CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY

THROUGH A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

by

ADRIENNE J. CARNER-WYLIE

(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

This action research case study focused on the critical need for cultural competency training for educators in increasingly culturally diverse classrooms. The Action Research Implementation Team participated in a series of interventions through a Professional Learning Community that provided actionable knowledge for educators. The Action Research Implementation Team was empowered to identify strategies and best practices that lend to the development of a cultural competency training program. The research study consisted of a Professional Learning Community, a book study of the text, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*, guest speakers and experts in the field of cultural competency, a poverty simulation and reflective journaling. In addition, this research study transitioned into an unforeseeable context of a world pandemic, Coronavirus COVID-19, causing educators to implement and examine their learning in an authentic, real-time cultural shift.

The researcher collected and analyzed various data sets, including student assessment data, researcher observation notes, teacher reflections, meeting discussions, book study

reflections obtained through journaling, which included free response, and responses to protocol prompts. As an alternative to written journal responses and reflections, the Design Team made video submissions through FlipGrid and electronic submission through eClass available to participants. The review of the data assisted the Action Research Design Team in determining if interventions and activities in each cycle increased educator cultural competency. The findings for this study revealed that participants in the action research perceived, 1) Cultural competency training for educators increased student engagement, 2) Participating in cultural competency training changed leader actions as well as teaching practices and interaction with students, 3) Cultural competency training caused change instructional practices. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

2. How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

3. How can a professional learning community with a focus on cultural competency change instructional practices?

INDEX WORDS: Cultural Competency, Student Engagement, Instructional Practices,

Professional Learning Community, Professional Development,

Coronavirus, Pandemic

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ADRIENNE J. CARNER-WYLIE

B.A., National Louis University, 2005

M.A., Argosy University, 2008

Ed.S., University of West Georgia, 2014

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

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ADRIENNE J. CARNER-WYLIE

Major Professor:	Jami Royal Berry	
Committee:	Karen Bryant	
	John Dayton	

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To

James P. Wylie, Jr.

My dedicated and supportive husband

Thank you for your love, friendship, and patience!

Without your support, this achievement would not have been possible.

Your encouragement instilled in me a willingness to persevere

and motivated me to do my best work.

And

Timothy James Wylie and David Jordan Wylie

My handsome, intelligent, and hilariously funny sons

You served as a source of motivation to achieve this milestone. You guys are so awesome and

talented. Pursue your dreams; go out into the world and BE GREAT!

And

Margaret Carner and Clarence Carner Jr.

My mother and father

Your love, encouragement, and wisdom throughout this process have been uplifting.

And

To the women of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Thank you for your encouragement

and support. Women of courage, intelligence, talent, beauty, and benevolence surround me – CL,

TW, NT, TH, BS, MM, and RK. "Service to All Mankind."

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The relationships that I had the pleasure of developing with my University of Georgia cohort will undoubtedly leave an impression on my heart. KV and DS, you are the best EVER! I am so grateful for our study team and support sessions.

Many thanks and undying gratitude to the educators that participated in the Action Research Implementation Teams. The support that you showed and continue to show through your work with our students is amazing. Sharing and investing your thoughts, time, ideas, and commitment to OUR students demonstrate a shared passion for student success. This action research study not only provided us with a way to further and more effectively educate our students but also opened a way to build stronger working relationships. You are all exceptional educators.

I would also like to acknowledge the core of the team that reviewed, analyzed, suggested, created, committed, and was a consistent source of encouragement. At times I was overwhelmed by your greatness, CD, SH, CL, JP, MB, MM, MR, MM, SG, MN, HG, and KW. Sincere thanks

to all of you who were dedicated to the development and success of this study. Your wisdom and insight throughout this process strengthened the interventions that have had a tremendous impact on student learning. This research is a game-changer.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Dr. Tommy T. Welch for his continued support, encouragement, and leadership. Your legacy lives on through those you have mentored, to ensure all students have equitable opportunities to learn and be successful. You have touched the lives of many people, adults, and students alike.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For over 19 years, the researcher's experience as an educator has been at one school. From substitute teacher, clerical, activities coordinator, teacher, and assistant principal, one thing has remained consistent, the need for educator training in cultural competency. Moreover, with growing diversity and an achievement gap that widens with each passing year, the urgency has become more significant. Cultural competency in various manifestations has been a consistent part of conversations in professional learning communities throughout the school. However, authentically addressing the issue with fidelity has consistently fallen short.

The role of assistant principal at Paisley High School presents many opportunities to influence change. Among the list of responsibilities, four job responsibilities position the researcher to lead change around cultural competency: Chairperson for the Instructional Leadership Team, the Cohort Leadership Team, co-administrator for the New Teachers program, and the administrator for Curriculum and Instruction. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) is a cross-functional action team that consists of approximately forty teachers, eight counselors, and five assistant principals that consistently participated. The primary focus is the continuous quality improvement of instruction and assessment at the local school level. The team has three subcommittees, Assessment Planning & Interventions, Literacy & Instructional Practices, and Cohort Graduation Support and Practices. ILT meets bi-monthly to discuss progress on an agreed upon action plan, developed by the team at the end of the previous school year. ILT provides an opportunity to work with a wide range of administrators and teacher leaders for focused and

intentional professional development. As the co-administrator for the new teachers' professional learning community, there is an opportunity to offer professional development for teachers new to the school bringing light to the importance of cultural competency.

Additionally, a professional learning community of this nature sets the tone and approach of educating students of diverse backgrounds. The role of assistant principal for Curriculum and Instruction positions one to have an impact on the curriculum provided to all teachers and students in the local school building. The role of the Curriculum AP positions one to have an impact on curriculum needs and provides an understanding of the students academically and socially, having a role in determining professional development and curriculum selections that have a direct impact on instruction and student outcomes.

The Problem

Classrooms in the United States are increasingly culturally diverse. The U.S. Census Bureau suggested a 77% increase in the Hispanic population by 2020 (Figure 1). Accompanying the rise in diversity was an increasing achievement gap between students of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Conversely, the cultural competence of classroom teachers had not grown as rapidly as the needs of culturally diverse students. Student achievement in the United States has suffered because educators, those in the classroom and out, often lacked the training to educate students of diverse backgrounds in classrooms.

These data show that the student population in the United States was increasingly diverse. The increase was exceptionally high for Hispanic students. The research suggested that the efforts to adjust education and student instruction was at best minimal to accommodate students and their families; application had yet to meet theory. As the number of non-White students

continually increased, educators considered their approach and teaching strategies in the

education of these students.

U.S. Population Increases - Projected for 2020

A bar chart titled "U.S. Population Increases - Projected for 2020" with a y-axis ranging from 0% to 90% in 10% increments. The bars show: Hispanics 77%, African Americans 32%, Asians 69%, Native Americans 26%, Whites 1%.
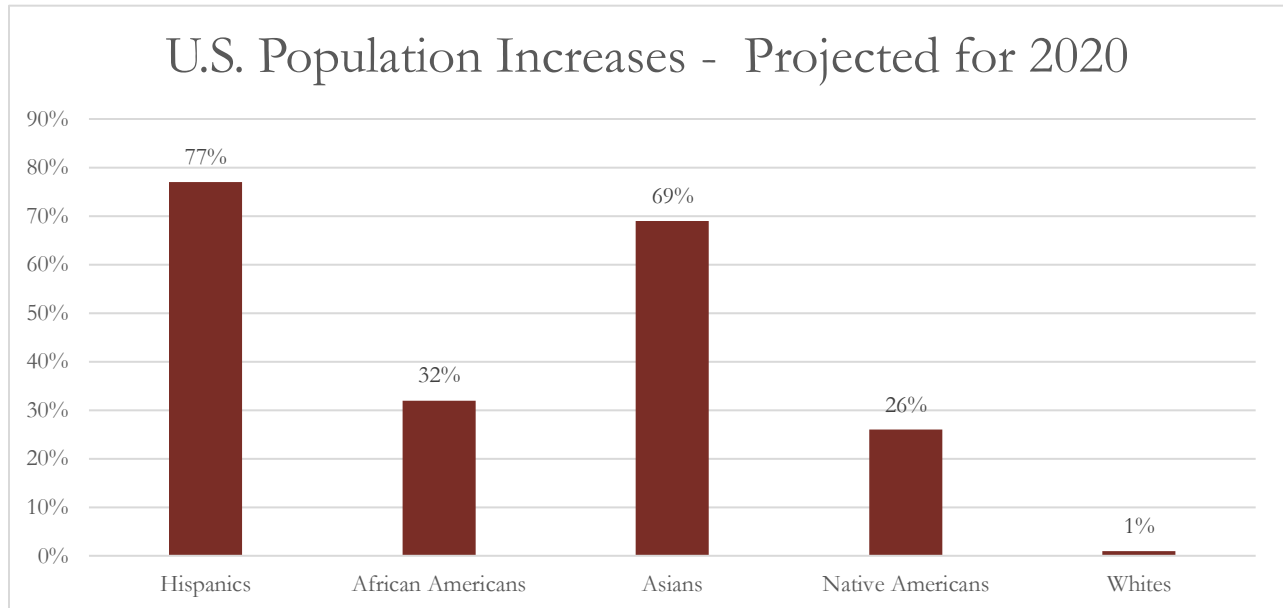
Figure 1-US Population Increases – Projected 2020

This action research study took place at Paisley High School, located in Dempsey County

Public Schools[1] (DCPS). DCPS, located in the southeast region of the United States, is an urban

district. DCPS is one of the nation's largest school districts and one of the largest in the state,

with an approximate enrollment of 180,000 students for the school year 2017-2018 (GCPS,

2017). Dempsey County Public Schools operates over 125 schools, with approximately 75

elementary schools, 25 middle schools, and 20 high schools. Between 1995 and 2015, DCPS had

experienced a significant shift in the ethnicity of its student population. The majority of the

increase was due to the growth in the number of non-White students.

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[1] All school names, districts, and Action Research participant names are pseudonyms.

DCPS Student Demographics Comparison Data 1995 vs 2015
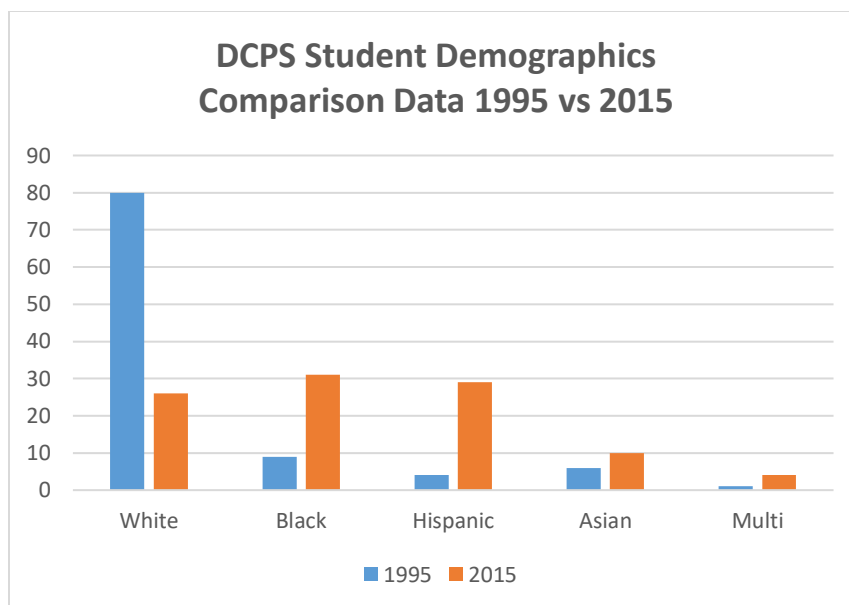
Figure 2– DCPS Student Demographics – 1995 v. 2015

As illustrated in Figure 2, in 1995, DCPS's White population of students was 80%, Black 9%, Hispanic 4%, Asian 6%, and Multi-Race 1%. In comparison, in 2015, the White student population was 26% of the population, Black students were 31%, Hispanic students were 29%, Asian students were 10%, and Multi-Race students were 4% (SchoolDigger, 2017).

Paisley High School's breakdown by ethnicity was 68% Hispanic, 19.69% Black, 8.5% Asian, 2.28% White, 1.18% Multi-Race, and .19% American Indian. At the time of the research study, PHS was a low performing school, with 85% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch. When compared, the achievement data for the state, DCPS, and Paisley High School, there was a significant gap in performance. For example, 2015-2017 local, district, and state 9th Grade Literature and Composition EOC scores showed that PHS performed lower than the state and considerably lower than the school's district (Figure 3). A review of these data showed that there was a definite trend in the number of non-White students, and specifically, an increase of Hispanic students when comparing the district and local school data.

At PHS, the school data indicated a lack of adequate and or appropriate instruction for diverse cultures. Culture plays a vital role in the education of students. There was a culture-based achievement gap and a culture gap. Cultural competency training was necessary to address the
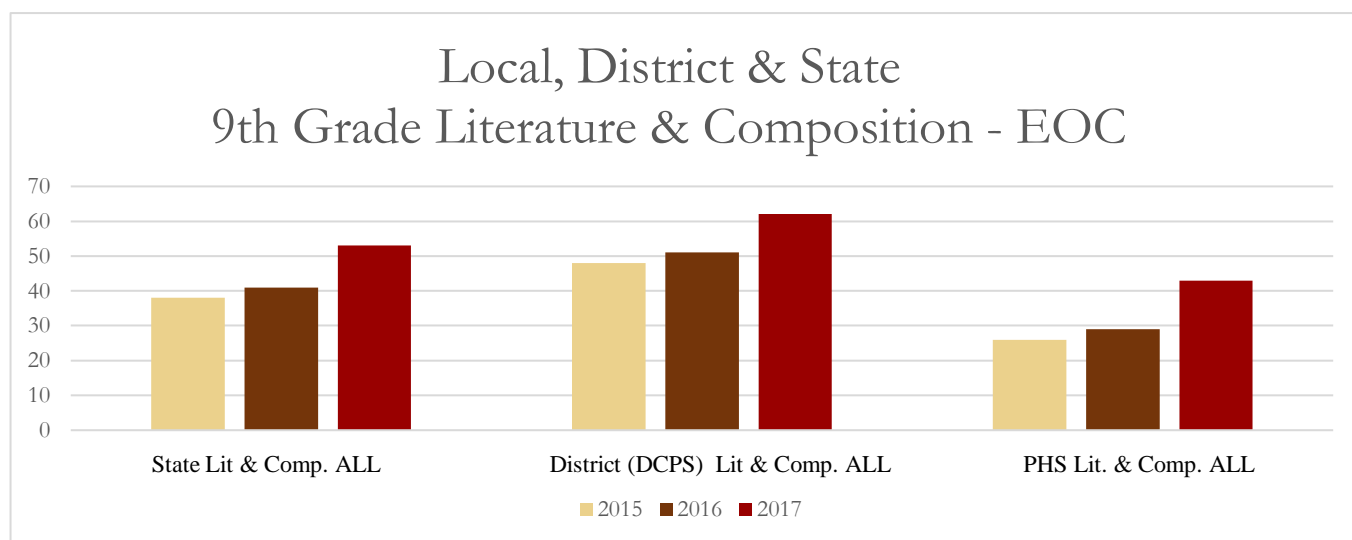
Figure 3-Local, District & State 9th Grade Literature & Composition – EOC scores.

cultural gap. Contrary to the misconception, culture has not, in all instances, indicated race but also socioeconomic status. A pattern emerged when comparing socio-economic data across secondary schools in the local school district (Figure 4). The data show that the larger the percentage of students from economically disadvantaged households, the lower the percentage of students scoring proficient or distinguished on district assessments. These data suggested a correlation between student success and socioeconomic status. Dell'Angelo (2016) indicated that areas or schools impacted the most by poverty are often places dominated by Black and Hispanic students (pg.246). These challenges faced by these students was compounded by the oppression experienced in a White dominated culture (Dell'Angelo, 2016).
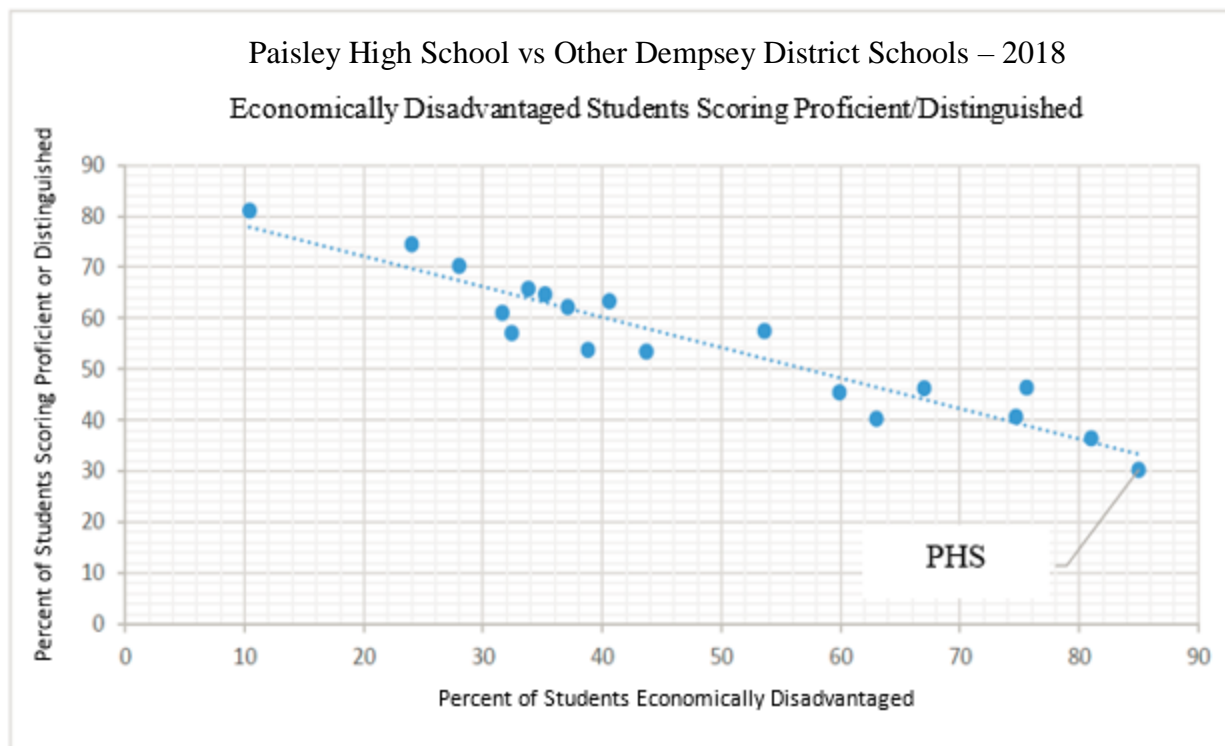
Figure 4- Paisley HS vs. DCPS Economically Disadvantaged Students scoring Proficient/Distinguished – EOC.

Although teachers do not influence the poverty level of their students, they recognized where they do have power (p.259). "These places included exploring ways that a teacher could change his or her practices to make a positive change for students and to spend time strategizing about the areas in which teachers have control" (Dell'Angelo, 2016).

The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score for the local school was reviewed and studied. Specific note was taken into consideration in regards to subgroup data (Table 1). The data showed significant achievement gaps between Socioeconomic Status (SES), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and English Language Learner (ELL) subgroups. These data further exemplified the importance of investigation of the impact of cultural competency training on instructional practices. The data showed that students did well in meeting performance targets. However, a deeper dive into the data was necessary to understand better how the targets

were determined and to study the significant variances in the targets from subgroup to subgroup. Students in some academic areas met targets, while actual performance targets varied considerably. Table 1 showed improvement targets for English Language Arts for the 2018-2019 school year; the Hispanic subgroup exceeded the intended improvement target of 56.19% with 57.70%.

Table 1 - College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) by Student Type

	Score	Target
ALL STUDENTS	59.00	59.28
AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKAN NATIVE	Too Few Students	Too Few Students
ASIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER	78.00	77.07
BLACK	54.76	58.65
HISPANIC	57.70	56.19
MULTI-RACIAL	59.10	86.53
WHITE	70.02	66.05
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	58.23	58.15
ENGLISH LEARNERS	31.44	22.70
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY	15.09	24.61

However, the intended improvement target for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 77.07%, and for Black students was 58.65%, which illustrated the achievement gap in another form. In consideration of the context of this study, data for Economically Disadvantaged is 58.15%, English Language Learners is 22.70%, and Students with Disabilities is 24.61%.

Neighborhood and Community Factors. A PHS student's daily experiences go far beyond the local school walls. A broader scope included the student's home and community experiences. PHS students faced many negative factors once they left campus. These factors were not overlooked, to consider the "whole" child and the totality of the student's environment. The family dynamic, neighborhoods, and community played an essential role in the development of the students. "[Urban area] is one of the biggest hubs of sex trafficking nationwide (Griffin, 2018)." At the time of the research study, [this area] had "the highest number of trafficked Hispanic females in the nation (Studies, 2013)." There was a probability that any student attending any school in the district, from elementary to high school, could fall victim to this crime. However, the primary focus was on poor and minority children, for someone aiming to lure a student into this criminal lifestyle. "Every month, 7,200 men purchase sex from a minor, accounting for more than 8,000 sex acts. Another study by Georgia Cares claims that more than 90 percent of domestic minor sex trafficking victims in Georgia were enrolled in school at the time of their exploitation" (Griffin, 2018). In January 2019, only 4.9 miles from PHS, a nine-minute drive, there were several sex trafficking arrests. This type of criminal activity was an added pressure that students possibly experienced off the school campus.

The achievement outcomes, demographic trends, and projected shifts in student population described foreshadow the significant challenges that lie ahead for America's public schools.

Beyond the moral imperative of fairness and equity, there are enormous
economic benefits to closing achievement gaps and significant economic costs
if we fail. Yet despite ample forewarning, we face this educational future
without the political and educational strategies in place and at the scale that

needed to produce the highly skilled workforce called for in the years ahead—

unless we make a different choice (Priority, 2015, p.7).

According to Walberg and Paik (2007), to help children succeed in school, school psychologists, educators, and other allied professionals must become better informed and improve the academic and life prospects of these children. To combat this gap, a program providing access to cultural competency training [to] equipped educators with the tools needed to serve students in the school and classroom environments. Also, Sanchez and Kasun (2012) offered, educators must move beyond the frameworks of understanding immigrant children through one-way or segmented assimilation, to understanding the transitive transnational nature of their experiences to educate these students best and enrich their more monocultural peers who do not have the same skills – skills needed in an increasingly globalized world. A collaborative effort of all educators and stakeholders must take place to address the growing problem.

School districts, as well as the local school level, teachers, counselors, and administrators, [are] faced significant challenges in providing students with the resources and effective classroom instruction necessary to be successful in today's global society. "As schools are confronted with increased numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse learners, a "just good teaching" approach, is simply not good enough (de Jong & Harper, 2005)." "Just good teaching" does not make room for the cultural differences of students. General teaching will not adequately reach ELL students through language or cultural diversity. "Great teaching must be accompanied by cultural competency" (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

 This action research study identified practices and interventions that increased cultural competency for educators, improved instructional practices, student engagement, and school and classroom environments. In turn, improved student outcomes for culturally diverse student groups. This research assisted in creating a program of practice through the implementation of a professional learning community (PLC). Interventions facilitated were designed to increase cultural competency for educators.

Research Questions

 1. How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

 2. How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

 3. How can a professional learning community focusing on cultural competency change instructional practices?

Definition of Terms

The definition of the terms listed were derived from Merriam-Webster (2019).

Culture - the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social groups. The characteristic features of everyday existence such as diversions or a way of life shared by people in a place or time, popular culture,

Culture – for the purpose of this research, the specific cultural differences considered in this study are race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Cultural Competence - cultural competence is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses being aware of one's worldview, developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences. Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, to respect and be responsive to the needs of diverse groups, and gain knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews.

Engagement (student) – a) the act of engaging**:** the state of being engaged b) emotional involvement or commitment.

Student Outcomes - the term student outcomes typically refers to either (1) the desired learning objectives or standards that schools and teachers want students to achieve, or (2) the educational, societal, and life effects that result from students being educated.

Professional Learning Community – a professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

Professional Development - learning to earn or maintain professional credentials such as academic degrees to formal coursework, attending conferences, and informal learning opportunities situated in practice, described as intensive and collaborative.

Cultural awareness - cultural awareness is the ability to understand the differences between themselves and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values.

Culturally responsive - cultural responsiveness is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of one's own culture as well as those from other cultures.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized the Communities of Practice Theory as well as the Social Learning Theory as the conceptual framework (Figure 5). The Communities of Practice Theory, defined, in part, as a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period sharing ideas and strategies, to determine solutions, and build innovations (Theories, 2018). The Action Research Design and Implementation Teams included classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators with a common interest in educating students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The team shared ideas and strategies and participated in research-based training to create a program for teacher training at the local school level.
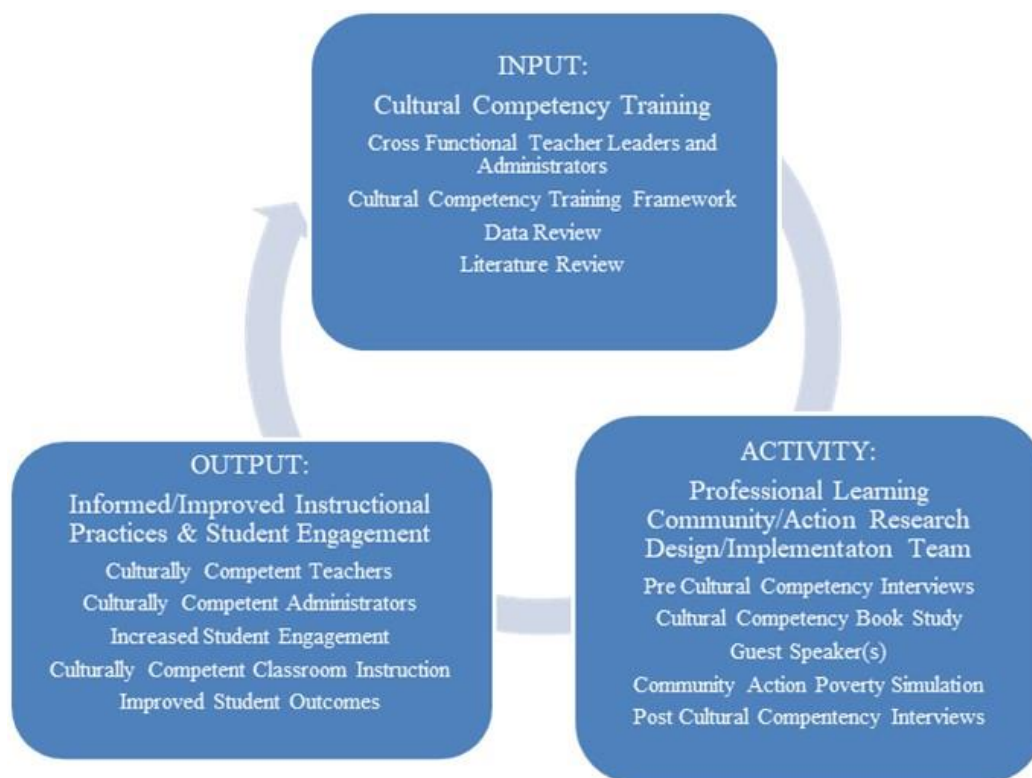
Figure 5 - Conceptual Framework-Communities of Practice and Social Learning Theory.

Woodly (2018) reported on the importance of educators' preparedness for the changing populations of today's students, "Often, there are instances in multicultural education that teachers are flat-out not ready [for]. Situations that arise teaching low-income or students of color become challenges not because something is wrong, but because [educators are not] prepared for them" (p.1). As the Hispanic population of the United States continued to grow, contributing to more than half of the nation's population growth in the last decade, the number of Hispanic students at all levels of education has doubled in 20 years. From 1996 to 2016, Hispanic students enrolled in schools from nursery school to college went from 8.8 million to 17.9 million. Hispanics make up 22.7 % of all students in the United States" (Bureau, 2017). As educators in rapidly transitioning schools, we needed to reexamine everything we were doing. Continuing with business, as usual [meant] failure or mediocrity for too many students, as the data related to racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic achievement gaps demonstrated" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005, pg.1). Rapidly changing demographics demanded that educators engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systemic process of professional development, to prepare educators in the school to function effectively in a highly diverse environment. Taliaferro (2011) has revealed that much instructional effort [is put] into closing the educational gap between students. Whether the effort works or not depends on the design of the learning and the instructional practices implemented.

Overview of the Methodology

The researcher developed the methodology selected for the study using a hybrid of the conceptual framework and the theoretical framework. "Fundamentally, action research is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm whose purpose is to gain greater clarity and understanding of a question, problem, or issue" (Stringer, 2014). The Action Research Design

and Implementation Teams formed a professional learning community that facilitated and engaged in interventions and activities, resulting in various qualitative data sets. The research study designed and identified interventions that provided access to practical, cultural competency training for educators. Although all participants were educators, the data collected were from a diverse group of participants in terms of job position, race, and years in education. The data were collected from reflective journaling, free or protocol prompted responses and researcher reflections. This collection of data resulted in triangulation, which contributed to increased credibility and the integrity of the study.

Intervention

The Action Research Design Team performed four research cycles and a Focus Group Interview. All action research activities and interventions took place at the local school. The researcher selected participants based on position as faculty and staff members, current role and interest in the support and growth of the local school at the time of the study. The Action Research Implementation Team engaged in cycles of activities/interventions through a continuous quality improvement model. Each cycle followed the process of Constructing, Planning Action, Taking Action, and Evaluating Action. Results of the Evaluating Action step of each cycle informed the planning of the cycle to follow.

Significance

This study contributed to the field of educational leadership by offering educators instructional practices, student engagement strategies, and classroom environment strategies through a cultural competency lens. Change Theory and Communities of Practice Theory guided the formation of a professional learning community. Educators provided insight and various

perspectives on how cultural competence influenced instructional practices and student engagement.

This research study informed educational practices by addressing the gap in the literature with a specific reference to the lack of formal training for educators in cultural competency. This research did not suggest that cultural competency training did not exist for educators; there was minimal research for pre-service educator training on this subject. However, this issue was not germane to the context of this research study. This issue spanned across borders in the United States, making transferability a significant factor. "It is possible for people not part of the study to make judgments about whether or not the situation is sufficiently similar to their own for the outcomes to be applied" (Stringer, 2014). The level of trust that people have in the outcomes of a research study depends significantly on whether or not they feel that the outcomes can be applied to their context, an indicator of transferability.

Organization of the Dissertation

The organization of this dissertation:

Chapter 1, the Introduction, laid the foundation for the study, providing the problem and purpose to justify the need for the research and provided the data to support the assertion. The conceptual framework and methodology provided a framework for the implementation of the interventions. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the related literature that supports the research, selected interventions, and methodology. Chapter 3 described the research design, including the Action Research Design and Implementation Teams. The methodology, an introduction to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks selected for the study, guided the action research. This chapter provided a detailed description of the action research design, interventions, timeline, data

collection, and the context of the study. Chapter 4 discussed the case and the problem in context. Chapter 4 also provided a thick, rich descriptive "story" of the research through the action research cycles, which provided qualitative details of the actions taken. Chapter 5 provided data collection details regarding the research questions and the results of the action research cycles. Chapter 6 offered a summary of the findings as related to the literature reviewed, and the research questions, and lastly, implications of the current study and recommendations for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter provides a review and examination of the literature to frame the problem in reference to cultural competency in the context of student engagement, classroom environment, instructional practices, and professional learning communities. The types of literature reviewed for this study included the following: articles, books, peer-reviewed journals. The databases used were university libraries, Google Scholar, ERIC, and EBSCO.

Many immigrants come to America for a better life, to live out their dreams of being successful. Many sacrifices are made, including working a number of low paying jobs (Lopez 2001). "Despite a strong work ethic, an intense desire to succeed, an understanding of the value and utility of education, and trust and belief in the quality of the American school system, the academic achievement of Latinos lag behind others in the United States (Lopez, 2001). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics, only 14% of Latino fourth-graders are reading at proficient levels, and 57% are below even basic levels, often this means that students are unable to read in either English or Spanish (2010). Since 1999, the earliest year for which data on all major races and ethnicities are available, the dropout rate among Hispanics has fallen by 24 percentage points, compared with 9 points among Blacks, 3 points among Whites, and 2 points among Asians. (Hispanics, however, still have the highest dropout rate of these four groups.)" (Gramlich, 2017). Sibley and Kalina (2017) noted, "When compared to their nonimmigrant peers, they are more likely to live in urban areas where they

face additional challenges such as under-resourced schools, underprepared teachers, violence, segregation, poverty, parental unemployment, and crowded housing" (pg. 10).

"Inequality is an unfortunate fact of life in the United States. The separation between rich and poor is among the worst of the developed countries. A social class of excluded persons, an underclass, now exists in a perpetuating system of poverty" (Alexander, Salmon, & Alexander, 2015). Unfortunately, this system, in many cases, is by design, perpetuating the poor and underserved. The issue concerns the system of government that acts in concert with private markets to drive some persons to the bottom of the social and economic ladders and then fails to provide corrective or remedial mechanisms to extricate them. It is the reality that led Yunus, the Nobel Prize winner in 2006, to posit that it is the system that creates poverty, not those who themselves are in poverty (Alexander, Salmon, & Alexander, 2015).

Culture and Cultural Competence

What is the true meaning of culture and cultural competence? A crucial element in creating new programs and processes is to understand what one is changing and why. According to sociologists, culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language and communication, and practices that people share in common, and used to define them as a collective (Cole, 2018). In addition, according to Cole (2018), sociologists have asserted that culture can be a force of oppression and domination. However, it can also be a force for creativity, resistance, and liberation. This definition of culture further demonstrates the underlying and generally unintentional negative impact of culture on social interactions. In turn, this perspective reinforced the need for professional development in the aspects of culture and its influence on social dynamics. Cultural competency encompasses all aspects of culture, including sociopolitical, economic, and historical experiences of different racial, ethnic, and gender

subgroups (Nichols, 2013). Cultural competence allows effective interaction with students. Cultural competence, according to Denboba (1993), is defined as a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program, or among individuals and which enables them to work effectively cross culturally.

Further, it refers to the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services, as well as the staff who are providing such services. Striving to achieve cultural competence is a dynamic, ongoing, developmental process that requires a long-term commitment. The specific cultural differences considered in this study are race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

"In its broadest sense, cultural competence is the capacity to interact effectively with other cultures. Culture can be defined as "the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world" (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 197)." Sperry (2012) offers that another way of defining cultural competence is a way of being embodied in a set of integrated values, beliefs, norms, and customs. Cultural competence has been studied and researched in a variety of contexts relating to personal and professional growth. For instance, Sperry (2016) offers, providing effective ministry (in context, teaching) requires sufficient cultural competence and sensitivity concerning the differing values, beliefs, norms, and customs of ministry recipients. In another context, *Cultural Competence, A learning guide by Culture Vision* (2019), offers that cultural competence requires "an open attitude, self-awareness, awareness of others, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills" (p.3). According to Culture Vision's comprehensive guide, an individual must start with an Open attitude and Self-awareness. Although in a differing context, suggesting that

the onset of cultural competency requires a form of self-reflection (Figure 6). Furthermore,

Cross, Bazron, Dennis, Isaacs (1989), in a project addressing effective mental health services for

minority children, cultural competency is a foundational element. *In Towards A Culturally*

Competent System of Care – A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who Are

Severely Emotionally Disturbed, the authors describe becoming culturally competent, as a
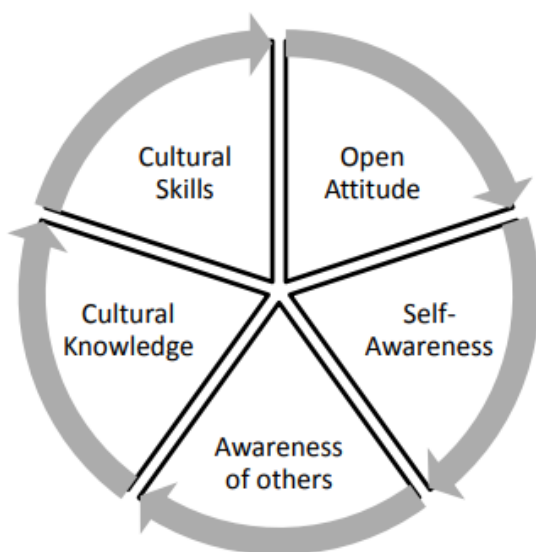
Figure 6 – The Building Blocks of Cultural Competence – Culture Vision 2019

developmental process. The project purports that there is always room for growth, and the first

step is for the individual or organization to assess its level of cultural competence. The steps that

follow self-reflection form a continuum. The authors detailed each element of the continuum as

follows:

> To better understand where one is in the process of becoming more
>
> culturally competent, it is useful to think of the possible ways of responding
>
> to cultural differences. Imagine a continuum that ranges from cultural
>
> destructiveness to cultural proficiency. There are a variety of possibilities
>
> between these two extremes. The six points along the continuum and the

characteristics that might be exhibited in each position are as follows: Cultural Destructiveness, Cultural Incapacity, Cultural Blindness, Cultural Pre-Competence, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Proficiency. (pp. 1-2)

While the Cross, Bazron, Dennis, Issacs (1989) research views cultural competency through a mental health lens and previously discussed models through patient care and ministry, one finds that the continuum's, processes and definitions for cultural competency are tightly defined. Further research on cultural competency suggested the use of cultural competency in multiple arenas. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (2019), "Definitions of cultural competence have evolved from diverse perspectives, interests, and needs and are incorporated in state legislation, Federal statutes and programs, private sector organizations and academic settings" (pg.1). The foundational definition of cultural competency is attributed to the seminal work of Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989). "Definitions of cultural competence have evolved from diverse perspectives, interests, and needs and are incorporated in state legislation, Federal statutes and programs, private sector organizations, and academic settings" (Development A. P., 2019, p. 1). Although the definition was modified, the core meaning and principles of the framework have remained constant and viewed universally applicable across various systems" (Development, 2019, pg. 1). As a result of the consistency, the seminal work Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989) is recognized and cited in various research studies and contexts.

In education, public school educators understand that children of growing subgroups in America, specifically ethnic minorities, are failing at alarming rates due to low performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Low performance leads to an increase in dropout rates and, additionally, a decrease in graduation rates. According to Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch

(2006), approximately 40% of students in our urban centers fail multiple classes in the 9th grade (p.8). "In many states, the difference between White and minority graduation rates is as much as 50 percentage points," Ream and Rumberger (2008, p.109).

Understanding, and an agreed-upon, standard definition, of cultural competence in context, set the environment for the training of cultural competence. Campinha-Bacote (2003) suggests that cultural competence is a process of becoming rather than being and that cultural competence should be possible to develop. Greater knowledge of culture is acquired over time. "The model proposed by Cross and others, which has helped shape cultural competence among social workers, identifies a continuum of cultural competence and describes a range of possibilities by which individuals demonstrate knowledge and acceptance of cultural differences" (Overall, 2009). Figure 7 provides a graphic representation of the continuum. According to Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (2009), the continuum starts at the fundamental level of "Cultural Incapacity" and moves through the continuum to "Cultural Competence." Each stage suggests the level of activity or engagement of the individual. For instance, while one individual might be at the beginning stages of cultural competency or "cultural pre-competence," a stage that involves only cultural reflection of themselves and others, someone further along the continuum may be engaged in personal experiences, professional development, education, reading, and travel.

The participants in the action research study moved along the continuum at different rates. They were actively engaged in the activities, which contributed to their growth in cultural competency. Using the continuum, the researcher monitored participant progress. For this
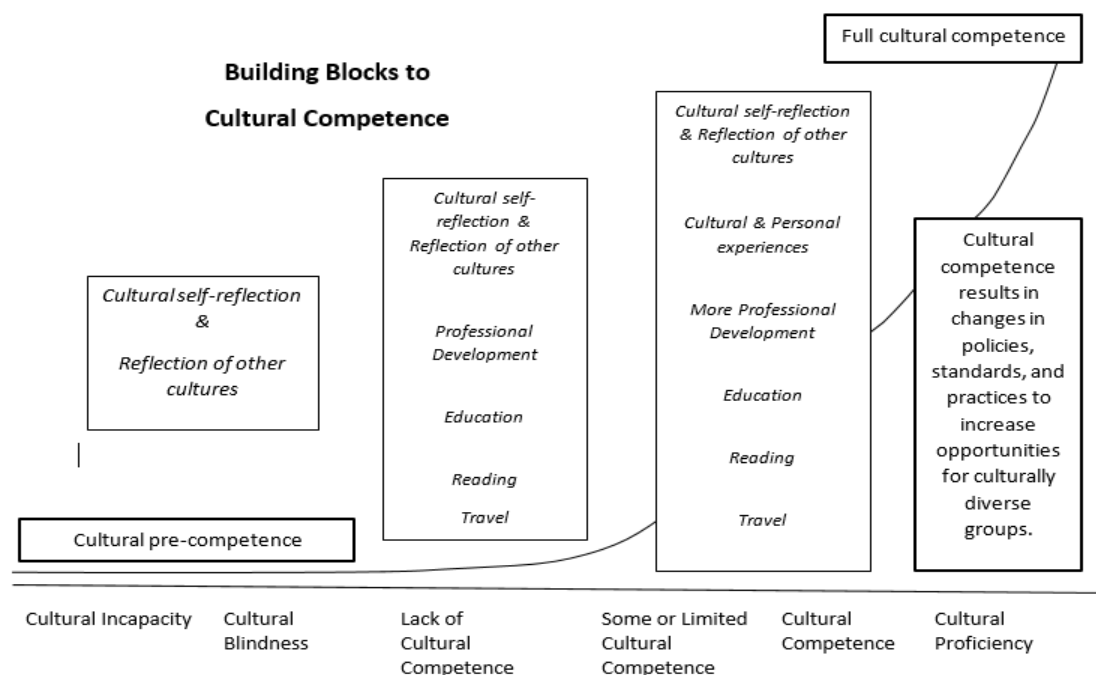
Figure 7 - Building Blocks to Cultural Competence Continuum as proposed by Terry Cross, Barbara J. Bazron, Karl W. Dennis and Mareasa R. Isaacs (1989).

research, the definition of Cultural Competency is the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, to respect and be responsive to the needs of diverse population groups. The specific cultural differences considered in this study are race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Cultural Competence and Student Outcomes

"Minority children are the fastest growing population in the United States, but overall they still have lower assessment scores than White students" (NEA, 2018). Walberg stated that multiple economic, family and social risk factors pose challenges to these students. Not surprisingly, evidence continues to show that these children face an ever-widening achievement gap throughout their school years. "Consequently, school psychologists, educators, and other

allied professionals must become better informed to improve the academic and life prospects of these children; to help these children succeed in school, narrowing the achievement gap" (Walberg & Paik, 2007). A collaborative effort of all involved educators took place to address this growing problem.

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones) is a comprehensive summative assessment program spanning grades three through high school (GaDOE, GaDOE, 2015). Georgia Milestones measure how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (GaDOE, GaDOE, 2015). The results for Dempsey County Public School's Georgia Milestones in the Spring of 2017 for 9th Grade Literature and Composition showed that 81% of White students scored Proficient or Distinguished, Black students 53%, Hispanic students 49%, Asian/Pacific Islander 77%. For Biology, White students scoring Proficient or Distinguished was 75%, Black students 45%, Hispanic students 39%, Asian/Pacific Islander 78%. The reviewed school data, included EOC (end of course) assessments showed there was a disparity in the achievement levels, especially when comparing White, Hispanic, and Black students. "Racial identity is tied to cultural identity, and each group self-defines through varying processes" (Fraise & Brooks, 2016). Cook (2015) offered, as the percentage of White students in our education system shrinks, and the percentage of students of color grows, the United States will be left with an education system that does not serve the majority of its children properly; the gaps in education will prove especially problematic.

Equity and Equality

As the cycle of miseducation continues, poverty is perpetuated. Miseducation and lack of appropriate education contribute to the increase of non-productive citizens. Holzer,

Schanzenback, Duncan, and Ludwig (2007) suggest that the impact of poverty starts as early as preschool.

> Compared to kindergarteners from families in the bottom fifth of the
>
> socioeconomic distribution, children from the most advantaged fifth of all
>
> families, are four times more likely to have a computer in the home, have three
>
> times as many books, are read to more often, watch far less television, and are
>
> more likely to visit museums or libraries (p. 2).

The data show that students from higher income families or attending higher income schools have been more successful. Further illustrated in Figure 4 of this study, a relationship exists between students living in poverty and student achievement.

According to Castagno and Brayboy (2008), the ability of educators to engage in CRS (Culturally Responsive Schooling) requires that they have a certain degree of cultural competence themselves. Becoming a culturally competent educator is a constant learning process that requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of the educator, depending on the particular students and contexts with which they work. To provide a 21st-century education for culturally diverse students, teachers needed the professional development necessary to meet the challenge of the ever-changing and diverse faces of the students in their classroom. Often, educators have contributed race or ethnic background to the failure of students. However, DeGaetano & Espana (2016) have revealed the following: "The research is unequivocal; teacher education programs must coherently infuse all teacher preparation courses with issues of cultural diversity so that we have culturally competent teachers who can spark students learning through their cultures and experiences" (p. 1). Students from all over the world are bringing experience and skills to classrooms in the United States. "Most professional development for educators omits the

possibilities of recognizing the transnational lives of students" (Sanchez & Kasun, 2012, p.82).

Teachers should not only know and be aware of the different cultures in their classrooms but also

have the skill to leverage the knowledge and skills that various students bring to the classroom.

Banks (1993) reported on the importance of cultural awareness in educational realms:

"Multicultural lessons, activities, and teaching materials, when used within a democratic

classroom atmosphere and implemented for a sufficiently long period of time, help students to

develop more democratic racial attitudes and values" (p. 15). Adequately trained teachers with

cultural competency tools and knowledge are equipped to embrace cultures. The training added

rigor, and purposeful teaching is less difficult or mysterious, resulting in an increase in student

achievement (DeGaetano & Espana, 2016).

Equity audits have a history in civil rights in an attempt to narrow or close the

achievement gap by ensuring that curricula from one school to the next are fair and balanced. For

example, the same curriculum at one of the more affluent schools in a district should be the same

at schools that are low-income or predominantly students of color, or both. "Persistent

achievement gaps by race and class in U.S. public schools are educationally and ethically

deplorable and, thus, need to be eliminated (Skrla, Schuerich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2006).

Cultural Competence and Socioeconomic Status

According to Green (2012), ultimately, we have to see poverty as unfreedoms of various

sorts: the lack of freedom to achieve even minimally satisfactory living conditions. Equity and

accountability are essential in ensuring that poor students are educated with a rigorous

curriculum. Although there is a debate for both sides, Scheurich, Skrla, and Johnson (2000)

proposed that dumbing down curriculum might be an issue. "We need to attend to whether

different schools and districts are using different curricula with different groups of children.

Specifically, we need to study curricula that are being used with low-income students and with students of color" (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000). Using research-proven tools to ensure that equity in education can avail positive results.

Poverty can be reduced by expanding these facilities, but to guarantee that, what is needed is an enhancement of the power of people, especially of those impacted, to make sure that the facilities expand and the deficiencies removed:

If any teacher performs at one standard deviation in quality (as measured by student achievement) above the district's mean adequate yearly progress rate for five years in a row, the resulting improvement in student learning would entirely close the gap between the performance of a typical student from poverty and the performance of a higher-income student (Jensen, 2013, p. 23). There is a considerably large achievement gap between students from low SES families and their peers from high-income families, and according to Morrissey and Vinopal (2017), the gap "begins well before kindergarten, and persists over the K-12 years and beyond" (p.757). Evidence captured from a "nationally representative study of infants born in 2001" revealed that cognitive score gaps appear as early as nine months to 24 months old (Halle et al., 2009). Without intervention, the gap continues to widen when children reach school-age. Reardon (2011) stated, "Although these SES achievement gaps widen during the elementary school years, the majority of the gap has appeared before children begin kindergarten."

The first learning experiences for children take place in their home environments with their parents as their first teachers. In a study of ninth-grade students, Liu and Lu (2009) noted that "the higher the student's family SES index, the more likely he or she is to receive relatively higher scores in math and language" (p.81). This discovery is attributed to the parent's investment in their children, whether materialistic or mental, has an impact on the child.

Additionally, the early stage of basic education, family education, and school education are integrated. Families and schools work both separately and jointly (Lu and Liu, 2009).

The federal Head Start program was created in 1965 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty to provide children in poor families with early learning opportunities to be on par with their more advantaged peers upon entering school (Morrissey and Vinopal, 2018). However, even with the availability of this program, there is a "wide variation within and between programs in curriculum, teacher qualifications and pay, and funding source" (p.758). It is important to note, "Different program types serve different populations" (p.758). With Head Start targeting poor children, private centers serving primarily tuition-paying (and some publicly subsidized) children, and public preschool programs vary depending on eligibility requirements (Morrissey and Vinopal, 2018). While Early Childhood Education (ECE) has significant implications on the achievement gap, it is important to note, "Little attention has been given to whether their residential neighborhoods moderate the effects of ECE" (p.758). The inconsistency of behavior and safety between a child's neighborhood and school-life may cause behaviors in the classroom that impede the learning process. Neighborhood poverty is a significant factor in school readiness. Morrissey and Vanopal (2017) found evidence that:

> Associations between neighborhood poverty and children's academic outcomes persist; after controlling for child, parent, and household characteristics, children who lived in high-poverty neighborhoods at kindergarten entry, have about one-fifth of a standard deviation lower math and reading scores in the spring of second grade. Given that the concentration of poverty has grown at the same time that income gaps in achievement have grown, examining the associations between neighborhood poverty and school readiness is important (p.759).

Moreover, these studies confirm that SES has an impact on school readiness. Whether it be that parents do not have the resources or funds to provide adequate preschool preparation or the neighborhoods where children of low SES families reside have adverse long-term consequences on student learning. Research has proven that children who participate in Head Start programs that live in poverty have improved readiness over children of the same SES that do not attend Head Start (Morrissey and Vinopal, 2018). However, neither of these groups are performing at the levels of children in higher SES families.

Education leads to better jobs, which leads to a higher salary, which in turn leads to power. On the opposite end of the spectrum, uneducated individuals have lower-paying jobs and have little power even in their own lives. Budge and Parrett stated, "More than 13.3 million children live in poverty or about 18 percent. Another 17 million (about 24 percent) live in families considered low-income (Semegar, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2017)." From 2008 to 2015, there was an increase in students living in poverty from 18% to 21%. When children live in poverty, their education is often interrupted by life circumstances.

Furthermore, the quality of education that students receive is despairingly dissimilar from their wealthier counterparts. The infusion of knowledge and activism to combat the disparities between the powerful and the poor have proven to be worthwhile. "Activism by people living in poverty achieves profound and lasting improvements in their lives. It constitutes a central means of combating deep-rooted inequalities by redistributing power, voice, opportunities, and assets to those who historically have lacked all three" (Green, 2012).

"From a broad structural-institutional perspective, scholars and policy makers point to the "economic, political, and social system, which causes people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being" (Bradshaw, 2006, p.10). Living in

poverty limits the ability to have control and make decisions concerning one's own life. "Poverty

contributes to problems with executive functioning, which includes the ability to plan, self-

regulate, attend to tasks, understand what information is relevant or irrelevant to a task, and

retrieve and store information over time (working memory)" (Budge & Parrett, Disrupting

Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices, 2018). When the quality of the education that

students are receiving suffers, so do the outcomes. "High poverty schools tend to have teachers

who are less experienced and teaching outside their certification, as well as school buildings in

disrepair and limited infrastructure to support technology." (Budge & Parrett, Disrupting

Poverty: Five Powerful Classroom Practices, 2018). When students are receiving a sub-par

education, their chances of leaving behind their lower-income environment is less probable.

"Income inequality in the United States is the fourth highest of the member nations in the

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), after Chile, Mexico, and

Turkey" (OECD, 2011).

Cultural Competence and Instructional Practices

The significant achievement gap between students of color and White students warranted

a close examination of instructional practices; while keeping in mind the understanding that

culture is not entirely about race. Cultural competence encompasses the whole child. Systemic

reforms must be undertaken that deal with multiple aspects of achievement (academic, social,

psychological, emotional) within different subject areas. These reforms also need to be

diversified according to the social variance of students, attending deliberately and

conscientiously to such factors as ethnicity, culture, gender, social class, historical experiences,

and linguistic capabilities (Gay G. , Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory, Research, and

Practice, 2010). Positive teacher-student relationships play a significant role in student success.

Taking a holistic approach to cultural competence further demonstrates the complexity of understanding and educating students from various cultures and backgrounds.

Cultural Competence and Teacher Efficacy

According to Castagno and Brayboy (2008), the ability of educators to engage in CRS [Culturally Responsive Schooling] requires that they have a certain degree of cultural competence themselves. Becoming a culturally competent educator is a constant learning process that requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of the educator, depending on the particular students and contexts with which they work. To provide a 21st Century education for culturally diverse students, teachers need the professional development necessary to meet the challenge of the ever-changing and diverse faces of the students in their classroom. Teachers should know the different cultures in their classrooms. "We do not need to explain the failure and underachievement by the weaknesses of classroom teachers, but confront it" (Ozturgut, 2012). The importance of teacher-student relationships needed to be at the forefront of priority and importance. Given the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the nation's school systems, the need to promote relationship-based learning has become more important with efforts to improve teacher efficacy in the classroom and administrative efficacy at the school building and central office levels (Nichols, Origin, Meaning and Significance of Cultural Competence, 2013, p. 80). "The knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes shown by teachers toward students, especially students who are different from themselves, influence the teaching and learning environments" (Sandell & Tupy, 2015).

With the increased diversity of students in the United States, increased cultural competency educator training is recommended before becoming teachers in local school buildings. Lack of cultural competence is a pervasive issue that calls for a change in the overall

expectations of a classroom teacher at all grade levels. "Cultural competency is often overlooked when it comes to the training of new teachers. Student learning outcomes are dependent on the ability of faculty to be culturally competent and adaptable to an increasingly diverse classroom" (Nelson, Larson, Mulder, & Wolff, 2016).

Cultural Competence and Student Engagement

Sheppard (2011) stated, "The engagement to understand is a continuous activity of learning to understand our own theories about the world and our relationship to or with it."(p.115). In order for effective teaching and learning to occur, there must be a level of student engagement. According to Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, and Barnett (1984), strong social bonds to school settings make delinquency less likely; conversely, weak bonds make delinquency more likely. Students must have a sense of belonging and purpose within their school environment. "The feeling that someone cares about the student's well-being forms an attachment. This bonding also contributes to an internal factor of, 'commitment to schooling,' and the external factor "student role enforcement (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984, p.3). "The idea that successful students develop a sense of identification with school while less successful students do not, or not to the same extent, has been described in positive terms under such rubrics as affiliation, involvement, attachment, commitment, and conversely, alienation, and withdrawal" (Finn J. D., 1989, p. 123). Family, community, culture, and educational context influence engagement. Routes to student engagement may be social or academic and may stem from opportunities in the school or classroom for participation, interpersonal relationships, and intellectual endeavors. "Currently, many interventions, such as improving the school climate or changing curriculum and standards, explicitly or implicitly focus on engagement as a route to increased learning or decreased dropping out" (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Cultural Competency and School Leadership

Successful leaders must understand and be committed to all facets and all individuals that make up their school environments, including the families of the students. Every individual is vital to the success of the students that attend the school. "The richest nation of the world, the United States still struggles to graduate 50% of its Latina/o high school students. Nominal policy attention on this issue begs the need for bolder and more creative initiatives that call attention to this crisis. States, districts, and schools need to reconfigure this pedagogical crisis by leveraging all venues of potential support, including popular culture" (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 1). Leaders must take a stand to advocate for students and teachers. Rodriguez (2008) calls for courageous leadership that moves beyond the traditional teaching and learning dynamic to address the impact of this problem on the future of the Latino community's health and mobility. "Schools should foster a culture that takes all cultures into account with their formal and informal curricula and policies. This type of school atmosphere provides an environment in which students feel safe enough to be themselves and in which their anxiety is lowered to the point that they can concentrate on learning in a culturally safe environment" (Fraise & Brooks, 2016, p. 14).

Administrators must be aware of the cultural achievement gap and have processes and mechanisms in place that address issues facing diverse, and in most cases, marginalized students and their families. When hiring teachers, effective leaders include criteria that specify that the teacher must have knowledge and skills they need to work respectfully and inclusively in a multicultural, multicolored, multinational, and otherwise diverse educational environment (Cullinan, 2017). Professional development for teachers should not end with hiring. The on-boarding process should continue throughout the year. According to Wu and Martinez (2006),

professional development efforts must have the support of the school's leadership. "If leadership is not convinced and committed to cultural competence efforts, it is difficult to gain staff buy-in and resources needed for successful implementation" (Wu & Matinez, 2006). The administration must have the belief that cultural competency training [makes] a difference and that the organization can change. Bandura (1993) reports evidence suggesting that those with low levels of belief in how controllable their environment produces little change even in highly malleable environments. The motivation of the leader has a substantial impact on the motivation of the teacher. "Among the cognitive mechanisms influencing efficacy beliefs are perceptions about how controllable or alterable is one's working environment" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

The following Empirical Findings, Table 2, includes peer-reviewed articles and literature providing support for the study. The review of the literature served as a guide in the selection of proposed interventions. In turn, the literature assisted in the development of the action research cycles.

Empirical Findings Table

Table 2: Empirical Findings Table

Author(s)	Title	Theoretical Framework	Methods	Findings
Gay, Geneva (2018)	Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory, Research, and Practice	Cultural Difference Theory Culturally Sensitive Pedagogy	Teacher PD	The discontinuities between the school culture and home and community cultures of low-income students and students of color are an essential part of their low academic achievement.
Kotter, John P. (2012)	The Heart of Change Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations	Change Theory	Professional Learning Communities Case Studies	People have the power to change their working environment with the right tools.
Wu, Ellen Wu Martinez, Martin (2006)	Taking Cultural Competency from Theory to Action	Cultural Competency Theory	Interviews, Panelists Speakers, Case Studies	Provides principles and recommendations for implementing cultural competency. Six fundamental principles—discussed at length in this report—are key to a successful cultural competency effort.
Reardon, Sean F. (2011)	The Widening Academic Achievement Gap Between the Rich and the Poor: New	Social Isolation	Propensity score stratification – removes bias associated with	Most but not all evidence suggests that the achievement gap between children from high and low-income families has grown substantially in recent decades.

			measured prior characteristics of students that predict exposure to mobility.	
Nichols, Edwin J. (2013)	Cultural Competence in America's Schools: Leadership, Engagement, and Understanding	Philosophical Aspects of Cultural Difference	Implementation of knowledge (i.e.- workshops, PD)	Teacher PD and workshops needed Teacher Reflections Need for teacher-student relationships
Sandell, Elizabeth J. Tupy, Samantha J. (2015)	Where Cultural Competency Begins: Changes in Undergraduate Students' Intercultural Competency	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity Concepts from Cognitive Psychology and Constructivism	Required Cultural Diversity education and experience incorporated into curriculum on a college campus	Traditional training 1st Semester (no statistically significant changes) vs. 2nd Semester with higher-impact activities (e.g., cultural partnerships), subjects showed statistically significant positive gains in their orientations to cultures different from their own.
Sanchez Patricia Kasun, G. Sue (2012)	Connecting Transnationalism to the Classroom and Theories of Immigrant Student Application	Globalization Constructivism	Case Study	Educators must move beyond the frameworks for understanding immigrant children through one-way or segmented assimilation. Current PD for educators omits the possibilities of recognizing the transnational lives of students.
The National Education Association 4th Edition (2011)	C.A.R.E: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps	N/A	N/A	Culturally competent teaching is increasingly necessary if educators are to connect with their students. Educators need to acquire new teaching strategies that match students' ways of understanding and interacting with the world.
Hanover Research (2014)	Strategies for Building Cultural Competency	Cultural Competence	N/A	Conducting self-assessments; Learning about students' cultures; Employing culturally responsive pedagogy; Fostering respect in the classroom, and Involving families and communities.
Tyrone C. Howard Foreword by Geneva Gay (2010)	Why Race and Culture Matter In Schools – Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms	Cultural Competence Social Justice	Case Study	Positionality – "We teach who we are. Does 'who I am' contribute to the underachievement of students who are not like me?"
Kouzes, James M. Posner, Barry Z. (2010)	The Five Practices Of Exemplary Leadership	N/A	N/A	Model the way, Inspire a shared vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, Encourage the heart.

Chapter Summary

Fraise & Brooks (2016) offered, "if culture is generally understood as customs and

beliefs and composed of traditions, practices, and behaviors, school culture is made up of formal

and informal dynamics related to espoused hidden curricular, instructional strategies,

administrator-teacher-staff-student interaction, language, communication, and policy development and implementation" (p. 21). Culture for a student is what is happening at school, at home, and all interactions in between. It is a charge to teachers and administrators to bridge the gap between students, families, and academic achievement, "which can be accomplished effectively through cultural competency" (Fraise & Brooks, 2016, p. 11).

With the increases in minorities living in this society as well as the increase in low-income families, adjustments to current curricula need to take place if these students are to compete globally. Paisley High School is an example of the many schools across the country that experienced a significant decline in retention rates, graduation rates, and test scores due in part to the lack of cultural competency. Supporting teachers and providing resources through professional development offers a way to close the instruction gap. Creating a program for use at the local school to increase cultural competency helps to provide that resource.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods used to meet the purpose and goals of the study. A description of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and a hybrid of the interaction of frameworks is also provided. The study follows the action research cycle process offered by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), Constructing Action, Planning Action, Taking Action, and Evaluating Action. Also, the intervention plan, timeline, data collection, and data analysis are presented.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this action research was the Change Theory. The origin of Change Theory is in the work of Kurt Lewin. In Lewin's previous work, he spoke of "re-education" as it relates to changing the beliefs of individuals. Lewin offers, "Re-education is also needed when an individual or group is out of touch with reality" (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945).

> Of course, convictions in regard to certain points in the total system may play
> an important role in the process of conversion. It is, however, important for the
> overall planning of re-education not to lose sight of the fact that efforts directed
> toward bringing about a change from hostility to open-mindedness and to
> friendliness to the new culture as a whole be given priority over conversion in
> regard to any single item or series of items of the re-educative program (pg. 62).

This work is consistent in requiring individuals seeking change first to have a level of open-minded acceptance to move forward into a different perspective other than their own; Lewin's

first step of change, "Unfreezing." Lewin believed that an individual's behaviors, feelings, and actions based on the group that the individual belongs (Burnes, 2004). Lewin proposed that there are three steps to change, Unfreezing, Moving, and Refreezing. In a review of the work of Kurt Lewin, Burnes (2004) noted, in the first step, "Unfreezing," Lewin believed that the stability of human behavior was based on a quasi-stationary equilibrium supported by a complex field of driving and restraining forces" believing that behaviors need to be destabilized before it can be changed. In step 2, "Moving," creating motivation to ready participants to begin learning. Step 3, "Refreezing," learners stabilize and solidify the new behaviors that were learned during the process. "The changes made to organizational processes, goals, structure, offerings, or people are accepted and refrozen as the new norm or status quo" (Study.com, 2019). Although Lewin's three-step process is arguably simplistic, his work remains relevant and very much in alignment with recent literature. Kotter broadens the scope of Change Theory with an eight-step change model that was used in tandem with Lewin's work for this study.

Kotter (1995) suggests an eight-step change process geared toward organizations. The steps in Kotter's model served as additional support to the theoretical framework for the study:

Step 1	Creating a Sense of Urgency, participants were provided with data that sparked interest and buy-in. In the context of this research study, participants in the professional learning community reviewed student data. They analyzed these data to identify trends and patterns. Participants also identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of this research.
Step 2	Form a Powerful Coalition, participants for the group were selected. The participants had various job titles/positions and levels of "importance" to could make decisions that are sometimes outside of tradition. Participants in this research were from a variety of positions/content areas.
Step 3	Create a Vision for Change, participants "determined the values and created a strategy." As a team, the participants designed the plan of action.
Step 4	Communicate the Vision; in this step, participants communicated often and led by example.
Step 5	Remove Obstacles; in this step, change leaders were identified, and a structure for change was created.
Step 6	Create Short-Term wins; in this step, the participants celebrated wins to avoid or combat the naysayers.

Step 7	Build on Change; in this step, encouraged participants to continue building on successes and not become complacent.
Step 8	Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture, participants discussed progress and created plans to make it a part of the organization's culture (pg.8).

Figure 8 - Theoretical Framework – Kotter's 8-Step Change Model

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of the Communities of Practice Theory and the Social Learning Theory. Communities of Practice Theory is defined, in part, as a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or

area collaborate over an extended period, sharing ideas and strategies, to determine solutions, and build innovations (Theories, 2018). The Action Research Implementation Team was comprised of classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators with a common interest in educating students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The Action Research Implementation Team/PLC members, guided by the conceptual framework, shared strategies, and participated in research-based interventions and activities, which created a program for cultural competency training at the local school level. When combined, Change Theory and Communities of Practice/Social Learning Theory created a guideline for the "Why? And How?" for the context of the research.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework Hybrid

The researcher developed a hybrid of the conceptual framework, the Communities of Practice Theory, Social Learning Theory and the theoretical framework, the Change Theory, with an origin in the work of Kurt Lewin (1945) and Kotter's Change Model (1996), which illustrated the interrelatedness of the theories, and how they worked together and guided the action research cycles. These theories worked in tandem and led to a hybrid form of the theories. The Kotter Change Theory provided a guide or map of the action research. At the same time, the Communities of Practice Theory drove the study through interventions and activities within the professional learning community. The stages in the Kotter Change Theory were essential to the professional growth of the participants. The relationship between the first three steps of Kotter's model, Establish a Sense of Urgency, Form a Powerful Coalition, and Create a Vision, aligned with the "Unfreezing" stage in Lewin's process, which prepared the participants with awareness for learning and changing behavior (Figure 9). When the participants are open to change the "input" or training can take place. The next three steps, Communicate the Vision, Empower

Others, and Plan for and Create Short-term Wins, aligned with the "Moving" step in Lewin's process. The participants took part in planned interventions for change. In this research, the "movement," a book study, and guest speakers for consistent exposure to and study of cultural competency. The last two steps of Kotter's model, Consolidate Improvements and Institutionalize Changes, aligned with "Refreezing." In Lewin's process, the steps stabilized the new behaviors of the group/organization and aligned the "output" of the conceptual framework of culturally competent educators and classroom instruction, which improved student outcomes. The fusion of the theories created a powerful vehicle that effectively moved the research forward.

Figure 9 - Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Hybrid – Communities of Practice/Social Learning and Lewis Change Theory and Kotter's Change Model.

Action Research

In terms of context, the action research team required a context conducive to a productive team. Members of a group with a shared history, goals, ideas, and direction tend to be productive research teams. This framework directly aligned with the Communities of Practice Theory. This quality of relationships focuses on the relationship between the researcher and the members of the team. "Relationships need to be managed through trust, concern for others, equality of influence, common language, and so on" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In this study, the researcher consistently managed and maintained the relationships in the group. An environment of trust and the well-being of all participants was a priority. The third factor was the Quality of the action research itself, which recognized that the focus is two-fold, the process and the implementation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Finally, the fourth factor is the Outcomes. This factor addressed the goal of the study in that the team created a program to develop cultural competency knowledge at the local school level.

Stringer (2014) indicated a vital point regarding action research. "Change is an intended outcome of action research, not the revolutionary changes envisioned by radical social theorists or political activists, but more subtle transformation brought about by the development of new programs or modifications to existing procedures (p.59). Action research evoked a transformation in the processes and procedures concerning how students of diverse backgrounds and cultures are educated. The implementation of the action research was vital to the sustainability of the program. The group members all have a stake, not only in work but also in the success of the work. Group members must also believe that their contributions are desired and meaningful to the success of the action research.

Specifically, data were collected using a cross-sectional approach, where a teacher's point of view, was obtained during the planned activities through researcher notes, reflective journaling, and responses to protocol prompts from meetings. The school environment constrained the context, which is where the members apply their trade. In conjunction with the action research method and Communities of Practice Theory, a professional learning community formed.

Professional Learning Community

"Of the many initiatives to pass through education, one of the most widely recognized is the concept of professional learning communities." (Marzano R. J., Heflebower, Hoegh, Warrick, & Grift, 2016). In many cases, organizations have transitioned from a single leader to shared leadership. The cultivation of many leaders that have taken the role of leadership has flourished. In education, teacher leadership has become a way to encourage engagement in professional learning. Members of PLCs continuously ask themselves, "What happens in our school when, despite our best efforts, a student does not learn?" (DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p.7). It becomes the responsibility of the PLCs to provide students with opportunities for intervention and establish systematic and timely supports. Ensuring that all students learn means fair and equitable instruction from classroom to classroom (Williams & Hierck, 2015). A PLC engaged teachers in a cycle of looking at what is happening in their school, determining if they can make it a better place by changing curriculum, instruction, or relationships between community members and assessing results – all with the goal of enhancing their effectiveness as professionals (Marzano et al., 2016). Knoster's work explored and distilled existing organizational change models to provide educational leaders with a straightforward tool to help facilitate sustained programmatic change in schools (Nanfito, 2015). Developing an active

professional learning community can prove to be a complex undertaking. Knoster (2000) identified several conditions for the successful implementation of change. The Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change (Figure 10) was a reference during this research.

> There are five elements required for effective change: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. If those leading change, fail to put any one of these elements in place, then the change efforts will fail. This can be helpful in planning as well as diagnosing what might be needed when plans go awry (p. 1).

Managing Complex Change
All 5 Factors need to be present to create lasting change

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Change
	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion
Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plan	=	Gradual Change
Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		=	False Starts

Figure 10 -Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change – 5 factors to create lasting change.

In consideration of many years of school improvement efforts, involving many successes and false starts, the researcher had conversations with the school principal regarding the implementation of the research. The researcher proposed the significance of the study, discussing the need and purpose of the research, with consideration of the historical data that showed trends and patterns. The patterns suggested a correlation between low test scores and culturally diverse

groups of students. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, this was a meaningful conversation. The researcher needed to confirm the approval and support of the research. In June 2019, the researcher received approval through IRB to continue the study. The researcher developed the action research design team at Paisley High School in July 2019.

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team consisted of three administrators, including the researcher, three teachers, and one media specialist. To gain input and perspective from a diverse group, participant selection, based primarily on employee positions at the local school, their willingness to participate fully in the action research, and their number of years in education. To evaluate the progress of the research, the Action Research Design Team followed a continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle. In the first action research cycle, the design team assisted the researcher in developing the framework for the cultural competency training and setting criteria for action research team participants. Initially, the Design Team received a basic intervention framework and timeline. However, after understanding their role in the process, the team provided additional ideas regarding interventions, sequence, and implementation. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) offered the importance of not "limiting action research to being a logical and clinical process, where the individuals and groups move through the action research steps in a rational, albeit politically aware, manner" (p. 73).

The development of an Action Research Design Team was necessary to assist the researcher in continuous planning and checking throughout the action research cycles. Table 3 shows the Action Research Design Team members, position, ethnicity, and the number of years in education. This section provides a brief description of each member of the Action Research Design Team.

Table 3 –Members of the Action Research Design Team

Name	Position	Ethnicity	# Of Years In Education
London Bridges	AP #1 (researcher)	African American	19
James Fields	AP#2	African American	23
Beth Jones	AP#3	Caucasian	23
Freda Mason	Teacher	Caucasian	8
Jessica Venda	Teacher	Mexican American	1st Year
John Daniels	Teacher	African American	6
Sheena Lee	Teacher	African American	11

London Bridges, the researcher, is an African American female assistant principal, employed at Paisley High School for 19 years. At the time of this study, she was responsible for Curriculum and Instruction, and the chair for the Instructional Leadership School Improvement Team. During her tenure, she had served as a substitute teacher, a clerical employee, the coordinator of activities, and as an Advanced Placement Psychology, Sociology, and Philosophy teacher. She has served as an assistant principal at Paisley High School for the past eight years, where she has witnessed the increasing changes in student racial and socioeconomic demographics. Ms. Bridges believes that teachers' ability to accommodate increasingly diverse student populations depends on engaging teachers in professional development that focuses on cultural competency.

John Daniels is an African American male teacher who had been employed at Paisley High School for three years at the time of this study. Mr. Daniels described himself as an advocate for students and was very open to the action research study activities. During the

Action Research Team meetings, Mr. Daniels shared his experiences as a counselor and the experiences that his students encountered, which prevented them from focusing on education and from attending school regularly.

James Fields is an African American male teacher who, at the time of this study, had over 23 years of experience in education at the middle and high school levels. Mr. Fields's experience included serving as a teacher at one of the district's alternative schools, where he witnessed disproportionate numbers of racially diverse and disadvantaged students placed at the school. Mr. Fields often asserted that if the student had been exposed to a viable teacher-student relationship, their behavioral issues could have been avoided. Known for being a firm but fair disciplinarian, Mr. Fields communicated clearly with parents and solicited their assistance when their children had behavior issues.

Beth Jones is a White female assistant principal, who at the time of the study, had 23 years of experience in middle and secondary schools. Ms. Jones's experience is unique because she is a graduate of Paisley High School and could recall when the school's student demographics were majority White. Ms. Jones also previously taught ESOL classes. During the action research process, she expressed that she was concerned because "…after so many years, we are still discussing educators that are not open to students from other countries or cultures." She was heavily involved in the preparation of the poverty simulation and wanted to ensure that participants experienced its full impact. Ms. Jones stated that she had been hesitant to speak up at a previous meeting, but wanted to share that it was unfair and untrue that people believed that a White person could not effectively teach a non-White child.

Sheena Lee is an African American female media specialist who had been at Paisley High School for nine years when this study took place. She started as a Language Arts teacher

and eventually became the school's Media Specialist. Ms. Lee has transformed the school's Media Center by facilitating inclusive activities and themes. She was very excited about the action research study and was very active in the book study. She volunteered to facilitate the book study, and her infectious attitude positively influenced the climate of the meetings and encouraged other participants to be fully active. Ms. Lee was also very instrumental in recommending alternative ways to submit reflections, such as electronically and through video.

Freda Mason was a White Language Arts female teacher with eight years of teaching experience. Ms. Mason was a teacher leader at Paisley High School, where she actively worked toward the success of all students. She often shared strategies for analyzing and reporting data with her department. Ms. Mason worked very well with students but recognized that there was a great need to identify strategies to assist educators in providing effective instruction for culturally diverse student groups.

Jessica Venda, was a Mexican-American, in her first year at Paisley High School when the study took place. As the teacher for the Translation Nation class, Ms. Venda instructs and guides bilingual students to become translators. She was very vocal about advocating for students. Ms. Venda shared personal experiences about attending predominately White schools, which led to her desire to ensure that all students, especially those who are from culturally diverse backgrounds, have sufficient academic, social, and emotional support. Prospective Action Research Implementation Team members were members of the faculty and staff and school improvement teams, who had proven to be active in participation. Those individuals received an email flyer, inviting them to participate in the research study. The educators had a common goal of improving instruction for all students. Additional participants approached the researcher and asked to participate in the study. These individuals also received an invitation to

participate via an emailed flyer (Appendix A), and a follow-up invitation during the first

Instructional Leadership Team Meeting

Selection

The Action Research Implementation Team consisted of teachers, counselors, and

administrators. Prospective participants received an emailed invitation to participate in the action

research. Individuals choosing to participate contacted the researcher via email. As the responses

came in, the researcher delivered a consent form to their classrooms. At the next Instructional

Leadership Team meeting, the researcher announced the invitation for participation in the study

for any additional prospective participants. After IRB approval and meetings with the Action

Research Design Team, AR Implementation Team meetings commenced. Participants were all

full-time employees of the school district. The average tenure at the intervention site during the

time of the study was approximately 7.5 years.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation Team members were members of the faculty,

classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, and district employees. Inviting active faculty

improved the probability of frequent and consistent feedback and reflection. The researcher

distributed consent forms to all participants. The consent form (Appendix B) outlined the action

research interventions and activities and provided a timeline. Table 4 shows the members of the

Action Research Implementation Team. For anonymity, each participant was assigned a

pseudonym. This section provides a brief description of the additional members included in the

Action Research Implementation Team.

Table 4 - Members of the Action Research Implementation Team/PLC.

Name	Position	Ethnicity	# Of Years In Education
Megan Moran	Counselor	Hispanic	3
Marsha Marshalls	Counselor	Hispanic	4
Harry Foxworthy	Teacher	Caucasian	19
Linda Tangler	Teacher	African American	21
Vera Vakars	Teacher	African American	20
Dena Straighter	Teacher	African American	12
Sheila Noteworthy	Staff	Caucasian	15
Melinda Bookings	Staff	African American	11
Elisa Ecles	Teacher	Caucasian	15
Barbara Commings	Teacher	African American	12
Bailey Stonington	Teacher	Caucasian	1
Cassie Gaither	Teacher	Caucasian	2
Firsteria Finter	Teacher	African American	14
Brandy Laural	Teacher	Caucasian	3

Melinda Bookings, an African American, is a staff member at Paisley High School, who had 11 years of experience in education at the time of the study and worked in the World Languages Department. During the research study, Ms. Bookings managed to be reserved but heard. She was one of the participants who assisted with creating the eClass page so that participants would have an alternative to hand-written reflections.

Barbara Commings, an African American teacher, is a teacher leader at Paisley High School, who had 12 years of experience when the study took place. Although Ms. Commings contributed to the discussions, at times, she did not seem to be fully committed to the process. On a few occasions, she walked outside of the meetings to have a conversation but later returned. Although it appeared that she was not engaged, her comments and contributions were always open, honest, and significant.

Elisa Ecles is a White female who had 11 years of service in education when this study took place. She was a Language Arts teacher who had a great rapport with students and teachers alike. She was a new teacher leader and was very dedicated to assisting her colleagues. Ms. Ecles' attendance at the meetings was inconsistent. However, when she attended, she provided productive input.

Firsteria Finter, an African American Language Arts teacher who had 14 years of experience at the time of the study, worked at an alternative school before coming to Paisley High School. As a member of the Instructional Leadership Team, a club sponsor, senior class sponsor, content team lead, a Culture and Climate team member, and RTI liaison, Ms. Finter was extremely active throughout the school. She had an excellent rapport with students and was always searching for innovative ways to serve them. Ms. Finter was a consistent participant in the meetings and did not hesitate to share her thoughts and ideas. In one meeting, Ms. Finter stated, she believed some teachers did not want to change their teaching style; they were too comfortable. She believed this attitude contributed to students not getting what they needed out of their formal learning experiences.

Harry Foxworthy, a White male who had worked in the field of education for 19 years when the study took place, taught World History and US History in the ESOL Department. Mr.

Foxworthy was one of the most active members of the Action Research Implementation Team, which was not surprising because he often requested to share his off-campus ESOL professional development with his colleagues long before the action research study began. Mr. Foxworthy consistently contributed to the book study discussions and expressed his appreciation for the poverty simulation. During the action research study, Mr. Foxworthy started a discussion board for teachers who needed guidance and targeted strategies when working with English Language Learners. He also had conversations with the researcher about potentially including a Language Acquisition class in Paisley High School's curriculum. Mr. Foxworthy's participation was a great asset and contributed significantly to the success of the study.

Cassie Gaither, a White female, is a social studies teacher who had two years of experience in education at the time of the study. Ms. Gaither was consistently active and worked very well with students and adults. She was known for coming up with great ideas on how to assist senior students with being successful in school, well respected amongst her peers. She was very pragmatic and was especially good at assisting students with developing a plan for their success that they can understand and attain. She was also candid with students and believed that many of them were not living up to their potential and were not taking the necessary steps to earn a diploma. Ms. Gaither was especially impressive when working through the poverty simulation. She took the time to study options and to take advantage of the resources. Ms. Gaither consistently showed sound leadership an outstanding work ethic.

Brandy Laural was a second-year math teacher at the time of the study and was one of the first to respond to the invitation to participate in the action research study. She was consistent and active in the process. Ms. Laural often checked in with the researcher to discuss the reading assignments. She shared some of the strategies she had used in the past to engage her students.

For example, Ms. Laural posted a world map in her classroom. She asked students to identify their home countries and share information about the countries with the class. During one of the action research meetings, Ms. Laural shared that this work was essential to her because teachers should have the knowledge to work with all groups and cultures. She also mentioned that because her children were biracial, she understood through them how a teachers' lack of cultural competence could hinder student learning and growth.

Marsha Marshalls was a Hispanic-American counselor who had four years of experience in education when the study began. She was also the chair for the Care Team and often worked to bridge the gap for students and their families' personal needs. During some of the initial meetings, Ms. Marshalls only spoke when asked a question directly. However, as time progressed, she opened up about her personal experiences. During the meetings, Ms. Marshall's anecdotes often seemed to provoke deep thoughts among the participants. Once, she shared that she called students to her office to discuss their grades only to learn that they were homeless or without food. "You would be surprised at how many students depend on the meals they get when they come here. Otherwise, they would get nothing," she once stated.

Megan Moran was a third-year counselor at Paisley High School at the time of the study. Ms. Moran worked with 9th-grade students and spent much of her time attending to the needs of the students. Ms. Moran participated in the intervention, but at times, she seemed subdued. Once during a book study discussion, Ms. Moran expressed how she related, as a Hispanic-American woman, to sections of the book that discussed teachers not being able to relate to their students from different countries. Sections of the text reminded her of her teachers when she was a young student and how she often felt alienated at school.

Sheila Noteworthy, a White eClass support specialist, had 15 years of experience at the time of the study and provided professional development for teachers. Ms. Noteworthy is very passionate about student diversity and inequities and immediately reached out to the researcher about participating in this study. She was very astute and outspoken and willingly engaged and shared her opinions.

Bailey Stonington was a 1st year White female Language Arts teacher at the time of the study. She was very enthusiastic about the research and was consistently involved in the interventions. She was very passionate as she described the relationships that she had formed with her students. Ms. Stonington was also passionate about advocating for her students and assisted other teachers with strategies to accommodate students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Ms. Stonington wanted her classroom to feel "inclusive" and believed that by participating in the study, she would gain knowledge to apply to her classroom.

Dena Straighter, a White Language Arts teacher who had 12 years of experience when the study began, was very outspoken and honest. Ms. Straighter had a good rapport with her students. Although she was known for being very strict with a strong personality, students gravitated towards her and wanted to be in her classroom. She builds excellent teacher-student relationships. Moreover, her ability to professionally and directly address comments or opinions that were contrary to her belief system often led to impasses.

Linda Tangler was a science teacher who had 21 years of experience at the time of the study, eight of those years at PHS. When Ms. Tangler missed one of the meetings, she was sure to communicate her absence beforehand. During book study discussions, Ms. Tangler seemed very engaged and would often make comments that agreed with other participant's statements.

Ms. Tangler was very enthusiastic throughout the study. She would often reference the readings when she spoke to the researcher in the hallway during the school day.

Vera Vakars is a science teacher at Paisley High School who had 20 years of experience when the study began. She was a consistent member of the action research team. Although somewhat reserved, she participated in the discussions, activities, and interventions.

During the first meeting of the Action Research Implementation Team, as suggested by Kotter (1995), the researcher created a sense of urgency by sharing the assessment and socioeconomic status data with the participants. The researcher also shared the research questions to inform participants of the nature of the research. Although previously reviewed in the consent form, the researcher provided an overview of the details of the time commitment. The participants actively participated in a protocol to establish PLC norms. After laying the groundwork, the researcher announced the first activity in the cycle, the book study. Participants received the selected text, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* (2010) by Tyrone C. Howard. The participants also received a journal to record reflections.

Action Research Timeline

Initially, potential participants received information that the action research would be starting in July, and the duration would be six months, 1st Semester. Time was limited, and therefore it was essential to share the duration as soon as possible. Additionally, the flyer was an invitation to participate in the study. The flyer included the proposed activities participants would engage in for the study. Once the faculty or staff members made contact stating that they would like to be a part of the study, they received consent forms that included a detailed timeline.

This action research study took place a total of 7 months, from July 2019 to December 2019, and March 2020 – April 2020. This process demonstrated the first five steps of Kotter's 8-step change model: 1) Establish a sense of urgency, 2) Form a powerful coalition, 3) Create a vision, 4) Communicate the vision, 5) Empower others, and Kurt Lewin's Change Theory phase of "moving," which was the theoretical framework selected for the study. The implementation of the proposed interventions occurred according to the timeline planned by the Action Research Design Team. The action research took place in cycles and phases. The Action Research Design Team reviewed the results of the interventions during each action research cycle to determine the impact of each intervention and determined changes when warranted. This research study identified practices and interventions that increased cultural competency for educators, improved instructional practices, student engagement, as well as the school environment.

Intervention

The Action Research Design Team developed a proposed series of interventions that took place during the action research process (Table 5). Each proposed intervention contributed to the professional development of individuals educators participating in the Action Research Implementation Team. The interventions engaged participant's in activities intended to provoke reflective thought, as it pertained to students of diverse backgrounds. The participants noted how cultural competency might have influenced student engagement, instructional practices, and the experience of being a participant in the Action Research Implementation Team. The interventions were in three cycles, and with each cycle, the Action Research Design Team evaluated the implementation of the intervention, as well as participant engagement, to determine the impact of the intervention and what would occur in the next action research cycle. Each cycle built upon the next cycle. The Design Team ensured that each step of the CQI process of

constructing action, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action, were effectively

facilitated.

Table 5 - The Intervention Plan

Cycle One				
Proposed Intervention	**AR Team Activities**	**Outcomes/Connection to the problem, theoretical framework**	**Date**	**Data Collected**
Action Research Design Team	Connections Protocol Reviewed Data Reviewed Problem Reviewed Purpose Create Norms Reviewed criteria for Implementation Team	Proposed AR Implementation Team Interventions/Activities Framework Consent Form Process Establish a Sense of Urgency – Kotter. Formed A Powerful Coalition, Create A Vision.	7-24-19	Researcher Observations Researcher Notes
Cycle Two				
Action Research Implementation Team Meeting	Connections Protocol Reviewed Data Reviewed Problem Reviewed Purpose Created Norms Book Study- Assigned reading from the selected text.	Facilitated consent form process. Established a Sense of Urgency, Formed A Powerful Coalition, Shared the Vision Communicated the Vision – Kotter. Empowered Others/ "Moving" – Lewin. Participants gained actionable knowledge	8-14-19	Researcher Notes Notes from Connections Protocol Participant Journal Reflections Researcher Notes
Action Research Design Team	Evaluated Action Connections Protocol Reviewed Book Study Implementation	Short Team Win – Kotter Implementation of the AR Implementation Team	8-14-19	Researcher Notes
Action Research Implementation Team Meeting	Discussed book study chapters using the "Round Robin" protocol. Additional chapters assigned	The AR Design Team gauged the increase in participant knowledge of cultural competency. Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin. Participants gained actionable knowledge	8-28-19	Participant Journal Reflections Researcher Notes
Action Research Design Team	Evaluated Action Reviewed guest speaker and book study, determined effectiveness. No changes to proposed interventions	Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin, Equal Voice, Celebrated Small Wins. Moved forward with book study and guest speaker #2	8-28-19	Researcher Notes Participant Journal Reflections
Action Research Implementation Team	Presentation by Dr. Sue Kasun from GA State University to discuss cultural competency.	Increase in participant knowledge of cultural competency from an educator on the post-secondary level.	9-11-19	Participant Journal Reflections Researcher Notes

	Book study chapters assigned.	Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin. Participants gained actionable knowledge		
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated Action. Reviewed and discussed interventions to determine effectiveness. Benchmark meeting added to Cycle 2.	Participants gained actionable knowledge Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	9-11-19	Researcher Notes
AR Implementation Team Meeting	Discussed chapter readings using the "Top 10 List" protocol.	Actionable knowledge Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	9-25-19	Participant Journal Reflections
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated Action The Design Team - Reviewed interventions for Cycle 2. Replaced original Cycle 3 guest speaker #2	Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	9-25-19	Researcher Notes
AR Implementation Team	Benchmark Meeting Characteristics of culturally competent schools. Text Rendering Experience protocol	Actionable knowledge Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	10-9-19	Participant Journal Reflections
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated Action. Reviewed Cycle 2.	Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	10-9-19	Researcher Notes
Cycle Three				
AR Implementation Team	David Araya, Co-founder, President and CEO of H.o.P.e - Hispanic Organization Promoting Education	Participants gain actionable knowledge Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	10-23-19	Participant Journal Reflections
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluate Action Design Team - Reviewed intervention progress. Poverty simulation prep.	No changes in interventions or activities. Prep for the poverty simulation: printing, cutting, assigning roles.	10-23-19	Researcher Notes
AR Implementation Team Meeting	CAPS Poverty Simulation Members of the action research team participated in a poverty simulation	Increase in participant knowledge regarding people living in poverty Empowered others/ "Moving" – Lewin	11-21-19	Participant Reflections: Journal, FlipGrid, eClass Researcher Notes
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluate Action Discussed the impact of the poverty simulation	Celebrate Win – Kotter Plan for concluding action research	11-21-19	Researcher Notes Observation Notes

AR Implementation Team Meeting	Final thoughts for book study, speakers, poverty simulation.	Celebrate Win - Kotter Consolidate Improvements/ "Refreezing" - Lewin Institutionalize Changes - Kotter/ "Refreezing" – Lewin	12-11-19	Participant Reflections: Journal, FlipGrid, eClass Researcher Notes
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated Action. Reviewed Cycle 3 interventions.	Determine participant change, Consolidate Improvements - Kotter/ "Refreezing" - Lewin Institutionalize Changes- Kotter/ "Refreezing" – Lewin	12-11-19	Researcher Notes
Cycle Four				
AR Design Team Meeting	Constructing Action Reviewed Purpose and Research Questions Designed Cycle 4	Cycle 4 Design Determined focus and format of discussions. Determined how discussions would address research questions in context	3-31-20	Cycle 4 Design Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Design Team Follow up meeting	Discussed plan and implementation. Discussed article selections	The AR Design Team solidified the Cycle 4 Plan Empowered others	4-4-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Implementation Team Meeting	Connections Protocol Members discussed assigned article(s) and lived experiences.	Participants gained knowledge, shared experiences, and gained cultural competency experience in the context of the pandemic.	4-14-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated AR Implementation Team Meeting. No changes.	Determined no changes to Cycle 4. Empowered others	4-14-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Implementation Team Meeting	Connections Protocol Members discussed assigned article(s) and lived experiences.	Participants gained knowledge, shared experiences, and gained cultural competency experience in the context of the pandemic.	4-16-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated AR Implementation Team Meeting. No Changes	Determined that no changes to Cycle 4. Empowered others	4-16-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Implementation Team Meeting	Connections Protocol Members discussed assigned article(s) and lived experiences.	Participants gained knowledge, shared experiences, and gained cultural competency experience in the context of the pandemic.	4-21-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Design Team Debrief	Evaluated AR Implementation Team Meeting. No Changes.	AR Design Team determined no changes to Cycle 4 needed. Empowered others	4-21-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Implementation Team Meeting	Connections Protocol Members discussed assigned article(s) and lived experiences.	Participants gained knowledge, shared experiences, and gained cultural competency experience in the context of the pandemic.	4-23-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Design Team Meeting	Evaluated Action – Design Team Reviewed Cycle 4	Determined the impact of Cycle 4 on teacher learnings and cultural competency.	4-23-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video
AR Focus Group Interview	The researcher interviewed eight members of the AR Implementation Team	Participants shared responses to 7 questions regarding cultural competency and learnings from Cycles 1-4.	4-24-20	Meeting Transcript Audio/Video

Research Design

The action research design consisted of a series of activities, a book study, guest speakers, a poverty simulation, and group discussions, providing classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators with information, tools, and resources in the area of cultural competency. As stated in Stringer (2014), members needed to focus on activities that had an immediate impact on aspects of the problem and "perform upstream work" that targets the problem's sources rather than dealing only superficially with its manifestations. The design addressed the lack of professional development and resources for educators of culturally diverse populations. A brief description of the activities and interventions:

Book Study. Members of the Action Research Implementation Team participated in a book study. *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms,* was selected as the book study text. Initially, the researcher considered three books for the study. The Action Research Design Team made the final decision when selecting the text. The AR Design Team evaluated the topics in the book and considered how closely aligned the topics in the text were related to the local school and the focus of the study. The research participants were assigned chapters of the book to read on their own. Book discussions took place twice per month, with two reflective journal entries, one reflecting on the readings and one reflecting on the group discussion from the previous week's chapter readings. The readings and discussions of the text familiarized participants with how culture affects education and instructional practices, as well as relationships with students and community stakeholders.

Community Action Poverty Simulation. Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) promotes a greater understanding of poverty. During the simulation, participants role-play the

lives of low-income families from single parents trying to care for their children to senior citizens trying to maintain their self-sufficiency on Social Security (Network, Open Your Eyes To Poverty, 2019). The Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) sensitizes participants to the realities low-income families face. Participants experienced possible day-to-day living scenarios their students may encounter in their homes and neighborhoods. The facilitation of this activity required participants to take on roles from low-income family scenarios and determine how they would solve issues during the simulation.

Guest Speakers. An effective guest speaker should be able to motivate and inspire the attendees with a powerful thought process and bind them with a high-energy delivery of the content. The guest speakers were experts in the cultural competency arena. The Chief Officer of Equity and Compliance of DCPS and an Associate Professor and Director for the Center for Transnational and Multilingual Education at Georgia State University agreed to address the Action Research Implementation Team to share their expertise and experiences with the action research participants. However, due to unforeseeable circumstances, the Chief Officer of Equity and Compliance was not able to keep the date; therefore, the speaker canceled and David Arraya, Co-Founder of HoPe (Hispanic Organization Promoting Education) presented to the AR Implementation Team. These presentations provided the AR participants with various perspectives on cultural competency and on working with diverse groups of students. After the presentation, the professional learning community participated in discussions with the speakers. Participants also recorded reflections in their journals. Consistent reflective journaling provided participants and the researcher with a tool to measure changes in mindset and behavior.

Group Discussions. This study of cultural competency intersected with the onset of the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the Action Research Implementation Team

participated in a series of four discussions regarding cultural competency, student engagement, and instructional practices in the context of Coronavirus Covid-19. The AR Design team assigned weekly article readings for the participants, which served to springboard the discussions. The articles addressed various aspects of how the virus influenced student engagement, instructional strategies, and how participants valued previous cultural competency learning through the study. Participants shared lived experiences from the context of the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. Participants discussed how the pandemic altered the culture of education, reinforced the critical need for cultural competency training for increased student engagement, improved and relevant instructional practices, and effective educational leadership.

Contextual Setting

Dempsey County Public Schools operates 139 schools, 80 elementary schools, 29 middle schools, and 21 high schools. Between the years of 1995 and 2015, the Dempsey district has experienced significant changes in its student population, most of the change is apparent in the number of non-White students. The student demographics for DCPS changed drastically in the last 20 years, from 1995 to 2015. The data show an overall 54% increase in non-White students with the number of Hispanic students leading the increase at 25% and Black students at 22% (SchoolDigger, 2017). At the time of this study, approximately 2,700 students were attending PHS; 85 % of these students receive free and reduced lunch. There were are 171teachers, eight counselors, 11 administrators, including the principal on staff at PHS, 15% of these employees were non-White. At the time of the study Paisley High School's student demographic breakdown
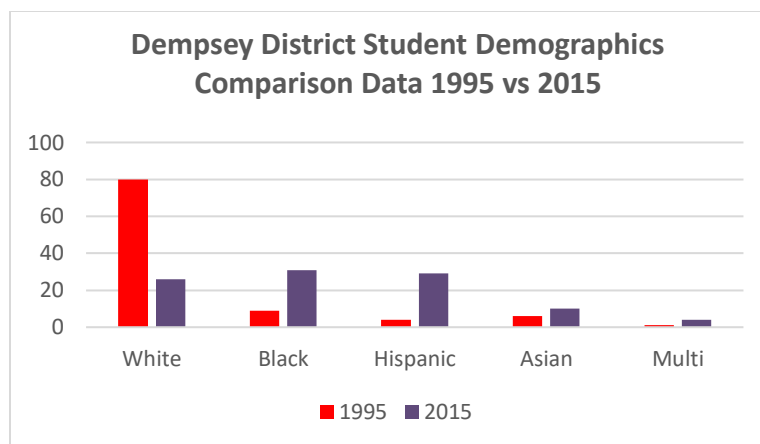
Figure 11 - Dempsey District Student Demographics - 1995 v. 2015

by ethnicity was 68% Hispanic, 19.69% Black, 8.5% Asian, 2.28% White, 1.18% Multi-Race, and .19% American Indian (Figure 12). The researcher also noted a 12% ESOL population. The students represented at least a dozen cultures, nationalities, and languages.
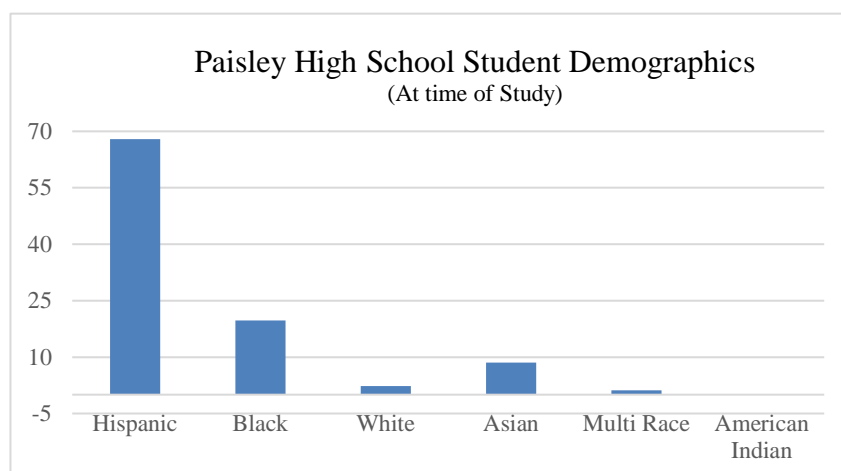
Figure12- Paisley High School Student Demographics – 2019-2020

This study provided teachers with professional development, tools, and resources to support the teaching of students from all cultural backgrounds and increased opportunities for student success. In a study regarding cultural competency and student engagement, the researcher,

Robinson (2012) noted, teachers, play an important role in sparking the engagement of their students, and that engagement influences student outcomes. "Cultural competence is a thinly researched field, and yet it has a huge potential for providing lasting positive change in schools. By employing cultural competency in the classroom, teachers communicate unconditional positive regard for students that may impact student engagement and learning" (Robinson, 2012, p. 97).

Data Collection Methods

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010), reflection is the process of stepping back from an experience, to question it, and have insights and understanding, with a view to planning further action (as cited by Kolb, 1984; Boud et al., 1985; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999; Rudolph et al., 2001; Raelin, 2008). "In action research, reflection is the activity which integrates action and research" (p. 25). Participants received journals and recorded their thoughts after readings and interventions in the provided journals. The consistent recording of observations and reactions provided data for determining findings for the research study. Discussions facilitated during the study were video recorded using a virtual platform and transcribed. Journaling provided the participants with a way to reflect on change or growth in their thinking.

Data Analysis

During the action research process, the researcher collected data through reflective journal responses (FlipGrid video, hand-written, or eClass electronic submission) from the book study, guest speakers, the poverty simulation, transcripts of group discussions and a focus group interview. The researcher collected demographic credentials that included position or role at local school, ethnicity, gender, and the number of years of experience in education. In action

research, data comes through engagement with others in the action research cycles. Coghlan & Brannick (2010) expressed the importance of understanding that any actions taken by the researcher to collect data are considered to be interventions in a research study. The "researcher is not neutral and that "every action, even the very intention, and presence of research, is an intervention and has political implications across the system. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to speak of data generation than data gatherings" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 74). The researcher collected data through meeting notes. The researcher strategically participated in discussions and attempted not to contribute in a way that would influence or deter the participants who were supervised by the researcher.

Coding. The researcher performed a thematic analysis of qualitative data obtained through qualitative research questions. After data were collected, the researcher analyzed the data. Thoroughly reviewing raw data, wherein the researcher grouped and labeled concepts identified in the data, that is, succinct verbal descriptions were applied to small portions of data (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The researcher then synthesized codes into themes in terms of properties and dimensions. The aim when creating the themes was to integrate coding sets, which is an iterative process involving change and adjustment (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The themes were sufficiently defined to communicate the themes to others. After themes were refined, examples of themes and possible subthemes were extracted from the data that illustrate the collective position of the members. These themes and excerpts were synthesized into a qualitative narrative, the researcher then connected the themes to the research questions, with possible revisions to the analysis occurring during write up.

The coding process was iterative and non-linear. It yielded a highly organized, usable data set that discovered emergent themes that orient and ground the analysis. The first step in the

data analysis process consisted of line-by-line coding. Coding was the central task when analyzing data (Lonkila, 2001), and the most foundational for this research study. Specifically, "open coding," which Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined as "the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions" (p. 74). Identifying concepts was accomplished by asking mental questions about the data, making comparisons, and developing labels and groupings for similar phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Next in the approach was "axial coding," which primarily consisted of reconstructing data "in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories" (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 97).

    Data Triangulation. The triangulation of data ensured that research outcomes were credible. The researcher collected qualitative data. The data collected from researcher notes, and reflective journaling from AR participants increased triangulation, the participant's journal entries included free response writing and responses to journal questions/protocol prompts. The participants were of various ethnicities and several years in education, adding to the layers of perspectives. The credibility of the study [was] enhanced when multiple sources of information were incorporated (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Data from reflective writing and journaling provided a guide for the Action Research Design Team that assisted in determining if there were warranted adjustments in the action research cycle. As Stringer (2014) suggested, "a separate plan was developed for each of the interventions delineated in the operational statement. As each plan was activated, the Action Research Design Team defined the following: The objectives of the project, the tasks to be done, the steps to be taken for each task, the people involved, the places where the activity [occurred], the timelines and durations of activities and the resources required" (p. 169). Each cycle informed the next and followed a continuous quality improvement

cycle of Plan, Do, Check, and Act. Qualitative data collected through the interventions and patterns identified through analysis and coding provided the foundation for findings. Triangulation of data also enhanced the reliability of the findings of the qualitative research study.

Rich, thick description. According to Creswell (2003) by using rich, thick description, "the reader [was] transported to the setting and given the discussion and element of shared experiences." In the findings of this research study, the researcher shared various details of the setting of the action research in terms of meeting space, protocols and agenda, climate, and participant dialogue.

Clarifying the bias the researcher brings to the study. "This self-reflection created an open and honest narrative that resonate well with readers" (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the researcher shared self-reflection, personal, and professional experiences to convey subjectivity in research. Identified possible biases in the analysis of the data and provided additional context and position of the researcher.

Spend prolonged time in the field. "The researcher developed an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and conveyed detail about the site and the people which provided credibility to the narrative account" (Creswell, 2003). The researcher began the study with firsthand knowledge of the school setting, having worked in this specific local school for 19 years, taking on a variety of roles from substitute teacher to assistant principal. The researcher experienced the changes in the population of students as well as the faculty and staff. The researcher provided a credible understanding of the phenomenon.

Subjectivity in Research

Personal and professional experiences provided context to the researcher's knowledge of the importance of educator cultural competence. Due to these experiences, the researcher was passionate about ensuring that students of all cultures had the best educational opportunities possible. One way of increasing the chances of improving positive student outcomes was ensuring that educators were equipped to educate and instruct all students.

The researcher's years as an educator have all been at one local school. As a teacher, the researcher recalled situations in the classroom that ignited the desire to ensure positive student outcomes. For instance, as a teacher, the researcher experienced receiving non-English speaking students in a regular education classroom. The researcher did not have the tools or skill set to appropriately or effectively instruct the students; this created a moment of helplessness for the researcher and the students.

At the time of the study, the researcher served in the role of an assistant principal and was aware that experiences, opinions, and offerings to this research were subject to bias. To avoid personal bias and ensure authentic feedback and data, the researcher's responses were limited during the AR discussions to avoid influencing the responses of the AR Implementation Team participants. The researcher also empowered the AR Design Team. The Design team maintained and guided the action research cycles to ensure more peer-to-peer interactions so that the data received were reflective of authentic participant responses.

Validity

As suggested by Creswell (2000), writing about validity in a qualitative inquiry was challenging on many levels. "Validity [was] based on psychometric instruments and the internal and external validity experimental and quasi-experimental designs" (Creswell & Miller, 2000). One of the challenges was in the multiple perspectives that resulted from the qualitative inquiry. There was an array of terms offered for validity, including authenticity, goodness, verisimilitude, adequacy, trustworthiness, plausibility, validity, validation, and credibility" (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher relied on the views of the participants in the study and personal notes and observations. Creswell (2000) offers several strategies to check or validate findings. "There were eight primary strategies organized from those most frequently used and easy to implement to those occasionally used and difficult to implement: Triangulate, member-checking, rich thick description, clarify bias, present negative or discrepant information, spent prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and external auditor" (Creswell, 2003). Triangulation, rich, thick description, clarifying the bias, present negative or discrepant information, and prolonged time in the field validated the findings.

Chapter Summary

"Action research enacts localized, pragmatic approaches, investigating particular issues and problems in particular sites at particular moments in the lives of interacting individuals and groups" (Stringer, 2014, p. 61). The selected theoretical and conceptual frameworks laid the foundation for this action research study. The Change Theory originating in the work of Kurt Lewin and Kotter's Change Model guided educators through a research-based model to change or consider thoughts and behaviors regarding cultural competency in education. The change model prepares individuals for change by creating a sense of urgency, provides interventions, and creating an avenue for institutionalized change. The researcher invited educators from the

local school to participate in the study. The participants were teachers from various content areas, administrators, and counselors. The individuals formed a professional learning community that engaged in action research and identified strategies that improved cultural competence for local school educators.

The design development for this study focused on local school data that was monitored by the researcher and the Action Research Design Team. The purpose of the design, "to provide participants with new understandings of an issue defined as significant and the means for taking corrective action" (Stringer, 2014, p. 61). As the AR Implementation team progressed through the research cycles, qualitative data collection took place through journaling and discussions to determine findings.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE

Context and Purpose

The context of this action research study was Paisley High School, an urban Title I public

school located in a large district in the southeastern region of the United States. Educators

employed at Paisley High School serve approximately 3,000 students in grades nine through

twelve. For this action research case study, the bounded system or context includes ninety

percent of the student body who are from a culturally diverse background that can be described

by but not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion. The purpose of this

study was to create a program of practice through the implementation of a PLC to increase

cultural competency awareness and knowledge; identify the need for cultural competency

teacher training, and identify interventions that would increase educators' cultural competency to

improve the academic outcomes for culturally diverse students.

Stringer (2014) defines action research as a form of practitioner research, through which

the participants, along with the researcher, seek to make meaning or interpret a particular

phenomenon in their workplace. For this action research study, two teams were organized: (1)

the Action Research Design Team and (2) the Action Research Implementation Team. Members

of each team were full-time employees of the school district. The Action Research Design Team

consisted of three administrators, including the researcher, three teachers, and one media

specialist. The goals of the Action Research Design Team were: (a) to establish criteria for action

research team participants; (b) to assist the researcher with developing a framework for the cultural competency training, and (c) to develop a series of interventions that would take place in three cycles during the action research process. The members of the Action Research Design Team also served as members of the Action Research Implementation Team. The Action Research Implementation Team were members of the faculty, classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, and a district employee. The primary goals of the Action Research Implementation Team were to engage in interventions that provoked reflection about students' diverse cultures and to understand how culture impacts student engagement and instructional practices.

Problem Framing in the Context

Paisley High School, the school that served as the research site during this study, is located in the Dempsey County Public Schools District. At the time of the research study, Dempsey County Public Schools was one of the nation's largest school districts and one of the largest in the state, with an approximate enrollment of 180,000 students for the 2019-2020 school year (GCPS, 2017). The district operates over 125 schools, with approximately 75 elementary schools, 25 middle schools, and 20 high schools. Between 1995 and 2015, DCPS had experienced a significant shift in the ethnicity of its student population. The majority of the increase was due to the increased enrollment of the percentages of non-White students.

At Paisley High School, there were approximately 2,700 students at the time of this study. Of those students, approximately 68% were Hispanic, 19.69% were Black, 8.5% were Asian, 2.28% were White, 1.18% are American Indian, and about .19% were of multiple races. The direct service English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) population was 22%. Further, 85% of the students who attended PHS at the time receive either free or reduced-priced meals.

However, while approximately 97.56 % of the students who attended PHS were from culturally diverse backgrounds, only 15% of the employees at the school were non-White. Data reported by the school district indicated that although the percentage of White students who attended PHS was fewer than the percentage of students from almost all other racial groups, White students outperformed their peers at every grade level and in every subject area.

Additionally, at PHS, at every grade level and in every subject area, non-English Language Learners outperform English Language Learners. Additionally, students who did not qualify for free or reduced-priced meals outperformed their classmates who do qualify for either free or reduced-priced meals. The overall achievement gap existing between White students and their non-White peers, between non-English Language Learners and English Language Learners, and between most students from economically affluent backgrounds and those who live in poverty, may not be an accurate indication of the underperforming students' true potential, but instead may be in part due to the possible lack of their teachers' cultural competence (Gay, 2010; Robinson, 2012).

Cultural understanding, awareness, and appreciation play a vital role in the education of students. For teachers to guide, lead, and influence the academic improvement of all students, especially learners who reside in marginalized households where poverty and limited resources are present, it is pertinent that classroom teachers behave and instruct with efficient cultural competence. According to Nichols (2013), cultural competence involves the continuous incorporation of the sociopolitical, economic, and historical experiences of diverse groups of students into the lessons they teach. At PHS, data indicated a lack of adequate instruction for culturally diverse learners. To improve academic outcomes for all students and to minimize the

gap between various subgroups of culturally diverse learners, it may be necessary to increase teachers' cultural competency.

The Story and Outcomes

The story began with the first step of this action research study, the Constructing Phase. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted, "It [was] important that the Constructing step [was] a collaborative venture, the researcher engaged with relevant others in the process to not be the expert who decides apart from others (pg. 9)." The researcher began the study in the prep step and transitioned to Constructing Action.

Constructing Action

Prep Step and Cycle 1

July 2019

During the Constructing Action phase, the researcher developed the Action Research Design Team, which began the pre-step of Cycle 1 (Figure 13). The development of the Action Research Design Team aligned with the first three steps of Kotter's (1995) eight-step change process, which were to form a powerful coalition, to create a sense of urgency and to create a vision. The selection criteria were based on the educators' job positions, willingness to participate fully in the action research, and the number of years in education.

During this phase of the action research, the researcher emailed invitations to participate in action research. From the responses received, the researcher met with six of the individuals who responded to be members of the Design Team. These six individuals represented a smaller version of the researcher's vision of the Implementation team: a variation in job positions, number of years in education, race, and commitment to school improvement teams at the local

school. These individuals met with the researcher to discuss their roles, the purpose of the professional development, and how the problem would be addressed.

On July 24, 2019, the Action Research Design Team met in a conference room, located in the Media Center of Paisley High School (Appendix F). To begin the meeting, the researcher welcomed and thanked everyone for volunteering his or her time to participate in the action research study. Before participating in the study, each member of the Action Research Design Team completed a consent form and immediately returned it to the researcher. Before progressing any further into the meeting, the researcher distributed consent forms to any of the members who had not received one previously, when responding to the initial flyer invitation. The researcher explained and reviewed the purpose of the consent forms. After reviewing the form with the group and answering questions, the researcher asked the participants to sign and return the consent form at that time. For anonymity, instead of using the participants' real names, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant.

Members of the Design Team then reviewed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved document and discussed the details of the proposed interventions and activities and how they were expected to produce the results needed to answer the research questions. The team also reviewed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The conceptual framework for the study, Communities of Practice Theory, is a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period, share ideas and strategies, determine solutions, and build innovations (Theories, 2018). The theoretical framework was based on Kotter's Change Model.

Next, the researcher facilitated a protocol familiar to all Paisley High School employees. The protocol, Connections, was a timed activity that provided participants with opportunities to

share their beliefs about specific, yet sometimes sensitive topics. Participants were not allowed to

engage in side conversations or rebuttal comments. The researcher used the Connections

protocol as an effort to make the members of the team feel comfortable with the action research

process. Participant's responses were limited to a total of three minutes, which the researcher

timed. Some of the thoughts shared were, "I'm wondering where these conversations are going

to lead us," "I'm excited that this conversation is taking place in this district, "I hope I'm able to

help," "I'm surprised we are having the conversation at all," and "This should be interesting."

After the Connections protocol, the researcher shared with members of the Action

Research Design Team, their roles in the action research study. The researcher described the two

roles that they would participate in during the study; one as members of the Action Research

Design Team and the second as members of the Action Research Implementation Team. The

Action Research Design Team was instructed to create a professional learning community,

develop interventions, and evaluate intervention outcomes. The Action Research Implementation

Team was instructed to create a professional learning community in order to actuate the

interventions created by the Action Research Design Team. After the interventions were

implemented, the Action Research Design Team reviewed the process of implementation,

discuss and evaluated any learning that took place, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the

interventions. The team decided whether to continue each intervention or suggest an alternative

if the intervention was not effective. When asked about the frequency of the meetings, the

researcher shared that the Action Research Design Team would meet immediately following the

Action Research Implementation Team meetings.

The team meeting norms was the next component to develop. "Group norms are the

guiding principles by which a collaborative team governs itself and its work. Norms helped

validate the purposes of the team. They provide a reminder of how team members had agreed to work with one another" (SRI - School Reform Initiative, 2019). After each member of the Action Research Design Team provided a norm that he or she needed in order to work productively on the team, the members voted and agreed to six norms. Table 6 displays the team norms and a description of each.

Table 6: Action Research Design Team Norms

Team Norms:	Description of the Norms:
Respect and Trust Each Other	Everyone's opinion and contributions will be honored and respected, assuming goodwill.
Honor Time	Be on time. Allow others to contribute.
Maintain Confidentiality	The environment will be a "safe place" to share thoughts and ideas.
Practice Flexibility	Understand that the action research process may take us in a different direction at times. Be prepared to change direction if necessary.
Listen Actively	Be fully present by listening carefully to all contributions to discussions without waiting for the speaker to finish, to speak.
Be Open to Learning	Be open to new information that may or may not agree with your way of thinking or mindset.

After the Action Research Design Team established norms for the meetings, the researcher reviewed the purpose and focus of the study and shared how the study had the potential to transform teaching and learning at Paisley High School. It was essential to ensure that the design team understood the goals of the research. The researcher then reviewed the research questions alongside the purpose of making connections between those two elements of the study. The group discussed how student engagement and instructional practices through a cultural competency lens would look in the context of the local school, and how participating in

this research might change or transform instructional practices for teachers and the long-term impact on teacher success and student outcomes.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) suggest that before creating a plan, it is essential to discuss the current conditions and ideal future results. "When the desired future state is articulated, you then attend to the present reality and ask, 'What is it in the present which needs changing to move to the desired future state?' Because the present is being assessed in the light of the desired future, [you] are assessing what needs changing and what does not." (p.66)

Each of the team members not only discussed their current cultural competence perceptions, but they each revealed how they believed the action research study would influence and change them. By articulating the desired outcomes, the Action Research Design Team set goals that reflected their opinions about how all educators at Paisley High School, would have a better understanding of the importance of cultural competence; expected to become more equipped with strategies that could improve academic outcomes for all learners, especially for their culturally diverse students.

To create a sense of urgency, as suggested by Kotter (1995), the researcher shared local school data to emphasize the gaps in achievement among student subgroups by race, socioeconomics, and the ESOL student population. Specific data reviewed included state 'end of course' (EOC) data and data sets comparing student achievement between students receiving free or reduced-price meals versus students who do not receive free and reduced lunch. After reviewing the data with the Action Research Design Team, the meeting transitioned to the actual design stage of the research study, Planning Action.

Constructing Action – Cycle 2

During the first meeting of the Action Research Implementation Team, as suggested by Kotter (1995), the researcher created a sense of urgency by sharing the assessment and socioeconomic status data with the participants. The researcher also shared the research questions to inform participants of the nature of the research. Although previously reviewed in the consent form, the researcher provided an overview of the details of the time commitment. The participants actively participated in a protocol to establish PLC norms. After laying the groundwork, the researcher announced the first activity in the cycle, the book study. Participants received the selected text, Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms by Tyrone C. Howard. The participants also received a journal to record reflections.

Constructing Action – Cycle 3

The Action Research Design Team reviewed the working themes of the study. The design team re-emphasized the importance of theory-based actions. Only activities and interventions that justify the appropriate response could continue. The guest speaker evaluation and action step evaluation were completed. The Design Team agreed to move forward with a second speaker in Cycle 3. However, the speaker initially scheduled was no longer available. The Design Team decided to proceed to the next step, Planning Action. It was decided to select a replacement speaker and schedule a presentation time.

Constructing Action – Cycle 4

In March 2020, the Action Research Design Team reconvened to develop and design Cycle 4 (Figure 16), which took place from March 31, 2020, to April 24, 2020. The researcher reminded the team of the research questions and the purpose of the study. The team reviewed the outcomes of Cycles 1-3 to determine the most productive way to move forward in the study. At

the time of the study, the world was experiencing a global pandemic. The pandemic caused a digital divide, which transcends the previous traditional norms of education. The AR Design Team decided that it would be timely and relevant to facilitate a series of discussions around the impact of the pandemic on the local school and specifically the goals of the professional learning community.

Planning Action

The second step of Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) Action Research Cycle Model is Planning Action. The Action Research Design Team designed Cycles 1-4. Cycle 1 (Figure 13), led by the researcher, each step was completed with fidelity. The Design Team continued the design of Cycle 1 through the Planning Action step. After completing the plan for Cycle 1, the Design Team then developed Cycle 2 (Figure 14), facilitated August 14, 2019 - October 9, 2019, of the action research study.

Planning Action – Cycle 1

The Design Team continued the design of Cycle 1 through the Planning Action step. After completing the plan for Cycle 1, the Design Team then developed Cycle 2 (Figure 14), facilitated August 14, 2019 - October 9, 2019. The planning of Cycle 1 also included the recruitment of additional participants who would complete the Action Research Implementation Team; the Design Team would also be Implementation Team members. The researcher emailed invitations to potential participants. Respondents received follow-up invitations after the first Action Research Design Team meeting. The final Action Research Implementation Team consisted of 21 educators - 3 administrators, 13 teachers, 2 guidance counselors, 1 media specialist, and 2 staff members.

Emailed Invitations to participate in action research
Developed AR Design team (Form Powerful Coalition)
Share Data (Establish Sense of Urgency)
Create Vision

Established AR Implementation Team
Reviewed Planned Interventions

Developed Training Framework (Create Vision)
Planned Interventions/Activities
Developed criteria for AR Implementation Team

Developed/Reviewed AR Implementation Team Agenda
Selected Book Study Text

Figure 13 – Cycle 1 - July 2019 –August 13, 2019

Planning Action – Cycle 2

Dr. G. Sue Kasun, a published author and an expert on cultural competency and strategies for educating culturally diverse students, was selected as the Cycle 2 guest speaker. At the time of the study, Dr. Kasun was an Associate Professor and the Director of the Center for Transnational & Multilingual Education at Georgia State University. The Design Team also planned the benchmark meeting previously suggested. The benchmark meeting time would be used to review the research questions, discuss participant learning in regards to instructional strategies and lesson planning. The researcher would also use this time to celebrate wins as it relates to the progress made by the Action Research Implementation Team.

Review Book Study reading pace.
Review book study notes and respon
Reflections regarding guest speaker
Reflection completions/response
mediums

Action Research Implementation Team
Meeting
Review school data – Create a Sense of

Book study text/assign readings
Shared data collection methods/journal reflections
(FlipGrid/eClass)
Add Benchmark Meeting/last Cycle 2 meeting
Scheduled Speaker

Book study reading assignments, discussions
Guest Speaker – Dr. Sue Kasun
Benchmark Meeting
Reflections for completed readings and guest
speaker

Figure 14 - Action Research Cycle 2 - August 14 - October 9, 2019

Planning Action – Cycle 3

Cycle 3 (Figure 15), took place from October 23, 2019 – December 11, 2019. Cycle 3

included book study reflections and discussions and a guest speaker presentation. Mr. David

Arraya, Co-founder, President, and CEO of H.o.P.e (Hispanic Organization Promoting

Education, shared his experiences working with diverse groups of students. He focused on the

equity needs of culturally diverse high school learners statewide. A question and answer period

followed the presentation.

During the final meeting /intervention for Cycle 3, members of the Action Research

Implementation Team participated in a poverty simulation called the Community Action Poverty

Simulation (CAPS). The simulation was an interactive immersion experience that sensitized

community participants to the realities of poverty" (MACA, 2018). The goal of the poverty

simulation was to bridge the gap between the team members' misconceptions and a real

understanding of cultural diversity. The poverty simulation guided the members of the Action

Research Implementation Team through a series of real-life scenarios that Paisley high school students are bound to experience on any given day.

Theory based actions
Rationale for actions taken
Basis continuing activities/interventions

AR Design Team final discussion regarding the impact of the action research interventions and activities and if the data would answer the research questions.
Celebrate Wins

Schedule Speaker
Prepping for poverty simulation
Celebrate Wins

Guest Speaker #2 – David Arraya (replaced original Speaker)
Community Action Poverty Simulation
Journal Reflection

Figure 15 – Action Research Cycle 3 – October 23 – December 11, 2019

Planning Action – Cycle 4

The Action Research Design Team met in a virtual platform to discuss and design Cycle 4. Cycle 4 included four Implementation Team Meetings and a Focus Group Interview. Recent articles were used to springboard meeting discussions. The researcher emailed the article(s) to the Implementation Team participants before the meetings. The researcher facilitated the meetings by introducing the topic and initiating the discussion regarding the selected article(s) and transitioned the discussion to allow participants to share lived experiences in the discussions. The Action Research Design Team developed topics that were addressed at each of the meetings.

- Did Cultural Competency training, during this study, prepare you for the cultural shift caused by COVID-19/Coronavirus? How?

- In this study, we have discussed the impact of poverty on student engagement. How has the added culture shift of COVID-19/Coronavirus influenced how you engage students? How were students affected?

- In this study, we have discussed the various aspects of cultural competence and how it relates to instructional practices and student outcomes. How have your instructional practices changed? To what degree do you believe cultural competency assists in educating students through the pandemic?

- In this study, we have discussed the various aspects of cultural competence and how it relates to lesson planning. Have your lesson plans changed? If so, how?

The Design Team selected articles that the Implementation team read in preparation for each meeting. As a result, of the Design Team meeting and follow-up meeting, Cycle 4 included a series of four group discussions regarding the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement and instructional practices with the added paradigm shift in school culture caused by the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. The Implementation Team, whose members held various roles/positions in the local school critiqued and analyzed Coronavirus Covid-19 articles related to education and shared lived experiences as leaders and teachers navigating the pandemic through the lens of cultural competency, and discussed technology, instructional practices, student engagement and participation in a professional learning community in the new normal. The Design team developed a topic for each meeting. The meeting topics included.

The use of a virtual platform allowed the researcher to facilitate meetings while adhering to social distancing guidelines. During each meeting, members of the Implementation Team shared how the onset of the pandemic in the surrounding area and the subsequent closing of schools may have required members of the Implementation Team to assess how cultural competency training may have influenced reactions or behaviors as related to student engagement, instructional practices, and general school culture. The responses from teachers, as well as leaders, provided insight on the behavior of educators trained in cultural competency.

AR Design Team meeting discussing the outcome of Cycle 4.
Were the research questions answered?
Did the intervention support the purpose of the study?
Focus Group Interview – Interview questions reflecting on study learning and outcomes.

Action Research Design Team developed and designed Cycle 4. Student engagement and instructional practices through a cultural competency lens during Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic

Determine Meeting Dates
Series of four Implementation Team Meetings
Focus Group Interview
Developed format of meetings
AR Design Team Follow-up Meeting

Discussion 1- Cultural shift caused by Covid-19/Coronavirus.
Discussion 2 – Coronavirus and student engagement
Discussion 3- Lesson Planning during the pandemic
**Discussion 4** - Instructional practices and student outcomes during the pandemic.

Figure 16 – Action Research Cycle 4 – March 31, 2020 – April 24, 2020

The final activity in the research study was a Focus Group Interview. The interview served as an opportunity for the participants to share and describe their learning. The interview was facilitated in a virtual format. The researcher used seven questions derived from the Albemarle County School district, *Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey, 2009*. The interview facilitated through a virtual format included nine members from the Implementation Team. Each member responded to the questions, and any follow-up or clarifying questions. The following are the Focus Group Interview questions (Appendix C).

Keeping in mind the totality of the research study:

1 - How would you define Cultural Competency? Is your answer different from when you started the study? How?
2 - Do you believe cultural competency, educator training, impacts student engagement? Why or Why not?
3 - Do you plan lessons to capitalize on your students' cultures and experiences? If so, please explain how.
4 - How do you plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped your students learn? Please explain.
5 - How does your teaching/leadership style vary in ways that accommodate the cultural differences in your school/classroom? Please explain.
6 - How do you believe that cultural competency training impacts instructional practices? Please provide an example.
7 - How would you describe being a part of a PLC focusing on cultural competency training? Do you believe there was a change in your behavior in the classroom?

Taking Action

Taking Action – Cycle 1

The Action Research Design Team agreed upon a book study for Cycle 2. Each Action Research Implementation Team meeting followed an agenda that examined and reviewed the book, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*, written by Tyrone C. Howard (2010). The text was selected due to its focus on the importance of race and culture and the school experiences of culturally diverse students and how school personnel is often uninformed by the problematic lifestyles of many culturally diverse households. Howard presented on it in three scenarios in which the achievement gap was successfully reduced due to the cultural competence training of the educators. Howard challenged educators to become cognizant of how race and culture played out in school settings. Sections of the book were discussed during each team meeting. The chapters that the team discussed were "Culture," "Are Teachers Being Prepared to Teach in Diverse Settings?" "Effective Instructional Practices," and "Socioeconomic Status and School Performance."

Taking Action – Cycle 2

August 14, 2019 – October 23, 2019. The initial meeting of the Action Research Implementation Team, which took place on August 14, 2019, in the school's Media Center (Appendix G). All of the future participants who replied with interest to participate in the research study attended the meeting. The researcher welcomed the team members and announced the purpose, goals, and the context of the action research study, along with the time and location of the meetings. The researcher then began the Connections protocol. The researcher presented the Connections protocol rules and opened the protocol for responses. Several team members replied, "I think this is going to be a great experience as we go along." "This is a great

opportunity to learn how to improve teacher-student relationships." "We need open and honest conversations about this topic," and "I would like to study more about building relationships with diverse students." The researcher noted all of the verbal and non-verbal languages that included head nods and body language that portrayed a sense of consensus. After the Connections protocol, the researcher shared the roles and expectations of the Action Research Implementation Team members. The participants then engaged in the Team Norms protocol. Table 7 shows the results of the six group norms established by the Action Research Implementation Team.

Table 7 - Team Norms Established by the Action Research Implementation Team

Team Norms:	Description of the Norms:
Honor Time	Be on time. Allow others to contribute.
Maintain Confidentiality	The environment will be a "safe place" to share thoughts and ideas.
Honesty	Honest answers. Do not agree if you do not agree.
Practice Flexibility	Understand that the action research process may take us in a different direction at times. Be prepared to change direction if necessary.
Listen Actively	Be fully present by listening carefully to all contributions to discussions without waiting for the speaker to finish, to speak.
Be Open to Learning	Be open to new information that may or may not agree with your way of thinking or mindset.
Remain Focused	Keep the vision in mind.

After establishing group norms, student academic achievement scores and antidotal data were examined. The sample consisted of learners who are members of the at-risk populations,

70% of the entire enrollment. An atmosphere of concerned consensus appeared at the discussions. Comments such as, "There is a connection between free and reduced lunch students and achievement," "There has been a considerable shift in demographics here," "The schools with money are doing well," and "We should be the best at teaching the ELL subgroup because we have more ELL students than many schools in [our district]." Other comments included, "Although it seems the test scores for 9th-grade literature have gotten better over time, the scores are still lower than the district and the state scores", and "From what I see on the Census Bureau data, the population increases for 2020 seem accurate because we experienced a huge increase in Hispanic students. I am not so sure about Native American increases that increase must be elsewhere." The researcher assured the members that the intervention activity demonstrated how the needs of these students could be met.

The researcher introduced the book study of Howard's *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools, Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* (2010), and reviewed the book study process. The researcher then distributed books and journals to all participants. The participants received their reading assignments. The first assignment was to read the Introduction and Chapter 1 and be prepared to discuss the text. A reminder that off weeks, the participants would complete the readings and journal reflections. The researcher shared that the next meeting would take place on August 28, 2019.

August 28, 2019

The second Action Research Implementation Team meeting took place in the conference room of the Media Center (Appendix H). The researcher started the meeting with the Connections protocol. The responses included, "I enjoyed what I read," "What is happening to our students is happening across the country," "Everything is not just Black and White and

should not be restricted to those terms," "There are other people in the world," and "I thought the idea of 'cultural mismatch' was very interesting." During the Connections protocol, the researcher observed many head nods and flipping through the pages of the text. At the end of the protocol, the researcher turned the meeting over to the facilitator. The facilitator opened with a summary of the introduction and the first assigned chapter of the book.

The facilitator then began a Round Robin protocol, adapted from the Florida Department of Education Professional Learning Tool Kits guide. The protocol followed the following steps:

1. One group member begins the discussion with a statement that begins with "I learned," "I realized," or "I now know" and shares something from the assigned reading that appealed to them. Refrain from evaluative statements such as "I think," "I feel," "I believe."

2. When Group Member 1 has contributed, attention turns to his or her left. This member can either add on to GM 1's statement or begin a new statement of what he/she learned.

3. The discussion continues in this fashion until every member has spoken at least twice.

4. Group norms can determine if someone can "pass" one turn until later. The participants followed the protocol and offered their thoughts regarding the readings. The researcher observed that the climate in the room was somewhat tense, but everyone seemed to be participating. The researcher noticed that it was difficult for some of the participants not to use "I think, I feel, or I believe"; therefore, in some instances, rewording was a focus to remain within the protocol rules.

During a round of the protocol, one of the participants, Ms. Freda Mason, shared her "I now know" statement in response to the book text (Howard T. C., 2010):

"Scholars in the field assert that we live in a racist, sexist, and classist society where certain aspects of schools and society favor the "haves" over the "have nots" (Nieto, 2000). As a result of our unequal society, school curricula and practices are frequently Eurocentric, biased, and one-sided, thereby negatively affecting students of color, girls, and low-income students." (pg.45)

In her response, Ms. Mason stated that she did not agree with the statement and that in her classroom, she did not see color. The protocol continued until everyone who wanted to contribute to the discussion, had an opportunity to do so. Concerning this statement, the researcher attempted to manage and maintain positive relationships between the members of the group. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) noted that relationships need to be managed through trust, concern for others, and equality of influence. An environment of trust and the well-being of all participants was a priority for the researcher who believed that addressing Ms. Mason's statement might have caused her to become defensive, to shut down, or to discontinue participation in future meetings.

After the meeting, Ms. Noteworthy shared with the researcher that she was not comfortable and somewhat annoyed by one of the comments made by Ms. Freda Mason, who stated, "I don't see color." When Ms. Noteworthy shared her views about Ms. Mason's remark with the researcher, she stated, "If you don't see color, you don't see me." The researcher understood Ms. Noteworthy's concerns and, in response, asked if she and the facilitator would revisit the statement during the next Action Research Implementation Team meeting. Although Ms. Noteworthy agreed to do so, during the following meeting, she did not revisit the statement. The researcher's failure to address the comment immediately, when it was initially stated, may not have been in the best interest of Ms. Mason or Ms. Noteworthy. Consequently, the learning

process was hindered, and not addressing the statement at that moment did not allow Ms. Mason to hear and learn from others why her statement was problematic and unacceptable, especially in terms of the true meaning of cultural competency.

During the last book study discussion, one of the chapters addressed the term "Colorblind." The researcher asked Ms. Mason to revisit that particular section of the book and to compare the text to her personal beliefs. The researcher discovered from Ms. Mason's journal entry that she was adamant about her opinion and stood firm about her beliefs regarding colorblindness and not seeing color. In reflection, the researcher considered that the decision not to address Ms. Mason's statement during the meeting might have indeed yielded unintended consequences and left a gap in learning. In regards to Ms. Noteworthy, if a member of the team does not feel they are being heard or acknowledged, they can become withdrawn. Although Ms. Noteworthy did not withdraw from the action research study, she may not have felt comfortable expressing her future concerns, thoughts, or ideas.

September 11, 2019

The third meeting began with an introduction of the guest speaker (Appendix I). The researcher introduced Dr. Kasun. Dr. Kasun began the discussion by stating, "I want you to think about what you did this morning before you came to work. Did your actions follow a pattern?" The participants replied with various responses to the question about their morning routines. Some participants stated that they showered, had tea, took out the dog, or played the guitar. Dr. Kasun explained that each one of these items is a part of a culture, which can be defined as those things or those habitual behaviors that we carry out daily. Dr. Kasun asked the participants to divide into pairs to discuss and quickly note two or three things they do daily that as a part of their regular culture or practices. After two minutes, the participants shared their partners'

cultural practices and behaviors. Dr. Kasun then asked the participants to think about the

Language of love. She asked, "What is something that you say to somebody that indicates that

you love them? It could be a child, a partner, a good friend, husband, or wife. Quickly write it

down." The participants shared their thoughts with the group. Dr. Kasun completed the exercise

with a few final inquiries. "How would you feel if someone told you that the things you shared

or the terms you used to describe you or your culture, you could not do or use them anymore?

Alternatively, that they were not important? Or, if you did not do them a certain way, it would

not be acceptable?" These questions precipitated more dialogue than the first part of the

conversation. Dr. Kasun explained that this is often how diverse groups of students perceive the

dismissal of their culture in the classroom. The first step towards cultural competency is

understanding your own culture and biases, which then allows for the acceptance of other

cultures. Dr. Kasun also discussed her thoughts on privilege and shared that as a White female

that she had privileges that others did not have. She also shared that acknowledging that this

privilege existed was an element of cultural competency. When the discussion ended, Dr. Kasun

suggested that the activity they participated in could be used as a strategy in their classrooms

with their students. Dr. Kasun also suggested that teachers steer away from a homogenous

environment by allowing students to share their cultures and by approaching diversity through an

asset rather than a deficit lens. The researcher ended the meeting by reminding the participants

that cultural competency is an ongoing process. Campinha-Bacote (2003) suggested that teacher

cultural competence is a process of "becoming" rather than "being" and that developing a greater

knowledge of culture is acquired over time. The Building Blocks to Cultural Competence

continuum, as proposed by Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989), agreed that an individual

must first engage in self-reflection, and then the reflection of other cultures, which is considered

Cultural pre-competence. To move along the continuum, individuals must build on knowledge

through, but not limited to, professional development, education, and reading. The professional

development they received provided them with the tools they need to move along the continuum.

The researcher reminded the participants that the next meeting would take place on September

25, 2019.

September 25, 2019

The focus of the fourth meeting was the book study text (Appendix J). The researcher

began the meeting by thanking everyone for being consistent with their attendance and keeping

up with the readings and their reflections. The researcher started the Connections protocol and

allowed one minute for participants to respond to the prompt, "What was one of your take-a-

ways from the last readings?" Some of the responses included, "Culture is a misunderstood and

misinterpreted construct." "I learned that culture does not determine the race or vice versa." "The

disconnect between home culture and school culture can make a difference in a student's

performance." I am social capital." "Instructional strategies that make learning targets relatable

can help students learn the material." "I found some of the suggested strategies for instructing

various groups to be very interesting. The story of the African American student being invited by

his teacher to join the academic tasks, rather than being directed to do so, which is what he was

accustomed to at home, was eye-opening." "We need to transform our practices, not transform

the child to fit into our practices." "Caring is important to teaching," "If we want to be culturally

competent, we have to reject the status quo." and "The more we learn, the more success our

students will experience."

To provide a more accommodating process for submitting reflections for the

interventions, the facilitator created a FlipGrid account to allow participants another option to

submit reflections through a video recording. In addition, one of the Design Team members created an eClass page so that participants would have the option to electronically submit their responses if they preferred to type rather than write in the journal. The researcher then turned the meeting over to the book study facilitator.

The facilitator started the discussion with a demonstration of how to use FlipGrid. The facilitator shared that to reserve time, a complete tutorial would not be facilitated. The participants would become more familiar with the tool through the book study protocol. To facilitate the book study discussion, the facilitator selected a protocol called, Top 10 List (FLDOE, 2019). The protocol called for a note-take and a facilitator to keep members on track. As suggested by the protocol guidelines, members took turns sharing interesting facts, opinions, or points they learned from the assigned reading, while the note-taker recorded the responses. The facilitator then shared some responses from members that used FlipGrid to record a video response. Once all of the responses were noted, the members engaged in the process of elimination until a "Top 10" developed. The list was ranked from least important to most important from the chapter readings. Table 8 displays the list on eClass for future review.

Table 8 – Top 10 List Protocol

Rank	Facts, Opinions and Points Learned
1	In light of current academic disparities between students from culturally diverse backgrounds and their peers, there is a need to examine culture in new ways thoroughly.
2	Culture is not bound exclusively by one's race, ethnicity, or place of origin, shaped by a myriad of factors.
3	Outcomes for students' experiences in school may be compromised because of the cultural disconnect or discontinuity that students may encounter in the different cultural contexts that they participate at home and in school.
4	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are responsive primarily to one group (middle-class White students) are one of the fundamental reasons why, historically, middle-class White students have performed better than all other student groups.

5	Social capital, the people, and community resources used for educational or professional opportunities and advancement.
6	Out of school, knowledge can and should be used as a conduit to acquire in-school knowledge.
7	Preconceived notions of students can be highly problematic and stereotypical and may reinforce institutionalized racist beliefs if they are not fully comprehended because they give little consideration to the heterogeneity that exists within every group.
8	Everyday subtleties that may seem insignificant in one cultural context may be viewed with the utmost significance elsewhere.
9	The epistemological origin of school knowledge is heavily steeped in a Eurocentric worldview and ideology that largely omits the experiences, histories, contributions, and cultures of people of color, the poor, and women.
10	The marriage of culture and pedagogy is built upon a comprehensive and informed set of knowledge and skills that many practitioners often lack in their attempts to engage diverse students in the teaching and learning process.

The team members agreed that the list represented their top ten as a group. The team acknowledged and recognized that the top 2 responses pertained to academic disparities and developing a broader understanding of culture. The protocol process took longer than expected; therefore, there was not much time to review the list. However, everyone agreed on the facts and points that were listed and the order of the "top ten." Before ending the meeting, the researcher reminded everyone to submit reflections and read the next two chapters.

October 9, 2019

As the participants entered the Media Center, the researcher greeted them with a catered lunch to celebrate the final meeting and completion of Cycle 2. It was essential to celebrate the win with the participants to encourage further engagement and to show appreciation for the hard work that had been dedicated to the research. Everyone took the time to chat and enjoy the food before the start of the meeting.

The researcher began the meeting with the Connections protocol allowing three minutes for responses to the following prompt: "What are your thoughts about the action research at this

point?" Responses included, "I think it has been beneficial. I have noted and considered several ideas for my classroom, from the book", "I think we need to figure out how to get this information to everyone," "At one point, I felt like I was doing everything wrong. However, now I am beginning to understand how to tweak what I am doing to for the benefit of the students," "I think I was feeling that way too. I know that I make an effort to recognize diversity, but it may not have been received in the way I intended. I have a different lens now." In addition, "It is good to know I am not alone in my understanding of how to implement this kind of knowledge in my classroom or life."

The researcher reintroduced the research questions by stating, "I wanted to make sure that everyone is keeping the research questions in mind as we progress through the action research. Please be sure to ask any questions. These are the questions we would like to be able to answer at the end of the research." The researcher projected the questions on a screen. "The first question was, "How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?" The second research question was, "How do teachers/educators describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?" The third question was, "How can a professional learning community, focusing on cultural competency, change instructional practices?" The researcher then paused for a moment and allowed time for the participants to review the questions. The researcher then asked if there were any clarifying questions. There were no questions.

The researcher then presented a document, *Strategies for Building Cultural Competency* (Hanover Research, 2014). Each participant received a copy of the 18-page document. The researcher informed the participants that there was valuable information throughout the document, but the current focus was two sections: (1) Teacher Self-Assessment; and (2)

Learning About Students' Cultures. The researcher selected the two sections to address the

questions asked most often by educators who desired to improve their cultural competence. The

first question was, "How do I learn about a student's culture?" The section from the document

offered different aspects of a student's culture that a teacher could learn about without seeming

intrusive. An excerpt from the selected reading offered by Cartledge and Kourea (2008):

> To appropriately assess their students, teachers need to learn about their
>
> students' origins, education, relationship styles, family discipline strategies,
>
> views of time and space (e.g., punctuality), religion, food, health and hygiene,
>
> history, and traditions. To better understand and interpret student behaviors,
>
> teachers can make conscious efforts to get to know their students through such
>
> activities as scheduling lunch for informal conversations or having students
>
> bring in family pictures or albums to share with them (p.1).

The next questions were, "How do I reflect on "my own" culture?" and "What does that mean?"

The section from the document called Teacher Self-assessment offered several techniques for

self-reflection. Next, the researcher used a protocol, Text Rendering Experience (SRI - School

Reform Initiative, 2019), to review the section in its entirety with the participants. The purpose

of the protocol was to collaboratively construct meaning, clarify, and expand thinking about a

text or document. The researcher presented the steps for the protocol: (1) Each person shared a

sentence from the document that she/he thinks/feels particularly significant; (2) a phrase; (3) a

word; (4) the group discusses what they heard and said, by each participant, about the document

(FLDOE, 2019). The participants offered their responses voluntarily; no one was called on to

share responses. The participants' responses were recorded as they were offered (Table 9). Many

of the phrases and words offered in the protocol lent to the desire for educators to acquire

additional knowledge regarding self-reflection. One of the selected phrases in particular, "Once

teachers develop this knowledge about themselves, they will be better situated to recognize

cultural biases in their teaching and adjust their practices accordingly," resulted in many heading

nods indicating that the participants acknowledged the phrase regarding self-reflection as

noteworthy. The meeting was adjourned after the protocol.

Table 9 - Text Rendering Experience Protocol

Protocol: Text Rendering Experience

Sentence	Phrase	Word
Therefore, to teach effectively, educators must be aware of these frames of reference.	Effective Instruction	Effectively
Higher levels of multicultural awareness are associated with greater cultural competence, non-racist behavior, and knowledge about other cultures	Multicultural awareness	Awareness
Engage in reflective thinking and writing	Reflective thinking	Reflect
Teachers must develop a knowledge base for [culturally responsive teaching] by acquiring detailed, factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups	Factual information	Particularities
Once teachers develop this knowledge about themselves, they will be better situated to recognize cultural biases in their teaching and adjust their practices accordingly.	Develop knowledge	Develop
This information has direct implications for how and what students in diverse classrooms should be taught.	Direct implications	Implications
Teachers must strive to learn about their students' cultures to provide effective instruction	Share with them	Share
Above all, culturally competent schools strive to promote a culture of inclusiveness and acceptance actively	Strive to promote a culture of inclusiveness and acceptance actively.	Strive
the teacher shall demonstrate competency in valuing and promoting understanding of diversity	Understanding of diversity	Understanding
teachers must develop a knowledge base for [culturally responsive teaching] by acquiring detailed, factual information about the cultural particularities	Acquiring detail factual information	Detailed
Crucially, this understanding of student cultural norms must move beyond mere awareness and into specific	Reflect the learning needs	Reflect

practices that reflect the learning needs of diverse students.		
Develop an appreciation for diversity	Appreciation for diversity	Appreciation
[Multicultural Awareness]This is essential to developing cultural competence, as research indicates that higher levels of multicultural awareness are associated with greater cultural competence, non-racist behavior, and knowledge about other cultures.	Multicultural awareness	Multicultural
Provide numerous opportunities for skill-based training, with a specific focus on effective communication skills and cultural considerations within the classroom and outside the classroom.	Skill-based training	Training
Provide training on communication styles and the delivery of effective feedback when responding to prejudicial or culturally incompetent remarks.	Communication Styles	Communication
Provide management training for administrators and supervisors to assist with managing the attitudes of employees.	Training for administrators	Training
Acknowledge membership in different groups	Different groups	Different
Crucially, this understanding of student cultural norms must move beyond mere awareness and into specific practices that reflect the learning needs of diverse students.	Move beyond mere awareness	Awareness
Once teachers develop this knowledge about themselves, they will be better situated to recognize cultural biases in their teaching and adjust their practices accordingly. They will also be more open to diversity and thus better able to serve their students.	Knowledge about themselves	Themselves
Explore managing unconscious bias and assumptions harbored by [district] community members	Unconscious bias	Bias
by honestly examining their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, teachers begin to discover why they are who they are, and can confront biases that have influenced their value systems	Essential to develop cultural competence	Essential

Taking Action – Cycle 3

The first Action Research Implementation Team meeting for Cycle 3 took place on

October 23, 2019 (Appendix L). The researcher opened the meeting by introducing the speaker,

David Araya, Co-founder, President, and CEO of the Hispanic Organization Promoting

Education (H.o.P.e). Mr. Araya shared his experiences with working with students of diverse cultures on the secondary school level. He shared with the team that students often felt they were not heard, and more often than not, the students felt as though most of the people around them did not care about their success, or presence, which made it difficult for them. Mr. Arraya continued to share his experiences and then opened for Q&A. One of the participants asked if he knew of any resources for immigrant students to go to college, which Mr. Araya was able to answer in detail and provided specific resources that the teachers immediately wrote down.

A participant also asked, "What is the one thing that you hear most often that concerns our students?" He answered, "The one thing I hear most often is that their teachers seemed to believe that their parents do not care about their education; that teachers believed parents do not care because they are not available to come to the school readily. On the contrary, their parents sacrificed everything so that they can be in the United States to get better opportunities than they would in their home country." After the Questions and Answers session, Mr. Araya concluded his presentation. The researcher thanked Mr. Araya for sharing his knowledge with the group. The researcher then adjourned the meeting by reminding the team that the next meeting would be on November 21, 2019; this session would not be an actual meeting but a poverty simulation.

November 2019

"Imagine being socially and economically disadvantaged and daily, dealing with the stress that comes along with those realities. Now imagine that a student dealing with [all these] issues is sitting in your classroom, walking through the hallways of your building, waiting to be inspired by a loving, caring, and trustworthy teacher or administrator" (Jackson, 2019). Many students needed and desired this type of support. "One of the primary areas that multicultural education examines is the role of socioeconomic status. Many scholars have posited that U.S.

students are becoming increasingly poor and that school reform efforts need to be mindful of the widespread poverty that afflicts many of the nation's school-aged population" (Jackson, 2019).

On November 21, 2019 (Appendix M). The Action Research Implementation Team gathered for a poverty simulation. This intervention sought to sensitize educators on the impact of socioeconomic status on long-term student learning and classroom engagement. The event required a minimum of two months of planning and preparation by the researcher and the Design Team. Each participant received a reminder or invitation via email (Appendix N) for participation, as some of the members would serve as simulation participants to fill as many roles as possible. In preparation of the poverty simulation, the researcher assigned roles to each participant. The community members, in the simulation, ranged from interfaith services workers that provided housing for the homeless to a pawnbroker, social services, banker, check cashing clerk, food center clerk, doctor, community agency worker, police officer, or utility company workers for instance. There were enough participants to assign roles for five families in the simulation. The Aber family with three children (ages 8, 10, 16), The Duntley family with two children (ages 14 and 17), the Hanlow /Harper family with one child (age 1), the Knowles/Kaminski family with one child (age 15), and the Olson family with three children (ages three and 13-year-old twins).

Community Action Poverty Simulation – The Day of the Simulation

The researcher informed participants of their roles as they entered the Media Center and asked that they sit at the appropriate "homes" indicated by the last name posted on a section of the Media Center until the start of the simulation. Once all participants had arrived, the researcher began to explain the process and what the next 2 hours and 15 minutes would entail.

The researcher explained to the members of the Action Research Implementation Team that for an hour and 15 minutes, everyone would play a role in a simulation of a month in poverty. After the team members participated in the simulation, a debriefing of the activity took place. A week in this simulation equals a total of 15 minutes, and the weekends were five minutes. At the end of each week, everyone returned to their "homes" to regroup and plan. The researcher further noted that the "school" would close on week three, so make arrangements for childcare. The researcher then introduced the "staffer/community members" to identify community resources and agencies that were made available during the simulation. The researcher set the timer for 10 minutes to provide time for the participants to review the pre-packaged family packets. Each packet varied in content, depending on the family profile. The packets included a family profile, names of family members, and social security cards. Some of the families received EBT – Electronic Benefits Transfer cards, transportation passes, disability checks or benefits checks, car titles, and appliance cards (pawning option), among other items that applied to the family profile. The families were also informed; in the simulation, 15 minutes is equal to one week. With this in mind, if someone in the family is employed full time, half of the time allotted for the week would be spent "at work," which shortens the amount of time the family has to complete other required tasks. The researcher also reviewed the terminology, "There may be some terms used in the simulation that may be unfamiliar, EBT stands for Electronic Benefits Transfer card, and this is the Social Services Agency's card for Food Stamps and cash benefits. TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which is the federal government's program to provide cash benefits. If there is an EBT card in the family packet, it means that the family or individual receives assistance — the amount of the benefit on the reverse side of the card. If there is no card, the individual or family may qualify but must apply

at the Social Services Agency" (MACA, 2018). The researcher then reminded the families of their goals. "Keep in mind that your goals during this month are to keep your home secure, feed your family regularly, keep your utilities on, make all necessary loan payments, pay for miscellaneous expenses, and meet unexpected situations. For those families with school-age children, be sure children are in school. Working parents with preschoolers must ensure that children are cared for while during work hours" (MACA, 2018).

Community Action Poverty Simulation Week 1. Once the preliminary instructions were complete, the researcher then set the clock for 15 minutes. The researcher then said, "And your week starts now." Each family moved about the room according to their family profile. The researcher could tell who had taken the time to read the packet and develop a plan, and who did not. After approximately seven minutes, some of the families began to panic in response to the amount of time remaining, leaving little time to complete the required tasks. Issues like obtaining transportation passes had proven difficult with limited funds. The researcher gave a two-minute warning and reminded the participants that they would need to return to their homes or the homeless shelter for the "weekend" period. The researcher called time, and everyone returned to his or her respective areas for the "weekend" and plan for the next week. During the "weekend" period, the researcher noticed that the participants were more engaged with one another trying to figure out their next moves. Participants began having meaningful conversations with one another.

For instance, the mother of the Knowles family addressed the father of the family, stating, "You wasted time during the first week and missed a week's pay. Now am not sure how we are going to pay this bill." The researcher noticed that increased engagement generated conversations that mimicked real-life conversations. Ms. Aber, stated to her husband, "This is

not going to work if you are not going to look for employment." Alternatively, the Olson family worked to figure out what to do next. The father was in jail, and the oldest sibling, a 21-year old college student, was attempting to juggle school and his siblings. There was no transportation to take the youngest child to daycare, leaving the older siblings (13-year old twins) to take care of the child, but this meant not going to school. Each family was working out a plan to move forward in Week 2.

Community Action Poverty Simulation Week 2. The researcher set the clock for 15 minutes and stated, "And now, Week two begins." During Week Two, the family members moved more deliberately. The researcher noticed that all of the full-time workers made it to work on time and were able to receive a check before leaving. A homeless woman, Ms. Harper, visited interfaith services and social services with her baby in tow. One of her tasks was to secure a place to live before the end of Week 2, which she was able to do. The Aber's had a pregnant teen daughter who needed to see a doctor; she eventually made a visit but could not afford the prenatal vitamins and was not able to fill the prescription.

Meanwhile, the Olson family decided that it was easier to skip school and save money by not having the burden of paying daycare. During those events, various family members were summoned by the courts, utility collectors were coming to collect payment or disconnect utilities and mortgage, and rent collectors were visiting families to collect money or evict families from their homes. Some families could not make enough money to pay bills and began pawning appliances and household items. The researcher also noticed that some of the participants began illegal activities like selling food stamp cards or pawning something but managing to get the item back when no one was looking. At the end of the period, the researcher called time. All participants returned to their homes. The researcher reminded the participants that during Week

3, there would be no school. The parents/guardians would need to secure suitable arrangements for their children.

Community Action Poverty Simulation Week 3. The researcher set the clock for 15 minutes and stated, "And now Week Three begins." At this point in the simulation, the participants began to devise plans to survive, as others were contemplating illegal activity. Parents figured out how to get care for their children while school is out of session. One of the families, the Knowles, had a teen daughter who worked part-time at the "Food-O-Rama" who asked for more hours because school was out of school for a week. However, the money the teen earned went directly to the family bills. The grandmother of the Knowles family felt terrible that the family had to use the teen's money, so she gave the teen $10 of her earnings back. There was an arrest of a teenage boy for illegal drug activity, which led to a younger sibling to disengaging in school. Also, there was a twist in the simulation. The researcher served as the director for the simulation was the holder of "Luck of the Draw" cards. One member from each family received a Luck of the Draw card. Some of the cards read, "GOOD NEWS LOTTERY WINNER – You win the lottery! If you have $1 in cash, you may trade it for $25 from the bank. Otherwise, return this card and draw another." or "BAD NEWS – FLAT TIRE – Your car has developed a flat tire, and you must get it fixed. Pay the bank $10 and report to work late, if you are employed. If you do not have a car, return this card and draw another." or "BAD NEWS – BAIL BOND – A member of your family is arrested. The person from whom you receive this card will deliver one member of your family to jail where she/he will remain until a $100 bond is paid or police decide to release her/him. Pay the bank $100 for the bond." The Luck of the Draw cards represented unexpected that arise in life that can determine whether a family eats or has transportation or

utilities. At the end of the period, all family members returned to their homes for the "weekend" period.

Community Action Poverty Simulation Week 4. The researcher set the clock for 15 minutes and stated, "And now Week Four begins." During the final simulation period, family members seemed to make more changes in how they made decisions. One of the family members, Mr. Hanlow, felt compelled to ask the researcher/director if it was okay to steal. The researcher was surprised but replied with little reaction, "If that is the decision you would like to make." The participant left immediately and went to "find" money. The researcher noticed that some of the participants were becoming frustrated with family members; some decided to separate from the family and "do their own thing." The researcher also noticed that the children from the Olson family never returned to school; one child from the Duntley family attended school; however, schoolwork was not the primary focus. The pregnant teenage daughter also began to miss school, focusing primarily on her relationship with the father of the child. During the last remaining minutes of the simulation, the researcher noticed that some of the families seemed to have made progress. However, it all began to unravel with each turn of events. At the end of the period, the researcher called time, and the families returned to their homes.

Community Action Poverty Simulation Debrief. To begin the debrief process, the researcher provided five minutes for the participants to debrief with their "families" before shared out to the group. After five minutes for the "family" debrief, the researcher asked everyone to arrange their seats to form a circle in the center of the Media Center. However, "families" should continue to sit near each other. For the next hour, the researcher posed questions to facilitate a discussion around the simulation experience. The floor opened for participants to reply to questions voluntarily rather than the researcher calling on individuals.

Table 10 is a breakdown of the poverty simulation debrief. After debriefing, the researcher

thanked the group for participating in the simulation. The researcher reminded the participants of

the date for the next and final meeting of the action research study, December 11, 2019.

Table 10: Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) – Debrief

CAPS – Debrief Questions and Answers	
1. What feelings did you experience during your month in poverty? How did you feel about yourself? Why did you feel that way?	
"I was feeling overwhelmed with trying to stay in school and take care of my siblings. I felt like it was not fair that I had to change what I was doing to take care of them. It was disturbing because even though my father was in jail, I began to think of different ways to GET money." Oldest Sibling Otto - Olson Family	"I felt like I let the family down when I missed a full week of pay the first week. That one time affected the rest of the month. We could not catch up. I was not able to take care of my family. I feel like the father should take care of the family." Father Kris - Knowles/Kaminski Family
"I started out feeling like I could conquer the challenge, even with starting unemployed. It started getting more and more difficult to manage, and I could not take care of the family. Even after pawning items, I found myself doing things that were illegal to try to get money. It was not a good feeling." Father Albert - Aber Family	"When I first started, I was homeless living with my one year old and my boyfriend. I used every moment to get to the resources I needed and felt like I was on my own, and we soon kind of parted ways to do what we needed to do, separately." Single Mother Helen - Harper/Hanlow Family
2. What happened to your family? What good things? What bad things?	
"As a single mother with two children, my son had a child on the way and was arrested for selling drugs, and my daughter did not want to go to school; she wanted to see her brother. I was faced with a lot of hard choices, and it was difficult to keep up with the demands and still go to work." Single Mother Doris - Duntley Family	"My family seemed to go from bad to worse. We started with a pregnant teen who lost interest in school and an unemployed father who could not find work. The only good thing was that we were together as a family at the end." Mother Ann - Aber Family
"I was a disabled grandmother in the home, but I was in charge of organizing, budgeting, and paying bills. I became very annoyed when my son-in-law missed a week's pay, and my daughter had to run around, trying to figure out how to get HIM to work. Something also went wrong with the plumbing adding an extra burden. It was shameful to have to use my granddaughter's money to help pay bills. She should not have to worry about those things." Grandmother Kate - Kaminski/Knowles Family	
3. How did other people respond to your needs? How did you feel about their responses?	
"I started the simulation homeless, so I went to social services. I had to sit in the waiting room for a long time, knowing I did not have long before they closed. The people working there seemed to be in no hurry. It was frustrating, but I stuck with it and ended up getting housing." Single mother Helen - Harper/Hanlow Family	
4. How did those of you who were children feel about the family's situation? Why? How do you think poverty affects education?	

"I felt like I just added to the issues being pregnant. It was a lot of pressure. I tried to have a relationship with the father of the child and maybe have a family of our own so that I would not be a burden to my family, but at that time, he was more interested in making money and selling drugs. I was still going to school, though, not sure I was doing well, though." Daughter Alice - Aber Family	"Before we started are instructions said that we had to stay in character and act like children, so that's what we did. We did not have many choices. My sister and I stayed home to watch our little brother. After a week it became easier to just stay at home so we could help our older brother. I felt somewhat sad because I knew I should have been in school. Honestly, I started to think outside of character about my students and the situations they deal with." Daughter Olivia - Olson Family
"There wasn't anything I could do. It was easy to see how our students can get caught in a cycle that they did not create, trying to be supportive of your family. It was also hard to watch my older sibling, trying to make everything work with my father being in jail." Daughter Opal - Olson Family	"I can agree with trying to be supportive. I wanted to help my family, but it was frustrating having to work and give up my money for bills. It also made it hard to focus on the school part (actually going) when I was a part of the discussion about the bills." Daughter Katlin - Knowles/Kaminski Family

5. What insights or conclusions have you come to about the life experience of low-income families?

Combined family responses:
"Transportation can be a very big issue for families. It was very difficult getting around without a transportation pass. You COULD NOT get around without a transportation pass."
"There are so many issues that can hinder a child from going to school, and if they get to school, their focus could be on so many other things."
"Attendance in school is important. The students missing days created a gap in their learning.
"Parents are making the best decisions they can with the resources they have."
"I thought about the father that missed a week of pay. Sometimes we never see parents at school because they cannot afford to miss work. I'm wondering if we should have conferences for different work shifts."
"Some students come to school in survival mode."
"In just a considerably short period, so many of us made decisions that we would not normally make because of the circumstances we were in, now just imagine how it feels for a student that lives this every day."
"Having to think about these types of scenarios in your real life cannot be easy, and engagement in class can be nearly impossible."
"I never really put a lot of thought into how much impact poverty can play in student performance at school."

December 11, 2019

The final meeting of Cycle 3 took place in the local school Media Center (Appendix O) The researcher provided all participants with lunch before starting the meeting. The Action Research Implementation Team assembled in a conference room to start the meeting. The researcher opened the meeting and gave an overview of the agenda. The meeting included a short discussion about chapters 5-7 of the book study text and final thoughts about the poverty simulation. The remaining time the participants completed journal reflection entries. The book study facilitator explained that the floor would be open for one or two comments for each

remaining chapter and the simulation. The participants share their reflections regarding race-related issues, personal biases that they had come to realize were held, racist structures, and individual accountability. The participants also shared their perceived difficulty in participating in the group due in part to having to face and address personal bias and the overwhelming challenge and expectation for educators to meet every need of the student. The participants also discussed the need to build meaningful relationships with students that built on their knowledge of students' backgrounds. In closing, the participants discussed the impact of the poverty simulation. Reflection of the activity reminded the educators of particular experiences with students and caused reflection and a new lens for culturally viewing future scenarios regarding students who live in poverty.

Taking Action – Cycle 4

April 14, 2020

The Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic closed all of the schools in the United States. This world pandemic caused a worldwide problematic paradigm shift within the culture of schooling. Teaching and learning became completely virtual. Therefore, Cycle 4 was executed by using only virtual technology. The researcher used the Zoom virtual platform for the Cycle 4 meetings. Attached to the invitation email for the Cycle 4 meeting were several peer-reviewed articles that would guide the discussions. The topic for the meeting was 'Did Cultural Competency training, during this study prepare you for the cultural shift caused by COVID-19/Coronavirus? How?' The article entitled, *3 Ways the Coronavirus Pandemic Could Reshape Education* (Tam & El-Azar, 2020), guided the discussion. The researcher started the meeting by thanking everyone for attending. The researcher then started the meeting with the Connections protocol. The springboard, "Share something you have learned from or about your students during digital

learning days." The researcher set the timer for 3 minutes. One participant stated, "I think directions have to be like crystal clear." "Flexibility is also a key issue with all of the different dynamics that our students deal with. So, it's very interesting to learn that some of them are working at this time trying to support their families." One of the administrators on the team stated, "I feel like there is a level of trust that we're building with some of the families."

After the Connections protocol, the researcher introduced a modified text rendering protocol. Participants offered a phrase from the article, *3 Ways the Coronavirus Pandemic Could Reshape Education,* and shared why the phrase was selected. A teacher stated, " 'Moreover the less affluent and digitally savvy individual families are, the further their students are left behind when classes transition online, these children lose out because of the cost of digital devices and data plans.' I think we've all seen that kind of crisis occur." The teacher went on to share that the students at Paisley High School had to borrow devices to complete assignments, and there was an added hurdle of obtaining an internet connection. "The pandemic is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the skills students need in this unpredictable world, such as informed decision-making, creative problem-solving, and perhaps above all adaptability.", shared by one of the administrators on the team. An administrator offered, "Some of this technology [depends on] the kids being able to know what to do, how to keep safe, and how to access the technology. Skills that some teachers have used more than others." The researcher noted that professional development might be the resolution for this issue. Another participant discussed the topic of student engagement, "There's an unintentional detachment and so when you are in a classroom with students, you can look them in the eye and give them that look, and they know you care about them. Being online, you can email them, you can send them messages, but it's not the

same thing, and I think it's easy for students to disconnect and detach when they don't see a person." The protocol continued until everyone that wanted to share had the opportunity to do so.

April 16, 2020

The Implementation Team met via a virtual platform. The researcher started the meeting with the Connections protocol. The springboard question for the protocol asked that the participants share what they have learned from or about educators, including themselves, during Digital Learning Days (DLD). One of the participants stated, "I think I relearned something. I always knew that teachers were integral in our students' lives, but I think this process has shown me just how important the school is and the teachers are." The researcher noted that this thought lends to the importance of teacher-student relationships. One participant expressed the importance of making connections with families and learning techniques modeled by colleagues.

After the close of Connections, the researcher introduced the topic of the meeting. "In this study, we have discussed the impact of poverty on student engagement. How has the added cultural shift of Covid-19 Coronavirus, influenced how you engage students? How are the students affected? The researcher also restated the names of the articles reviewed for the meeting, *Mitigate the Effects of Home Confinement on Children during the Covid-19 Outbreak, As Classes Move Online During Covid-19, What Are Disconnected Students To Do?, and Online Teaching Can Be Culturally Responsive* (Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang, 2020).

The participants reviewed the articles individually and shared a phrase from the article and why the phrase was selected. About the article, *Mitigate effects of Home Confinement on Children during the Covid-19 Outbreak*, a participant shared, "Children have little voice to advocate for their needs." The participant expressed that this phrase was important to her because she had been attempting to reach out to some students at no avail. The participant said

she believed students did not respond because they did not have the emotional intelligence to express how they were feeling. An added comment, "We are each other's social safety net." The participant expressed the importance of reaching out to students and parents, especially those who are in disadvantaged or single-parent families. Also, the participant recognized that the disconnect between teachers and students could be "an issue of access, which is directly related to poverty." The participants also discussed the local school being a "safe haven" for many students. Many students depend on relationships and connections outside of their homes for day to day survival, mentally and physically. The next article, *As Classes Move Online During Covid-19, What Are Disconnected Students to Do?* (Fishbane & Tomer, 2020). The discussion around this article centered around the digital divide. Members listed the many resources not available to students: teacher-student physical contact; emotional contact; devices, internet connection, and the friendly classroom environment. A phrase shared by one of the participants, "The students who are already the most vulnerable to falling behind, face, even more, hurdles, to keep up with the pace. [The pandemic] increased the impact for many students that already had difficult situations to deal with." The next article, *Online Teaching Can Be Culturally Responsive* (Mahmood, 2020)*,* sparked discussion around building relationships, student engagement, and instructional strategies. One participant shared the phrase, "At the heart of culturally responsive teaching, is the idea of being responsive to a student's academic and social-emotional needs." The participants discussed the need to provide support for students who were demonstrating emotional distress during the pandemic. A balance between attending to students on a social-emotional level as well as implementing instructional practices that steer away from homogeneous classrooms and deficit thinking, and promote overall student success. Several members discussed how the article encouraged teachers to use compassion over compliance. The

researcher, from a leadership standpoint, noted that within the realms of education, being culturally responsive, in the new normal meant being responsive to the changes in school culture and home culture by acknowledging what the change means for students as well as teachers long term. Each participant had the opportunity to share from the article before the meeting adjournment.

April 21, 2020

The third Implementation Team meeting for Cycle 4, continued in the guidelines of safety due to Covid-19 held in a virtual format. The researcher started the meeting by introducing the topic and moved into the Connections protocol. The springboard for the protocol required the participants to complete the sentence, "I think my (students, student's parents, administration, teachers, colleagues or district) do not understand instructional practices [during the pandemic] because . . . ? The researcher paused the meeting and allowed the participants a moment to think about the statement. An administrator stated, "Other schools in other parts of our district are sometimes missing the struggle or the difficulty that some of our kids have with some of the [guidelines] that have been put in place." The researcher acknowledged the statement commenting that the guidelines were meant for 'all,' but direct and customized support was needed for the specific needs of the students attending Paisley High School.

The topic for this meeting was - In this study, we have discussed the various aspects of cultural competence and how it relates to instructional practices and student outcomes. How have your instructional practices changed? To what degree do you believe cultural competency assists in educating students through the pandemic? The article for the meeting discussion was, *Poor Students Face Digital Divide in How Teachers Learn to Use Tech.* (Herold, 2017). Following the same protocol as previous meetings, participants shared a phrase from the article and why the

phrase was selected. "Our responsibility is to prepare students for the next phase of their life, whether that be fast food retail or a warehouse."

The participant expressed that at times educators get "hung up" on going to college when not all students are college-bound, stating that educators should not "fixate" on students going to college. Another participant selected the same phrase and shared the when she read the phrase, she felt angry. She believed the author was implying that some student groups expected to pursue jobs rather than the college experience. She explained that the comparison of two schools in the article, one with access to technology with lessons that included games and game design at the age of 10, while students who attended a different school, expected to "just go to low paying jobs, and it just perpetuating the cycle of poverty." The discussion also touched on student engagement through relevant lessons and exposing students to opportunities in the classroom. One of the participants shared information about programs that were available to students that provide training to go into professional fields. The participants agreed that it is vital to be familiar with the resources available to assist students in making decisions about future endeavors, creating life chances. The participants also discuss the importance of the professional learning community and professional development, discussing the lack of training about technology but not the lack of opportunities. The local school provided numerous opportunities for technology training, yet many teachers selected not to attend. In hindsight, the teachers recognized the value in training. They also agreed that the lack of training separated them more from their students than teachers that were well trained and prepared to execute lessons online.

April 23, 2020

The Implementation Team met via a virtual platform. The researcher started the meeting with the Connections protocol. The springboard question was, "How are the Digital Learning

Days going? One of the Implementation Team members who served as a counselor expressed

concern regarding the feedback she was getting from teachers. Teachers reported that student

motivation decreased. One of the members of the team, the Media Specialist, offered that there

was an increase in student engagement in regards to eBooks and audiobooks checked out. The

students were still reading. "It is a matter of getting to know your students in this [environment]

too, and what's going on in their lives on a personal basis." The researcher noted that the

teachers' comments led to an understanding that the pandemic changed the culture of teaching

and learning and called for additional changes to instructional strategies and lesson planning. The

researcher closed connections.

The article, *This is How Digital Literacy can Transform Education* (Srinivasan, 2020)*,*

guided the discussion. One member stated, "School universities will need to expand and revise

their curriculum if they wish to educate students for a digital future that is inclusive, sustainable,

and collaborative." The participant explained that collaboration with colleagues assisted him in

restructuring lesson plans and instructional practices. Another participant offered, "Good design

can be a source of empowerment." The teacher commented that she had a significant amount of

SWD students, but with assistance from her administrator and colleagues, she was able to build

the elective courses for seniors, which assisted them in graduating. She also mentioned that she

attended a virtual Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting to continue to provide services for a

Special Education student, despite the school's closed doors. Another phrase shared, "Digital

literacy is just the doorway," led to a discussion questioning if students themselves are prepared

to learn in a digital format. Although these students have lived through a digital age, many of

them lack digital literacy. Therefore, if teachers and students alike lack training in this area, the

divide becomes more profound and broader in regards to the achievement gap and student

engagement. One of the participants mentioned not forgetting the human side of digital teaching and learning, a critical piece of teaching and learning is relationships, human contact.

Evaluating Action

Coughlan and Brannick (2010) describe the Evaluating action step of action research as the outcomes of the action both intended and unintended. In this study, the Action Research Design Team performed this step during the study. After each cycle, the Action Research Design Team met to discuss participant progress, the effectiveness of the interventions, and possible adjustments for the next cycle. In addition, after each Implementation Team meeting, the Design Team met briefly to discuss "just in time" changes to the cycles.

Evaluating Action – Cycle 1

July 2019

The researcher developed an Action Research Design Team and, with the assistance of the Design Team, developed the Implementation Team. The Design Team reviewed and assessed the criteria required for full participation, which included attendance, documentation, assignments, and level of active participation. To ensure readiness and preparedness, the Design Team reviewed the proposed intervention action plans and the printed agendas.

Evaluating Action – Cycle 2

October 2019

The first Design Team meeting of Cycle 3, convened on October 23, 2019. The Design Team reviewed the results of each activity in Cycle 2. The book study was the first intervention activity. The Design Team agreed that the book study was successful in developing a collaborative team spirit and providing a vehicle to examine many deep-rooted educational issues. The book study also created another resource for increasing the ability to increase student

engagement. The next topic on the agenda was the guest speaker. The guest speaker presented cultural competency content through the lens of secondary education and post-secondary education. The presentation, activities, and discussions challenged the participants to assess their levels of cultural humility as well as cultural competency as an educator. The Design Team agreed that the knowledge brought to the team was valuable, complemented, and reinforced one another. The participants reflected on their culture and the meaning of culture, which are the first steps in becoming culturally competent.

The last item on the agenda to evaluate was the Benchmark meeting. The Benchmark meeting provided an opportunity for the researcher and the Design Team to evaluate the progress of the Action Research Implementation Team. During the Benchmark meeting, the Action Research Implementation Team reviewed the research questions as a reminder of the intended direction of the research. Additionally, the Action Research Implementation Team reviewed research-based cultural competency strategies to increase actionable knowledge for the participants to consider in their reflections of the new knowledge introduced during the action research. The Design Team concluded that the interventions taken thus far were successful in progressing towards its intended purposes of identifying strategies and providing cultural competency professional development for educators in a professional learning community environment.

After the Evaluating Action step from Cycle 2, the Action Research Design Team determined that the proposed interventions were successful and would move forward as planned with the proposed interventions for Cycle 3. The consistency of design between Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 supported the theoretical framework that guided the action research as a whole. The change theories from Kotter and Lewin guided the interventions of the research. The Change

Theory, according to Lewin, offers that "the process of change entails creating the perception that a change is needed, then moving toward the new, desired level of behavior and finally, solidifying that new behavior as the norm" (Study.com, 2019). Cycle 3 continued by "moving" participants toward "desired levels of behavior." Cycle 3 marked the conclusion of the action research for this study.

The Action Research Design Team repurposed the final meeting of Cycle 2 to add a "Benchmark" meeting (Appendix K). The Design Team agreed that a "check-in" was needed to gauge the participant's engagement in the process and to review the research questions. The Design Team wanted to ensure the discussions remained focused, and the research questions were being answered. The team also wanted to ensure that the interventions addressed the purpose and the research questions. A Benchmark meeting would provide an opportunity to gauge the progress of the participants. The Action Research Design Team also decided that it would be an excellent time to present research-based strategies for cultural competency, utilizing a brief from Hanover Research, *Strategies for Building Cultural Competency* (Hanover Research, 2014).

Evaluating Action – Cycle 3

The Action Research Design Team met briefly to discuss the impact of the action research interventions and activities thus far. The team agreed that the inventions made a lasting impact on the participants in the research study. The benefits from the professional development would have a long-term positive impact on not only teacher-student interaction but student engagement and instructional practices. The members also agreed that the data from the research would answer the research questions.

Evaluating Action - Cycle 4

Within a few days, the Paisley High School educators, who had taught and worked in a face-to-face setting, were forced to transform their instructional practices to a virtual and electronic platform. Several educators had no experience in effectively teaching using a virtual platform. The Design Team met on April 23, 2020, to discuss Cycle 4. The Design Team agreed that Cycle 4 would be much different, and the intervention had the potential to give extra support to these educators who were experiencing and reacting to new systems. The design team recognized that Cycle 4 would probably serve more than one purpose. The discussions in Cycle 4 first took on their same collaborative culture, but as the activities progressed, the discussions became emotional and sincerely revealing. The participants shared their thoughts and emotions regarding the impact of Coronavirus Covid-19 personally and professionally. The team agreed that through the discussions, the research questions were answered, yet the discussions allowed the participants to discuss how the closing of schools made it more challenging to interact with students, thus creating new instructional needs in order to continue to motivate students to engage in the curriculum lessons. An intense discussion occurred that focused on the paradigm shift affecting: lesson planning, parental involvement, student recognition, exceptionality instruction, electronic device availability, and hunger.

Focus Group Interview

April 24, 2020

The final activity in the research study was a Focus Group Interview. The interview served as an opportunity for the researcher to gather further data on participant learnings during the study. The researcher prepared seven questions derived from the Albemarle County School district, *Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey, 2009*. The interview, facilitated through a

virtual format, included nine members from the Implementation Team. Each member responded to the questions and answered any follow-up or clarifying questions. The questions prepared for the interview, each related to cultural competency, provoked responses that revealed the progress educators made during the study. The participants shared their thoughts regarding the difference in how they defined culture and cultural competency as opposed to when the study began. In addition, participants described how their perspectives evolved throughout the study concerning self-reflection and overcoming inner biases. Further, participants shared the importance of collaboration as a professional learning community, professional development, and sharing instructional strategies. The participants also discussed the emphasized value of cultural competency concerning student engagement, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices in the context of the pandemic.

Chapter Summary

Long (2012) justified that although many methods of explaining the circumstances of why a behavior exists, the activities of "rich thick" description and focused reflection can lay the groundwork for successful interventions. The first three cycles followed a prescribed agenda that evolved through the steps of a PLC. The Action Research Design Team developed four action research cycles, following the continuous quality improvement process, to provide actionable knowledge in the area of cultural competency. Through examining books and textbooks, the participants were able to construct and reveal their own lived experiences when using cultural competency as a skill to engage high school culturally diverse students. Through listening to guest expert speakers, the participants were able to reflect on their actual competence in appreciating cultural differences among their students and the students' diverse learning styles.

This chapter has attempted to present the context and circumstances of the four cycles and the activities and the participant's reactions.

This action research qualified as a bonded system for a case study because of the location of Paisley high school surrounded by poverty, low-performing state test scores, a paramount of many diverse cultures, and other marginalized challenges. The first three cycles revealed participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding those challenges. However, the activities in Cycle 4 were through the lens of an added circumstance, a worldwide pandemic. This chapter has also attempted to provide the additional context of the same participants, yet with significant paradigm shifts. Each cycle, described in detail, with participant quotes provided a verbal mapping of the participant's growth. In conclusion, the participants purported to be more confident. The participants not only wanted to continue the professional development but also wanted to develop ways to offer the experience to remaining faculty and staff.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop an action research case study that followed an action plan focused on establishing cultural competency within each academic and operational component of a selected school campus enrolling culturally diverse learners. In response to the completion of the intervention implemented, as a part of this action research study, Chapter 5 presents the complete findings in accordance to each research question. The following research questions guided this study:

- How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

- How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

- How can a professional learning community focused on cultural competency change instructional practices?

Action research Cycles 1-4, provided data to support the overall research study findings. Table 11 shows data derived from the preliminary coding. The occurrences strengthen the data and provide basic categories of focus. For instance, 218+ occurrences suggested, the participants

strongly believe "culturally competent teachers engage their students by incorporating their

histories, languages, cultural beliefs, and practices into teaching and learning," which addresses

research question 1 in part. Or, 122+ occurrences suggest, training can help teachers understand

various aspects of cultural competence and how it relates to instructional practices and student

outcomes. Table 11 shows further synthesizing of the data to develop specific findings and

subsequent themes for the research. Table 12 shows the data connected to the research questions.

Table 11 Coding Occurrences Chart

	Categories	Cycle 2-3 Journal Reflections	Cycle 2-4 Discussions	Cycle 4 Focus Group Interview
1	Engagement through cultural competency impacts student success. (RQ1)	24	93	10
2	Culturally competent teachers engage their students by incorporating their histories, languages, cultural beliefs, and practices into teaching and learning. (RQ1)	79	218	42
3	Cultural competency training entails giving students a voice to share information about their backgrounds, including their languages, positive contributions made by individuals from their respective cultural groups. (RQ1)	19	64	20
4	Teachers described cultural competency training as an opportunity for self-reflection and analysis of one's inner biases. (RQ2)	62	115	19
5	Teachers perceive that participation in cultural competency training is beneficial for teachers as well as students long-term. (RQ2)	31	154	26
6	Professional development may be instrumental in increasing teachers' cultural competence. (RQ3)	48	38	7
7	Teachers need specific research-based strategies that can be explicitly demonstrated and incorporated into their teaching practices. (RQ3)	27	35	1
8	Participation in cultural competency training can help teachers understand various aspects of cultural competence and how it relates instructional practices and student outcomes. (RQ3)	38	122	27
9	Participation in cultural competency training can help teachers create and modify more student-centered lessons. (RQ3)	46	74	16

Table 12 - Data Collection Connected to Research Questions

Research Question	Findings
1. How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?	- Professional development that includes examining current literature may be instrumental in understanding the alignment of cultural competency and the ability to increase student engagement during instruction. - Before the training, participants recognize their level of cultural competence may have been severely limited to their own personal lived experience. - Culturally competent teachers are able to engage their students by incorporating their histories, language, cultural beliefs, and practices into teaching and learning. - Cultural competency training has increased the awareness of how student voice can increase student academic engagement. - Teachers need specific research-based strategies that can be explicitly demonstrated and incorporated into their instructional practices.
2. How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?	- Participants perceive that teachers' participation in cultural competency training is beneficial not only for students, but for professional educators, parent stakeholders, and the entire campus. - Participation in cultural competency training leads to self-reflection, bias analysis, and teacher efficacy. - Participants believe cultural competency training must have the support of leadership to ensure sustainability and buy-in. - Participation in Professional development is essential in the growth of novice and veteran educators - Cultural competency training entailed allowing students to express their student voice to share information about their

	backgrounds, including their languages, positive contributions made by individuals from their respective cultural groups.
3. How can a professional learning community, focusing on cultural competency change instructional practices?	A professional learning community focused on cultural competence can: • support problematic and controversial instructional issues that often arise. • deliver a sound format to deliver appropriate professional development for new instructional practices that require technology platform changes • examine individual student learning styles that may be connected with current health issues • provide a compassionate learning atmosphere yet accomplish compliance for instructional change • incorporate parental involvement strategies without controversy.

Data Collection and Findings Connected to Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

The purpose of the first research question was to understand how the study intervention action, cultural competency training, had impacted a needed skill all educators should master - the ability to engage students, especially culturally diverse students, during instruction. Participants were able to either affirm or contradict their initial perceptions about the impact of cultural competence on student engagement. These scenarios were put in place to retrieve from the participants, authentic, self-reflective opinions, and views about any unrevealed teacher practices or biases as related to student engagement during classroom instruction. One participant had never recognized the relationship between student engagement and cultural competency in any given school setting.

"You got to know your audience, no matter what you do. It's like if I went to the far

reaches of [District] County, or a rural, poor, white state, I would still have to have some

cultural competency, no matter where I'm teaching."

Additionally, the PLC structure provided a "trusting" atmosphere to listen to the discussion on

how the participants had applied any new knowledge (relationships between student engagement

and cultural competency) gained from the intervention practices. An overall analysis of the data

used to answer the first research question indicated a consensus among the participants that the

intervention implementation provided an opportunity for classroom teachers to monitor student

engagement behavior very closely. One of the participants reported a new change that was

developing because of this training.

"I'm considering flipping my classroom. Making class a little more engaging, a way for

those kids that I see that are really thriving using eClass."

The participants believed that when cultural competence is an embedded attribute of the

instructional practices, then student engagement increases, teacher self-efficacy improves, and

increased academic performance may occur.

By the end of the study, the data suggested that teachers understood, that to increase

student engagement, educators should become more knowledgeable about their individual

students' backgrounds to plan for lessons, implement teaching strategies, and create assessments,

which incorporated information about their students' histories, languages, cultural beliefs, and

practices. One participant said it this way:

"I think I relearned something. I always knew that teachers were integral in our student's

life, but I think this process has shown me just how important the school is and the

teachers are. The teachers are like family to these students."

Another participant offered:

> *"We cannot ignore the fact that our country's demographics are changing very drastically and dramatically. Our willingness to embrace this change will have a direct impact on our schools."*

One participant candidly stated:

> *"I do not always or continuously practice or put in place this willingness to take into account my students' culture, and I think I have fallen into the trap of grouping cultures that are not necessarily the same. I think this chapter has made me realize that I need to do better as an educator."*

Allowing students to voice their perceptions about curriculum issues was clarified by the cultural competency training. The participants were intrigued as to how important this student right was as related to learning.

> *"After the last session, I allowed an open forum about the daily lesson. I was amazed at the overall participation and varied opinions discussed".*

Participants discussed new experiences in the classroom, where students shared cultural differences like arranged marriages and how, in some ways, they agreed with the practice, but in other ways, they wanted the freedom to make their own decisions.

> *"I think this was one of my, aha moments, where like, I actually was intentional questioning of culture and made me really get to know my students on a deeper level, and I think they respect that."*

The participants also expressed the need to become more knowledgeable about cultural competence through ongoing professional development so that ultimately, academic, social, and

emotional outcomes improve for all of their culturally diverse students. One participant did not believe enough training through a PLC format was available on campus.

"Making sure that our teachers have the resources they need as far as cultural competency is concerned, in how to work with students of all backgrounds and their colleagues of all backgrounds. I feel that there is not enough training in that area."

Moreover, an analysis of the data indicated that teachers need to be equipped with specific research-based strategies that can be explicitly demonstrated and incorporated into their teaching and assessment practices.

By the end of cycle three, most participants recognized the importance of cultural competence in student engagement. Participants gained knowledge about how building relationships with students, incorporating student backgrounds into lessons, and viewing students from an asset rather than a deficit thinking lens promotes student engagement. Other participants' responses indicated the intervention led them to increase their students' engagement by providing opportunities that would allow them to share information about their culturally diverse languages, practices, and beliefs through student inventories, classroom discussions, and student-teacher interaction.

After the onset of the Pandemic 2020, the school closings, and the transition to the virtual platform, the Cycle 4 findings changed significantly regarding student engagement as aligned to a virtual impact. When the participants discussed their feelings and beliefs during the digital learning days, the impact of engagement resulted in the following responses.

- *"Kids are getting unmotivated."*

- *"I've had two students that have been working so hard to pass these classes as well, but I have seen a lack of motivation from some, including in peer leadership too."*

- *"As a school librarian, I've seen an increase in eBook and audiobook circulation. When before I was begging students to sign up."*

- *"I can see now that it's a matter of, I have to change the way I'm planning. I know that I speak a lot about change and planning, but that's my way of doing things, and so traditional learning [has to change]."*

The participants believed that a setback had occurred in some areas of ability to teach students effectively. Findings from Cycle 4 discussions reflected deficits in student motivation, engagement, and accountability.

Five findings emerged from the data collected to answer the first research question:

- Professional development that includes examining current literature may be instrumental in understanding the alignment of cultural competency and the ability to increase student engagement during instruction.

- Before the training, participants recognize their level of cultural competence may have been severely limited to their own personal lived experience.

- Culturally competent teachers are able to engage their students by incorporating their histories, language, cultural beliefs, and practices into teaching and learning.

- Cultural competency training has increased the awareness of how student voice can increase student academic engagement.

- Teachers need specific research-based strategies that can be explicitly demonstrated and incorporated into their instructional practices.

Research Question 2. How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

The purpose of the second research question was to understand how teachers described the impact of their participation in cultural competency training. The data used to answer the second research question was collected during the Action Design and Implementation meetings. The meetings, designed to cultivate an ongoing dialogue about cultural competence, increased cultural competency awareness, and developed a sound knowledge base of cultural competency established within the entire school program. Participants stated the following regarding their growth.

> *"I have been forced to think about the struggles different students might be having during test times."*

Another participant:

> *"I do not have to lower my course expectations, but I do have to understand how my students might think, feel, or react to different situations at the school."*

And another participant:

> *"My takeaways will cause me to understand that my students are different, but they all can learn."*

Participants perceived that the training made them increasingly aware of their own cultural identity and encouraged their willingness to learn about the cultural and community norms of their students. Also, the participants perceived the training to be relevant to their teaching practices, especially as it related to giving students a voice in a safe, respectful environment where they could talk about their families and positive contributions made by people in their communities.

Overall, an amalgamation of the participants' responses indicated that their involvement in cultural competency training would be beneficial for both their students and them. After participation in the training, several participants noted how the information they learned helped them to be more impactful in the classroom and described the action research study as a great experience. Participation in the intervention also caused the participants to reflect on their own experiences and biases about race and poverty and how those experiences impacted how they teach their students. According to the participants, the poverty simulation activity was enlightening. It caused them to understand better the challenges of students who are from impoverished backgrounds. Another participant stated that she became more aware of the challenges of students who lived in poverty and would look at situations differently, having the knowledge and skills to address a situation of this type in the future accurately. The participants also shared that the cultural competency training brought about awareness for the need for additional professional development, and the importance of cultural competency professional development school-wide.

> *"Who could not honestly understand how this is making a difference or what is involved.*
> *. . . There's a great need, and hopefully, we can expand and help other teachers*
> *understand so that together we can reach all the students in the school and*
> *understanding where they are."*

Overall, the participants' responses indicated their participation in cultural competency training had caused a self-analysis of their thoughts about cultural diversity and how it impacts their ability to accommodate students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

During the fourth cycle, when the virtual platform became the classroom, the participants recognized how the leadership support of the PLC had fostered the transition from face-to-face teaching to the virtual platform.

> *"Some of my department colleagues who did not take this training, are having a rough time communicating (alternative ways) with their students who do not speak English in the home. I think this training has made me more comfortable in talking with those parents when attempting to set up the devices and the instruction format."*

Five findings emerged from the data collected to answer the second research question:

- Participants perceive that teachers' participation in cultural competency training is beneficial not only for students, but for professional educators, parent stakeholders, and the entire campus.

- Participation in cultural competency training leads to self-reflection, bias analysis, and teacher efficacy.

- Participants believe cultural competency training must have the support of leadership to ensure sustainability and buy-in.

- Participation in Professional development is essential in the growth of novice and veteran educators

- Cultural competency training entailed allowing students to express their student voice to share information about their backgrounds, including their languages, positive contributions made by individuals from their respective cultural groups.

Research Question 3. How can a professional learning community, focusing on cultural competency change instructional practices?

The purpose of the third research question was to understand how the teachers' participation in a culturally competent professional learning community could change their instructional practices. Four findings indicated that a culturally competent professional learning community can:

- support problematic and controversial instructional issues that often arise.

- deliver a sound format to deliver appropriate professional development for new instructional practices that require technology platform changes

- examine individual student learning styles that may be connected with current health issues

- provide a compassionate learning atmosphere yet accomplish compliance for instructional change

- incorporate parental involvement strategies without controversy.

The participants indicated that they had never had the opportunity to discuss instructional practices and issues regarding race, language, or technology in a comfortable and trusted environment as the PLC format. One participant responded to the guest speaker's follow-up discussion:

> *"At first, I was afraid to say how a certain group of students sometimes scare me by their comments. But the speaker's presentation convinced me that these feelings could sometimes happen if I do not understand certain cultural behaviors."*

Someone else stated:

> "*[The visiting professor] said something that resonated with me about her experience growing up in a rural area, and moving somewhere else, and learning that she had white privilege. That was the first time that I actually had someone to express the fact and acknowledge that something like that even existed.*"

During the fourth cycle, the participants who are classroom teachers indicated their struggles with changing instructional practices to the virtual platform. Two participants felt uncomfortable with the grading guidelines handed down by the leadership. Through a series of conversations led by the researcher, who is an assistant principal, all of the participants were able to examine the subject of grading through the lens of a pandemic-stricken school district. The researcher addressed specific topics, "grading with grace," "compassion over compliance," asynchronous instruction, and diverse learning styles.

Being a participant in a PLC provided an opportunity for the struggling teachers to express their beliefs, their frustrations, and for some, their anger caused by change in the grading process. All of the above instructional issues, the PLC also provided an opportunity for the assistant principal to provide instructional coaching (Bloom et al., 2005). In regards to cultural competency training and professional development, one of the participants stated:

> "*I think it's important that a lot of educators are exposed to the fact, or understand the fact that sometimes our progress is overestimated, it really at times looks like very little progress has been made; truly a matter of perspective. That is why this training is vital in education. And a good place to start is understanding that cultural competency recognizes all cultures in its own right, no matter what context.*"

Results from Action Research Cycle 1

Action Research Cycle 1 lasted from July 2019 until August 2019. The cycle began with developing the Design Team. During this phase of the action research, the researcher emailed invitations to participate in action research. From the responses received, the researcher met with six of the individuals that responded to be members of the Design Team. These six individuals represented a smaller version of the researcher's vision of the Implementation team: a variation in job positions, number of years in education, race, and commitment to school improvement teams at the local school. These individuals met with the researcher to discuss their role, the purpose of the professional development, and the problem that it would address. In Cycle 1, the Design Team created proposed cycles of interventions to guide the Implementation Team through the research study and created agendas for each meeting. The Action Research Design Team, along with the researcher, developed a proposed series of interventions that took place during the action research process; Action Research Cycle 1 ended on August 7, 2019.

Researcher's Notes – Action Research Cycle 1

The researcher, along with the Action Research Design Team, maintained the focus of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) through each cycle. The researcher developed an Action Research Design Team and, with the assistance of the Design Team, developed the Implementation Team. Cycle 1 served as a preliminary cycle or "pre-step." It also provided opportunities for the researcher to take notes, and gauge participant progress as a baseline to measure the progress and learning of the participants. The duration for Cycle 1 was July 2019 – August 2019 and laid the foundation for the action research study.

Researcher Notes - Design Team Connections Protocols and Meeting Discussions

The Design Team played a pivotal role in the planning of the interventions and activities. This type of professional learning community was novel in this context. During the Connections

protocol that took place before meetings, some participants were conservative in their responses. In contrast, others were outwardly excited about the process and the learning opportunity. The researcher noted that the responses during the earlier Connections protocols were vague with little to no substance and of very few words. These short and passive comments lent to the idea that participants possibly started the program with minimal knowledge about cultural competency or perhaps not confident in their beliefs. The researcher also noted that there might be misconceptions and uneasiness regarding expectations.

The Action Research Design Team selected the book *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* by Tyrone C. Howard in Cycle 2. The book study offered comparative data regarding White and non-White students. It addressed the disparities in academic performance between students of low socioeconomic status and students of higher-income families. The researcher and the Design Team participants agreed that the book offered many topics that paralleled the data offered in the examples from the book. These parallels made the book relatable and prompted productive discussion among educators.

Results from Action Research Cycle 2

Action Research Cycle 2 took place from August 14, 2019, until October 9, 2019. During the second cycle of the study, the implementation of the proposed interventions began according to the timeline planned by the Action Research Design Team. The planned interventions included a book study and guest speaker, Dr. Sue Kasun. These interventions took place during regularly scheduled meetings. The readings and book study discussions for *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms* provided the participants with literature about how culture affects education and instructional practices, as well as relationships with students and community stakeholders. The presentation

by the guest speaker provided the participants with an external perspective relating to cultural competency and working with diverse groups of individuals. The researcher notes and observations data were collected through Implementation Team meetings, which included book study discussion and protocols, Design Team Meetings, and the guest speaker presentation.

Researcher Notes – Implementation Team Meetings and Discussions

The researcher, who was also a participant on the Implementation Team, took notes whenever appropriate during the initial Implementation Team meetings. The researcher noted during initial meetings, the participants were quiet and reserved. During the Connections protocol, the participants expressed their interest in the topic. The researcher believed that some of the responses indicated that the participants looked forward to the professional development of cultural competency.

To start the cycle and create a sense of urgency, the researcher shared data with the participants. The data included the United States projected population increases for racial subgroups, differences in student outcomes as it pertained to assessment scores as well as the difference in student outcomes between low socioeconomic status groups and higher-income groups in other schools in the same district. The researcher observed that the participants began to make comments about the data. The increase in conversation conveyed that the educators were considering and discussing what might be hindering positive student outcomes. The researcher observed some frustration as the Implementation Team reviewed the data. However, through discussion, the team agreed that there was work to do, and they were up for the challenge. The group discussed improving instruction. The researcher noted that the members had a mutual thought that professional development focusing on cultural competency and strategies to become

culturally competent as well as what cultural competency looks like in the classroom was needed.

The researcher noted during Dr. Kasun's presentation, the participants engaged in the activity and the question and answer session. The researcher also noted that participants took notes when Dr. Kasun shared a strategy for working with diverse populations. The group also seemed particularly interested when Dr. Kasun shared her story of when she realized she had White privilege. Some of the educators shared that they had never heard anyone explicitly say they had White privilege. They wondered if some of their colleagues would be able to acknowledge White privilege. The researcher believed that this statement indicated that non-White teachers might believe that White teachers do not understand that they may have biases that cause unintended consequences for students. The researcher referenced a passage from Howard (2010).

> One of the more pressing issues that require further analysis is the degree to which teachers who are largely White, middle class, monolingual, and female are effectively prepared to teach in diverse settings. Researchers have found that many candidates have negative beliefs about the individuals who are different from them…when one considers the increasing homogeneity of classroom teachers, many of whom may believe that students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are less capable of being academically successful, one has to question the quality of the instruction, concern, and care that diverse students receive in classrooms (pg.41-42).

The researcher took note of this idea and noted that through cultural competency, educators might be equipped to teach any student.

During an AR Design Team debrief, on September 11, the Design Team determined that a Benchmark meeting should take place, during Cycle 2, to gauge the progress of the participants. The researcher noted that participants were indeed gaining knowledge and more willing to share their thoughts with the group. The researcher noted that during the Connections protocol, more participants desired to share their thoughts with the group.

The researcher noted the increase in contributions might be due to the increase in knowledge and comfortability with the team. The participants seemed more confident in the strength of the content of the ideas and thoughts they were sharing, noting that the participants gained knowledge regarding broadening their definition of culture. Also noted the reference to the Mismatch Theory that indicated to the researcher that the participants recognized that incongruence of a student's home and school culture might make a difference in student outcomes. The researcher also noted growth in the participants showing that there was an understanding that to reach diverse student groups, there needs to be a change in instructional practices. Teachers' comments were focusing more on how to change instructional practices for individual groups of students. The discussion shift from macro to micro indicated to the researcher that smaller groups were recognized for their individuality and uniqueness. This form of acceptance encourages and engages students. The researcher observed a shift in the conversation regarding professional development and the action research process. The discussions were focused on what was learned and how the training has broadened their scope of thinking regarding their student's learning, indicating a change in the thought process.

The researcher believed through the Action Research Implementation Team discussions; there was evidence that the participants showed change. The participants seemed to be more empowered. The researcher also noted that the teachers shared actionable knowledge providing examples of how their classroom actions had evolved. These indications of changes in instructional practices and mindset shifts were a result of participating in the training confirmed a definite trend towards the outcomes of the action research study.

Researcher Notes - Action Research Implementation Team Participants' Journal Reflections

The researcher collected data from participants' journal entries. However, the researcher noted most often, the participants used their journal entries when participating in the discussions. As the researcher reviewed the journals, many of the participants wrote thoughtful notes about their learning. Many of the initial comments were personal reflections. Personal reflection is essential in the process of becoming culturally competent; the researcher noted the participants' journal entries they shared about self-reflection and self-assessment. The researcher found that the participants gave critical thought to the presentations from the guest speakers and the book study. The journal entries indicated that the teachers were connecting with their learning and, in turn, improved connections with their students.

The researcher noted the thoughts in the various teachers' journals. The researcher found that the journal entries showed deep thought and reflection regarding the book study topics and the guest speakers. Teachers reported what they had learned about cultural competency, transforming instructional practices, and increasing student engagement.

Researcher Notes - Design Team Meetings

The Design Team Meetings were explicitly for the Evaluating Action step in the action research cycles. The researcher met with the Design Team to ensure that the proposed

interventions were working or if an intervention needs to eliminated or changed. In Cycle 1, the Design Team was active in establishing the Action Research Implementation Team and the interventions. The researcher noted that the Design Team was concerned about being sure that individuals involved would be committed to the study. The team also reviewed the interventions that would take place in Cycle 2 to ensure the interventions would be an effective and efficient use of time. The researcher also noted that the team wanted to be sure that the first meeting for the Implementation Team agenda was similar to the Design Team's first meeting, which included sharing data. The members believed that the inclusion of data would be a driving force in engaging the participants. The Design Team made a few changes in Cycle 2. The researcher noted that the Design Team adjusted the reading pace of the book study to include more chapters per reading assignment. The Design Team also presented more convenient ways for participants to submit journal entries, which included a FlipGrid video or an eClass document, created for convenience for those that would prefer to submit electronically rather than in written form. The final adjustment was to repurpose one of the meetings to a Benchmark meeting to allow an opportunity to disseminate more information regarding strategies and measure participant progress. The researcher found the changes to be valid and helpful to the participants. The Evaluating Action Step for Cycle 3 was the final step for action research. The Design Team and the researcher discussed the data as it related to the research questions agreeing that the data collected would address the questions.

Results from Action Research Cycle 3

Action Research Cycle 3 took place from October 23, 2019, until December 18, 2019. During the third cycle of the study, the planned interventions included a guest speaker, Mr. David Arraya, and a poverty simulation. The participants also concluded the book study discussion of *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms.* By participating in the poverty simulation activity, the participants had an opportunity to understand the challenges of students who are from impoverished backgrounds and how the status of their socioeconomic background influences their educational outcomes. The participants continued to reflect on their participation in the interventions and the impact on student engagement. Through peer discussions and reflective journal writing, the team members had various opportunities to discuss and to reflect on how their participation in the professional learning community impacted their cultural competence and how it could apply information to instructional strategies to improve student outcomes.

Researcher Notes – Implementation Team Meetings and Discussions

As stated previously in the Cycle 2 results, the researcher was also a participant on the Implementation Team. The researcher took notes to record significant thoughts or statements that took place during the Implementation Team meetings. The first meeting for Cycle 3 was a guest speaker, David Arraya. The speaker engaged the participants with his story sharing how he came to be the Co-founder of the Hispanic Organization, Promoting Education with his wife. He shared that his mission was to limit the negative schooling experiences for Hispanic students, considering his experiences as a student. The researcher observed that the speaker was very dynamic in his delivery, which generated energy in the environment. During the Questions and

Answers sessions, one of the participants asked, "What is the one thing that you hear most often

that concerns our student?"

Mr. Arraya replied that the students were often bothered by the notion that their teachers

believed that their parents did not care about their education. The researcher noted that the

participants seemed stunned by the answer. The researcher observed that some of the participants

took a written note of the speaker's response to the question. The researcher solicited follow up

responses regarding the speaker to gather additional responses to the speaker. The researcher

asked participants to share their biggest take-a-ways. The responses indicated that the

participants believed they gained information to share with their students that would encourage

student engagement. The researcher made note that the participants recognized that the speaker

offered resources and strategies that encourage student engagement. By offering resources, it

gives students hope for future educational aspirations. Moreover, the resources and discussion

regarding parent involvement lend to the importance of building relationships by getting to know

your students, parents, and their cultural differences.

During the next meeting, the researcher and Design Team facilitated a poverty

simulation. As the participants entered that media center, the researcher observed that the

participants were excited about participating in the simulation. The researcher assigned roles and

provided the family scenarios to guide the groups. The researcher observed the participant

behavior change as the simulation progressed, from laid-back to more serious and thoughtful

actions and decision-making. The participants began to consider different options and make

tough decisions regarding how their family would survive the "month." Also observed were

participants beginning to have conversations about students in their classes who were living

some of the scenarios in the simulation. These conversations connected the participants to their

students by providing an understanding of what some of their students are experiencing off-campus and how those experiences have an effect on student engagement in class. During the simulation debrief, the participants shared more about the experience and the insight gained. The actionable knowledge that will cause an adjustment in how the participants work with students that are having these types of experiences, noting that teacher-student relationships are critical to increasing student engagement.

During the final meeting for Cycle 3, the participants offered final thoughts regarding the book study and the poverty simulation. The researcher observed that prompting was not necessary. The researcher listened intently to the responses offered, noting that the participants were displaying exponential growth in knowledge. Referencing the Building Blocks to Cultural competence, the researcher noted that many of the participants moved from "Lack of Cultural Competence" to "Some or Limited Cultural Competence." However, according to the continuum, the researcher recognized that one or two participants were "stuck" in the "Cultural Pre-Competence" stage. This observation was encouraging in regards to overall participant growth.

Researcher Notes – Action Research Implementation Team Participants' Journal Reflections

The researcher reviewed the participants' journals for Cycle 3. The journal submissions showed that the participants were experiencing significant growth in their cultural competency knowledge. The researcher noted that the participants were also beginning to consider the forces outside of their classrooms that influence cultural competency change. The researcher noted that the participant "found her power," realizing that educators have the power to change the trajectory of student outcomes for students of all cultures. The participants began to take what they learned in the text and customize it to the needs of the students. Taking well-recognized

events and placing an academic meaning to them without anyone having to lose their identity to be seen or heard.

Participants' Journal Reflections from Poverty Simulation Activity

The participants' journal responses from the poverty simulation activity indicated that they were enlightened by the experiences of individuals who live in poverty. As a result of their participation in the poverty simulation activity, participants communicated being better able to understand and empathize with students whose caregivers have financial challenges that may impact their overall formal learning experiences. Because teachers are mostly considered to be from "middle class" socioeconomic backgrounds, initially, they may not be aware of their parents' ability to make provisions for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, as well as other needs like transportation. Additionally, the participants indicated how the poverty simulation activity enlightened their awareness about the trajectory of students who live in poverty. In a journal entry, a participant shared:

> *"This was a real eye-opening experience. It made me really place myself in the shoes of people that are living in poverty every day, not only how they have to fight against odds in the outside, but also how it takes a toll on you emotionally with the stress, anxiety, and uncertainty of every day. Overall, this activity was enlightening and great at challenging/changing my perception, which I will take with me to improve my skills as an educator."*

Another participant shared:

> *"The simulation activity was a somber, valuable learning experience for me. It made me think on a deeper level about the hardship of so many of our students and the resilience*

they each must have just to come to school and sit in class, while their 'outside world'

may be falling apart."

Researcher Notes – Design Team Meetings

During Cycle 3, the Design Team continued to monitor the action research study. Much of the work for Cycle 3 included preparing for the poverty simulation. No warranted changes needed for the cycle. However, the researcher did not that participation did not decrease but rather increase with everyone helping to prepare. During the last step of Cycle 3, the researcher met with the Design Team to debrief about the action research study. The Design Team seemed pleased with their work and desired to continue in professional development, going in some form. The researcher shared with the team a discussion took place with the principal to put cultural competency professional development in place for new teachers as well as during pre-planning for all teachers.

Results from Action Research Cycle 4

Action Research Cycle 4 took place from March 31, 2020, to April 24, 2020. Cycle 4 used a virtual platform because the schools remained closed, and all instruction had also transitioned to a virtual platform. The design team had planned a discussion format to springboard from the series of assigned articles that were read. However, the majority of the indicated results centered on lived experiences that the participants had recently endured. The real-life phenomena of the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic required the participants to implement and utilize their learnings. One participant expressed their frustration because the school district administration had charged the teachers to behave with a 'compassion over compliance' attitude.

> *"Other schools in other parts of our district are sometimes missing the struggle or the*
>
> *difficulty that some of our kids have with some of the things that have been put in place.*
>
> *That 'seems' like it's for the good of all."*

Although the participants were mostly upset with the various changes in instructional practice,

most of them articulated their discussion with a sense of cultural humility, thus describing the

situation as a culturally competent teacher. Participants examined the impact of the pandemic on

students as well as their personal experiences. The participants discussed how cultural

competency training might have prepared them for the resulting digital divide caused by the

pandemic and how the divide further exacerbated the widening of the achievement gap and

student engagement. When asked for their opinions regarding the letter sent by the state's

superintendent for education, if they believed that the superintendent's letter was culturally

competent, one participant responded by stating:

> "*I thought it was very culturally competent. I think he addressed your concern*
>
> *[participant,] when he said, for some of our students, their teacher is their lifeline. I*
>
> *totally agree with that. And he also mentioned a lot of schools that don't have internet*
>
> *access, and the fact that he sees compassion, we think that educators should know to*
>
> *have compassion, but there are a lot of educators that do not.*"

Further, the participants discussed the importance of relevant professional development

facilitated through PLCs and the collaboration and support between teachers and leadership.

> *"I want to add something. I think the whole article connected both of the research*
>
> *questions pretty nicely because the whole article seemed to almost value the professional*
>
> *learning community, professional development and, school district inspired things that*

trickle down to them and impact student engagement, like these, you know, robotics

programs and these computer coding things and stuff like that…."

Each member of the PLC was able to share lived experiences in the context of the Coronavirus

COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of cultural competency interventions. The real-life

phenomena of Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic required the participants to implement and

utilize their learning and new knowledge base regarding cultural competency. Participants

examined the impact of the pandemic on students as well as their personal experiences.

Researcher Notes – Implementation Team Meetings and Discussions

During Cycle 4, the researcher took notes to record significant thoughts or statements that

took place during the Implementation Team meetings. As stated previously, there were four

meetings in Cycle 4, all of which were facilitated by the researcher on a virtual platform. Each

meeting introduced a topic along with an article that provoked dialogue about implementing new

cultural competency knowledge amid Coronavirus COVID-19. The researcher observed the

eagerness of participants to share their experiences at that point in the pandemic and the impact it

has had on students as well as teachers. The researcher also noted that the participants seemed to

find the discussions therapeutic in the sense that the discussions as times became somewhat

emotional as the educators shared learnings thus far in the pandemic.

During the first meeting, the participants discussed their preparedness for the pandemic

as it relates to cultural competency training. One of the participants stated:

"*I think we all went into this with a different perspective because we had already been*

talking about our kids and talking about what [cultural competency] meant and how we

need to reflect on our students and reflect on who we are and the assumptions we make

about the kids and our expectations going in. I think that was something [the training]

has given us this year; that has made a difference for at least this group."

Another participant went on to share how the pandemic caused him to use what he had learned.

"So cultural competency seemingly is an innate part of who we are as educators, yet if

we don't access it, there's nothing that will be done, and it won't even formalize or allow

us to convey the understanding of cultural competency on any level to our children, and I

think this experience has taught me a lot."

The participants agreed that although it was an undesirable situation, the pandemic required them

to reference their training to navigate through the adverse impact on student engagement, and

self-reflect on who they were as educators. A participant said:

"We're just being forced to move to where we need to be [instructionally]. It's not just the

students, but we're in the same boat; we're all kind of together along with students."

The participants also discussed teachers that are not willing to make changes.

"Unless people realize and want to reflect and understand [that] we need to make some

changes and look at ourselves. It's still not going to make a difference. [When we] come

out[of the pandemic], a lot of people will see it differently; others [will] be back to

business[old ways]."

The researcher found that the participants believed that the training helped them to adjust to their

new context; however, ongoing, consistent development and growth will be critical when the

pandemic lifts.

Meeting 2 focused on student engagement. The participants agreed that the pandemic

magnified the differences between students of different socioeconomic status. The participants

discussed how the pandemic "exposes the country's deep digital divide." One of the participants shared:

> *"The Coronavirus pandemic isn't making broadband essential; it's exposing that is*
> *always was."*

Another participant stated:

> *"[A device], is not just like a luxury. It's something that everybody should have and has*
> *to have. "We were trying to incorporate technology in our instruction in the classroom*
> *while we were there [face-to-face] anyway. But how can we count on that if we're trying*
> *to incorporate it and [the students] don't have access at home?"*

Results from Focus Group Interview

Hennink (2014) suggests that focus group interviews are beneficial when the majority of the action research is completed. Participants not only shared their views, but they are able to listen to the other group member's views, which may allow their own views to be refined. By examining the Focus Group Interview Results chart, Table 13, it is evident that this group format achieved the goal of collecting a paramount amount of significant data. The focus group format allowed the participants to recall their cycle experience and extend their initial perspectives and beliefs as related to the content of the three research questions. Research question number one sought to understand how the teachers described the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement within the classroom. The teachers believed that training had caused the student-teacher relationship to improve and create increased cultural humility on the part of the teacher and the student. Research question two inquired as to how the participant was impacted by being trained to increase cultural competency. Teachers indicated significant gains in curriculum and instruction. Among the nine participants, the focus always pointed to improved

student performance, increased student achievement, improved teaching professional practice, and improved teacher-student relationships. Research question three focused directly on the change of instructional practices when the teacher has been trained in cultural competency behavior. These results centered on improved lesson planning, parental communication; new learning strategies; and improved cultural awareness of diverse student cultures.

Table 13 – Results from Focus Group Interview

Focus Group Interview Results	
Participants' Overall Responses - Cycles 1-4	
Definition of Culture	Culture entails a group of individuals' beliefs, customs, practices, traditions, and expectations relating to race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, and language. Culture is more than race.
Understanding Cultural Competency.	Teachers reported having a clearer understanding of cultural competency and learning that awareness is the first step. Being able to understand, acknowledge, and accept other people's cultures while understanding your own. Valuing all.
Self-Reflection and Biases	Teachers reported understanding that an important step in becoming culturally competent is self-reflection, reflecting on why one may think the way they think or teach the way they teach. Steering clear of homogeneous classroom instruction. Knowing oneself before you can be open to knowing others.
Teacher-Student Relationships	Teachers believe that teacher-student relationships are critical in student engagement. Making connections with students enhances the academic environment.
Familiarity With Various Cultures	Teachers reported being aware of various cultures in their schools and classroom, with an understanding that cultural competency goes beyond awareness and humanizing students while at the same time humanizing ourselves as educators.
Learning About Various Cultures	Teachers reported discovering methods they can use to identify various cultures represented in the school and classrooms.
Awareness of the Impact of Culture on Communication and Teaching	Teachers reported recognizing increased cultural competence fosters better student-teacher relationships and the need to make lessons more relevant to students' backgrounds.

Beliefs about the Impact of Cultural Competency on Student Engagement	Teachers believed that cultural competency training positively impacted their relationships with students and made their lessons more student-centered.
Display of Cultural Competency	Teachers reported displaying cultural competency through decorations, book displays, and by associating students' backgrounds and the literature being studied.
Use of Materials that Reflect Cultural Competency	Teachers reported bringing in resources and in materials that are relevant to the students.
Incorporation of Cultures Into Teaching and Instructional practices.	Teachers reported planning lessons that capitalize on their students' cultures and experiences and giving students a voice by creating discussions about their backgrounds. Identify strategies incorporating culture, i.e.-Flag project. Teachers also identified multi-modal learning as a strategy.
Cultural Competency in Planning and Assessing	Teachers reported incorporating information about students' backgrounds into lesson and evaluation systems. Teachers believe planning and assessing is not limited to paper and pen; Conversations/verbal assessments will allow teachers to assess what student know.
Accommodating Students	Teachers reported planning lessons to accommodate various groups of students based on their students' cultures and experiences.
Impact of Cultural Competence on Instruction	Teachers believed that cultural competency impacts instruction. Teachers began to recognize different learning behaviors of students, i.e., - Communal vs. Individual learners. Engaging students with relevant text.
Teacher-Parent Communication	Teachers reported wanting to increase their parental involvement and wanting to become a part of the school community through parent-teacher collaboration.
Informing Parents	Teachers reported keeping parents informed through conferences.
Collaboration With Parents	Teachers reported building communication with parents to build strong and trusting relationships to ensure their children's success.
Perceptions of Participation in Cultural Competency Training	Teachers perceived that it would be beneficial for them to participate in cultural competency training and that it would improve their instruction. Teachers believe that once you learn more about cultural competency, you learn better practices, and you do things differently.
Support of Leadership	Teachers believe that the support of leadership is important to teacher growth in cultural competency. Leadership must support teacher efforts. "We can't be

	afraid to tackle different ideas and challenge ideology, because that's what we expect our students to do. We can't be afraid to show them that it's okay to change to adapt. You know, vote this way or that way or take, you know, this seriously if that's what they want to do, then we need to show them that it's okay to do that."
Professional Development in a professional learning community	Teachers believe that consistent professional development in cultural competency and implementation of culturally competent lessons and instructional practices is necessary for continuous growth.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 presented the findings for this action research study from the lens of the research questions, the action research cycles, and the researcher notes. The findings indicated that the training model and participants' discussions clarified the vital need for a culturally competent classroom, in which the teacher understands, appreciates, and considers cultural diversity and humility when using instructional practices and curriculum content. The participants recognized the benefits of the training model. Opportunities to self-reflect and identify any existing biases were provided. Behaviors and practices that can influence instructional competency were identified. The participants demonstrated how their newly learned knowledge and the information related to developing renewed and improved instructional practices that would increase student engagement.

The action research cycles showed much of the same results. In Cycle 1, the participants discussed the importance of cultural competency training and believed that the training would increase student engagement, and participating in a professional learning community focusing on cultural competency would change instructional practices. The sharing of school data further enforced the idea. In Cycle 2, participants began interventions that increased actionable knowledge by participating in a book study, sitting for a presentation by an expert in the field of

cultural competency, and a benchmark meeting that also shared strategies for cultural competency. Cycle 3 included another guest speaker that caused the participants to rethink their newly acquired knowledge regarding curriculum content. From Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, each intervention provided tools and resources for educator growth in cultural competency, thereby increasing student engagement and changing instructional practices.

Cycle 4 findings indicated similar findings, but results were impacted by the transition from face-to-face instruction to a virtual platform. Apprehension, anxiety, and struggle were indicated as the participants established new classrooms filled with technology tools and reflective prompts. The insightful discussions that focused on virtual schooling allowed robust responses that demonstrated the new knowledge of implementing a culturally competent classroom through the use of technology.

Chapter 6 presents the interpretation of the findings as related to the developed themes from the action research. Implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study was to identify strategies and best practices that increase cultural competency through instruction and curriculum. The examination of related literature supported the premise that increasing cultural competence or developing cultural humility when teaching, will improve student outcomes for culturally diverse students (Clark, et al., 2011).

The research findings from this action research case study answered the following questions:

- How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

- How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

- How can a professional learning community focused on cultural competency change instructional practices?

This chapter provides, not only further discussion of the findings as related to the literature, but this chapter presents implications and recommendations for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers who are charged with ensuring that cultural competency is an established phenomenon among teachers, curriculum content, and instructional practices.

Before conducting this study, educators at Paisley High School expressed concern about the lack of professional development needed to increase efficiency when teaching culturally

diverse learners. To address this issue, local school educators, led by a researcher who was matriculating through a doctoral program, reviewed school data, and related literature to develop cycles of interventions. The cycles of intervention provided educators with appropriate and meaningful professional development focusing on cultural competency, described as a phenomenon that enriches student engagement, especially among culturally diverse students. The team created a Professional Learning Community (PLC) that would serve as an Implementation Team to participate in the proposed interventions. Interventions consisted of a book study, two guest speakers, and a poverty simulation experience. After the third action research cycle, the entire world was hit with a health crisis. Schooling, school leadership, and academic matriculation within P-12 schools were forced to convene using only virtual platforms. School buildings were closed. Classroom teachers used their computers as their primary teaching device, and school principals were still responsible for educating children at the same optimal level of success and engagement.

The fourth cycle, as explained in the previous chapter, conducted an intervention by using aligning published articles as the springboard template to execute focus group discussions and many impromptu brainstorming sessions in which the researcher who is an assistant principal led. The researcher created and modeled calmness and cultural humility because teachers were exhibiting varied frustrations as they attempted to master engaging their students through technology.

Through the focused lens of the definition of cultural competency, the action research participants engaged in interventions that provided several opportunities to discover and explore possible personal biases that had possibly hindered student engagement and effective instructional practices. Through action-research, the participants examined their teaching

practices, beliefs, attitudes, and pedagogy. The results of this study reached a significant outcome when understanding how cultural competency training can positively impact academic performance and student-teacher relationships.

Major Findings Related to the Literature Review

As stated previously, a crucial element in creating new programs and processes is to understand what one is changing and why. The definition of cultural competence proved to be somewhat elusive. In a review of the literature, Campinha-Bacote (2003) suggests that cultural competence is a process of 'becoming' rather than 'being.' Therefore, cultural competence opens up an ability to develop a greater knowledge of culture acquired over time. The process of "becoming rather than being" proved to be an essential factor in the findings of this research. After synthesizing several resources, participants reached a consensus: "educators believed an understanding of cultural competency with training/professional development benefits educators and in turn benefits student outcomes. Therefore, at the onset of the study, a definition of cultural competence was established: Cultural competence is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures, to respect and be responsive to the needs of diverse population groups, gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews. For this study, the culture or cultural differences as they relate to cultural competency were race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The Building Blocks of Cultural Competency by Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (2009) is a cultural competence continuum scale. By using this scale as a measurement tool, the ability to observe how each participant moved from one continuum point to another point was possible. The participants in the research study started at different places on the continuum, ranging from pre-competence to cultural competency. In order to move continuously on the

scale, the action research findings indicated that the tool of self- reflection was most beneficial as participants progressed through the building blocks. Hanover Research (2014) offered:

> The first step toward employing culturally responsive teaching is for educators
>
> to appraise their cultural perspectives and biases. By honestly examining their
>
> attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, teachers begin to discover
>
> why they are who they are and confront biases that have influenced their value
>
> systems. (pg. 14).

Using self-reflection during the follow-up discussions and final focus groups, participants were able to: uncover biases, unveil authentic beliefs; analyze professional practices that had not been scrutinized, and examine a particular curriculum that may have previously violated student's culture and prevented student's voice. Self-reflection allowed the participants to articulate how they could adjust their current practices to increase student engagement among highly diverse student classrooms. After self-reflection, some participants often described how professional development training had produced potential strategies that could influence culturally competent instruction and curriculum content. By the end of the study, participants had drawn consensus that the cultural competence training had changed their mindset. They were better informed about how an effective teacher thinks and behaves daily when cultural competence is an integral component of each classroom, school programs, and school procedures.

Wlodkowski (2008) recommends that educators enroll in cultural competency and responsiveness training in order for classroom teachers to experience how learning can be enhanced when students, especially culturally diverse students, become engaged with curriculum

that they value. The findings supported what Wlodkowski recommended. One participant expressed the same sentiment by stating,

> *"[To] acknowledge or to welcome diversity into the classroom, not making students feel like they need to assimilate, you know, a homogeneous type classroom. I think it's important that the training piece is there and I think it needs to be something that is required."*

After engaging in self-reflection activities, which included reflective thinking and writing, exploring personal and family histories, acknowledging membership in different groups, and visiting or reading about teachers in diverse settings, the participants began to recognize specific biases that they had never noticed during their teaching career. Their dialogue seemed to take on an attitude of acceptance and appreciation for diversity. A participant framed that idea,

> *"Not just being aware that there's different cultures, but being responsive and being competent. So … I have actually learned some things going through this whole process as an administrator and knowing people for who they are and on an individual basis, not just this group of students."*

The findings indicated that the participants believed they were able to better- serve their students (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 13). A participant expressed the idea of serving students by saying how she could understand instructional practices better,

> *"I finally know that you have people from different backgrounds in your classroom, and you must teach them as if they can learn better if they are taught better…"*

The idea of serving students better was discussed during Cycle 4 at the beginning of the pandemic. One participant voiced serious concern about how teachers need to recognize the needs of others.

"I think that it's key to a lot of this, especially going through what we are going through

[the pandemic] now. You have to take into consideration student's emotional needs, not

just the academic needs."

The participants agreed that cultural competency training in a professional learning

community contributed to increased student engagement and change in instructional practices,

resulting in the third major finding, which stated that educators needed specific cultural

competency strategies that increased student engagement and changed instructional practices.

"[Include not only] lessons that talk about people of different cultures, but talk about the

perspective of those people of different cultures, not just including people from different

backgrounds when it's convenient."

This study sought to identify strategies that educators could utilize to support and

encourage an ongoing pursuit of cultural competence. The study, built from a conceptual

framework that utilized the Communities of Practice Theory (Theories, 2018). brought together

individuals with a common interest in curriculum content. By sharing ideas and collaborating for

an extended time period, the participants recognized that the development of a professional

learning community was a viable strategy that supported their efforts and allowed continued

discussions about cultural competency. As suggested by Marzano (2016) the PLC engaged

teachers in cycles that looked at what was happening in their school and determined they could

make a better place by changing curriculum, instruction and relationships between community

members and assessing results, to enhance their effectiveness as professionals" (pg. 6). The

teachers discussed alternative instructional strategies or modifications to the original

instructional strategies that were better suited and promoted student learning (Hord & Tobia,

2012).

Productive collaborative learning generated through the professional learning community not only resulted in a sustainable educational learning community but also revealed specific strategies for student engagement and instructional strategies (Table 14).

Table 14 – Strategies for Increased Student Engagement and Instructional Practices

Student Engagement and Instructional Practices Results from Cultural Competency Action Research	
Student Engagement	Build relationships with students and parents
	Share personal cultural identity with students while learning about their culture. – What is "routine" for you?
	Create challenging thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values
	Engender competence, creating and understanding that students are effective in learning something they value
	Establish inclusion, creating learning atmospheres in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another.
Instructional Practices	Use knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching beyond the familiar.
	Actively collaborating in curriculum design[1]
	Match classroom instruction to cultural norms for social interaction to enhance students' social skills development and problem-solving ability.[1]
	Adjust wait time for students from different cultures to enhance classroom participation and the development of critical thinking skills.[1]
	Be sensitive to the cultural shifts that immigrant students, or other students with minority family and community cultures,

	must make as they move between school and home.[1]
	Invite parents to the classroom to lead particular topics
	Create a message board accessible school-wide to share best practices and strategies.
	Effective Professional Learning Communities

The participants agreed that the program of practice for increased cultural competency and offered specific strategies that provided a guide for implementation of the learned behavior, skills, and resources.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

Major findings for Research Question 1 – How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement? The training revealed the critical need for understanding culture and the steps toward cultural competency. This was indicated in the analysis of the data representing the opportunity for participants to self-reflect and analyze inner biases. In Cycle 2-3, there were over 151 occurrences, where participants discussed or wrote about culture and understanding and becoming culturally competent. The participants discussed the cultural competency continuum and specifically self-reflection. Conversely, in Cycle 4, there were 26 occurrences of the subject. The discussion leaned more towards the application of strategies. In Cycle 2, a participant shared a thought after reading a passage from the book study text:

> *"One of the main points I got [from the reading], culture is not valid exclusively be one*
>
> *specific city, place, or place of origin but is shaped by a myriad of factors … Many*

individuals from dominant groups mistakenly believe that culture is something possessed

only by people of color."

As the research progressed, two different participants demonstrated growth in understanding culture and cultural competency, discussing incidents when students are reassigned to different teachers because of teacher-student conflicts that may have related to racial differences. Their comments were as follows:

"If we're really truly looking at the real definition of culture, I don't know all the

cultures of all black people just because I'm black. . . I think it's important that when

people are learning about cultural competency to understand that first of all, if people

are culturally competent, no matter what the color is, they understand students, they

understand people, they understand their individual cultures."

"I remember reading about the frequency of preconceived notions of students can be

highly problematic and stereotypical and may reinforce institutionalized racism. They

are not fully comprehending it because they give little consideration to the heterogeneity

that exists within every group. And that made me look at the complexity of culture."

One participant expressed how teacher self-reflection can help teachers strengthen their cultural competency, thereby supporting their ability to engage students in the academic process.

"Self-reflection is difficult because it makes you think about things you usually

don't pay attention to. Biases that you have, but never truly act upon. It makes

you think critically about the students. It's your baggage."

In turn, educators recognized, respected, and included other cultures in the classroom environment resulting in increased student engagement. Being a part of the training also brought about an awareness that educators' reference while in the classroom.

Major finding for Research Question 2 – How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training? The participants participated in interventions that caused self-reflection and in-depth discussions with colleagues regarding cultural competency, resulting in a distinction of the external and internal factors that affect student performance and the educator's power to influence those factors. The interventions led educators to focus on the internal places they have the power to influence. "These places include exploring ways that a teacher could change his or her practices to make a positive change for students and to spend time strategizing about the areas in which teachers have control" (Dell'Angelo, 2016). The educators believed that participation in the process of cultural competency training contradicted the previous assumptions of the level of power they possess as educators. The educators also reassessed the additional impact a culturally competent educator makes in this context and how training impacts interaction with students and colleagues. During one of the book study discussions, one of the participants stated:

> "*I think I realize more than ever, based on what the book said about teachers are the most valuable influence on the students' performance in the classroom. I didn't think I had that much power.*"

Another participant used the term power to express the type of impact he had received from the training:

> "*I think this training also made me realize that we have more power than we think we do in the classroom. I didn't think before that I had some power to change the student experience in high school but now, I think it makes the difference between a student wanting to come to school or not, and makes the difference between the student*

graduating or not. So if the student is seen and know that we care about them, they're

definitely going to be more involved in school for sure."

Major finding for research Question 3 – How can a professional learning community

focused on cultural competency change instructional practices? The data showed that a cultural

competency lens allowed educators to create and modify lessons that are inclusive and relatable

for students.

Educators participating in the research reported experiencing the opportunity to

collaborate with other educators regarding instructional practices caused a transformation and

reshaped their instruction. The knowledge gained through the training provided tools and

resources used to accommodate diverse groups of students, and in turn, influenced student

outcomes.

Limitations of the Current Study

"The process of becoming culturally competent is an ideal state, but one with no end

point. It is conceived as a development process that requires life-long learning (Este, 2007)."

Therefore, time can be a limitation of this seven-month study. Although a fourth cycle was added

to the action research to collect data related to the time period of the Pandemic health crisis when

the school program at Paisley had to change from face-to-face schooling in a physical building to

a virtual platform for instructional delivery.

Another limitation resulted from the study that can be defined as a comprehension issue.

Although many resources were used by the researcher who is an assistant principal trained in

transformational leadership, some participants struggled with differentiating between the

concepts, 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural competency.' Awareness allows the recognition of

subtle differences in cultures. In contrast, cultural competency allows one to work with,

recognize, and celebrate the richness of all cultures (Development A. P., 2019). This inability of participants to differentiate between the two concepts hindered the personal, professional learning of those participants. The researcher believes that a fixed mindset prevented some participants from moving progressively on the continuum to pass the awareness stage while others showed growth. Dweck (2006) offered, A fixed mindset will lead you to avoid challenges because they can make you feel inferior. Also, stating, those with a fixed mindset were only interested in hearing feedback that reflected directly on their present ability but tuned out information that could help them learn and improve. They even showed no interest in hearing the right answer when they had gotten a question wrong, because they had already filed it away in the failure category. However, Dweck goes on to explain, "Like anything else, it takes time, effort and deliberate practice." This was demonstrated in a participant's statements in Cycle 2 of the research study as opposed to a response from the same participant in the Focus Group interview. In Cycle 2, the participant stated:

> *"I do not feel like I have to assess my students any differently because I have an expectation that they all work for me."*

This participant experienced some struggles with some of the concepts along the way but seemed to show progress at the end of the study.

> *"I thought, well, we're just doing what we do in the classroom every day. We're aware of cultures and all that jazz. But now, I think that we do impact student education and engagement. More because we're learning more about ourselves. And we continually want and strive to be better than we were yesterday, you know, to be more culturally competent, because we have learned and continue to learn."*

This growth was not observed in all participants. However, it demonstrates that time and commitment can result in positive change.

Additionally, the researcher's role limited the study. Action research allows the researcher to be a member of the action research teams. However, at the time of the study, the researcher also held the role of direct supervisor for many of the participants. The dual role, at times, seemed to intimidate and possibly stifle participant responses during discussions. On occasion, participants seemed uncomfortable with sharing their responses and adding an apology statement following certain responses that required sensitive topics discussion. These behaviors conveyed that the participants might have been hesitant in sharing their complete and honest responses in the presence of their supervisor. Although the researcher intentionally facilitated a norms protocol to ease tensions and establish a "safe place," this did not prevent cautious responses or possible non-responses.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The findings also suggest that an increase in the number of teachers trained in cultural competency determines the pervasiveness of the climate shift in the school environment. The increased capacity of teachers to change the culture and climate of the environment school-wide demonstrates the positive impact of cultural competency professional learning and professional learning communities.

Lastly, the need for continued cultural competency professional development is ideal for maintaining and continuing cultural competency growth and relationships amongst educators. The collaboration that occurred during the action research encouraged positive working relationships that produced effective communication and the sharing of instructional strategies.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

Kurt Lewin (1946), Kemmet and Taggart, (1988), and John Elliot, (1991) recommend that additional knowledge can be acquired by repeating the same action research study with a different sample. Therefore, it is recommended that the same action research monograph be conducted during the next school year. Based on the findings, this action research indicated that successfully trained educators in the area of cultural competency in a professional learning community environment were created. These conclusions recommend that Paisley High School and other schools should develop permanent programs like this action-research study. Programs, as such, are sometimes identified as a 'Continuous Improvement Cycle (CIC) (MetroResa, 2016). Each school year data can be collected and analyzed. This analyzed data can identify a current problematic issue, whereas cultural competency can positively impact and resolve the issue.

Through observations, the researcher noted that relationships between educators could benefit by examining cultural humility among the faculty and their peers. This focus can move educators towards authentic working relationships and an increase in collaborative inquiry, which in turn can have a positive impact on student performance outcomes.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

The positive impact of this action research generated a recommendation for the local policy-making component of most public-school districts, identified as a Board of Education (BOE), assesses the importance of cultural competency training for all employed educators. It is also recommended that the BOE proceed to implement a preservice teacher cultural competency training. This policy will ensure that new student residents who may be underserved and reside

in a marginalized community, are exposed to a teacher who is equipped to deliver optimal instruction; rather than a single class or workshop, that most often focused on cultural awareness. A mandatory cultural competency preservice program implemented that will segue into ongoing training at the local school, providing all educators with a solid knowledge base in cultural competency.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

The participants in this action research studied how training educators in cultural competency can influence student engagement, instructional practices, and how participants describe participating in the process. Participants on the Action Research Implementation Team worked together to gain actionable knowledge that contributed to participants' cultural competency growth. Participants learned that cultural competency is a state of becoming not being, meaning that the process is ongoing. However, the state of "becoming" allows participants the freedom and knowledge necessary to begin effective and meaningful work with diverse groups of students in a culturally competent manner.

Through the implementation of this action research study, participants learned that cultural competence encompasses awareness and responsiveness; this knowledge was essential to the learning process for participants, considering the concepts have technical differences. The literature reviewed supported the findings of the study. Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004) offered, "Family, community, culture, and educational context influence engagement. Routes to student engagement may be social or academic and may stem from opportunities in the school or classroom participation, interpersonal relationships, and intellectual endeavors." When students are welcomed into a classroom that accepts, recognizes, celebrates, and acknowledges the rich

backgrounds that they bring, with an asset rather than a deficit approach, student engagement increases.

Further, a professional learning community with a common interest, focusing on cultural competence, has the power to change instructional practices that will effectively support teaching and the learning of diverse groups of students. The collaborative efforts of the PLC shared and studied practices that accommodate and address the learning styles of students rather than offering a homogenous classroom environment. In addition, the educators experienced a change in how they approached interaction with students and how the training influenced the building of teacher-student relationships.

This action research study resulted in different levels of learning for each participant. The researcher recognized that not all participants would experience the same level of learning nor pursuit of continued learning after the completion of the study. However, the successes that resulted from the research laid the groundwork for future work in cultural competency, and highly effective, data-driven teaching and learning; recognizing that highly diverse classrooms deserve highly diverse instruction. Additionally, the researcher has pursued plans with the principal of the local school to offer continued training for the participants and an introduction to the program for additional members of the faculty and staff.

If the school leadership does not understand, appreciate, and value the diversity of the faculty, families, and the community, then increased academic improvement is limited. This action research study has validated the power of cultural humility behavior when educators and policy makers are trained to achieve cultural competence when teaching, selecting curriculum, and building social capital among a thriving community. The study has produced evidence of

how teachers can increase academic engagement when they know how to deliver a curriculum that every student can value and have a desire to learn.

<u>Final thoughts through the lens of an assistant principal in a diverse high school</u> –

The critical need to incorporate cultural competency training into professional development to increase student engagement and change instructional practices, according to participants, must be supported and led by leadership.

This action research study has validated the power and positive influence that a professional learning community can exhibit when used as the vehicle to professionally train, develop, and inform educators. Although an abundance of curriculum and instructional knowledge and experience was gained by conducting this action research study revolving around the impact of cultural competency, it is appropriate to express what the researcher, an assistant principal, has learned, recognized, and understood. In the context of school leadership, the researcher's reflections reveal three important takeaways:

- The Professional Learning Community is a powerful framework to use when the goal is to create positive change within a school culture.
- Action research methodology can improve professional practice
- In order to lead and facilitate cultural competency training, the leader must practice exemplary leadership.

The Professional Learning Community is a powerful framework to use when the goal is to create positive change within a school culture. Not until the researcher was charged with the final capstone project, using action research as the methodology, did the researcher understand the power that the PLC can exert when training, learning, designing, and reflection are combined

into a continuous process. During this study, a group of educators were able to contribute to how they wanted to: be trained (the design team); learn using different models (guest speaker, simulation, discussion), and freely express their previous experiences and how they constructed their own reality. The PLC structure allowed freedom of voice, ability to collaborate with honesty, and an opportunity to inquire and ask any type of question without judgement. Yet the PLC model that was used retained the main focus of being able to return to the classroom and professionally practice the new learning- ways to increase engagement for each student regardless of differences, challenges, culture, or circumstances.

Though the researcher had studied the action research methodology within the courses of the doctoral program, never before had the researcher recognized how action research methodology can improve professional practice. During this study, especially when the participants were forced to change their teaching platform from a face-to-face environment to a virtual platform using technology devices, the participants were able to immediately practice their new learning, and immediately discuss and reflect their practice. In Cycle 4, the participants read an article that discussed how on-line teaching could be culturally responsive. In the article, new areas of concern were presented, building a new type of teacher-student relationship, rebuilding trust, and coping with the missing 'physical' classroom. When the study participants re-convened, they were able to not only discuss the article content, but they were able to discuss, commensurate, and defend their classroom experiences while teaching online. The researcher has concluded that if the participants had not been in an action research study, they probably would not have had the opportunity to examine some pertinent issues connected to igniting student academic engagement during the pandemic environment. The required Cycle 4 research

(reading and reflecting on the professional articles) provided an opportunity for each of the participants to improve (action) their professional practice during a world health crisis.

The researcher has been an assistant principal for nine years. Serving in many roles has provided a myriad of school leadership experiences. Matriculating in many leadership courses has provided historical and recent school leadership knowledge. However, not until the researcher conducted this action research study, was the researcher able to recognize how important exemplary leadership practices are when facilitating and leading an action research study.

Studying Posner and Kouzes (2010) enabled the researcher to identify certain behaviors that a school leader must not only understand but be able to authentically and consistently demonstrate. During Cycles 2, and 3, participants remained cautious when expressing their beliefs, current attitudes, and historical biases regarding teaching culturally diverse students. However, as the researcher attempted to focus on building sincere professional relationships among the group, the atmosphere began to appear more relaxed and freer. The researcher also referred back to leadership notes attempting to ensure using transformational leadership while facilitating this research study. By Cycle 4, when the participants were forced to change teaching practices but retain the same academic goals, the researcher observed a completely different relationship style. After 7 months of an action-research study, the assistant principal had taken on the role of professional mentor. At Cycle 4 follow up discussions, lengthy video meetings occurred. Each participant desired to discuss their experiences while attempting to solve so many problems their culturally diverse students were facing: securing language translators for some parents; locating resources for students who did not have enough food;

securing devices and many other urgent needs that could enable teaching and learning to continue and improve. Indeed, the participants had become culturally competent.

Hopefully, this research study will be established as a permanent continuous improvement cycle, open to many more, and facilitated by authentic culturally competent school leaders.

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APPENDIX A

Flyer: Invitation to Participate in the Action Research Study

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY, CULTURAL COMPETENCY RESEARCH STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to create a program of practice, through the implementation of a professional learning community (PLC) to increase cultural competency for educators. This research will assist in identifying practices that increase cultural competence that will improve instructional practices, the school and classroom environment, and in turn improve student outcomes.

What is the duration of the study?

July 2019 – December 2019

Is participation in this study mandatory for anyone?

No. Participation is not mandatory for ANYONE.

How often are the meetings?

Face-to-face meetings are twice per month. Alternate weeks will be reflective journaling.

Research Activities:

The study activities will include a pre and post interview, guest speakers, book study, poverty simulation and reflective journaling.

Whom should I contact if I would like to participate?

Please contact Adrienne Wylie via email. – ajw42682@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

Action Research Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

Creating a Program to Increase Educator Cultural Competency through a Professional Learning Community Environment

I am asking you to participate in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to

be in the study. Before you agree to participate, please read the information in this form carefully. Please ask the

researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need additional information. When you have had

an opportunity to have all of your questions answered, you can decide if you want to participate in this study. This

process for research is called informed consent. I will give you a copy of this form for your records

Principal Investigator: Jami Berry
                                 Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
                                 E-Mail: jamiberry@uga.edu
                                 Phone: 404-668-5106

Co-Investigator:

                                 Adrienne Wylie, UGA Doctoral Student
                                 Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
                                 E-mail: ajw42682@uga.edu
                                 Phone: 770-374-9107

We are doing this research study to learn more about cultural competency and how it influences teacher efficacy

and instructional practices. The following research questions guide this study:

Research Questions

1. How do teachers describe the impact of cultural competency training on student engagement?

2. How do teachers describe the impact of being a participant in the process of cultural competency training?

3. How can a professional learning community focusing on cultural competency change instructional
   practices?

You are being invited to be in this research study because you have been identified as an educator that has an influence on instruction in culturally diverse classrooms.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to create a program of practice through the implementation of a professional learning community (PLC), increasing cultural competency for educators. This research assisted in identifying practices that increase cultural competence to improve instructional practices, the school and classroom environment, and student outcomes.

If you agree to participate in this study:

•The duration of the study will be six (7) months, July 2019 - December 2019 and March-April 2020(an extension of 1 cycle added to research study).•A book study (an estimated one hour is anticipated for the reading of each chapter outside of face to face meetings – seven (7) chapter book), journaling, face-to-face meetings, guest speakers and the CAPS poverty simulation, Focus Group Interview; a maximum total participation will be 36 hours* per participant at the completion of the action research. *Please note this time includes any necessary breaks or incidentals.

Information will be collected about your professional growth as an educator as it relates to cultural competency training.

Activities included in this action research have been listed by month below:

July 2019
Reflection Journal entries begin - Week of July 15, 2019 – 1 hour
 Participants will be asked to complete journal entries reflecting on the previous week's activities, interviews, discussions, and book study text.
Introduction of book study text - Face to Face - July 24, 2019 (Assign Chapter 1) – 1 hour and 30 minutes Introduction of Action research study
Reflection Journal entry - Week of July 29, 2019 – 1 hour

August 2019
Book Study Discussion - Face to Face - August 2019 (Assign Chapters 2&3) – 1 hour and 30 minutes
Reflection Journal entry - Week of August 2019 – 1 hour
Book Study Discussion - Face to Face - August 2019 (Assign Chapter 4) – 1 hour and 30 minutes
Reflection Journal entry - Week of August 2019 – 1 hour

September 2019
Guest Speaker - Director, Center for Transnational & Multilingual Education, ESOL and Language Education
September 2019 – 1 hour and 30 minutes
 Participants will be addressed by a guest speaker who will discuss cultural competency and working with students of various cultures and backgrounds.
Reflection Journal entry - Week of September 9, 2019 – 1 hour
Book Study Discussion - September 18, 2019 (Assign Chapter 5) – 1 hour and 30 minutes
Reflection Journal entry - Week of September 23, 2019 – 1 hour

October 2019
Book Study Discussion - October 2, 2019 (Assign Chapters 6 & 7) – 1 hour and 30 minutes
- Introduction of CAPS - Poverty Simulation - October 2, 2019 – Reflection Journal
  entry - Week of October 7, 2019 – 1 hour
  CAPS - Poverty Simulation - October 23, 2019 – 3 Hours
- Participants will engage in a three (3) hour poverty simulation. Each participant will be
  given a role to play as a member of a low SES family.
  Reflection Journal entry - Week of October 28, 2019 – 1 hour

November 2019
Book study discussion - November 6, 2019 - (Discussion regarding the book) – 1 hour and 30 minutes Reflection
Journal - Week of November 11, 2019 – 1 hour
Guest Speaker - Local School principal/Chief Equity and Compliance Officer Gwinnett County Public Schools -
Cultural
Competency - November 13, 2019 – 1 hour and 30 minutes
  □ Participants will be addressed by a guest speaker who will discuss cultural competency and working with
    students of various cultures and backgrounds.
Reflection Journal - Week of November 25, 2019 – 1 hour

December 2019
Reflection Journal - Week of December 2, 2019 – 1 hour

March-April 2020 - Extended Research - Cycle 4
Cycle 4 will include 4 meetings and a Focus Group Interview. Recent articles will be used to springboard meeting
discussions. The researcher will email the article(s) to the Implementation Team participants before each meeting so
that the participants may prepare for the meeting discussions. The researcher will facilitate the meetings by
introducing the topic and initiating the discussion regarding the selected article(s), and transitioning the discussion to
allow participants to share lived experiences. The dialogue from discussions and the Focus Group Interview, which
will be audio and video recorded, for each meeting will serve as Cycle 4 data. Participants will participate in a series
of discussions regarding the shift in school culture (teaching and professional learning, student learning and student
engagement) as it relates to the Covid-19/Corona-virus Pandemic.
Design Team Meeting - March 31, 2020
Discussion Meetings - Week of April 13, 2020 - April 14 and 16, 2020 (Design Team meeting will follow each
meeting) Discussion Meetings - Week of April 20, 2020 - April 21 and April 23, 2020 (Design Team meeting will
follow each meeting) Design Team Meeting - April 23, 2020
Focus Group Meeting - April 24, 2020
Meeting #1 - April 14, 2020
Topic: Did Cultural Competency training, during this study prepare you for the cultural shift caused by Covid-
19/Coronavirus? How?
Article: 3 Ways the Coronavirus Pandemic Could Reshape Education
Meeting #2 - April 16, 2020
Topic: In this study, we have discussed the impact of poverty on student engagement. How has the added culture
shift of Covid-19/Coronavirus influenced how you engage students? How are students affected?
Article: Mitigate the effects of Home Confinement on Children during the Covid-19 Outbreak
Article: As Classes Move Online During Covid-19, What Are Disconnected Students To Do?
Article: Online Teaching Can Be Culturally Response
Meeting #3 - April 21, 2020
Topic: In this study, we have discussed the various aspects of cultural competence, and how it relates to instructional
practices and student outcomes. How have your instructional practices changed? To what degree do you believe
cultural competency assists in educating students through the pandemic?
Article: Poor Students Face Digital Divide in How Teachers Learn to Use Tech.
Meeting #4 - April 23, 2020
Topic: In this study, we have discussed the various aspects of cultural competence, and how it relates to lesson
planning. Have your lesson plans changed? If so, how?
Article: This is How Digital Literacy can Transform Education
AR Design Team Meeting - April 23, 2020 outcomes.

Evaluating Action – AR Design Team will evaluate and discuss Cycle 4

Focus Group Interview - April 24, 2020 Keeping in mind the totality of the study:
1 - How would you define Cultural Competency? Is your answer different from when you started the study? How?
2 - Do you believe cultural competency educator training impacts student engagement? Why or Why not?
3 - Do you plan lessons to capitalize on your students' cultures and experiences? If so, please explain how.
4 - How do you plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped your students learn? Please explain.
5 - How does your teaching/leadership style vary in ways that accommodate the cultural differences in your school/classroom? Please explain.
6 - How do you believe cultural competency training impacts instructional practices? Please provide an example.
7 - How would you describe being a part of a PLC focusing on cultural competency training? Do you believe there was a change in your behavior in the classroom?
Please note - Even though the investigator will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the group at some time in the future.

Audio/Video Recording:
The discussions and Focus Group interview in this study will be recorded using a digital voice recording application on a computer and a virtual meeting video recording platform. All recording data will be downloaded to an external drive. Recordings will be transcribed and archived in a file on the external drive and deleted after five years.

Participation is voluntary:
You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your participation in other professional learning communities.
The interview questions are designed to ask you your thoughts about cultural competency in the local school and how cultural competency plays a role in instruction and school climate. You may skip any question that is asked during the interview process if, at any time, you do not feel qualified or comfortable in answering the question. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that is identifiable as yours will be destroyed and not used as a part of the final study. Your participation in this study will not affect your employment status with the school system or at this school.

Incentives for Participation:
There are no planned incentives for participation in this study.

Benefits for Research:
Your responses may help us understand the ways that cultural competency training changes educator behaviors, specific instruction, and the climate of the school. Additionally, your responses may help us understand specific practices and create a program that schools can implement to train educators in cultural competency.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will use identifier codes during the analysis of the interviews. We will use these identifiers to record your quotations for accuracy initially. These identifiers will be removed using pseudonyms in the final written analysis that will appear in the final study. The interview data will be collected anonymously and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Final data and analysis will be published in summary form. Any identifiable data will be stored on an external drive with access only to the researcher. Identifiable data will be deleted after five years. The researcher will not release any identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the study without your written consent. Summary research with identifiers removed may be used for additional study without additional consent.

Questions:

The main researcher conducting this study is Adrienne J. Wylie, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, under the direction of Dr. Jami Berry. Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jami Berry at 706-542-2214, or by sending her an e-mail at jamiberry@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate:

In order to agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature indicates that you have

carefully read and understood the information in this consent form.

Adrienne J Wylie _____

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX C
Action Research Focus Group Interview Questions

Creating a Program to Increase Educator Cultural Competency through a
Professional Learning Community Environment

Confidentiality Statement: All interview data is anonymous. No identifying data will be collected in the completion of this interview.

Keeping in mind the totality of the research study:`

1 - How would you define Cultural Competency? Is your answer different from when you started the study? How?
2 - Do you believe cultural competency, educator training, impacts student engagement? Why or Why not?
3 - Do you plan lessons to capitalize on your students' cultures and experiences? If so, please explain how.
4 - How do you plan and assess to determine if culturally responsive teaching practices have helped your students learn? Please explain.
5 - How does your teaching/leadership style vary in ways that accommodate the cultural differences in your school/classroom? Please explain.
6 - How do you believe that cultural competency training impacts instructional practices? Please provide an example.
7 - How would you describe being a part of a PLC focusing on cultural competency training? Do you believe there was a change in your behavior in the classroom?

Interview questions have been adapted from the Albermarle County School District Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey(2009).

# APPENDIX D

Local School Research Request Form

LOCAL SCHOOL RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

Name of School: REDACTED

Name of Researcher: Adrienne J. Wylie

Position or Grade: Assistant Principal

A. Research Project

  a. Title: Creating a Program to Increase Educator Cultural Competency through a Professional Learning Community Environment.

  b. Statement of Problem and research question: School districts, as well as local school level, teachers, counselors and administrators are facing great challenges in providing students with the resources and effective classroom instruction necessary to be successful in today's global society. Through cultural competency training, educators may develop the skills necessary to confront this issue. RQ 1 - How does cultural competency affect educator efficacy? RQ 2 - How can a professional learning community, focusing on cultural competency change instructional practices? RQ 3 - How does cultural competency training influence the school/classroom environment?

  c. Subjects or population for the study: The population for this study will include local school educators – teachers from multiple grade levels (9-12) and subject areas, counselors and administrators.

  d. Reason for doing this research:

X	Graduate Study at University of Georgia	University/College
	Publication/Presentation	
	Other (please specify)	

  e. Dates research will be conducted: July 2019 to December 2019

B. All research and researchers must a) Protect the rights and welfare of all human subjects, b) Inform students and/or parents that they have the right not to participate in the study, c) Adhere to board policies and applicable laws which govern the privacy and confidentiality of students records.

C. This request applies to research conducted within and by local school personnel. All other research requests must be submitted by completing a GCPS Research Application and submitting it electronically according to instructions. For complete details and instructions, please visit our Web Page at the following link: http://tinyurl.com/ce7pmpm or you can simply go to gwinnett.k12.ga.us. When you open our webpage, click on "I want to" section . . . Apply for Research Approval." This will take you to our webpage.

D. Principals ONLY need to approve Local School Research Requests. The copy sent to the Research & Evaluation Office is for filing purposes only. No further approval is necessary.

E. After approval by the principal, please forward a copy of this completed form to:

| Via GCPS Courier:
Jim Appleton
GCPS - Research & Evaluation
ISC | Via US Mail:
Dr. Jim Appleton, Executive Director
Research & Evaluation Department
Gwinnett County Public Schools
437 Old Peachtree Road, NW
Suwanee, GA 30024 | Via Fax:

Jim Appleton
678-301-7088 |

REDACTED

Principal's Signature

5-15-19

Date of Approval

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

| » | My Inbox | Library | |

View Project
Print Project
View Differences

Progress Report

Create Version
Add Public Comment

Creating a Program to Increase Educator Cultural Competency through a Professional Learning Community Environment

ID:
PROJECT00000703

Principal Investigator:	Berry	Contacts:	Wylie
Reviewer:	Westbrook	Review Level:	Exempt
Determination:	Approved	Approved Date:	6/3/2019
Funding Source:		Expiration Date:	
Committee:		Project Status:	Approved
Review Category:			

APPENDIX F

Action Research Design Team Meeting Agenda

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Design Team Meeting

July 24, 2019/August 7, 2019

Team Norms
Respect and trust each other
Honor Time
Maintain Confidentiality
Practice Flexibility
Listen Actively
Be open to learning

Agenda	
Welcome	Researcher
Connections Protocol	
Action Research/Your role	
Consent Forms	All
Norms Protocol	
Purpose of Study	Researcher
Research Questions	
School Data Review	
IRB Review	
Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks & Hybrid	
Proposed Interventions/Activities	
AR Study Goals	
Development of AR Cycles	All
Dismissal	
Action Design Team – Follow-up Meeting – August 7, 2019	
Review Action Research Implementation Team Interviews	
Dismissal	

APPENDIX G

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting Agenda

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

August 14, 2019

Team Norms	
Honor Time	
Maintain Confidentiality	
Honesty	
Listen Actively	
Be open to learning	
Remained focused	
Agenda	
Welcome	
Connections	
Action Research Team Role/Expectations	
Consent Forms	
Norms Protocol	
Review Purpose of Study/Research Questions	
Review School Data	
Vision/Goals	
Book Study Introduction	
Distribution of books and journals	*Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools, Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms by Tyrone C. Howard*
Dismissal	

APPENDIX H

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

August 28, 2019

Team Norms
Honor Time   *Maintain Confidentiality*   *Honesty*   *Listen Actively*   *Be open to learning*   *Remained focused*

Agenda	
Welcome **Connections** **Book Study Discussion** **Book Study Protocol – Round Robin** **Dismissal**	**Book Study Facilitator** *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools, Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms by Tyrone C. Howard*

APPENDIX I

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

**CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT**

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

September 11, 2019

Team Norms
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*

Agenda	
Welcome	Researcher
Introduction of Speaker	Researcher
Guest Speaker	Dr. Sue Kasun Associate Professor and Director for the Center for Transnational and Multilingual Education at Georgia State University
Q&A	
Dismissal	

APPENDIX J

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting
September 25, 2019

Team Norms	
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*	
Agenda	
Welcome/Thank You	Researcher
Connections	Researcher
Reflections Updates/New Tools	
FlipGrid Demonstration	
Book Study Protocol	Top 10 List
Dismissal	

APPENDIX K

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting
Benchmark Meeting
October 9, 2019

Team Norms
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*

Agenda	
Welcome/Thank You	Researcher
Connections	Researcher
Research Questions Review	
Text Review Text Rendering Protocol	Strategies for Building Cultural Competency
Dismissal	

APPENDIX L

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting
October 23, 2019

Team Norms
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*

Agenda	
Welcome	Researcher
Guest Speaker	David Araya – Co founder, President and CEO of H.o.P.e Hispanic Organization Promoting Education
Research Questions Review	
Q&A	
Dismissal	

APPENDIX M

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting
November 21, 2019

Team Norms	
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*	
Agenda	
Welcome	Researcher
Assigning Roles	Researcher
Provide Simulation Instructions	Researcher
Poverty Simulation	All
Debrief	
Dismissal	All

APPENDIX N

Community Action Poverty Simulation – Email Reminder

ILT Poverty Simulation - COMING SOON

Adrienne Wylie   Monday, November 18, 2019 09:58AM

Bcc: Show Details

Good afternoon,

Could you survive a month in poverty?

The poverty rate in Norcross, GA is 21.4%, meaning 21.4% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Norcross, GA (3.53k out of 16.5k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 13.4%. The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who classifies as impoverished. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to be living in poverty.

The most common racial or ethnic group living below the poverty line in Norcross, GA is Hispanic, followed by White and Other. Many more have incomes above the poverty line, but their incomes are still low enough to qualify for programs like food stamps and Medicaid. The recent economic downturn has seen employment rates rise and the use of emergency food pantries increase.

It is difficult for those of us who have enough to truly understand the situations that families living in poverty experience every day – the decisions they have to make, and the fears and frustrations they feel. That is why we are inviting you to walk a mile in the shoes of those facing poverty by participating in the Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS).

As a member of the Action Research Implementation Team Subcommittee or a member of ILT, you will be assigned a role as a member of one of the families for the simulation. Therefore, attendance is VERY important. Please let me know if you ARE NOT available to attend as soon as possible. Otherwise, look forward to an eye-opening and informative experience as we journey through a simulation of what a percentage of our population of student's families may experience day to day.

WHEN:

Thursday November 21, 2019

TIME:

2:20 PM – 4:20 PM

PLACE:

– Media Center

Ms. Adrienne Wylie
Curriculum & Instruction
Assistant Principal

APPENDIX O

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting
December 11, 2019

Team Norms
Honor Time *Maintain Confidentiality* *Honesty* *Listen Actively* *Be open to learning* *Remained focused*

Agenda	
Welcome	Researcher
Holiday Celebration/End of Research	All
Book Study Final Discussion	All
Poverty Simulation Final Discussion	All
Debrief	

APPENDIX P

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Design Team Meeting

March 31/April 4, 2020 (Follow-up)

Norms-

- o *Respect and Trust Each Other*
- o *Honor Time*
- o *Maintain Confidentiality*
- o *Practice Flexibility*
- o *Listen Actively and Carefully*
- o *Be Open to Learning*

AGENDA

Review Research Questions

Review Purpose of Study

Discuss Timeline

Discuss Cycle 4 Design – Number of meetings, Virtual Format

Collaborate on Design and Final Plan

Follow-up Meeting – April 4, 2020

Researcher presents Cycle 4 according to suggestions outlined by the Design Team

Discuss Articles to be used for discussions

Researcher updates Cycle 4 as needed.

Adjourn

APPENDIX Q

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Implementation Team Meetings

Meetings 1- 4
April 14, April 16, April 21, April 23, 2020

Norms-
- *Be Open to Learning*
- *Remain Focused*
- *Honor Time*
- *Maintain Confidentiality*
- *Honesty*
- *Practice Flexibility*
- *Listen Actively*

__AGENDA__
Review Research Questions
Review Purpose of Study
Connections
Review Article – Text Rendering Protocol
Share Experiences
Adjourn

APPENDIX R

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Action Research Design Team Meeting
(Evaluating Action)
April 23, 2020

Norms-

- o *Respect and Trust Each Other*
- o *Honor Time*
- o *Maintain Confidentiality*
- o *Practice Flexibility*
- o *Listen Actively and Carefully*
- o *Be Open to Learning*

AGENDA

Evaluate and discuss Cycle 4 Outcomes
Review Purpose of Study
Review Research Questions
- *Were the research questions answered?*
- *Were interventions successful?*
- *Future professional development*

APPENDIX S

ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CREATING A PROGRAM TO INCREASE EDUCATOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH A

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Focus Group Interview

April 24, 2020

__AGENDA__

Review Interview Process

Present Questions

Share Responses

Adjourn