw (chapter 4) are both African American teachers and taught at Bridge Middle School, they had very different perspectives about the role and influence of pop culture. Ms. Shaw for instance, rejected the role and relevance of it. Still, both teachers are successful. How would you compare and contrast the mindsets and practices of Mr. Jackson and Ms. Shaw? From your perspective, which educator seems to connect with students more? Be specific.
- Ms. Shaw (chapter 4) has a "motherly" way about her and some of the students saw her as an 'other-mother.' She had been teaching for several decades in the same school and even attended Bridge Middle School herself. In what ways does she demonstrate this parental role?   4
- Unpack the interaction that Ms. Shaw (chapter 4) has with Christine on pages 133– 134. How is Ms. Shaw able to calm the student down before she goes to In-school Suspension? How would you have handled a similar situation with a student?
- Christine (chapter 4) makes it clear that she does not "like" the teacher who has sent her to the office, see pages 133–134. Are you concerned that some of your students do not participate in learning because they do not "like" the teacher or even the school? How can teachers help students move beyond likeability in order for them to be successful in the classroom?
- Review and discuss the summary chart on pages 145–146. How relevant and applicable are these strategies, tips, and mindsets to your own classroom and school? Be specific.
- What did you learn from Ms. Shaw (chapter 4) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.
- In chapter 5, many of the six White teachers showcased have good intentions. What are some of their challenges and what are some of their strengths and successes?
- In chapter 5, one White teacher voiced her concern about the low number of African American role models available to the African American students in her school. She worried that her African American students would not be able to relate and connect with African American teachers in the same way that White teachers had connected with her. At your school, how many racially diverse teachers are there? How many diverse students are there? What about in your district? Do you feel this is the right balance?
- Milner supports Beverly Tatum's belief that a "positive sense of ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for *both* White people and people of color." In what ways can White and nonwhite teachers benefit each other in terms of more deeply understanding the teaching and learning exchange?
- In chapter 5, one teacher with a majority of African American students in her class commented: "A couple of times I gave them a choice of assessments, written or   5

- verbal, and they almost always chose to tell me verbally." What are some problems with allowing the African American students to do the alternative assessment? How might the verbal assessment hinder the students' progress given broader structural expectations for assessment? In short, what are some pros and cons to the assessment?
- What did you learn from the six teachers (chapter 5) that you would like to adopt and/or adapt in your (1) classroom and in your (2) school? Be specific.
- What do you think can be done to better prepare teachers to teach all students well in schools across the U.S.?
- On pages 184–192, Milner outlines several interrelated practices and suggestions to increase, build, recognize, and sustain relationships. Identify the classroom level suggestions on pages 185–188. Which of those strategies have you already used in your efforts to build relationships? Which might you adopt and adapt? What classroom level activities and strategies not mentioned have you employed to build relationships?
- On pages 188–192, identify the school level recommendations that resonate with you. Which of these would you like to see adopted and adapted? Why? What would be required to implement the recommendation for the entire school?
- Overall, what are the major implications of the book? What are some implicit and explicit lessons that you find transferrable to your classroom and school?