

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CULTURALLY  
RESPONSIVE TEACHING ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

A Dissertation by

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## ABSTRACT

Middle school classrooms, like most US public schools, are becoming increasingly diverse and experiencing rapid growth in the number of students of color, low-income, and those from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Howard, 2007). In these culturally and ethnically diverse classrooms, some teachers, administrators, and parents view their schools' increasing diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity. The study examined these culturally diverse classrooms through the lens of self-efficacy to assess middle school teachers' perceptions on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) practices. Teachers' perceptions largely influence and determine the instructional strategies they employ. It is important to understand what it takes for instructors to practice a CRT approach to teaching. Teachers' perceptions was explored by the analysis of teacher's cultural awareness, knowledge, skills, and agency. The study also examined the role of teacher self-efficacy, and the interactions of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors in teachers' CRT instructional decisions. The study employed a qualitative approach and collected data from interviews and observations. The research questions which guided this study include: What role does teacher self-efficacy play in CRT practice? How do personal factors (i.e., awareness, knowledge, and skills), behavioral factors (i.e., differentiated practice), and environmental factors (i.e., classroom/school context) influence teachers' application of CRT instruction? What forms of agency (personal, proxy, collective) influence teachers' willingness to implement CRT practices? The research revealed that participants seemed to be aware of CRT and showed a desire to practice it during classroom instruction but seemed to have a limited knowledge and lacked a deep understanding of CRT practice. The study supports the need for CRT awareness for teachers to help them manage culturally diverse classrooms.

**Key Words:** Teachers' Perceptions, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Instructional Practice

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## CHAPTER 1

Culturally responsive teaching is a type of pedagogy that requires integrating the cultural awareness, experiences, perspectives, and prior knowledge of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds into teaching practices to make learning experiences more appropriate and productive (Gay, 2002, 2013). In doing so, teachers engage in an instructional approach that places students' cultural knowledge, experiences, socio-political and historical contexts at the center of teaching and learning. This, in turn, empowers students to embrace their cultural heritage, develop critical consciousness, and strive for equity in educational practices (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral articulation of knowledge, beliefs, and values that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity in learning (Bazron et al., 2005). While culturally responsive teaching is appropriate for all levels of schooling, this study will focus on middle school classrooms.

Middle school classrooms, like most US public schools, are experiencing rapid growth in the number of students of color, low-income, and those from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Howard, 2007). The middle school classroom is the venue where interactions, if not appropriately managed, can produce a social environment not conducive to learning (Black, 2006). Middle school learners are unique in the sense that they are young adolescents with developing minds whose needs include good nurturing role models who embrace diversity. Middle school marks a key transitional point in education between elementary and high school, where academic knowledge and cultural awareness are increasingly intensified (Fukuzawa, 1994). This critical point on these young minds acknowledges the need for culturally responsive teachers who can nurture these learners to embrace diversity and excel in education. What is

learnt in middle school stays to adulthood and largely influence an individual's behavior, character, and interactions (Garcia & Chun, 2016).

### **Research Problem**

Culturally relevant pedagogy was developed by Ladson-Billings (1995) as a conceptual framework and approach to teaching students of color in a manner more aligned with their familial cultures. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to “accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Culturally relevant pedagogy teaches through the strengths of diverse learners empowering them intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Geneva Gay (2002) later operationalized it as culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching uses the cultural awareness, knowledge, and perspectives of diverse learners as channels for teaching efficiently.

Culturally responsive teaching encourages teachers to transform their teaching to be more responsive to the diverse students they serve (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral articulation of knowledge, beliefs, and values that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. Middle school educators can use culturally relevant instructional materials to communicate productively with diverse learners to improve the instructional interaction between the teachers and their students from diverse backgrounds.

Empirical research on culturally responsive teaching demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy in facilitating students' success during classroom instruction (Bonner et al., 2018; Chen & Yang, 2017; Garza, 2009; Kea & Trent, 2013; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Students have reported that teachers who provide this level of specialized

assistance welcome a variety of student discourse and show genuine interest in their successes (Byrd, 2016; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Nganga, 2015). Research shows culturally responsive teaching increases student motivation, interest in content, ability to engage in content area discourse, perception as being capable learners, and increases student confidence when taking exams (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Bui & Fagan, 2013; Chen & Yang, 2017).

Culturally responsive teaching is grounded in the assumption that students learn best when learning content relates to their own experiences and when teaching styles mirror students' culture (Bazron et al., 2005; Sue & Torino, 2005). Research indicates that culturally responsive teachers use cultural awareness, prior knowledge of diverse learners, skills, classroom, and school climate/context to make learning experiences more appropriate and productive (Nganga, 2015). Engaging in culturally responsive teaching requires valuing cultural differences and challenging stereotypes, racism, prejudice, oppression, intolerance, and injustice (Gay, 2002, 2013).

While culturally responsive instructional approaches have demonstrated benefits meeting individual student needs (Oberge De La Garza et al., 2020; Patterson, 2012; Pérez et al., 2012; Santamaria, 2009), some educators have made intentional efforts to practice culturally responsive teaching strategies, while others seem unable, unwilling, or reluctant to practice culturally responsive instruction (Fredricks & Literacy, 2012; Gay, 2013). Teachers can be perplexed about how they can teach simultaneously for meeting standards of academic excellence and cultural responsiveness. When the reasons for these fears and resistance are examined, racial prejudices, anxiety about lack of knowledge of ethnic and cultural diversity, and doubts about teaching diverse learners quickly surface (Gay & Howard, 2000). Evidence is growing that culturally responsive teaching makes schooling more meaningful and relevant for

minority students but, the process of implementation for teachers is challenging. Many teachers have not been properly prepared to teach diverse student populations in schools (Howard, 2007).

Moreover, teachers' perceptions about and willingness to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices are largely influenced by their cultural competence, cultural awareness, prior knowledge, skills, human agency, and the understanding of the diverse student populations they serve (Bandura, 2001, 2006; Gay & Howard, 2000). Human agency is one's actual ability to deal with a task or situation (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, one may speculate that a teacher's willingness to adopt culturally responsive teaching strategies may be influenced by teacher self-efficacy, teacher perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices and their willingness to embrace diversity. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to organize and execute a course of action essential to achieve in a particular situation or one's perceived ability to deal with a task or situation (Bandura, 1986). Teachers' self-efficacy, cultural awareness, prior knowledge, skills, and classroom/school context may explain their willingness or not to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices. The extent to which teachers utilize their personal factors (i.e., skills, cultural awareness, prior knowledge) behavioral factors (i.e., differentiated practices) and environmental factors (i.e., classroom and schoolwide context) varies based on their level of self-efficacy.

Although much empirical research on the benefits of culturally responsive teaching has increased in elementary schools in recent years (Baum & Swick, 2008; Bui & Fagan, 2013; Gorham, 2001; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Nganga, 2015; Siwatu, Polydore, Starker, et al., 2009), fewer studies have been conducted in middle school settings (Garcia & Chun, 2016). My study focuses on middle school and offers to explore the reasons why some teachers readily adopt culturally responsive teaching and others do not.

The focus of the study, therefore, was to examine middle school teachers' willingness to adopt culturally responsive teaching instructional practice. The research focused on a range of core and non-core subject middle school teachers, not necessarily looking for those who claim to be using culturally responsive teaching but gauging teacher's willingness to employ culturally responsive teaching practices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To provide effective instruction which responds to the differences within the classroom, teachers have been encouraged to adopt culturally responsive instructional strategies and practices. Teachers' use of culturally responsive teaching skills enable them to be more sensitive to the needs of a diverse student population and provide quality education, resulting in improved student educational outcomes (Gay, 2010). The theoretical framework for the research is based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977). I employed Bandura's social cognitive theory to elaborate how self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism influence the development of teachers' willingness to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices.

Teacher self-efficacy can help to explain why some teachers willingly adopt culturally responsive instructional practices and others do not. Teachers with a high level of self-efficacy are more likely to adopt a new set of teaching practices, which in this case happens to be culturally responsive pedagogy (Bandura, 1986; Fitchett et al., 2012; Siwatu, Polydore, Starker, et al., 2009; Smith & Ng, 2009). Teacher efficacy can be defined as a teacher's belief in their ability to teach unmotivated students (Guskey & Passaro, 1994) and it has a significant relationship with teacher expectations toward student performance.

## Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a framework for examining the construct of teacher self-efficacy and understanding the changing nature of human behavior often referred to as reciprocal determinism. Bandura (1977, 1986) proposed two types of expectancy beliefs: self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to organize and execute the course of action essential to achieve in particular situations (Bandura, 1986). Outcome expectancy is defined as one's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

Bandura's expectancy ideas help to explain how teachers' willingness to employ culturally responsive teaching strategies is influenced by their perceived self-efficacy. This influences the instructional strategies teachers employ in their classrooms. Self-efficacy makes up a significant portion of teachers' perceptions and beliefs. Teachers who are highly self-efficacious in their instruction tend to have positive expectations of students' outcome (Siwatu, Polydore, Starker, et al., 2009; Siwatu et al., 2017). Teachers' efficacy beliefs significantly influence expectations held for student learning and achievement. These beliefs lead teachers to treat students differently resulting in positive or negative performance, aspirations, and self-concepts (Villegas, 2007). Teacher efficacy significantly influences teacher aspirations and practice. Teachers with low self-efficacy may fail to practice culturally responsive teaching in their classroom, they may feel that they lack the time to make lesson adjustments, lack confidence in their own content knowledge, or focus on all ways the lesson may fail. On the other hand, teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to be culturally responsive and incorporate culturally responsive strategies in lesson delivery (Siwatu, 2007; Siwatu, Polydore, & Starker, 2009).

## Self-Efficacy and Reciprocal Determinism

In social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is seen through the lens of reciprocal determinism. Reciprocal determinism provides a basic analytical framework to understanding the nature of human behavior. According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, reciprocal determinism influences self-efficacy and human behavior occurs through the interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. In reciprocal determinism these three factors mutually influence each other and are recognized as functional properties or dimensions of perceived self-efficacy. The extent to which teachers utilize their personal factors (i.e., cultural awareness, prior knowledge, and skills) behavioral (i.e., differentiated practices) and environmental factors (i.e., classroom and schoolwide context) varies based on their level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Each of these factors and how they were applied is explained below.

### ***Personal Factors***

In social cognitive theory, Bandura explains personal factors are self-beliefs, awareness, knowledge, skills, and aspirations that regulate behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bandura, 2012). Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to integrate cultural awareness and prior knowledge of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds into teaching practices to make learning experiences more appropriate, inclusive, and productive. Teachers with high self-efficacy can easily integrate personal factors to make learning experiences more interesting for all learners. For this study, I examined what beliefs, awareness, knowledge, skills, and aspirations that middle school teachers exhibit that influenced their willingness to engage in culturally responsive instruction.



### ***Behavioral Factors***

Bandura (1977) explains behavior is a self-system that enables individuals to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. By differentiating learning practices, culturally responsive teachers can influence learners' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to feel accepted and included in the learning process. Culturally responsive teaching can be more productive with behavioral articulation of differentiated classroom practices that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. Self-efficacy can motivate middle school teachers to engage in instructional approaches that place students' personalities, cultural values and experiences, socio-political and historical contexts at the center of teaching and learning. During the study, teachers were asked to explain what differentiated learning practices they engage in that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity. Observation data obtained looked for teacher behaviors such as skills in practicing differentiated learning practice and acknowledging social differences in the classroom.

### ***Environmental Factors***

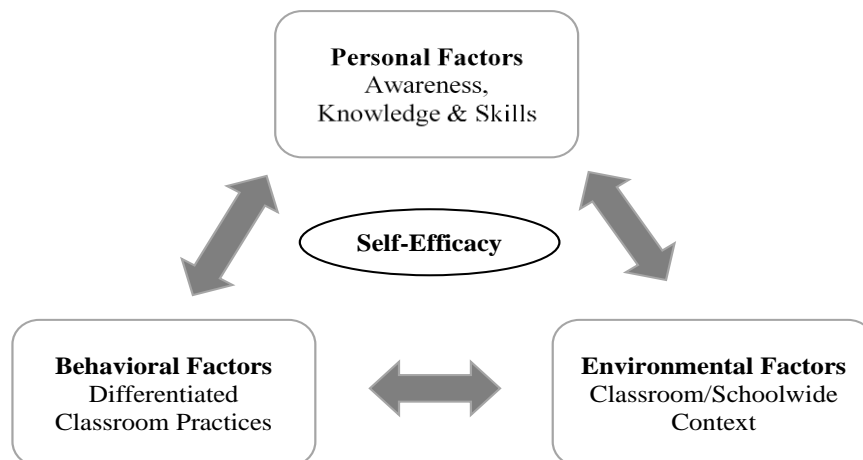
According to social cognitive theory, the environment is composed of social and physical factors; environmental factors influence how a person thinks and feels, which in turn influences their behavior (Bandura, 1977). The environmental factors in this study include classroom and schoolwide context. While middle school teachers generally lack much control over selecting their classroom environment (i.e., class sizes, student diversity, cognitive abilities, socio-economic status), or schoolwide context (i.e., teacher and parent demographics, socio-economic status, diversity, geographical location), they do have some freedom/agency on how they choose to interpret and react to these contexts. Middle school teachers with high self-efficacy can manage the different contexts to empower students to embrace their cultural heritage, develop

critical consciousness, and strive for equity in educational practices. During the study I examined the classroom and schoolwide environment to identify culturally responsive teaching ideas and aspects. This information provided insights into teachers in these contexts and how they react to and interpret culturally responsive teaching.

Self-efficacy reflects confidence in a teacher’s belief in their ability to control personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Culturally responsive teachers construct outcome expectations from observed conditional relations between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors in the school. Reciprocal determinism is a back-and-forth process where each factor influences and, is in turn influenced by the other two factors to shape human behavior (Bandura, 1986). Figure 1 below illustrates the process of reciprocal determinism and perceived self-efficacy.

Figure 1

*Bandura's reciprocal determinism and self-efficacy model of social cognitive theory (The Tripartite Model)*



*Note:* Adapted from “On the functional properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited,” by A. Bandura, 2012, Journal of Management.

This process of reciprocal determinism among connected factors informs my research on middle school teachers' perceptions on culturally responsive teaching in the sense that; although teachers generally lack much control selecting their classroom environment, they can choose how to interpret and react to this context. For instance, middle school teachers can choose to adopt differentiated classroom practices as an instructional strategy. Teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy determine decisions made on culturally responsive teaching in classroom instruction. Bandura (1986) posits that people operating in the same environmental contexts can make different choices and regulate their behaviors and beliefs differently. The study used teacher perceptions and beliefs about culturally responsive teaching to better understand their decisions to practice culturally responsive teaching instruction. Practicing culturally responsive instruction can depend upon the personal and behavioral factors teachers possess.

#### Self-Efficacy and Human Agency

According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is one's perceived ability to deal with a task or situation, whereas human agency is one's actual ability to deal with a task or situation (Bandura, 2001; Code, 2020). Human agency connects with self-efficacy in this study as it explores a teacher's willingness to adopt and practice culturally responsive teaching. As active agents, teachers have some control over what happens to them. They can make choices about which instructional methods they choose to employ. Making self-evaluation conditional on matching individual qualities, culturally responsive middle school teachers give meaning to their pursuits and create self-motivation through self-efficacy and human agency to support their efforts to achieve culturally responsive instructional practices. Social cognitive theory differentiates three modes of human agency (Bandura, 2006): personal/individual, proxy, and collective. These three forms of agency interact with each other, so each form is a piece of the

puzzle. These modes of human agency can motivate middle school teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching and to acquire the capacity to coordinate learning skills, motivation, and emotions to effectively practice culturally responsive teaching.

### ***Personal/Individual Agency***

When a person acts on their own behalf, they are demonstrating personal/individual agency. People bring their influence on what they can control, for instance their own functioning and on environmental events (Bandura, 2001, 2006). Individuals have differing amounts of abilities and resources resulting in some having greater agency than others. This helps to explain why some middle school teachers can practice culturally responsive teaching while others are reluctant. During the study, middle school teachers were asked about what resources and other supports as well as abilities they have (e.g., training, professional development, etc.) related to implementation of culturally responsive teaching. The information gathered was used to understand what tools and skills teachers have and how they are prepared to apply culturally responsive teaching practices in the instructional process.

### ***Proxy Agency***

In proxy agency, people influence others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf. This is to secure the outcomes individuals desire (Bandura, 2006, 2018). Proxy agency relies on perceived social efficacy to engage the thoughtful efforts of other individuals (Bandura, 2001). For instance, middle school teachers can work with another teacher or administrator who is knowledgeable in culturally responsive practice during instruction. During the study, middle school teachers were asked if they collaborate to achieve effective culturally responsive teaching. If so, were the teams of teachers working together? Was there a

supportive administrator and/or instructional coach? Was there a key teacher who led the way for others?

### ***Collective Agency***

In collective agency, people pool their knowledge, skills, and resources to shape their future (Bandura, 2001). A functional dimension of collective agency is that human pursuits require commitment to a shared purpose and coordination of interdependent course of action. People's belief in their collective capability to achieve certain attainments is a vital element of collective agency. Many things' people seek are achievable by working together through a common effort. In a collectivity, members acting on their common beliefs contribute to promoting group attainments (Bandura, 2006, 2018). During the study middle school teachers were asked if they work together collectively to implement culturally responsive teaching. Were they having collaborative teams? Were they sharing resources to advance culturally responsive teaching? What kind of resources did they use to engage in culturally responsive teaching?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to gain an in depth understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions of their willingness to implement culturally responsive teaching, understand what teachers know, believe, and practice, the influence of the classroom/school context, and the role self-efficacy and agency plays in teachers' decisions to implement culturally responsive instruction.

Teachers' perceptions can be explored by the analysis of their personal factors (i.e., awareness, knowledge, and skills), behavioral factors (i.e., differentiated practices), and environmental factors (i.e., classroom and school context). These factors are recognized as functional properties or dimensions of self-efficacy. The study examined culturally diverse

classrooms through the lens of self-efficacy to assess middle school teachers' level of culturally responsive teaching practices.

### **Research Questions**

With the focus of this study being teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching on their instructional practice, the study was designed to address the following questions:

- How do middle school teachers perceived self-efficacy beliefs, influence their willingness to implement culturally responsive instructional practice in culturally diverse middle school classrooms?
- How do personal factors (i.e., cultural awareness, prior knowledge, skills), behavioral factors (i.e., differentiated practice), and environmental factors (i.e., classroom/schoolwide context) influence middle school teachers' application of culturally responsive instruction in diverse middle school classrooms?
- What forms of agency (personal, proxy, collective) influence teachers' willingness to implement culturally responsive teaching practices?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

In this literature review, I examined culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, curriculum content, instructional practice and culturally responsive teaching, and teacher self-efficacy and culturally responsive teaching. I explored teachers' perceptions about and willingness or not to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices in teaching and managing diverse learners. Empirical research has indicated that teachers overall feel at least somewhat competent in many components of culturally responsive teaching, including knowledge about cultural diversity, the instructional needs of diverse student groups, and the use of effective strategies to teach minority students (Gorham, 2001; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Nganga, 2015).

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teaching is conceived from the culturally relevant pedagogy framework. Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as a “theoretical model that addresses student achievement, assists learners to accept their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge school inequities and, empowers students intellectually, socially and, emotionally by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469).

Culturally relevant pedagogy embodies a professional, cultural, ideological, and ethical practice centered in fundamental beliefs about unyielding commitment to see students succeed. Howard (2007) advocates that culturally relevant pedagogy is more than just a way of teaching, or a simple set of practices embedded in curriculum lessons. Gay (2010) further posited that using cultural knowledge to guide pedagogy, mediating classroom inequities stemming from

culture, class, race, and other disparities, and embracing cultural responsiveness is integral to educational effectiveness for all students.

Research shows that although culturally relevant pedagogy is applied in educational curriculum and practice, it is often not commonly understood as a conceptual framework that advocates the elements of academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Young, 2010). Young's research was an attempt to define, implement, and assess culturally relevant pedagogy as a viable pedagogical tool in classroom instruction. Research findings revealed deep structural issues related to teachers' cultural bias, and the lack of support to adequately implement culturally relevant pedagogy theory into practice. The study recommended further inquiry-based dialogue among scholars and practitioners to utilize the culturally relevant pedagogy theory more consistently in academic research and in classroom instruction.

Teachers who draw upon the culturally relevant pedagogy framework set rigorous learning objectives, engage students in critical thinking, hold high expectations and long-term goals for their students, and utilize real-life examples to help students understand difficult concepts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally relevant pedagogy is a standard framework of good instruction that is promoted to improve the achievement of students of color (Schmeichel, 2012).

In their conceptual advocacy work, Baldwin (2015) and Milner (2011) posit that culturally relevant pedagogy suggests that students develop a critical consciousness and that they move beyond spaces where they simply or solely consume knowledge without critically examining it. Culturally relevant pedagogy facilitates and supports the achievement of all students, which corresponds with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching. In a culturally responsive classroom, effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-



centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement.

Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching have many features in common and often are used interchangeably. Culturally relevant pedagogy provides a basis for the development and advancement of culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is grounded on the ideas first advanced by culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching uses cultural awareness, prior knowledge, and frames of reference of diverse learners to make learning experiences more appropriate and productive (Gay, 2002, 2010; Minkos et al., 2017). Culturally responsive teachers focus on individual students' academic success and develop a sense of social and critical consciousness.

Culturally responsive teaching is an interactive process in which teachers continuously explore their attitudes and beliefs about cultural issues, increase their understanding of specific learners, and examine the impact awareness, knowledge and skills has on what and how they teach as well as how they interact with diverse students (Griner & Stewart, 2013; Spanierman et al., 2011). Culturally responsive practice places much emphasis upon student learning, culturally sensitive curriculum, and community connection, but it does not overlook the critical role that teachers play in student learning (Griner & Stewart, 2013). Griner and Stewart's research involved clarifying the need for culturally responsive teaching practices in schools, to meet the needs of all students. The research was framed around looking at the achievement gap between increased diversity of students through the use of culturally responsive teaching practice. Findings from the study showed statistically significant results indicating that participation in culturally responsive teaching had an impact on teaching practices. Findings also reported that

teachers' beliefs were confirmed and validated by the strategies presented by culturally responsive teaching. Spanierman, et al.'s (2011) research was based on the development and validation of culturally responsive teaching with emphasis on cultural teaching skills and knowledge. Spanierman found support for the link between cognitive understanding of social inequalities and self-reported culturally relevant teaching competencies, which suggested that teachers should be trained in sociopolitical realities of diverse racial and ethnic groups in addition to culturally responsive teaching practices.

In their conceptual advocacy work, Woodley et al. (2017), posited that culturally responsive teaching is about devising effective environments and employing classroom practices that enable learners to thrive academically. This student-centered approach and the value placed on diverse student experiences provide access for students to maintain cultural integrity while succeeding academically. Culturally responsive teaching releases the intellect of diverse students through making authentic knowledge about different ethnic groups accessible to students. This privilege enables learners to focus and concentrate on academic learning activities (Brown, 2004; Chun & Dickson, 2011). Teachers can apply proximity and provide individual help to all students equitably. Individual meetings with learners are the utmost confidence builders for students and are essential as follow-ups to instruction.

Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral articulation of knowledge, beliefs, and values that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. It is the awareness of one's own cultural identity and views while having the ability and willingness to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of others (Baldwin, 2015). Advocates for culturally responsive practice view middle school teachers' culturally responsive teaching as vital to the educational process (Fukuzawa, 1994; Garcia & Chun, 2016).

## Effects of Culturally Responsive Teaching on Academic Outcomes

Empirical research has examined the effects of culturally responsive teaching on academic outcomes. Bui and Fagan (2013) for instance, found that students' perception of their teachers' culturally responsive teaching was significantly related to their academic self-efficacy and sense of school belonging. They also examined the effects of a reading intervention program in a culturally responsive teaching framework and found significant increases in word recognition, reading comprehension, and story retelling. Chun and Dickson (2011) argued that utilizing various instructional methods, maintaining students' cultural integrity during instruction, and affirming the value of Spanish contributed to Latino students' sense of school belonging and academic self-efficacy.

Teachers who practice culturally responsive teaching demonstrated higher levels of respect for cultural diversity, greater levels of engagement and achievement at school and, are more prepared to work with culturally diverse students (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Gorham, 2001; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013). Bui and Fagan's research sought to enhance the reading comprehension performance of fifth-grade students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through an integrated reading comprehension strategy intervention. Their study indicated that the combination of strategies had a positive and strong effect on the students' achievement. Gorham's (2001) study explored elementary school teachers' perceptions of their strengths and deficiencies for working with and meeting the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research findings showed that teachers who had multiethnic family origin and early education experience with culturally diverse students and cultural friendship groups, perceived themselves as competent to teach culturally diverse students.

Research shows that while many teachers believe that culturally responsive teaching is an important link in working with diverse populations, teachers and school staff lack clear examples and tools for best practices that will aid them in addressing the achievement gap and disproportionality effectively within their schools and classrooms (Griner & Stewart, 2013; Phuntsog, 2001). Phuntsog's research was based on identifying teachers' perceptions towards culturally responsive teaching. The findings showed that children learn better and register good academic outcomes when teachers are sensitive to home and school cultural differences when preparing and presenting instructional materials.

The unique experiences of diverse learners are instrumental in informing the design of a curriculum, this in turn influences how well it will be received by all students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Aronson and Laughter's research sought examples of research connecting culturally responsive teaching to positive student outcomes across content areas in the curriculum. Their research demonstrated that the engagement of culturally responsive teaching across the content areas resulted in positive increases in academic skills and concepts among learners.

#### The Importance of Communication Skills in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Communication skills in culturally responsive classroom are necessary because communication is strongly influenced by culture. Culturally responsive teaching is effective in the classroom where teachers employ their skills, knowledge, and awareness to communicate well with diverse students (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2004). Students from different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds talk, write, think, and listen in ways that are different from school patterns and expectations (Howard, 2007). Middle school teachers' responsibilities lie

with the application of culturally diverse knowledge and sensitivities to the various aspects of learning (Brown, 2004; Garcia & Chun, 2016).

In culturally responsive classrooms creating a positive learning environment requires attentiveness to the way in which teachers communicate and interact with students. Differences in communication processes affect the quality of relationships between teachers and their African, Hispanic, Native American and immigrant students. If not checked this can impact negatively on the learners' academic achievement (Brown, 2004; Bui & Fagan, 2013). Brown's research was to determine if the classroom management strategies teachers used reflected the research on culturally responsive teaching. The research revealed several management strategies that reflected culturally responsive teaching: (a) development of personal relationships with students, (b) creation of caring communities, (c) use of culturally and ethnically congruent communication processes, (d) demonstrations of assertiveness, and (e) utilization of clearly stated and enforced expectations.

The use of body language, gestures, and expressions to communicate with learners is important in culturally responsive classrooms. Nonverbal behavior can be the most immediate part of a teacher's overall reward system, as well as one of the most subtly motivating or discouraging forces available to teachers in their interactions with students. Students almost always notice nonverbal behavior, especially when others are receiving it, while it is often unperceived by the teacher using it (Bondy et al., 2007). According to Bondy et al., a culturally responsive teacher is sensitive to the cultural norms of the students and holds students' attention by using the communicative style of their culture, appeals to affiliation rather than authority to maintain order, and believes it unnecessary to use coercive means to control behavior.

A culturally responsive teacher builds a caring learning community where connections with and among students create a safe place to learn and an emotional climate where students can take risks, laugh, and trust one another and their teacher. In their literature review McAllister and Irvine (2000) posited that to better understand and interpret student behaviors, teachers 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.

#### Teacher Self-Reflection and Recognition of Biases in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Self-reflection is self-assessment meant to inspire inward reflection on teachers' cultural experiences in order to recognize strengths, areas for growth, and curricular and instructional adaptations they could make to improve equitable and high achievement outcomes for learners in culturally diverse classrooms. Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and recognition of biases are suggested to be important for culturally responsive teaching. Implicit stereotypes and negative attitudes can influence student judgements and contribute to unfavorable educational outcomes of diverse learners.

#### ***Teacher Self-Reflection***

Culturally responsive teachers continually reflect upon their own cultural experience and the experiences of their students; and they consistently use this knowledge to create learning environments that support students' diverse learning needs. Teachers' self-reflection is influenced by their experiences and backgrounds which in turn influences how they advocate for their students in trying to eliminate educational disparities (Abacioglu et al., 2020). In his theory into practice scholarship, Banks (2013) advocates that teachers self-reflect and develop sociocultural consciousness, which is an awareness that helps them negotiate interactions with

their students with an understanding that these interactions are mediated by their sociocultural backgrounds.

Some of the self-reflection techniques that teachers employ to attain higher levels of culturally responsive teaching include reflective thinking and writing, exploring personal and family histories, visiting or reading about successful teachers in diverse settings, and developing an appreciation of diversity (Gay, 2010). Once teachers develop this awareness, they are in a better position to acknowledge cultural biases and modify accordingly their instructional practices. They are more open to diversity and to incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies during classroom instruction.

The unique experiences of diverse learners can help teachers to self-reflect when preparing instructional materials to provide for an all-inclusive instruction (Nganga, 2015). Nganga's research sought to examine teachers' perceptions of a culturally responsive, anti-bias curriculum. Additionally, this study explored how the use of culturally responsive course work influenced teachers' perceptions. Results of the study showed that after experiencing culturally responsive curricula, teachers not only developed a better understanding of anti-bias curriculum, but they also gained essential self-awareness in diverse contexts and become more aware of culturally responsive teaching practices.

### ***Teacher Recognition of Their Biases***

Unconscious stereotypes and biases that teachers carry with them about their students often lead to their students' academic needs not being met. Because students are often ignorant of or naive about the historical and contemporary state of race relations, their academic success is affected when negative stereotypes are expressed to them through their interactions (Ebersole et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive teachers assess their own cultural perspectives and biases, employ culturally responsive practice, and connect with diverse families (Ebersole et al., 2016). By educators honestly examining their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, they begin to discover who they are, and can confront biases that have influenced their principles (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This is important in developing culturally responsive teaching. Teachers' lack of acknowledgement of personal biases can result in students having marred educational experiences, therefore changes need to take place to avoid the potential for inequitable interaction and practice that would fall back to the diverse learners (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014).

Ignoring privileges and disadvantages related to cultural differences has been common practice in schools for some time. By confronting cultural blindness and allowing for a diverse population to emerge, educators' growth in cultural competence would surge (Wang et al., 2014). Wang et al.'s, research examined whether perfectionism, individualism, and racial colorblindness predicted cultural diversity awareness of prospective teachers in culturally diverse classrooms. The study found that teachers' dispositional factors including perfectionistic ideals, individualism, and racial colorblindness all predicted lower levels of cultural diversity awareness which hampers culturally responsive teaching practices.

#### Professional Development and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teachers' participation in professional development strengthens their culturally responsive classroom practices. Teachers benefit from professional development focused on their ability to practice culturally responsive teaching and differentiated instruction (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Brown, 2004). Staff development on strategies for teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can provide teachers with



continuous opportunities to collectively examine appropriate practices in culturally responsive teaching (McKoy et al., 2017).

Empirical research shows that lack of enhancement in teacher culturally responsive teaching results from long-established teacher training programs, which provide little exposure to culturally responsive teaching instructional strategies (Kea & Trent, 2013; Pas et al., 2016). More in-service training for teachers may be required to develop these skills and may serve as a strategy for supporting diverse learners. Improving/increasing professional development for teacher use of culturally responsive classroom teaching and management strategies may increase the interaction between teachers and diverse learners which can lead to high achievement levels of these learners.

Kea and Trent's (2013) research sought to gain a better understanding of how teachers infused culturally responsive teaching in lesson plans after receiving instruction in culturally responsive curricula. The study also sought to examine efficacy in preparing teachers to integrate culturally responsive content in lesson plan design and delivery over time. Findings from the study indicated that participants demonstrated minimal skills in preparing lesson plans that successfully infused culturally responsive teaching, even though they were effectively designed.

Pas et al.'s (2016), study focused on the adaptation of the classroom check-up model for addressing culturally responsive classroom management strategies. The classroom check-up is an example of a coaching model that aims to improve teachers' culturally responsive classroom management practices by applying a structured problem-solving approach. The study findings indicated that the adaptation of the classroom check-up model to address issues related to culturally responsive classroom management is novel and not well understood. The results suggested that teachers were more apt to identify a goal related to positive behavior support and

less apt to choose a goal related to cultural proficiency. It could be that teachers felt they needed more support in basic classroom management strategies prior to addressing the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies specifically. On the other hand, teachers may have felt less comfortable working on a goal that was related to cultural proficiency. These two studies demonstrate the ongoing need for teacher in-service training about implementation of culturally responsive teaching.

The persistent disproportionality among diverse learners also underscores a necessity for teacher professional development in culturally responsive teaching practice (Pas et al., 2016). In their literature reviews Larson (2016) and Lehman (2017) suggested that there is a gap between traditional styles of classroom management and culturally responsive classroom instruction and management, indicating that specific support around these two areas is needed.

Teacher in-service training can bring awareness to teachers that knowledge and skills can always be present and, establish an ongoing process to better connect all students in any classroom (McKoy et al., 2017). McKoy, et al.'s research sought to investigate the impact of an in-service program on cooperating teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. Findings showed that in-service programs on culturally responsive teaching increases awareness of the impact cultural background has on student learning.

### **Curriculum Content and Relating Course Content to Student Experiences**

Culturally responsive curriculum is critical in developing inclusive instruction. A culturally responsive curriculum invites students to see their identity in the learning process. Complementary materials may need to be embedded in the curriculum and during instruction to make the learning process inclusive. To develop instruction that is culturally responsive, educators must be proficient in relating to their students. Educators can see inclusive practices as

an approach to developing safe learning environments, thoughtfully planning instruction, and strategically selecting and aligning curriculum that meets the needs of students. This section looks to discuss curriculum content, instructional practice, and relating course content to student activities.

Research has validated many of the culturally responsive approaches that innovative teachers have implemented to establish cultural matches, intersections, or bridges between curriculum content, instructional practice, and student learning style (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Kumagai and Lypson critically analyzed the concept of culturally relevant education and proposed that culturally responsive teaching must go beyond the traditional notions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It must involve fostering critical awareness, that is, developing a critical consciousness of the self, others, and the world and a commitment to addressing issues of societal relevance.

#### Curriculum Content and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive schoolteachers acknowledge that cultural attributes provide the means for influencing how instructional practice strategies should be adopted into the curriculum. For example, a circular communication style that omits explanations about the relationships between topics, is conducive to a storytelling teaching style. Cooperative group learning arrangements and peer coaching fit well with the communal cultural systems of African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Latino groups (Gay & Howard, 2000).

Culturally responsive approaches to teaching have largely been replaced by standardized curriculum. This can negatively affect the learning process, especially for learners from diverse backgrounds. In her review Sleeter (2012) described how standardized curriculum and pedagogy have replaced culturally responsive approaches in the curricula, marginalizing them in the

greater educational discourse as neoliberal reforms have risen. To combat such marginalization, Sleeter identified three needs: (a) evidence-based research that documents connections between culturally responsive teaching and student outcomes, (b) educate parents, teachers, and education leaders about what culturally responsive teaching means and looks like in the classroom, and (c) reframe public debate about teaching, especially teaching in diverse and historically underserved communities. For students to understand differences and develop cultural sensitivity, they need a curriculum that addresses their cognitive as well as affective needs (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004).

Culturally responsive classroom teaching is connected to a teacher's ability to use culturally responsive curricular materials and instructional processes (Brown, 2004; Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). Stodolsky and Grossman's research explored concerns about subject matter and student diversity, and it examined adaptations in curriculum, instruction and assessment made by teachers to support culturally responsive teaching. The research explored why some teachers tend to exhibit adaptations to diverse students while others make limited adjustments. The study also sought to examine commonalities and differences in characteristics and behaviors of teachers in diverse learning environments. The research findings showed that a dynamic conception of subject matter, multiple goals, and a personalized approach to diverse learners were common elements among teachers who adopted culturally responsive teaching practices or expressed willingness to do so. Researchers concluded that all adaptations are not equal but, the most effective adaptations are those that uphold high expectations for student learning in culturally diverse classroom environments. Advocates of culturally responsive teaching posit that researchers have much to learn about the specific ideas and beliefs of teachers that best promote

growth of diverse learners and how to in-corporate that into the curriculum (Gay & Howard, 2000).

A clear understanding of teachers' attitudes towards culturally responsive teaching practice is vital as it can contribute to the effectiveness of developing a relevant curriculum to meet the challenges of teaching in culturally diverse classrooms (Phuntsog, 2001). Phuntsog's research was about identifying what elementary teachers think about the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices in their schools. Phuntsog found that encouraging respect for cultural diversity is essential for creating an inclusive and relevant curriculum to provide for the needs of diverse classroom environments. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching contributes to the enhancement of self-esteem of all culturally diverse students. Because both the teachers' and students' cultural lens affect learning, educators can learn, understand, and employ culturally responsive teaching skills in the curriculum to ensure that the needs of all students in the classroom environment are fully met.

#### Relating Course Content to Student Experiences

Effective culturally responsive teachers are also competent at interweaving valued elements of students' cultural identities into content. They create instruction with multicultural materials and actively use these materials to illustrate core concepts. These teachers have command of the cultural metaphors, rituals, and social structures that permeate their students' lives (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Shevalier and McKenzie's research examined culturally responsive teaching as questions of ethics, inquiry, and caring and explored critically the theory-practice links that make this approach so effective. Their findings showed that culturally responsive teaching does make a difference in schools not only in terms of academic achievement but also in social and emotional growth and empowerment of learners. However, it

is not clear that teachers grasp the full dimensions of culturally responsive teaching, the choice is sometimes based on being able to make a difference rather than a personal commitment to diverse students and communities.

Experts advocate using culturally representative content in instruction, talking about negative stereotypes in textbooks, and referencing historical contributions from culturally diverse individuals to make content more reflective of student diversity (Richards et al., 2007). Bazron, Osher and Fleischman (2005) posit that complementing classroom instruction design to cultural standards for social interaction enhances learners' social skills growth and problem-solving ability. Culturally responsive educators use their diverse learners' cultural knowledge, previous experiences, and performance styles to make learning appropriate and meaningful.

Research-based techniques for relating content to student experiences include connecting classroom instruction to cultural norms for social interaction to enhance students' social skills development and problem-solving ability. When a teacher asks questions during instruction, they can give extra time for students from other cultures and be sensitive to the cultural diversity of students with minority family cultures.

Using students' real-life experiences to connect school learning strengthens student motivation and boosts student success (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). All learners are much more interested in information that relates to their personal situations. Teachers can recognize the students' world outside the classroom by posting a poem, quote, joke, song, or picture every day that demonstrates an awareness of and respect for students' backgrounds. They can also engage students in content-based projects, surveys, free-writing exercises, and storytelling that enable students to directly connect school with their communities (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). Coffey and Farinde-Wu's research sought to capture and learn from a teacher's experiences as she

navigated teaching while also implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. The research suggested that knowledge of culturally responsive teaching alone is insufficient during induction. Rather, teachers must undergo cognitive development and personal experiences that interrupt and dismantle destructive perceptions before learning and applying culturally responsive teaching. Research analyses found out that effective practices of a successful teacher of diverse students include designing culturally relevant curricula, developing culturally informed relationships, making connections with learners' background including families and, cultural congruity in classroom instruction.

Researchers (Kieran et al., 2019; McKoy et al., 2017) have suggested that when planning for instruction, educators must be aware of their students' readiness to learn, their interests, and their learning profile, which includes learner preferences, strengths, and challenges. Every individual's background and experiences shape the learner. Educators need to be aware of the extent that previous learning experiences have been meaningful and connected to their lives. Kieran, et al.'s research examined strategies for combining universal design for learning with a culturally responsive teaching framework to further guide educators in making instructional design decisions based on the specific attributes of diverse learners. Universal design for learning embodies a flexible, research-based planning framework that guides teachers' instructional decision making that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. Their data analyses found that when planned proactively, universal design for learning and culturally responsive teaching combine to increase diverse learners' success in meeting teachers' expectations for the intended learning outcomes. McKoy, et al.'s (2017) research investigated the impact of an in-service program on cooperating teachers' perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. The study results showed that culturally responsive teaching increases awareness of the impact

cultural background has on student learning and that making assumptions regarding students' cultural backgrounds is inappropriate. It further showed the value of acquiring background information about the students enrolled in teachers' respective classes rather than using broad generalizations about school demographics, this enhances culturally responsive teaching instruction.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Teacher self-efficacy is teachers' perception of their capability to bring about desired outcomes of student achievement. Teachers with a higher sense of self-efficacy have a greater belief in their ability to influence learning of culturally diverse students (Sue & Torino, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). This concept has a powerful impact on teachers in relation to their behavior in the classroom, the effort they invest in teaching and the expectations set for students.

Self-efficacy is enhanced when teachers are critically conscious of their own cultural socialization and its impact on their attitudes and behaviors in shaping the classroom. Research shows that as teachers study and reflect on their own attitudes and biases, they recognize the impact of their assumptions about diverse students in inclusive classrooms (Weinstein et al., 2004). When teachers critically analyze and evaluate their own cultural values and beliefs, which shape their performance in the classroom, they are more likely to seek ways to minimize negative perceptions and be more inclusive in their practices. Weinstein et al.'s research was based on culturally responsive classroom management with emphasis on teachers' recognition of their own ethnocentrism, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, and understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context. The research also explored teachers' ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies and their commitment to



building all-inclusive caring classrooms. Analyses revealed teachers demonstrated the ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies. These strategies included such tasks as creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals and establishing and maintaining expectations for behavior. Other culturally responsive strategies were enhancing students' motivation, organizing, and managing instructional formats, working with families, and using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems.

Teacher self-efficacy begins with a willingness to understand and accept all students in the classroom. Research shows that self-efficacy requires teachers to be aware of their own culture and expectations and how they differ from those of diverse learners in their classrooms (Cruz et al., 2020). Cruz et al. explored specific areas in which teachers feel self-efficacious regarding implementing culturally responsive teaching practices and the factors that affect practicing teachers' self-efficacy in delivering culturally responsive teaching. Research analyses showed that teachers felt more confident in building personal relationships with students and building trust. However, they felt less confident in areas that involve specific cultural knowledge, such as being able to validate students in their native language and teaching students about their culture's contributions to curricular topics. Results also showed that years of experience positively correlated with increased self-efficacy.

Effective culturally responsive teachers have significantly higher self-efficacy regarding engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices, and they form strong relationships with their students which has a greater effect on student outcomes (Sue & Torino, 2005). There has been a push for teachers to assess their self-efficacy and beliefs because these beliefs should predict future behavior in the classroom (Siwatu, 2007, 2011; Siwatu, Polydore, Starker, et al., 2009; Siwatu et al., 2017).

## The Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, culturally responsive instructional practices become especially important. Teacher self-efficacy played a major role as teachers integrated elements of culturally responsive teaching to develop an instructional model to accommodate all learners (O'Keefe, 2022). Teachers shifted from the classroom and adopted teaching to an online format (Dolighan & Owen, 2021). An increased sense of isolation and feelings of disconnectedness made the ethical use of technology paramount, not only for teaching, but also for making human connections during a disaster (Sherwood et al., 2021). As a result, social and emotional support became especially important for all students who were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

As teachers struggled with the traumatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world got really small, but it opened up a hope to see the world through a lens of equity and inclusion. The pandemic made educators to modify traditional teaching practices and adopted an online instructional approach (Dolighan & Owen, 2021) embedded with culturally responsive teaching as teachers sought to seek more student feedback to ensure the wellbeing of all learners.

Teacher self-efficacy can help teachers figure out what personal or behavioral factors to model particularly during the changes brought by the COVID-19 global pandemic and virtual schooling to support culturally responsive teaching (Smith, 2020). The abrupt shift to virtual learning and the reactive responses of educators highlighted how self-efficacy can influence teachers to adopt a culture of caring and compassion and develop a critical understanding of the significance of culturally responsive teaching instruction for the benefit of all students.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The purpose of the study was to gain an in depth understanding of how teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching on instruction, understand what teachers know, believe and practice on culturally responsive teaching, how the school context influences that, and the role teacher self-efficacy plays in their willingness to implement culturally responsive teaching. The study examined culturally diverse classrooms through the lens of teachers' level of culturally responsive teaching and the effects of teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice in diverse middle school classrooms. The research questions which guided the study include, what role does teacher self-efficacy play in culturally responsive teaching practice? How do personal factors (i.e., awareness, knowledge, and skills), behavioral factors (i.e., differentiated practice, building relationships), and environmental factors (i.e., classroom/school context) influence teachers' application of culturally responsive teaching instruction? What forms of agency (personal, proxy, collective) influence teachers' willingness to implement culturally responsive teaching practices?

This chapter outlines the overall research design and methodology, including the study setting, participants and sampling, data collection plan, analysis and interpretation of data, and research quality.

#### **Research Design**

To answer the research questions for the study, the research employed a basic qualitative study approach in order to identify how middle school teachers perceive and practice culturally responsive teaching during instruction. Basic qualitative research elaborates on how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and, what meaning they attribute to

their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives, perceptions, and experiences. Qualitative research methods are developed to help researchers realize the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within their natural, social-cultural contexts (Creswell, 2015; Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005).

The choice of utilizing a basic qualitative design allowed me to understand how the participants have constructed their viewpoints and lived experiences regarding culturally responsive teaching. Fossey et al., (2002) posits that basic qualitative research opens conversations with basic explanations of how the participants have constructed their perceptions. A basic qualitative design allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the teachers practice culturally responsive teaching or not during classroom instruction. Through the lens of Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) questions constituting the basic qualitative design, the study particularly focused on exploring middle school teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and actions taken towards culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice.

These design decisions were important to this current study because it was my intent to gather and analyze participant viewpoints and interpret their meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). The study participants were given the opportunity to share their views, thoughts, and experiences during interviews. I conducted classroom observations where I observed and recorded ways in which teachers interacted with their students, evidence of culturally responsive teaching themes in their teaching and, obstacles if any, these teachers faced when applying a culturally responsive teaching approach. The main expected outcome was to gather data about middle school teachers' perceptions on culturally responsive teaching during instruction to provide an illustrative sample of their experiences and opinions.

## Research Setting

The study was conducted at Turner Middle School in the Randal public school (RPS) system (for confidentiality purposes, the school and district names have been replaced with pseudonyms). The study focused on middle school teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on their instructional practice.

Currently, Randal Public Schools (USD 659) is a large urban district, which has the largest student enrollment in a midwestern state of USA, educating approximately 11 percent of all public-school students, and more than half of all school-aged children in Sedge County. According to RPS website, the enrollment for the 2021-2022 school year was 47,334 students. Student population includes 36.79% Hispanic, 30.52% Caucasian, 19.48% African American, 7.83% Multi-Racial, 4.31% Asian, 0.82% Native American, and 0.25% Pacific Islander students. There are 105 languages spoken in the homes of RPS families from 95 countries of birth.

Turner Middle School is one of 15 middle schools in RPS. According to the School's website, in the 2021-2022 school year, Turner Middle School had 23 grade level faculty team members spread out as follows, seven teachers in sixth grade, seven teachers in seventh grade and nine teachers for eighth grade. The teams are organized across disciplines with science, language arts, social studies, and math teachers working together on a team. There are 41 equivalent full-time teachers with a 78 percentage of full-time teachers who are certified. The student teacher ratio is 12:1.

The student population at Turner Middle School is 494. The school's overall minority student enrollment is 78%. Student diversity includes 32.6% Hispanic, 22.3% White, 30.8% Black or African American, 7.9% Multi-Racial, 5.9% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.6% Native American or Alaskan native. The student population is made up of 45% female students

and 55% male students. The school enrolls 86% of economically disadvantaged students, as determined by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.

### Participants and Sampling

The sample for this current study consisted of seven middle school teachers. My plan was to invite 6-8 Turner Middle School teachers to participate in the study. With the assistance of the principal, seven middle school teachers were identified and invited, and all agreed to participate in the study to examine their perceptions of culturally responsive teaching. They instructed both core and non-core classes: Math, Science, English, Social Science Studies, Music, and Spanish. My consideration to interview non-core subject teachers of Music and Spanish is majorly influenced by the idea that culturally responsive teaching is elaborate and very much applicable in these subjects because they embrace students from diverse backgrounds. A lot of cultural cues are commonly taught in Music and Spanish.

Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to identify and select the seven study participants to gain knowledge on their perceptions on culturally responsive teaching. I sent the principal the invitation email and she sent it to all teachers asking them to participate. This resulted in 5 participants. Then I used snowball sampling to recruit two more participants. Although the principal agreed to share the invitation email, no teachers were pressured or coerced to participate. The principal did not know who agreed to participate as the teachers responded directly to me and not to the principal.

Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of available resources (Patton, 2014). This involves identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2015). Snowball sampling is a

strategy used to recruit more participants as needed during the study. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist the researcher in identifying other potential subjects. It involves generating a pool of participants for the research study through referrals made by participants. According to Yin (2015) when selecting participants consider the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

The participating teachers were chosen considering that they are educators of students from diverse backgrounds and have successfully obtained at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university or college and are qualified or certified to teach middle school students. I worked with the school principal to identify teachers willing to participate in the study. These are individuals who can provide information-rich data and a wide variety of perspectives (Lapan et al., 2012; Patton, 2014). For the purpose of ensuring collection of information-rich data, my intention was to select study participants to ensure as much race, gender, and ethnic diversity representation as possible. The seven participants were contacted through email, see Appendix D. Purposeful sampling is vital in selecting data collection units simply because of their ready availability (Yin, 2015).

#### Data Collection

Fieldwork in a qualitative study entails the evaluation of various data collection approaches and procedures (Yin, 2015). Yin identifies four potential data collection methods i.e., interviewing, observing, collecting, and examining, and feeling. Yin continues to elaborate that these four methods may seem too informal, however if desired a researcher can implement each of the methods by using a formal instrument and (or) a rigorously defined data collection procedure. There are likely different types of data produced by each of the data collection

methods. In this basic qualitative research, two techniques were applied in the process of data collection: interviews and observations. Interview and observation data inform each other, they help produce elaborate and complementary findings. The interviews were conducted at a mutually agreeable time and location. Observations were conducted in the classroom either before or after the interview. Observation informed the research on the culturally responsive teaching phenomena in the classroom environment. Analysis of the observations helped to connect and validate the information gathered from the interviews. The plan for each strategy is detailed below.

### ***Interviews***

Individual interviews were conducted with seven middle school teachers, they were audio-recorded, were approximately 40-60 minutes, and took place at a mutually agreeable time and location. A semi structured interview with a list of questions which act as an interview guide on the research topic was used. The purpose was to acquire a genuine understanding of the views of teachers about their perceptions and expertise regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice. The semi-structured interview allowed me to go off script and explore more deeply with participants (Bell & Bryman, 2007).

A semi-structured interview is outlined by a list of questions, connected to the main theme, but the interviewee has a great deal of freedom to express their opinion. When communicating with several interviewees, the researcher uses the similar set of wording (Bell & Bryman, 2007). The use of a semi-structured interview approach allows freedom for the researcher to refocus questions if something of interest emerge (Baskarada, 2014). According to Hays (2004), interviews are one of the richest sources of data in research studies; hence, semi-structured interview employing interview questions was used in this study to uncover the facts



and meanings presented by participants in the study. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

The interviews provided information on experiences, opinions, perceptions, expertise, knowledge, awareness, skills, teacher behavioral factors, classroom, and school context. This ensured a more informed analysis and interpretation of the collected interview data. The data determined which dimensions of culturally responsive teaching practices are important for teaching in a diverse classroom setting (McKinley et al., 2008). The interview approach also gives confidence to the respondents and makes it possible for new significant information to emerge during the interview. The interview method allows the researcher to be more flexible in exploring the study.

Qualitative interviews are dependent on trust being established between the interviewee and interviewer. To establish trust, I employed active listening and interpersonal skills, as well as moderate probing when further explanation was needed (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Interviews take a conversation format rather than following a firm script. This approach offers the means to use follow-up questions leading to a comprehensive understanding of responses (Yin, 2015). Each participant was asked about their perceptions, including their views regarding culturally responsive teaching. With this approach, I was able to gather a wide range of information-rich data that provided answers to my research questions.

### ***Observations***

In qualitative research, observations from the field (i.e., eyewitness accounts of places and behaviors) are typically used to describe the setting, or to provide a social context for what participants say and do in the field during the study (Marvasti, 2014). Observation can be easily employed as a technique of data collection; care should be taken to ensure observations are not

considered controversial. The data from observations consists of detailed descriptions of participants' behaviors, staff actions and interactions with learners, and the full range of human interactions (Labuschagne, 2003). Openness should be provided regarding the purpose of the observations (Creswell, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

During the study, I conducted one to two classroom observations per participant that lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. During the observation I assumed the role of nonparticipant/observer as participant (Creswell, 2015) whereby I only observed and took notes without direct involvement and the participant was aware of my presence. I could talk to the participants whenever they engaged me during the observation, this way I recorded a conversation in my field notes which was useful in bringing quotes into my final narrative. I developed and used an observation checklist/protocol to make sure that all parts of the observation were completed. The teachers interviewed were the same teachers I observed.

During the study I observed and recorded the following: ways in which teachers interact with their students; evidence of culturally responsive teaching themes in their teaching based on planning and preparation; nature of resources, tools and documents used to support culturally responsive work; obstacles these teachers faced when applying a culturally responsive teaching approach and, motivation and engagement of the teacher during instruction. I only observed general student responses to the teacher's interaction with them (e.g., they seemed attentive, enthusiastic, and excited). I used the observation protocol (Appendix B) to guide my observations to ensure they focused on what the teachers did, and to ensure the observations were authentic representations of their teaching.

Field notes refer to transcribed notes or the written account derived from data collected during observations and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Field notes generally consist of

two parts: descriptive whereby the observer attempts to capture a word-picture of the setting, actions, and conversations; and reflective in which the observer records thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns based on the observations and interviews (Creswell, 2016).

During the study I wrote field notes during and soon after the observation and interviews. To avoid forgetting important details, I fleshed out the field notes as soon as possible after the observation. I included both descriptive and reflective notes (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Descriptive notes are the research questions I asked myself while reflective notes are preliminary themes of what I learnt from the observations. Field notes were used to broaden data collection and produced data that was useful in the later stage of data analysis.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The qualitative data collected for the research was derived from interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix A) as a guide and direct classroom observations of the participants using the classroom observation protocol (see Appendix B).

I made scheduled classroom observations in each participant's classroom to document how they had attempted to apply culturally responsive teaching during instruction. I made holistic observations of the teacher's behavior, the interactions between teacher and learners, the materials that were used, the classroom dynamics during the discussions and activities, the ways the teacher attempted to make the lesson reflect cultural relevancy and any challenges the teacher faced when attempting to apply culturally responsive strategies. I took on the role of an observer as I took extensive notes on each lesson. Observation data was recorded in field notes and analyzed.

The interview data was transcribed and analyzed. An interpretive content analysis of the transcripts was employed to reveal themes of effective practices of culturally responsive

teachers. The interview was recorded using Temi, an online audio recording tool. The data captured via the audio recording was handled with care and accurately captured the perspectives of the study participants prior to interpretation. Written notes were used as a back-up source of information. Before beginning to analyze data, I used self-efficacy factors i.e., personal, environmental, and behavioral and, agency modes i.e., individual, proxy and collective to generate a priori codes. I then used Dedoose to create a grid that encompasses the self-efficacy and agency constructs when analyzing the data. A priori codes are codes that are developed before examining the current data (Creswell, 2015), these codes are developed by the researcher ahead of time based on the theoretical framework. After transcribing data, I looked for relationships across the data to gain a broader conceptual understanding of preliminary categories and potential themes (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) so as to assign codes to each unit of data. This was achieved by systematically and repeatedly digging backward and forward through the data findings to unearth the layers of deeper meaning (Yin, 2016). I then entered the data into Dedoose a computer software program to code it. Coding the data assists the researcher in the winnowing process to improve focus or clarity, as well as maintain the integrity of the entire data sample (Guest et al., 2012). Coding is a process of identifying a passage in the text or transcript, searching, and identifying concepts, and finding relations between them. Coding links the data to the idea and back to other data. Coding helped me to refine and fine tune the data, segregate, group, regroup and relink the data in order to consolidate meaning and explanation. Coding the data helped me to identify themes, patterns, and categories. After coding the data, I accordingly identified and finalized the themes as findings from the study. Participants were then invited to participate in the member checking process. This process

involved reviewing the transcribed records to further ensure the information was accurately captured (Patton, 2014).

The observational data was analyzed to uncover and highlight contextually meaningful culturally responsive teaching processes that participants used during classroom instruction. Indeed, any research manuscript based on observational technique invariably includes a description of the setting before proceeding to the rigor of analysis (Marvasti, 2014). The information was then organized into themes and analyzed to draw conclusions.

#### Research Quality

Several techniques were employed to enhance the quality of the study. Research quality pertains to the confidence in research findings (Krefting, 1991). It requires investigators to apply rigor in how to collect, analyze, and interpret data so that the findings generated as a result of a conducted study can be trusted, transferred, and confirmed (Lapan et al., 2012). Trustworthiness supports the argument that the research findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This is especially important when using inductive content analysis as categories are created from the raw data.

To ensure trustworthiness of the research, data analysis was conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and analyzing with enough detail to determine credibility. Trustworthiness requires the use of an inquiry audit in order to establish dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. Trustworthiness of a research study is critical to its overall success. The measures used to promote and secure this were dependability, credibility, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Pseudonyms were used for the confidentiality of the participating teachers.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability is the stability of the research findings over time. Dependability involves participants to evaluate the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Dependability is important to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable. The researcher sought to verify that the findings were consistent with the collected raw data.

To ensure dependability of the research, all procedures were made available to participants prior to their participation. The procedures were reviewed and followed during interviews and observations. Dependability establishes study reliability, which ensures that the methodological approach is consistent in the research process. All research procedures were transparent, and after the analysis was complete, the determined findings were reviewed for linkage to the original data for verification (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

### ***Credibility***

Credibility encompasses creating a study with value and authenticity (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). In addressing and maintaining credibility, trustworthiness, and accuracy of the data, the processes of member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefer were utilized to follow up and to verify the data with the participants.

Member checking is a technique that consists of continually testing with informants the researcher's data (Krefting, 1991). The research gathered information using audible interactions with participants. To maintain credibility, the interactions were audio recorded, transcribed, and reviewed by participants to ensure the transcripts accurately captured information presented.

In addition to member checking, credibility of research findings was verified by triangulation. Triangulation involves using multiple data sources to gain a more complete understanding of the explored topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). A combination of interviews supported by observations and field notes helped to ensure the collected data and emerging findings were comprehensive, rich, and well-developed.

The use of peer debriefer also ensured the credibility of the research findings. Peer debriefing is the process of working together with one or more peers i.e., an unbiased and knowledgeable colleague who has no personal interest in the project to enhance the validity of the research. It involves allowing a qualified, impartial colleague/peer to review and assess transcripts, methodology, coding and the final themes or near final draft of the research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Also, a peer may review selected site documents, observational notes, and possibly other written work of the researcher. I employed this technique to probe my research process to establish credibility. Peer debriefing is crucial to uncovering bias and assumptions in research and could help to detect problems in my perspective.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to another situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2015). This is to ensure generalizability/transferability of the results of the research study i.e., readers of the results may apply, or transfer, the results to their own situation. I facilitated the transferability judgment through thick description. Transferability is established by providing readers with evidence that the research study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations.

To achieve transferability, I included a variety of participants in the study to enable more readers to apply the findings to their situation. Providing a detailed explanation of the research can indicate transferability and applicability of the study. I achieved this by collecting enough data and providing thick descriptions of the findings which can also inform future research on the topic.

### Positionality

Identifying and understanding one's positionality helps to reduce the likelihood of the researchers' own personalities, background, and experiences from getting in the way of the study. Positionality describes the identities of the researcher in relation to the participants and data (Lapan et al., 2012). My experiences as an African American educator have reinforced my commitment for instruction and the responsibilities teachers have to nurture learners. My nine years of middle school teaching experience have helped me realize the importance of embracing diversity, especially by making sure the needs of every student in the classroom are satisfied. This is the source of my passion for culturally responsive teaching. I embrace the idea that every learner brings unique opportunities to the classroom, therefore as an educator I have a responsibility to increase opportunities to all learners to make sure every student succeeds.

It is important to acknowledge my position and not transfer my experiences and assumptions into the study. I employed reflexivity involving interpretation and reflection, and practice self-awareness to the possible impact of my positionality. This helped limit possible interference from my own personal identity as an African American, background as of African descent, and experiences as a high school and middle school educator which might manifest during this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2014). I also involved peer examiners to cross-examine the data and confirm or question my information or results.



To further aid with this, I established a protocol script and set of questions to streamline the interview and committed to carefully following up as needed with further probing questions without leading the participants in a particular direction. I also used the protocol script to help develop and maintain rapport during each interaction with participants.

I also sought to maintain neutrality in my interactions with the study participants. Neutrality can be maintained during the interview through remaining nonjudgmental in both verbal and nonverbal responses or follow-up questions, and provided that each participant is treated with respect and cordiality (Patton, 2014).

### Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, it is important to address ethical considerations before, during and after the study. The application of ethics to the research ensures that valid and reliable research is conducted with integrity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In support of this, I have completed the applicable Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) ethics modules, which prepare WSU doctoral students to conduct research and to ensure professional and scholarly integrity. Before the study, I got my application to conduct the research reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wichita State University and sought permission from Randal public schools to allow me to conduct the study. Before conducting the interviews, I had the participants sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C).

To ensure that participants are treated with respect, dignity and their confidentiality maintained, I informed them that the interview is voluntary, and they can choose to skip a question or leave at any time during the interview. All identifying information was removed from the data (Lapan et al., 2012) and pseudonyms were applied during data transcription and analysis. After the interview, a copy of the transcript was sent to the participants for member

checking to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. The protection of raw data is critical; I have stored the transcribed data in my password protected computer to ensure its security. Ethical conduct in research is all-important, it guides the way data is collected, analyzed, and how findings are presented (Patton, 2014). The data is accurately presented and honestly reported (Yin, 2015).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings**

This section presents findings related to the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice. The findings are a result of the analysis of data collected from individual teacher interviews and classroom observations. The data gathered is highlighted in themes that emerged during analysis of the perspectives provided by the participants. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, the research site and participants are described but not clearly identified. This ensures that the participants, the school, and the district confidentiality is protected.

#### **Research Site: Turner Middle School**

Turner middle school is one of 15 middle schools within Randal Public Schools, an urban school district in the midwestern region of the USA. Turner middle school is an AVID demonstration school. AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, is an in-school academic support program. The purpose of the AVID program is to prepare all students for college eligibility and success (Bernhardt, 2013). Arising findings suggest the AVID program is perceived as integral to culturally responsive teaching practices and professional development at Turner middle school.

The school has grade level faculty team members who are organized across disciplines with Science, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Music, Spanish and Physical Education. Other subjects taught include Art, Band, Choir, Orchestra and Technology. There are forty-one equivalent full-time teachers with 78% of full-time teachers who are certified with a student teacher ratio of 12:1 in grades 6-8.

The school's website presents the student population for the academic year 2021-22 as 494. The overall minority student enrollment is 78%. Student diversity includes 32.6% Hispanic, 30.8% Black or African American, 22.3% White, 7.9% Multi-Racial, 5.9% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.6% Native American or Alaskan native. The student population is made up of 45% female students and 55% male students. The school enrolls 86% of economically disadvantaged students, as determined by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.

#### Turner Teacher Participants

I interviewed and observed seven participants during my data collection process. The following is their profiles which represents their ethnicity, teaching experiences, gender, and subjects taught. The teachers work in different teams arranged at grade levels i.e., sixth, seventh and eighth teams. Within the grade levels, they have subject level teams. Table 1 below gives a summary of the participants profiles.

*Fernando* is a male Spanish teacher with seven years teaching experience in middle school. He identified himself ethnically as Mexican American. He said, "I'm Mexican American. Or as they would say in Spanish, Chicano. Chicano means that you're Mexican American, and that's always a hard question to answer because when I'm in America, I'm Mexican. But when I go to Mexico, I'm American." *Jessica*, who identified as white, is a female teacher who teaches social studies. During the interview she said, "I teach social studies, it's adapted for special education students, and I also teach a tier three reading intervention class." Tier three intervention classes are designed to assist struggling learners.

*Melissa* is a female sixth and seventh grade ESOL English Language Arts teacher. She described her identity as white and added that "I'm a part of the LGBTQ community." *Devin*

teaches sixth, seventh and eighth grade science and ethnically identifies as white. He said, “my cultural identity is just your typical white male American citizen.”

*Joseph* is a male Caucasian teacher, who grew up in the area and has taught Social Studies for twelve years at Turner Middle School. When referring to his experience, he said, “I’m going on my 12th year here at Turner Middle School, and through that time, the racially diverse group has shifted and the group that goes to Turner Middle School in the last 12 years has become more Hispanic.” Joseph was mentioned by the other participants as being the lead teacher in charge of culturally responsive teaching at Turner Middle School, a position delegated to Joseph by the principal.

*Jasmine* is a female teacher from Canada in her second-year teaching math, she had initially taught social studies. When explaining her teaching experience, she said “last year I taught US history, which is funny cause I’m Canadian teaching US history, but now I teach all math.” She is of mixed-race heritage, her father is White, and said, “My mom is Native American.” *Vanessa* is a female vocal music teacher, in her words, “I teach sixth through eighth grade vocal music.” She is white of Eastern European descent who has only taught in Turner Middle School and grew up in the area. On her teaching experience, she says she has had a great experience teaching at this diverse school which as much as being the only school she has taught.

**Table 1**

*Profiles of Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching Experience (Yrs.)</b>	<b>Subject Taught</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Fernando	Male	7	Spanish	Mexican American
Jessica	Female	10	Social Studies	White
Melissa	Female	2	English Language Arts	White
Devin	Male	5	Science	White

Joseph	Male	12	Social Studies	White
Jasmine	Female	2	Math	Native American/White
Vanessa	Female	3	Music	White

The common theme in these participant profiles is one of desire to make a difference in the educational experiences of diverse learners. When talking about their experiences teaching diverse learners, participants were very much aware of the growing diversity in the school and the socioeconomic situation in the community. For instance, Joseph posited, “with the addition of lower income students from diverse backgrounds, there was a reckoning that needed to happen within our school. Largely I feel like that has happened, so the norm now is cultural value and respect.” Jasmine noted, “I think that our school does a really great job at celebrating the diversity of the students.”

### **Expectations and Professional Development Regarding Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The school district provides provisions for district personnel and school staff to model appropriate behaviors, so that children and adults learn to appreciate the differences and similarities of the diverse backgrounds represented in the Randal Public Schools. According to Randal Public Schools BOE Policy 6812 Cultural Proficiency Education, building principals and leadership team are expected to lead and facilitate culturally responsive teaching in the buildings. The district provides building principals and building leadership teams with ongoing professional development regarding culturally responsive teaching. The principals and building leadership teams are expected to be responsible for providing culturally responsive teaching professional development to their respective staffs but, there is no guidance on how this is defined or what it means for instruction and curriculum.

## Perceptions of District Policy and Expectations for Culturally Responsive Teaching

District policy is to provide a coherent, rigorous, safe, and nurturing, culturally responsive, and inclusive learning community for all students. Participants generally agreed that the school district provides some professional development on culturally responsive teaching but does not enforce its teaching. Joseph says there is no mandate for culturally responsive teaching, “our district doesn't mandate that we necessarily do any culturally responsive teaching.” Joseph has taken it upon himself to seek professional development within the district. He said, “I've taken several opportunities that the district offers, to benefit from that. Within professional learning, our building has the ability to look at the needs of the students.” Others were less clear about what the district offers or expects regarding culturally responsive teaching. Jasmine seemed to be referring to behavior programs for certain groups of students rather than pedagogy or instructional practice, when she said, “there are programs in Randal School District that are set up to help with kids who are diverse and mostly directed towards young African American males, but I don't know of like explicit expectations other than best practice.” She seems to be saying she is unaware of any expectations for employing culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Melissa also seems not to know if there are expectations, she noted, “I am new to the district. I started last January, and so I have not been given the full disclosure or professional development around culturally responsive teaching.” Fernando spoke in general terms about inclusivity when he posited, “I think the district just want you to be inclusive, making sure that every student has a chance.” None of them seem to have a clear idea about any expectations to use culturally responsive practices. So, while the district might have some written policies, the teachers do not see them as requirements if they are aware of them at all.

Participants believed the school has also provided expectations on culturally responsive teaching, which they identified as culturally responsive professional development courses, an annual culture fest day, and a program referred to as Capturing Kids' Hearts. The school cultural fest day, which is organized and conducted by the school was mentioned by all participants. They expressed it offers an opportunity to deepen cultural awareness and understanding by celebrating the cultural richness of the students, teachers, and other school staff. Arguably, culture fest days seem not to support culturally responsive teaching, but it is normally a tradition that schools look forward to as an opportunity to celebrate the diversity that exists within the school community.

#### Perceptions of Professional Development for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Participants pointed out that the PD courses are provided either online or in person and either during school days or summertime. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program came up numerous times when participants talked about professional development opportunities. AVID provides professional learning for educators to close opportunity gaps and improve college and career readiness for middle and high school learners, especially those traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Much of the teachers' PD for culturally responsive teaching was provided through the AVID program. When asked about professional development courses specific to culturally responsive teaching, Joseph stated, "I think the primary one that I've done is called culturally responsive teaching, which is now run by AVID. Basically, it allowed us to see things and opened perspective like your norm is not everybody's norm." Joseph said the district did pay for him to attend a PD that was provided by AVID. He went to Dallas for it, but they now provide it every year in May, and anybody from the district can get paid to attend. Other teachers also



associated the school's culturally responsive teaching PD with their AVID training. Fernando asserted, "at the end of the school year, AVID does a lot of trainings. In one of those trainings is culturally responsive teaching, and since we're an AVID demonstration school, we encourage our teachers to go take some of those training." Devin also said the school is an AVID demonstration school and, usually at the end of the year, they have different courses that teachers can take. He said, "They have two or three culturally responsive instructional method courses that teachers can take at the end of the year." Devin had a little concern about the AVID PD courses he had attended, as much as they were good, he felt like they were a little rushed. He posited,

The district offers a few culturally responsive teaching PDs on our in-service days.

Usually, they also offer an AVID course during the summers on culturally responsive instructional methods. I've taken that course before. I would say though the courses are good, they seem rushed, and I always have questions that don't get answers or methods that I am curious about and I want to get to know more.

Although Devin appreciated the PD offered by the district, the time was insufficient for what he needed to develop his culturally responsive teaching practices.

Teachers also have other PD opportunities through the district office. Jessica says they are given training through the district, they have in-services where they learn about different aspects of being culturally responsive. She stated, "The district has offered a lot of them, I've taken several, we took a class two years ago called, cultural biases." Vanessa pointed out that before school started, district office personnel provided a PD on culturally responsive teaching. She noted, "they came and talked and did like a 40-minute presentation on culturally responsive teaching, so I know that the district is prioritizing it more than they have in the past."

The participants agreed the school organizes its own culturally responsive teaching PD courses teachers are required to attend. Participants who have attended these programs indicated they are beneficial during instruction especially when engaging with culturally diverse learners. Joseph mentioned PD courses the school has provided on culturally responsive teaching. He stated, “I think just within what we do in professional development, several of those have been the ones that our school has chosen to bring somebody in to share about different ways to reach different students.”

Capturing Kids Hearts was another program that one teacher mentioned as representing the school’s culturally responsive teaching efforts. Capturing Kids Hearts equips educators to implement transformational processes focused on social-emotional wellbeing, relationship-driven school culture, and student connectedness. (Cano, 2019). Many of the practices the participants described, even though they didn’t make the connection explicitly during the interviews, are part of the Capturing Kids Hearts. The tenets of Capturing Kids Hearts include cultivating relational capacity, improving school culture, strengthening trust between teachers and students, building self-managing classrooms, creating accountability in the learning process, improving academic performance, and fostering trauma-informed care for all learners. By adopting these tenets, teachers can facilitate culturally responsive teaching practice which can ensure the provision of academic needs of the diverse learners.

Melissa talked about Capturing Kids Hearts program which she believes the school has adopted to support culturally responsive teaching efforts mostly targeting new teachers. She said about the training, “They do a lot of talking with culturally responsive instruction and what that means and how to build relationships, focusing on the emotional component and the background of students, not just trying to reach all common core standards.”

## **Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Culturally Responsive Teaching**

This section will present the findings on teacher understanding of culturally responsive teaching, teacher perceptions of being culturally responsive, the school culture fest day and teacher self-awareness.

### **Teacher Understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Teachers varied in their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. While their comments tended to be rather general, most teachers mentioned awareness of students' culture and background as integral to their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Joseph connected awareness of student culture with being inclusive. He said, "culturally responsive teaching for me looks like I'm aware of the culture that's represented in my classroom, and that I'm not excluding anybody." Melissa went a step further from inclusion to connecting students' background to what she does in the classroom. She explained culturally responsive teaching to her meant "using my students background to influence my own instructional moves and finding a way to help learners connect to the material I am presenting in their own background and frame of thinking." Jessica adopted an even deeper stance, viewing the need to be "educated on various cultural, not just characteristics, but concerns and issues." Jessica's comment suggests the need to look beyond the superficial aspects of culture to develop a deeper understanding of her students' cultures and their educational needs. Jasmine considers herself to be a teacher who listens to the learners to recognize their values and needs and tries to bridge the gap between her own outlook and that of the students. She stated, "I feel like being a culturally responsive teacher is being able to understand my students and meet them where they're at without having expectations on them and recognizing that how I grew up and how they grew up were different."

## Teacher Perceptions of Being Culturally Responsive

While some participants indicated they were culturally responsive in their instructional practice, others indicated they had room for growth as they worked on becoming culturally responsive. Two teachers believed they were implementing culturally responsive teaching practices. Fernando stated, “Yes. I am a culturally responsive teacher, because I try to let the kids know they need to be culturally aware, culturally responsive, and culturally sensitive.” Joseph also affirmed he believes he is a culturally responsive teacher,

I do, and I think I've grown and gotten to learn more about students. I really seek to place the students first and the content second, because if my students don't know that I care, the odds of them caring about what I have to share with them would be very low. There's a lot of instances in which I seek to provide students with opportunities to share about who they are.

Fernando and Joseph were confident they were implementing culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms.

The other five teachers thought they were not sufficiently culturally responsive and identified they were working to improve their knowledge and skills. Vanessa, for example, indicated she still has much to learn about culturally responsive teaching. She stated, “I think obviously I still have room to grow considering my students cultures and identities, but I mean, I try every day to show up and meet their needs as they are and to get to know them.” Devin desires to be a culturally responsive teacher, but like others, thinks he has more to learn. He posited, “I consider myself one that wants to be, but have much room to grow. I'm a little bit more than most teachers, I still have plenty to learn. I want to be the best, so my students learn in the classroom.” Devin sees himself as “a little bit more than most teachers,” however is not

where he wants to be. Melissa also spoke about being dedicated to becoming a culturally responsive teacher. She stated, “I would say I'm on the path to being culturally responsive, but I know I'm not a hundred percent. I know I'm still fairly new to the program and every year there's new material coming out and there's always growth.” These teachers admitted to being “works in progress” with a strong desire to become the culturally responsive teachers they want to be.

The classroom observation of Melissa, an English Language Arts teacher illustrates her attempt to employ culturally responsive instruction. She was teaching a diverse 7<sup>th</sup> grade class with a nearly balanced racial/ethnic composition amongst White, Hispanic, and Black students. Melissa introduced nouns and pronouns in grammar and read a story emphasizing the usage of nouns and pronouns. She explained and asked questions about the proper usage of nouns and pronouns in respect to gender and diversity. Melissa had one on one interactions with each student making sure all student needs were taken care of and group discussions were comprised of diverse learners. The teacher freely interacted with the students asking them questions and acknowledging their responses. Melissa explained the purpose of having a poster on the wall “You Are Loved, Think Big, You Are More Capable Than You Think” was to acknowledge the different perspectives students bring into the classroom and to be inclusive.

During an observation in Vanessa’s Music class, I noticed the class was diverse with students from all backgrounds i.e., Caucasian, Multi-racial, Asian, African American, and Hispanic. Vanessa had diverse learners on each singing tone, and they sang songs in Spanish and Swahili. There were some Swahili and Spanish speakers in the classroom who were able to make connections with the songs by way of helping the teacher in giving meaning and translation of the songs into English. This is an example of language infusion during instruction. In Jessica’s social studies class, she was responsive to the needs of learners by giving extended time to all

those who needed more time to complete tasks. While leading a classroom discussion on advantages and disadvantages of migration, she gave opportunities to learners from diverse backgrounds to present their views. On the wall she had a poster reading Be Respectful to Everyone. She also had flags of all the countries of the world on the wall, which she indicated was a sign of respect to all.

### The School Culture Fest Day

While there are many criticisms about the usefulness of culture fair days in promoting culturally responsive teaching (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), one popular activity teachers identified as an example of culturally responsive teaching at Turner Middle School is a culture day celebrated annually by the entire school community. The school culture fest was held the week after data collection and was clearly on the minds of the teachers. Vanessa told me, “As far as the school goes, like in next week actually, we'll have a diversity festival day where kids get to explore lots of different cultures within the day.”

The participants indicated the event involves all members of the school community including participation by parents, teachers, students, non-teaching staff, and representatives from community cultural resource centers. Teachers planned the culture day by looking first to the resources that already exist within their community. Joseph elaborated on some of the events and the expertise of community members who attend the school culture fest. He said, “We utilize community resources such as the Caledonian pipes and drums, a Scottish bagpipe, Mexican dancing group, the local university Greek council who'll bring some of their fraternities and sororities and do stepping and strolling, a dance performance.” Melissa acknowledged the culture fest is community based, and shared, “We bring in a whole bunch of speakers, dancers, and performers from a wide variety of cultures. The students get to experience foods and

entertainment from around the world and professionals with different backgrounds.” Jessica also talked about how the community is involved during the culture fest, she said, “For years we have been bringing in different organizations to present, they do crafts and games too, guest speakers are invited and there is plenty of food from different cultures.”

School faculty, staff, and students also contribute to making the day special. Fernando mentioned the lunch staff prepares different foods from different cultures on that day. He stated, “Our lunch staff prepares food, I think she's from Laos, so she prepares different food from different cultures on that day.” The students and teachers are also allowed to showcase their talents. Joseph noted, “We then allow the students to share their talents, which is part of what makes them diverse or unique. And then we also have teacher-led activities where the teachers can share their culture with the students.” The school’s culture fest was pointed out with pride by all teacher participants as an example of their approach to culturally responsive teaching.

#### Teacher Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize one’s emotions and thoughts to understand how one’s own culture or upbringing influence behavior. It also includes making accurate assessments of one’s strengths and limitations (Mahatmya et al., 2016). For teachers, self-awareness also involves an understanding of how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors impact interactions with students. Teachers who understand their own backgrounds and make conscious ongoing efforts to increase their own self-awareness, are more likely to integrate cultural experiences of diverse students into teaching practices to make learning experiences more inclusive and productive (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

As it concerned their self-awareness, teachers in this study generally indicated they are culturally self-aware and want to know the different cultures amongst the learners in the

classroom to help empower and advocate for them. Jessica acknowledges that being self-aware informs her on how to interact with the diverse learners. She stated, “it makes me more aware of what I need to learn, what I need to be sensitive to you know, what I need to be, sometimes I feel like I need to work harder to gain the trust of certain students.” Vanessa demonstrated self-awareness of her cultural background to enhance culturally responsive teaching in her class. She stated, “I would say I start every day very aware of my privilege and wanting to use that to help empower my students, and hopefully be someone that can advocate alongside them rather than working against them.” Fernando talked of self-awareness as “just being culturally aware, needing to know what different cultures I have in my classroom and then try to always use different examples. You know I don't like to put kids on the spotlight.” Participants in the study identified the importance of understanding their own cultural background as they seek to work with the different cultures’ students bring to the classroom to enhance culturally responsive teaching.

### **Cultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Understanding of Diverse Students**

Cultural awareness, knowledge of student identity and understanding the diversity of learners are important while teaching diverse learners (Chamberlain, 2005). Some of the participants acknowledged that the opportunity to think about their own identities and those of their students was helpful in practicing culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom. Consequently, some participants seemed to realize that being aware of the diversity in their classrooms opens opportunities to challenge and influence their instructional process to embrace differentiated teaching which can provide opportunities for the success of all learners. This section contains findings concerning teachers’ experiences working with diverse learners, their understanding of the diversity of learners, and knowledge of student identity.



## Experience Working with Diverse Learners

The study results showed participants having mixed views about their experiences working with diverse learners in the school. Some teachers suggested having positive working experiences with learners while others seemed to suggest that as they appreciate their experiences, they have moments of feeling resentment or negativity from the students. The participants generally agreed that Turner Middle School has learners with diverse backgrounds which has given them an opportunity to interact and work with these learners either positively or otherwise.

Most participants expressed having positive experiences working with diverse learners, especially a couple of teachers who come from small, homogenous communities with little diversity. Teaching at Turner middle school gave them an opportunity to engage with a diversity of learners. Jessica shared, “I grew up in a small town that was mostly white people, and I wasn't really exposed as I should have been to a diverse group of people. So, I've enjoyed learning and, just being exposed to more cultures.” Jessica described her experience teaching diverse learners as positive and enjoyable. She went on to say, “I feel that our school in particular, does a good job of trying to celebrate diverse cultures, it makes it easier for me and the students to connect because they know that it's a safe place where we celebrate it.” Like Jessica, Jasmine came from a small white community. She shared, “I came from a school in North Dakota and there was no diversity there.” Jasmine also enjoys the school’s diverse population, as “they have all sorts of learners in the school, which is really nice and important for me.” Fernando, who had previously taught at a school in rural southwestern Kansas, which was primarily comprised of students from his own cultural background, expressed enjoying an even more diverse group of learners in his classroom. He said, “I think I have a lot of kids that are from different cultures. the Asian culture,

middle Eastern culture, African culture, and the Hispanic culture. So, I learn a lot of different cultures in my classroom.” Southwest Kansas is largely Hispanic, so teaching there probably did not seem very diverse to him, as most of his students shared his background.

One teacher, Devin, indicated having some negative experiences from some students who seemed to resent his efforts. He stated, “There's been times where students tell me, I won't get it. I tell them, you're right, I probably don't understand what your life is like, or what you're going through. But I want you to help me help you.” Despite these resentments, Devin is committed to being a culturally responsive teacher.

#### Understanding and Knowledge of Diverse Student Identities

The teachers interviewed suggested that understanding the diverse identities of the learners brings a variety of life experiences and attributes to the learning process. A few participants indicated that by understanding and honoring the diverse identities of the learners allowed them to adjust their instructional approach to be more culturally responsive to ensure that the diverse learners benefit from the learning process. For example, Joseph, a Social Studies teacher acknowledged that understanding the diverse identities in the classroom provides a basis for structuring instruction. He posited, “knowledge of student’s identity informs what readings, texts I pick, so rather than reading from one perspective, I seek to try to read from multiple perspectives.” He continued, “I can't just look at my perspective, I have to look at others too. So, ensuring that kids recognize that there are multiple perspectives is a way that's incorporated within class.” Joseph acknowledged that recognizing and embracing the diverse cultural identities and perspectives during instruction can help to enhance culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

During classroom observation, Joseph taught a lesson on the English colonies, and asked questions why the colonists come to the new world and who was there before their arrival. He asked if the students might be able to connect their own stories to the colonists' experiences. When asking questions, he allowed sufficient time for the learners to respond. The class took some time to discuss the colonies. During the discussions, he openly and freely interacted with the learners, which appeared to be a sign of good relations he has developed with them. For those learners who seemed to struggle to respond correctly to questions, he encouraged them by helping them along. The teacher was able to connect well with the learners as was evidenced by the good working relationships expressed between the teacher and the learners in the classroom.

Jasmine's thoughts seemed to reflect those of Joseph, she suggested that understanding the learners' identities can help to identify reading prompts that can manifest through the learners' perspectives. She stated, "I think it's important when you're reading stories like in language arts, that the kids are listening to stories that are about them, they could see themselves in it." Jasmine explained that the stories resonate much better with the learners when their cultural identity is taken into consideration when choosing instructional materials. Jasmine was able to identify the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives in ELA but did not do so for her own subject of Math. During a classroom observation, Jasmine's lesson was a review of fractions. She used direct teaching of the concepts of numerator and denominator to explain fractions. Jasmine interacted with all learners by having one on one contact with the students as they were working on their assignments. When asking questions, she gave opportunities to all learners to answer and enough wait time for those who seemed to struggle. The class was diverse with all groups represented but with a substantially large group of students who appeared to be biracial. She took time to advise and inform the class that she was always available to help them

succeed irrespective of her white identity. She tried to relate and connect with the class especially those learners who appeared biracial by using example of her home situation of having a biracial child because she is married to an African American. On the wall she has a poster with “Just Walk a Day in My Flip Flops” which she explained as meaning, understanding and being empathetic with others. The teacher attended to the needs of all learners and was quick to help those who needed individual attention.

Fernando believes he values every student's culture and identity and tries to get to know every student in class and encourages students to be respectful of all cultural identities. He said, “I always let the kids know upfront that, in my class we're going to learn about everybody's culture, we're not going to sit here and laugh at people's cultures.” He continued to note and stated, “I try to let them know that we're going to be open-minded, and always be respectful.”

When observing Fernando in the classroom, I noticed the class was quite diverse. There were learners of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and those of Multiracial descent. He encouraged the learners to acknowledge and respect the diversity in the classroom by having learners from different ethnicities sit together. To Fernando, this seating arrangement allowed for cross-cultural conversations and working together with the aim of fostering learners' respect for each other's culture. The learners did not have a problem interacting freely with each other and with the teacher. He moved around the class helping and interacting with every learner and addressed the learners by their full names, which he believes is a sign of cultural respect. He used textbooks with diverse authors and used a Spanish instructional video with presenters who represented diversity.

## **Strategies for Facilitating Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Participants identified several strategies which they believe are necessary to supporting culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. There was a general consensus among the participants that it is necessary to adopt successful working strategies in order to fully engage students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The three main strategies the participants mentioned were building relationships with students, building relationships with parents, and incorporating racial and ethnic group representation into instruction.

### **Building Relationships with Students**

Building relationships with students was stressed by participants as a working approach to enable culturally responsive instruction in the classroom. Approaching students who are culturally diverse is not easy but understanding a student's background to make specific connections is essential. The teachers approached building relationships in different ways. Devin suggested that he finds time away from schoolwork to have one on one friendly conversations with students. He stated, "I try to talk with them at least two times a week for at least four minutes each. That time that I spend with them is just getting to know them, doesn't deal with schoolwork, doesn't deal with anything at school." Jessica felt like she connects with learners during instruction by using humor and encouraging them to freely make their contributions. She explained, "I build good relationships with my students to the point when I'm teaching, I can use humor and they understand. We have a feeling that it's not just me up front giving them information, they can join and be part of the discussion." Vanessa checks in with every student first thing as they come into class. She stated, "At the very beginning of every day, they do like an attendance question where they can check in with me and check in with each other." On how building relationships influences her teaching, she said "I think being aware and being able to

read their body language when they come to class influences how and what I teach. So, I plan with them in mind and change things based on how well they went.” Getting to know students on a personal level can lead to better understanding of what needs to happen in the classroom.

One participant learned that students appreciated it when he spoke a few words in their native language. Fernando posited, “I just start talking like them a little bit and, they start to see, oh, okay, you know, they open up a little more and so they get more comfortable.” Fernando is fluent in English and Spanish. While observing Fernando’s class, he held conversations in both English and Spanish and spoke just a few words precisely two to three words in some of the diverse languages in class namely Swahili and Arabic. The students responded with enthusiasm when Fernando tried to speak their language. This motivated the learners and seemed to work well in building relationships in class.

#### Building Relationships with Parents

Having good working relationships with parents allows teachers and parents to work as a team leading to learners appreciating school which can lead to academic success. Increased cultural awareness by schoolteachers increases parental involvement (Garcia & Chun, 2016). Participants suggested several ways of connecting and building relationships with parents. For Vanessa direct conversations by phone worked well with her considering how difficult it is due to commitments for them to meet face to face. During these conversations, she emphasizes the child’s successes and strengths rather than deficits. She said, “I have to call home and talk to a parent, most of the time I start with what the child did that was successful, that is a positive phone call celebrating something amazing that their kid did in class.” Melissa agreed with Vanessa on how to connect with parents and used a similar approach. She noted, “Calling home is the cheapest and most impactful. I make positive phone calls which motivates the learners to

become top performers, the first ones to contribute and, those ready to lead the charge and help control other students in class.” Melissa is suggesting that the positive phone calls she makes to parents encourages learners to perform better and lead the charge in class because they know their efforts are being recognized and appreciated.

Unlike Vanessa and Melissa who call parents, Joseph takes a different approach, as he appreciates face to face interactions. He goes to the parents’ homes and also invites them to school. He stated, “I’ve visited students at their home and connected with their parents. So, I get to see the neighborhood that they live in, the family that they live in, and I get to meet them, learn their concerns and their values.” Joseph elaborated how he partnered with parents, “In order to start that partnership, most often it requires an invitation. Most parents don’t want to force their culture on us. They seem to wait until they’re invited in, because they don’t want to be abrupt, they’re very respectful.” Jessica agreed to some extent about how to establish relationships with parents as far as being invitational. She noted, “We invite them into the building for all sorts of events, we try to stay in regular contact so that when we do have to call with something negative, they don’t feel like it’s an attack.” Having established a relationship beforehand helped to prevent the first encounter with a parent being something negative about their child. Jessica continued “Usually parents are very supportive of me because I’ve taken the time to build those relationships. So, I usually get positive responses. We do a lot of family events, so the parents feel like they’re on our team.”

The parent-teacher conference was identified as a good opportunity to connect with the parents. Devin indicated he usually connects with parents during parent teacher conferences. He stated, “A lot of parents won’t answer calls cause they’re at work - or emails. So, the best opportunity is during conferences.” Devin expressed situations of uncooperative parents who

refuse to communicate by generally making it difficult for teachers to reach them. Devin stated, “I have some parents who just don't want to talk to me, they usually talk through the principal as a mediator.”

Building relationships with parents is a culturally responsive teaching strategy that encourages teachers and parents to work as a team for the success of the learners. The study findings suggest that participants agreed it was important to partner with parents. These teachers also believed it was their responsibility to initiate those connections through invitations, phone calls, and/or emails.

#### Incorporating Racial and Ethnic Groups in Instruction

Exploring further on strategies for enhanced engagement in culturally responsive teaching, the study findings suggest participants tailored learning to students' interests by incorporating various cultural and ethnic groups into the instruction and, designing lessons that include representation of important personalities to celebrate diversity.

Several teachers explained how they incorporated learning materials into their instruction that represented their students' cultural and ethnic identities. Several participants talked about how they integrate cultural role models into their instruction. Vanessa in her music class incorporates individuals from particular ethnic languages to perform songs through video. She noted, “On the Spanish song we're doing I can show them video of an actual Hispanic person singing a traditional Spanish Carol, rather than hearing it from me. I always try to find the closest to a primary source.” Joseph, like Vanessa, also integrates individuals from different ethnicities into his social studies lessons but, unlike Vanessa who sometimes uses video, he identifies important role models. Joseph stated, “I incorporate a lot of examples of students seeing people who are similar to them. He continued to note, “we just got done with our unit on Mexico,



Central America and South America, and we finished with a fiesta, and they got to bring and share like food and things that they enjoy and appreciate.” However, while Joseph believes he is being culturally responsive and is thoughtful in most of his responses, the idea of sharing food and cultural celebrations do not promote culturally responsive teaching.

Fernando also integrates cultural role models during classroom instruction, focusing on those who are well known. Fernando gave in detail examples of important cultural icons he incorporates into instruction. He encourages students to conduct research on these famous individuals. He explained.

I do something called "cultura diaria" which means daily culture. So, I'll give them interesting facts about important cultural personalities like Simon Bolivar, who was the person that helped free most of the countries in South America. Cesar Chavez, who helped the Chicanos get better wages in California. There's actually a project that I give them where they need to come up with somebody that impacted the culture. I've had kids ask me if they could do Nelson Mandela, or a soccer player. Am like, but okay, outside of soccer, how does they impact the world or the culture?

Fernando is talking about recognizing important people who have influenced culture in the society. However, reducing these cultural icons and role models to “personalities” is not exactly aligned with culturally responsive teaching.

Jessica, a Social Studies teacher takes advantage of important cultural events and incorporates them into instruction. She also suggested welcoming associated representatives of cultural groups to honor such an event with the students. She stated, “We celebrate different events like, you know, Black history month, we celebrate Native American history month and Hispanic heritage month and try to bring in individuals of those specific different cultural groups

so they can celebrate their heritage.” When asked the reaction of the students on those different experiences she said, “They like it, definitely I think they enjoy it. I think they like to be exposed to different things or learn about different people or different things that they've not maybe heard of.” It is important to note that celebrating holidays and cultural days is not a precise culturally responsive teaching practice. There is more to be done to ensure explicit culturally responsive instruction that moves beyond celebration.

The study results show that some of these strategies identified by participants can support culturally responsible instruction. These strategies work well when teachers, students and parents work as a team and embrace the diversity amongst them (Byrd, 2016). This can increase the learner’s engagement levels in the classroom. On the contrary, cultural fairs where food and other cultural materials are shared and celebrated do not support culturally responsive teaching. Nor does reducing cultural icons to “personalities” promote cultural understanding.

### **Curriculum and Instruction for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

A culturally responsive inclusive curriculum helps teachers and students understand different perspectives, appreciate others' culture, and build inclusive classrooms (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Participants agreed that regularly examining the curriculum instructional materials for bias and making necessary changes and adjusting instruction to adapt to the classroom situation, goes a long way to provide a more inclusive culturally responsive instruction. This section provides findings on how teachers examine instructional materials for cultural bias, adjusting or adopting instruction to suite the learning process and obstacles or challenges when applying culturally responsive teaching.

## Examining Instructional Materials for Cultural Bias

Participants expressed concerns about existing cultural biases embedded in instructional materials. They emphasized the need to examine carefully and thoughtfully the instructional content for cultural bias and be aware of the potential impacts on the learning process. Vanessa spoke of her struggle with district-adopted biased instructional materials, she stated, “I would say this comes up a lot in music, like this one folk song, the Swahili piece we're doing right now. It's edited by a white guy that's never been around the language or never spoken the language.” Jasmine agreed with Vanessa but acknowledges that the bias may pass by her occasionally without noticing. She noted, “I think sometimes it's hard for me to catch bias because I am white, and I don't see it right away. But when I do see it, or I do feel that something's not quite right, I definitely would switch it obviously every single time.” Jasmine continued, “I would say, textbooks definitely miss out parts of history, and that's where a teacher who is culturally responsive has to fill in.”

Participants indicated that examining instructional materials for bias all the time is fundamental. Joseph noted that bias is widespread not only in reading content but also in the picture content. He stated, “Basically, the first step is to read the content looking through everything before, making sure it agrees with what I think is right. That's through, both the text and the imagery that they use in the textbook.” Jessica agreed and makes sure content is checked every time to avoid distortion. She stated, “I always preview everything before I show it. I learned a long time ago because if you don't, it does bring up misrepresentation and it is uncomfortable.” Fernando also agreed there is bias in instructional materials but had a different view on how he checks for bias. Fernando prefers examining bias during instruction so that learners can see first-hand the bias. He posited, “I really don't preview content before instruction

because I purposely want them to keep an open mind at all times and then I can identify the bias and discuss it with the learners.”

Most teachers in this study indicated their textbooks and other instructional materials do contain some biased content. Participants identified several ways they examined and identified bias on these instructional materials. Although teachers often have little to no control over textbook adoptions, they can take the initiative to report the bias to the individual in the district who is responsible for textbook adoptions. The participants indicated that their responsibility is to fill the gaps, to make adjustments when they notice biased materials.

#### Adjusting/Adapting Instruction

Participants agreed on the necessity to differentiate instruction by adjusting the teaching process to adapt to what the classroom and individual student presents. Adjusting or adapting instruction by making changes to instruction allows students to easily access the curriculum and gives them the opportunity to process and demonstrate what has been taught. Vanessa indicated that she adapts as the class period progresses and modifies instruction to make it more interesting for students with different academic needs. She posited, “I’m always changing what I teach based on how they respond. It might look like a staggered assignment, where like the super high academic achieving kids get longer enrichment, where maybe lower academically performing students have like a paired down version.” Devin also modifies instruction by tailoring content to individual needs. He stated, “I’m always shifting my practice to meet the needs of the students. It’s a matter of like I cut down the assignment, I mean just instructional methods and accommodations, adding those to my lessons.” The participants generally talked about the process of differentiating instruction to accommodate every student in the classroom.

During classroom observation, Devin introduced the concept of eclipses to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class by showing the students a video of a solar and lunar eclipse. The presenters on the instructional video were people from different ethnic backgrounds which represented diversity. He then discussed the dangers of watching the eclipse with naked eyes. Devin took time to listen to each student and allowed extra time for responses, especially those learners who need more think time before they can respond to a question. He adjusted the pace of the instruction by slowing down, walking around, and making sure he attended to every learner before moving forward on the lesson.

Working with special education students requires regular adjustments of the instructional materials. Jessica who works with special education students posited, “I have to modify almost all lessons to meet their needs because they're at different levels, my students are lower than their general education peers. Whatever the general education teachers present, I usually have to dial it back or modify.” The findings suggest that participants agreed it was important to adjust lesson content to adapt to the different needs of learners in the classroom.

### **Obstacles/Challenges When Applying Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Obstacles or challenges when practicing culturally responsive teaching emerged as a theme from the research findings. Participants expressed concerns about the practicality of implementing culturally responsive teaching by highlighting potential difficulties. Participants spoke at length about challenges that result when trying to navigate culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom. These included most of the teachers being monolingual and cultural differences, including students and parents’ negative experiences with other cultures.

Not being multilingual is a challenge that was presented by some participants. This was expressed as a language barrier. Joseph posited, “I think, one thing that I feel limits me is

sometimes not speaking Spanish for some of my Spanish students.” While observing Joseph in the classroom, I noted he had many students in class, which he acknowledged was a little bit challenging. He noted that some of the learners were not fluent English speakers, their first language was Spanish. He indicated that would not be a problem had he been bilingual. Although Fernando is fluent in Spanish, he indicated having difficulty communicating with parents of African background during conferences, where there also was a little bit of a language barrier. He stated, “I told them, the student was talking too much in class. I don’t think the father understood maybe half of what I said. Sometimes the parents bring a translator and, I always wonder if they’re getting the message.” Teachers do have access to translators when meeting with parents, but that does not resolve all the communication challenges. Melissa noted, “You can’t have a good conversation if you’re going through a third party.” Melissa talked about a work around the district came up with on the issue of language barrier is a translation app that the district uses. She said, “It’s called Proprio. At a glance, it’s a multilingual educational service, it’s a paid program that the district pays for a subscription.” Teachers are free to use the app in case of a situation of a language barrier. Melissa acknowledged she sometimes uses the app; the other participants did not talk about the app giving the impression they either did not like using the app or they did not have any idea about the app.

Cultural differences between home and school were noted as another challenge presented especially by parents and students who have had negative experiences with people outside their race. Jessica stated, “Kids come to school with their parents’ biases, the only way to combat those negative viewpoints that their parents have instilled in them is to let them be exposed, learn and then change their own mindset.” Devin seems to acknowledge that the negative attitudes act as a distraction because of feelings learners develop towards people outside their race. He

asserted, “To some students, it's a door that closes cause they're like, who's this white guy talking, he won't understand me, or he doesn't care, and that's the biggest thing.” Davin continued, “I tell them that I'm not trying to bring them down. I'm trying to figure out ways so that we're both happy so that they're learning and that they're happy to be in the classroom.” Culturally responsive teaching is intended to help alleviate or eliminate these cultural misunderstandings, but as the participants noted, it is hard work to overcome parents and students' unpleasant prior experiences.

When teachers have a different background than their learners, it presents a challenge. For instance, Joseph stated, “my norms are different, that's an obstacle, I think I have to learn about their culture in order to respond to it. Some students aren't comfortable sharing their culture, they don't want to be identified as unique.” Cultural differences could also be seen in gender relations. Melissa indicated gender disparity was a challenge when applying culturally responsive teaching. She said, “My issue isn't necessarily race, but more gender. A lot of cultures have different views on women. So, it takes a lot more to build relationships with those individuals.” Cultural differences between teachers and learners may take different forms and can be difficult to address.

### **Schoolwide Changes Needed to Support Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Participants identified and proposed several changes within the school that can be made to support culturally responsive teaching. The study findings shows that schoolwide changes can play a major role in ensuring that all learners benefit and succeed in their academic endeavors. Participants proposed several changes they believe are needed. These changes can be summarized into behavioral support and technical policy changes.

## Behavioral Support Changes

Behavioral support changes are changes meant to provide interventions to help stop behaviors which may interfere with the learning process. One of the more welcome change participants would like to see which can support culturally responsive teaching is the creation of a safe space where students could cool off after an episode. Vanessa thought that a safe space would be a great outlet for kids, she stated, “a lot of kids just really need a safe space to calm down after a trigger episode. I don’t feel like the office is a safe space, oftentimes the kids, associate negativity with the office, like they’re going to be disciplined.” Jasmine presented a change idea which is about focusing more on meeting where the student is. She stated, “I think we need to get better at recognizing that we need to meet students where they’re at, and sometimes that involves changing.” While observing Jasmine, I noticed she had a safe space in the classroom. Jasmine seemed to have already figured out the change Vanessa was proposing. I asked her how useful the safe space is to her students, she noted that it is a place for reflection and refreshing the minds of the learners after an episode. Joseph suggested a change focusing on not disregarding the conduct of the learners by consenting to cultural expectations. He expounded by stating, “out of a safety of cultural representation of recognizing that cultures are different, we’re going to let everything go. If we abandon a sense of behavior responsibility, we’re giving up on parents hope for their child’s expectations.” Joseph is trying to say that what might look good at home is not necessarily good practice and may not be allowed in school.

## Technical Policy Changes

These are changes which may involve lengthy processes to change parts of school policy. Participants suggested changes in the daily schedule, changes in determining students for Special Ed and changes in the implementation of PD programs. For instance, Melissa suggested a change



to the daily schedule to incorporate components of culturally responsive teaching. She posited “we have a socioeconomic learning component to our first hour class, but I think that also needs to be a little bit more cultural knowledge to encourage students to explore other cultures and ethnic groups to understand and build that perspective.” She added, “I think a lot of it comes down to changing and making curricular resources being more inclusive.” Devin recommended changes regarding fairness in the constitution of ethnic groups in special Ed, he posited, “equity is not existent, there's an over overrepresentation of African American students in special Ed versus Caucasian. I've had one Asian student, but I've identified Asian students who should be probably in special Ed but they're not.” Devin was suggesting the need for a change to mitigate the high numbers of African American learners in special Education. Fernando suggested making a change to ensure conducting annual culturally responsive teaching training and making it a priority for everyone. He stated, “I do feel like a culturally relevant teaching class training every year might be helpful, some teachers, once they get in their rhythm, they might forget they have a diverse classroom, so sometimes you need to change how you teach.”

The participants felt like making changes at school level to support culturally responsive teaching would be a step towards creating instruction that allows students from diverse backgrounds to succeed. Discussions at team levels could revolve around these proposed changes discussed above to ensure their implementation.

### **Collaboration/Working Collectively**

The participants suggested that Turner Middle School teachers collaborate and work together to practice culturally responsive teaching. Most participants suggested that it involves working in subject or content teams. One participant mentioned collaboration at grade level teams. Some participants indicated they collaborated with teachers from other schools. The

participants also examined their principal on how supportive she is in collaborating with them to promote culturally responsive teaching in the school.

Subject/content teams is an area of collaboration that was mentioned by most participants. Participants suggested that they work together to review subject matter in relation to culturally responsive teaching and to help underachieving diverse learners. Vanessa talked about how she collaborates with other music teachers to analyze the performance of the diverse learners to help them attain their potential. She said, “we talk with other music teachers during team time about a kid that's struggling academically at school or share ideas like why in some cultures, students love to sing while some cultures they aren't allowed to sing or express themselves through music.” Jasmine also shared having time set aside when they get to share with her math subject team. She stated, “we collaborate a lot, we have like a period every day where we collaborate with our team.” Jessica indicated that she works together with her social studies content team and felt like they are dedicated to being culturally responsive. She stated, “I'm on my content team, social studies team, and I feel that we are all committed to bringing culturally responsive lessons to our students. Trying to expose them, even if it's like field trips or guest speakers or events.” Jessica affirmed that Joseph was their social studies content team leader. She stated, “We have a team lead, and social studies team lead, it's Joseph. He's our content team leader.” During Jessica's classroom observation, I noticed she was working together with another teacher. She acknowledged that the teacher was a member of her content team they were collaborating with. Together they had a good handle of the class making sure the needs of all learners were taken care of. Devin acknowledged working with his science team, when he said, “as a science team, I feel like we are, we have been very culturally responsive, I have had two science leads since I've been here.” He identified the earlier science lead teacher as

being his mentor. He posited, “he and I were probably the most culturally responsive teachers on the science team, he was the one that gave me the idea like, look at these lessons in these different areas and get them to relate to the students.”

One participant, Joseph acknowledged having grade level teams who work together to understand how the students are progressing in class. He stated, “when we meet together as a seventh-grade team, we ask other teachers’ knowledge of students. The goal is to know who the student is when considering how to intervene or to address what they’re seeing either academically or behaviorally.” They work with special Ed teachers to help students who speak other languages. He stated, “for students whom English is a second language, we have an ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] coordinator who we work with, who often has known the families for a long time, has seen the students’ progress from sixth to eighth grade.”

The two participants who taught exploratory, non-core classes indicated having time to collaborate with teachers from other buildings. Vanessa sometimes works together with music teachers from other schools. She stated, “I think I talk a lot with other choir teachers, not as much about with teachers at Turner.” Fernando also noted having some time when they can collaborate with teachers from outside Turner. He said, “when we collaborate, we actually have a couple days a week where the principal has given us to collaborate, which means we can collaborate with teachers from another building.” The participants were not very clear on how and in what context they collaborate with those from other buildings.

Most participants generally talked of having a lead teacher, but they were not very specific about this person’s functions and roles. For instance, Devin did not give any details about the responsibilities of the lead teacher. Devin noted, “our lead teacher now is a white male who is younger, and I think he’s more aware, but like I said, I really think he has a lot of area to

improve on, at least as a lead teacher.” Jessica seemed to associate her subject team leader to the lead teacher, she stated, “we have a team lead, and social studies team lead, it's Joseph.” Jessica was referring to Joseph as being the Social Studies team leader and also as being the lead teacher in charge of culturally responsive teaching in the building. Some of the participants’ understanding of culturally responsive lead teacher seems to be vague because they seem to suggest that subject content team leaders stand also for culturally responsive teaching lead teachers.

### Principal Support

The study findings show that participants believed the principal of Turner Middle school collaborates with them to support culturally responsive teaching practices by providing programs and opportunities intended for culturally responsive teaching. All participants acknowledged the support they receive from the principal and credited her for working with them and showing commitment to provide time and material support for culturally responsive PD and other resources. Jasmine suggested the principal is delighted and she is gratified with the support the principal provides. She said, “it is a hundred percent, it is super important to her, she's prideful of it. Last year our theme was ‘one school many stories,’ so the school honored how diverse our kids are.” Vanessa seemed to agree with Jasmine and mentions the principal’s support and commitment to the diversity fair. Vanessa said, “absolutely, like next week we're doing diversity festival and she allows for time that would have been spent traditionally, like in classes, to take a break and to really invest in the needs of honoring the diversity around us.” Joseph gave some details on how the principal supports culturally responsive teaching in the school. He indicated that she supports it monetarily and as a part of their professional development. He asserted, “she supports it with finances and a part of culturally responsive teaching PD. Additionally, she talks

about its value and often communicates that value to the faculty which in-turn communicates it to the students.”

Melissa seemed to agree with the other participants, she suggested that the principal has faith in the teachers to apply culturally responsive teaching. She noted, “she's very comfortable but confident and trusts us to be emotional and respectful to all students. It's more of a metacognitive thinking process and how to impact our own instruction to then filter it down to our students.” Fernando was positive about the principal’s support; he agrees with Joseph on the professional development support. He said, “she absolutely does support, we have culturally responsive training at the beginning of the school year, and again, like the district, she is making sure everybody has a chance, making sure no one's left behind.” Fernando is saying that the principal works with the teachers to ensure that every teacher has an opportunity to attend culturally responsive professional development opportunities.

The participants agreed that their principal collaborates with them to support and advance culturally responsive teaching in the school, she develops and supports structures and routines that prioritize and focus the alignment of culturally responsive teaching. A culturally responsive principal continuously takes action to meet students and educators needs especially a leader in a culturally and ethnic diverse school environment (Baldwin, 2015). The participants seemed to agree and suggested that teachers in the school have the opportunity to apply culturally responsive teaching because of the collaboration and support they have from the principal.

### **Community Cultural Resources in Support of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Participants spoke about culturally responsive teaching resources within and around the school community. The teacher participants made use of community resources through field trips and invited representative speakers from diverse ethnic backgrounds to come to school to speak

with the learners. Most participants identified several resources including African American Museum, Native American Museum (Mid-America All-Indian Museum), Hispanic heritage center and the local university office of diversity and inclusion.

#### Community Cultural Resources in the City

The participants identified several community cultural resources within the city that teachers can access to support culturally responsive teaching. Several teachers talked about visiting the African American Museum as a beneficial cultural resource. Joseph spoke about, “we partner with the African American Museum for the Dockum Drug Store sit-in, and we got to take our kids to the Kansas Historical Society. We brought participants in the Dockum drugstore sit-ins to share with our students.” Devin also made annual visits to the African American museum. He stated, “We would take the sixth graders every year to the African American museum downtown by the jail I think, but since Covid we haven't.” Jessica spoke about the African American museum and how the teachers and students have benefited from both visiting it and bringing in speakers. She said, “we've gone on field trips, and we have speakers come in. Couple of years ago we had a woman come in from the African American Museum, and talked about Nicodemus, a town founded by former slaves in Kansas.” Melissa expressed how she has utilized the Native American resources, “we do have a Native American museum and I know that they work with the district to put on a cultural fest sometime in the spring.” Melissa was referring to the Mid-America All-Indian Museum. Melissa did not elaborate clearly how her students benefit from the district putting on the Native American cultural fest.

Most participants did not come out very clear on how they made use of these community resources to enhance their culturally responsive teaching practices. For example, Fernando expressed not having many connections to the cultural resources around the city, although he did

talk about making use of the local university's cultural diversity office. He explained, "the resource I know is the cultural diversity office and the office of multicultural affairs at local state university." Fernando mentioned having some contacts within the Hispanic community. He stated, "You know I think of the Hispanic community, I have some connections with them. Depending on what we need, I can go to certain people for help. But outside of the Hispanic community, I don't have a lot of connections." Vanessa also mentioned partnering with the local state university when she stated, "I would say more like I would partner with different smaller communities at the local state university, because I went to school there and, I'm also aware of the office of diversity and inclusion." Neither teacher indicated what kind of partnerships they make with the university to benefit learners in the classroom. I attempted to explore more with the participants but not much detail was presented.

#### Invited Speakers

The participants noted that many of the invited speakers who come to speak on culture and diversity are representatives from the community cultural resources around the city. Most of the participants indicated they individually invited speakers to talk to their classes while a few suggested it was a teacher event involving subject teachers inviting speakers to talk on essential content matter. The participants were not clear about what the speakers talked about and how that helped them advance culturally responsive teaching. For example, Vanessa indicated that she had invited student speakers from the local university to talk to her students. She stated, "like the multicultural Greek council, I've been able to talk with students and brought them in to come and do something and share with our students." However, she did not articulate what the speakers were intended to accomplish. Fernando talked about a speaker connected to the community resources who visits schools to talk to and help diverse learners, he stated, "I have a

friend who, I don't know her title, but she basically goes around schools, and she helps those Native American kids be more, like prouder of their culture." Again, his comment was rather vague and unrelated to his own practice of culturally responsive teaching. Joseph mentioned a guest speaker he had invited during his student teaching who was originally from a foreign country. He stated, "at one point in my student teaching, I had a gentleman from, I believe he was from Uganda, he came and shared with my students about what was normal in Uganda education norms." Joseph was referring to a guest speaker he had invited about a decade ago when he was a student teacher, it is not clear how the information back then is relevant to the present in regard to the application of culturally responsive instruction in the classroom.

Some participants talked about bringing in speakers relevant to their content area. Jasmine indicated that in her subject/content area of social studies they invite speakers to talk to the students. She noted, "especially in history, I know that we bring in speakers who have different backgrounds for the kids to hear." Melissa, who agreed with Jasmine noted, "we bring in a whole bunch of speakers." Melissa is a Language Arts teacher and was talking about speakers they invite to talk to the diverse learners in their subject area.

Overall, the participants were not very specific about how the invited speakers participated in promoting culturally responsive teaching in classroom instruction. Inviting speakers to talk about cultural issues without a specific educational purpose seems to do little to promote culturally responsive teaching.



## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions and Implications

This chapter delivers conclusions analyzed through the theoretical framework and provides implications for middle school teachers' perceptions on culturally responsive teaching, schools, school districts, policy makers and others with the power to implement. The theoretical framework applied to the research findings is the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1999, 2001), through the lens of self-efficacy. Through this framework, the study makes sense of teachers' perceptions and their influence on culturally responsive teaching.

#### Teacher Self-Efficacy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

The theoretical framework elaborates how self-efficacy influences the development of teachers' willingness to adopt or not adopt culturally responsive teaching practices. Self-efficacy influences the extent to which teachers utilize their personal factors, behavioral and environmental factors to practice culturally responsive. On the functional properties of self-efficacy culturally responsive teaching is influenced by the interconnection between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. All these factors work together to support teachers culturally responsive teaching practice, making sure all learners are part of the learning process. Participants showed commitment to culturally responsive teaching but lacked knowledge and skills to put them into practice or did not have a fully supportive environment. This makes it more challenging for them to have a high level of self-efficacy.

Most participants had some level of self-efficacy, although none had high self-efficacy. Joseph appeared to have a higher sense of perceived self-efficacy as compared to others, he seemed to have a clearer understanding of culturally responsive teaching practice. Devin appeared to be struggling the most with a lower self-efficacy level, he seemed to be the least

informed of culturally responsive teaching practice and seemed to struggle to make connections with the students in class. Devin for instance talked about the negative attitudes coming from some parents and the students who seemed to resent his efforts. Fernando saw himself as culturally responsive, but his beliefs and actions were not always consistent with culturally responsive teaching. The other participants were pretty honest in their self-assessment of still having much to learn. They are committed and working towards fully becoming culturally responsive teachers. They all are a “work in progress,” having a willingness to make an effort to achieve culturally responsive teaching practice in the classroom.

### Personal Factors and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Through the lens of self-efficacy, the theoretical framework identifies personal factors such as self-beliefs, awareness, knowledge, skills, and aspirations as ways to regulate how teachers practice culturally responsive teaching. Participants demonstrated some awareness, knowledge, skills, and lots of aspirations toward culturally responsive teaching. The participants showed an effort/desire to influence learners’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to feel accepted and included in the learning process. They aspired to integrate the personal factors to achieve culturally responsive teaching but need to continue to work on their perspectives to fully engage all learners.

Teachers’ perceptions of their self-awareness, knowledge of student identity and skills necessary to teach in a diverse classroom environment was elaborated in the literature (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2004; Chamberlain, 2005; Nganga, 2015). These studies elaborated on the use of cultural awareness, prior knowledge of diverse learners and teacher skills to make learning experiences more appropriate and productive. Teachers in this study generally believe they are

culturally self-aware and want to know the different cultures amongst the learners in the classroom to help empower and advocate for them.

### Behavioral Factors and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Behavioral factors encompass a self-system that enables individuals to exercise and control their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The participants showed the desire to be more productive by showing some behavioral articulation of differentiated classroom practices that acknowledge the significance of racial and cultural diversity in learning. Participants showed some skills in practicing differentiated learning practice, acknowledging social differences, and showing respect to the diverse cultures in the classroom. This is consistent with the extant literature that calls for adjusting, adopting curriculum or differentiating instruction (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). Participants made the effort to differentiate instruction in recognizing the individual and unique experiences each learner brings to the classroom.

The literature also indicated building relationships with parents and students was an important element of culturally responsive teaching (Sue & Torino, 2005). Successful culturally responsive teachers have significantly higher self-efficacy, and they form strong relationships with parents and their students which has a greater effect on student outcomes. Consistent with the literature is a significant finding which shows that participants recognized the importance of making connections with students and parents. They depended on the relationships they created to build trust to maintain a cooperative learning environment. Most participants demonstrated mutual respect for students through interactions that honored students' ethnic and cultural background, although one participant seemed to struggle to make partnerships with parents and students. He talked about parents who want to avoid talking to him and students who did not seem to understand the efforts he is making. Nonetheless, he was committed to keep trying.

Participants spoke of striving to create caring partnerships with parents and students alike and demonstrating genuine interest in each student to build connections to foster culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom.

Along with examining the curriculum and the instruction materials for cultural bias, participants generally attempted to design lessons with classroom activities that are culturally supportive of their students. The literature on culturally responsive teaching encouraged teachers to examine instructional materials for biases when preparing to provide for an all-inclusive anti-bias curriculum (Nganga, 2015). Also, consistent with the literature, participants acknowledged that instructional materials contained some cultural biases and failed to adequately represent diverse groups. To be culturally responsive the participants indicated the importance of identifying cultural bias, supplementing instruction with resources rich in diversity and portraying icons and role models from different cultural backgrounds during instruction.

The participants demonstrated a desire to be culturally responsive, but overall, they have limited knowledge and do not have a deep understanding of culturally responsive practice. Their personal attributes (desire to be culturally responsive) did not align with their knowledge and understanding (implementation of culturally responsive teaching).

#### Environmental Factors and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Environmental factors had both positive and negative influence on participants' application of culturally responsive instruction. Helpful environmental factors were, support by the principal, collaboration and working together, and opportunities for culturally responsive professional development courses. Negatively the environment has restrained or constricted teachers on issues like policies in place that are not very specific, for instance, professional development which is not always aligned with culturally responsive teaching. They are also

hanging on to old practices like the culture fest, and community cultural resources and bringing in speakers that seem to have no purpose - these kinds of things are holding them back from practicing culturally responsive teaching.

### ***Helpful Environmental Factors***

The principal collaborates and supports teachers by providing programs and opportunities intended for culturally responsive teaching. Participants acknowledged the principal works with them and shows commitment to provide time and material support for culturally responsive activities in the school.

Teacher collaboration and working together within the school environment was highlighted in the study as important in supporting culturally responsive teaching. As the study demonstrated, teachers collaborated in one way or the other to ensure the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Collaboration with the content/subject teams, grade level collaboration, working with a lead leader, and working with teachers from other buildings were some of the ways participants collaborated on culturally responsive teaching. Collaboration connects with self-efficacy and human agency, the teacher collaborations indicate collective, personal and proxy agency (Bandura, 2001, 2006) which is consistent the theory. Most participants in the study worked with their subject/content teams while some collaboration was reported in the other areas.

Professional development initiative is significantly highlighted in the literature as an important factor that supports culturally responsive teaching. Professional development focused on the ability to practice culturally responsive teaching is beneficial to teachers (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Brown, 2004), and can provide continuous opportunities to collectively examine appropriate practices in culturally responsive teaching (McKoy et al., 2017). The participants

attested to the district and school's efforts in providing and facilitating culturally responsive professional development which to some extent has provided some opportunities for further engagement and learning. As will be seen below, the professional development was also a hinderance.

### ***Hindering Environmental Factors***

Participants in the study acknowledged provision and availability of professional development provided by the school and the district. However, the professional development offered did not seem sufficient for meeting the teachers' needs for advancing their culturally responsive instructional practice. Much of the professional development provided was one-size-fits-all and not specifically aligned with culturally responsive teaching. Instead, it was primarily embedded within the district's AVID initiative.

The importance of using community cultural resources is elaborated in the literature on culturally responsive teaching. The literature explores the teacher's ability and willingness to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms and resources (Baldwin, 2015). Participants agreed on the availability of several community cultural resources within and around the school community, yet it was unclear how those resources were used to support a culturally diverse curriculum and/or lessons. Most of the participants identified the cultural community resources but failed to identify how they incorporate these resources into their classroom instruction. The school culture fest day which was mentioned by all participants is commonly misinterpreted as having implications to support culturally responsive teaching. This is consistent with the literature (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Gay, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) which criticizes the usefulness of culture fair days in promoting culturally responsive teaching.

The teachers have very little or absolutely no control over most of these environmental factors, for instance they have no control over the textbook adoptions, professional development, community cultural resources etc. But the teachers showed determination by doing the best they could with what environmental circumstances they have to work in. Certainly, they have some self-efficacy that motivates them to keep pursuing culturally responsive practice in spite of not really having an environment that supports what they are doing. The principal seems to support what they are doing, but other district policies and professional development availability are not aligned with what they desire to do.

#### Teachers Use of Agency to Promote Culturally Responsive Teaching

Through the lens of self-efficacy, human agency is an individual's ability to deal with a task or situation (Bandura, 2001; Code, 2020). As active agents, teachers have some control over what happens to them and to others. Human agency connects with self-efficacy to explore teacher's willingness to adopt and practice culturally responsive teaching. Participants showed ability and willingness to work with others to achieve culturally responsive teaching. Individuals have differing amounts of abilities and resources resulting in some having greater agency than others. Participants practiced to some extent the three forms of agency I.e., personal/individual, proxy, and collective.

#### *Personal/Individual Agency*

Personal/individual agency seemed to be widely practiced by the participants. The teachers in the study demonstrated personal/individual agency by showing commitment to act on their own behalf with intentions of advancing culturally responsive teaching. Teachers brought their influence on what they were able to control individually and on the environmental events. The participants aspired to gather skills and knowledge for the application of culturally

responsive teaching by engaging in activities such as inviting speakers to speak to their students, attending culturally responsive professional development courses or reviewing instructional materials for cultural bias.

### ***Proxy Agency***

Proxy agency confide on perceived social efficacy which elaborate on the influence of individuals who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf. Participants acknowledged having a lead teacher (proxy) who is guiding and leading the culturally responsive initiative in the school. The school principal has delegated the responsibilities to the proxy to guide the culturally responsive process. It is important to acknowledge that participants did not clearly identify the functions and responsibilities of this individual. Joseph, one of the participating teachers was identified as the lead teacher at least among the social studies teachers, who in this case is the proxy. During my interview and observation interactions with Joseph, he appeared to have knowledge, resources, and ideas on culturally responsive instructional practice. The principal was mentioned by participants as a supportive administrator but seemed to be removed from the process. She doesn't seem to be directly involved because participants suggested responsibilities have been delegated to the lead teacher. The study participants indicated that the delegated roles and responsibilities of the lead teacher were not clearly defined and elaborated, which was rather confusing.

### ***Collective Agency***

Collective agency is when individuals collaborate and pool their knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively achieve a set goal. Participants worked collectively in subject/content and grade level teams. Some participants indicated working together with other teachers from other buildings collaborating to achieve culturally responsive teaching. Having a collective



agency seemed to be important in moving culturally responsive teaching forward in the school. The participants seemed to have some collective agency but not necessarily much collective agency. They seem to be working collectively more on content teams but not so much on grade level teams.

The conclusion derived from agency is that participants practiced to some extent the different forms of agency through collaboration and working together to achieve effective culturally responsive teaching. Participants made an effort to demonstrate agency through either working individually, collectively or using a proxy to promote culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Participants worked together in subject/content teams, and a few worked on grade level teams which demonstrated collective agency. The participants generally practiced personal/individual agency widely through visiting community cultural resources, attending professional development courses, differentiating instruction, and incorporating cultural icons/role models into instruction. The participants worked with a lead teacher who represented a proxy to whom the principal has delegated responsibilities as appropriate to promoting culturally responsive teaching in the school.

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching is Challenging to Implement

The data analysis provided the opportunity to examine culturally responsive teaching from the perceptions of Turner middle school teachers who instruct and work with diverse learners. The participants in the study generally appreciate and want to be culturally responsive, but they have a lack of enough knowledge and a deep understanding of culturally responsive teaching. It is work in progress for the participants working towards becoming culturally responsive teachers.

While many culturally responsive teaching strategies were discussed, the participants noted that employing culturally responsive teaching has challenges and obstacles. Teachers not being multilingual, cultural biases, uncooperative parents who refuse to talk to teachers, teachers having a different ethnic background than the learners and gender disparities were presented as the main challenges by the participants. Participants identified solutions to some of the challenges but to some of the obstacles is work in progress to find working solutions. Since culturally responsive teaching encourages teachers to position themselves as both facilitators and learners, the challenges presented connect to a need for increased exposure, information, resources, and strategies to help navigate these existing obstacles. These challenges are an expected component of the culturally responsive teaching process. The teacher's ability to find working solutions to these challenges is important to ensure the practicality and successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices in diverse middle school classrooms.

Developing culturally responsive teaching is an "elusive journey that likely has no destination" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 20), meaning it is a journey that covers a lifetime and is never completed. Most participants understood culturally responsive teaching as the means to help students recognize and honor their own cultural experiences and practices while acquiring access to equal educational opportunities. The participant's focus was to prepare their students to successfully graduate, move into the community, and work within that community as valued individuals who embrace diversity.

### **Implications For Practice**

The findings and conclusions indicate teachers were committed and making an effort to fully becoming culturally responsive. As this study demonstrated, the participants lacked some knowledge and skills and did not have a fully supportive environment. The teachers had some

level of self-efficacy, although none had high self-efficacy. This makes it more challenging for them to fully practice culturally responsive teaching. In this section, I propose implications intended to provide teachers, schools, school districts, policymakers, and others with the power to implement change with suggestions and guidance to facilitate and develop with greater efficacy, strategies, and policies to support, implement, and ensure sustainability of culturally responsive teaching and learning.

### Personal Factors

Teachers' perceptions of their self-awareness, knowledge of student identity and skills is a necessary first step to develop culturally responsive teaching (Chamberlain, 2005). Consistent with the literature, teachers in this study had a great desire to be culturally responsive. Even when their efforts to be culturally responsive fell short, they continued to reflect on their practice and to persist. Teachers can improve their self-efficacy when they develop and practice self-awareness, knowledge, and skills. Encouraging teachers to explore how they conduct themselves provides them with the opportunity to reflect upon their awareness and how they negotiate themselves in the diverse classrooms. Beyond their actual classroom practices and behaviors, teachers' perceptions of their own cultural awareness and knowledge of student identity can increase their self-efficacy and contribute greatly to the development of culturally responsive teaching.

As this research established, teacher cultural knowledge and skills is necessary to enhance the development of culturally responsive teaching literature (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2004; Chamberlain, 2005; Nganga, 2015). Middle school teachers need to be conscious of their own cultural awareness and identity in their effort to identify inconsistencies and inadequacies in their personal interactions with the diverse students from various cultural backgrounds. Teachers

need to do more in order to explore their awareness, knowledge, skills and biases, for the benefit of their diverse learners.

### Behavioral Factors

In this section, implications for behavioral factors that promote culturally responsive teaching are discussed. These include differentiating instruction, incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into instruction, and making connections with students and parents.

Differentiating instruction is critical to culturally responsive teaching (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000) and the teachers in this study attempted to modify, adapt, and alter instruction within the limits of their knowledge of how to do so. Considering that each student is unique with different learning needs, recognizing these distinctions enhances the ability of the teacher to address the individual needs of the students. The key is to differentiate instruction to respond to each student based on their identified strengths and weaknesses, and not on preconceived notions about the student's cultural background. Teachers and schools can ensure that all learners have an equal opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability. If instruction reflects the cultural practices and values of only one group of students, the other students are denied an equal opportunity to learn. Learners are much more interested in information that relates to their personal situations (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). When teachers embrace culturally responsive teaching, they play an important role in creating a culturally responsive learning environment which can address the needs of all students in an equitable manner. Teachers in diverse classrooms can commit to differentiated teaching considering individual differences. Policy makers can develop policies that adopt practices that recognize, embrace, and honor differences as opportunities for growth among the diverse learners. School districts can provide professional development opportunities to teachers and ensure these policies are implemented.

A culturally responsive classroom reflects stories, histories, and examples of cultural role models/icons with which all students can relate to make content more reflective of student diversity (Richards et al., 2007). This enables students to directly connect school with their communities (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). School districts can institute and perpetuate behavior standards that require treating all learners with respect and, they can forge a sense of community within the diverse classrooms. As this study demonstrated, effective culturally responsive teachers can recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning. In the application of culturally responsive teaching practices, teachers can properly assess the gaps in learning and achievement of their students and then develop culturally responsive teaching strategies to address these gaps.

Teachers in this study understood the importance of making an effort to connect with diverse parents (Garcia & Chun, 2016) and ensure that the school environment is accessible and welcoming to these families. This is critical for enhancing an inclusive school environment. These efforts involve activities which include programs to assist parents acquire cultural skills to connect well with the teachers and the school. Schools should provide parents with opportunities to access these programs to enhance connections and relationships. As the study demonstrated, getting to know students and parents enables teachers to form good working relationships to discover what knowledge the families have to offer to the student, classroom, and school. The subsequent goal of this type of communication is to allow students and their families to become involved in the learner's educational experience (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Increased student and family participation can lead to increased student achievement. When teachers, students, and families work together they communicate an appreciation of diversity, and actively pass on the belief that acknowledging and embracing diversity is key to culturally responsive teaching. In

diverse school environments the need for teachers to learn skills to engage, collaborate and work with families and communities is significant. In a classroom where culturally responsive teaching practices are used, students have the opportunity to learn about things that their families talk about, to study the accomplishments of people that look like them, and to see ways their families and communities learn and act present in the classroom.

#### Environmental Factors

Implications related to environmental factors are discussed in this section. Factors highlighted include professional development, community cultural resources, teacher collaboration and cultural bias in the curriculum/instructional materials.

Considering the challenges highlighted in this study, educators who desire to develop effective culturally responsive instructional practices would benefit from the opportunity to engage in professional development and learning opportunities on culturally responsive teaching (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Brown, 2004). School administrators can develop professional development courses appropriate to culturally responsive teaching. School districts can adopt these PD courses and ensure their implementation to prepare and equip teachers with tools to facilitate culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. A change in teachers' perceptions is necessary to highlight culturally responsive teaching as an educational asset. As diverse classrooms continue to grow, designing culturally responsive professional development courses and workshop training can meet the development of culturally responsive teachers. Through the participation in these professional development courses, these teachers can understand better what culturally responsive teaching is about. They can explore their knowledge, awareness, skills, beliefs, values, dispositions, biases, and experiences related to diversity. They then can learn and adapt culturally responsive teaching strategies and consider how to best incorporate

these strategies into classroom instruction. Along with providing opportunities for teachers to reflect and engage in culturally responsive instruction, this study demonstrated the importance of exploring specific strategies to foster an inclusive and responsive learning environment which empowers all learners and promotes equitable access to educational opportunities. Schools and school districts can hire bi- and multi-lingual para educators from the communities to help bridge communication gaps. This can help to some extent solve the problem of teachers not being able to speak several languages.

As this study demonstrated, teachers would benefit from utilizing community cultural resources in a more effective way to make connections and incorporate them into classroom instruction to promote culturally responsive teaching. By utilizing cultural community resources in a meaningful way (Baldwin, 2015), teachers can be more culturally responsive in their instructional process. School districts can develop guidelines for utilizing the community cultural resources and ensure teachers and students fully benefit by either visiting or inviting representatives. Schools need to establish ideas which can integrate events like school culture fest into classroom instruction. Teachers can develop lessons incorporating culture fest events into learning activities so as to benefit the learners. This will allow them to move from merely celebrating different cultures toward honoring and understanding student cultures on a deeper level.

Middle school teachers can strive towards ensuring that collaboration and working together (Bandura, 2006, 2018) is sustained during the instructional process. School principals can support the collaboration process by providing necessary opportunities and facilities. School districts should provide culturally responsive collaboration opportunities between teachers in different buildings. This can ensure transfer of knowledge, awareness, and skills on culturally

responsive teaching throughout the district. As this study demonstrated, teacher collaboration and working together is an inclusive welcoming approach to support the successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching practice in diverse classrooms, particularly in middle school settings where grade level and subject matter teams are already part of the school structure.

Teachers in this study understood that when the curriculum fails to address the needs of all students, they can provide a way forward by adjusting/adopting instruction (Bazron et al., 2005) to reflect cultural awareness and inclusivity. Teachers can be culturally responsive by utilizing materials and examples, and demonstrating values that include students from diverse backgrounds. Educators need to develop culturally responsive curriculum which is critical in developing an inclusive classroom instruction. A culturally responsive curriculum invites students to see their identity in the learning process. Complementary materials may need to be embedded in the curriculum to make the learning process inclusive (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). To develop instruction that is culturally responsive, teachers need to be proficient in adopting content to relate to their students. Teachers can thoughtfully plan instruction by selecting and aligning curriculum that meets the needs of the diverse learners.

### **Implications For Future Study**

As society becomes more dynamic and as diverse classrooms continue to grow, new ideas about culturally responsive teaching on instruction are likely to emerge. As this study has demonstrated, there is a need for professional development programs to focus on culturally responsive teaching practice. The future of culturally responsive teaching requires middle school teachers to recognize the importance of identity, language, ethnicity, and culture in shaping how they structure instruction and inform their diverse classrooms. Banks states, “culturally



responsive teaching will continue to evolve in complex ways. Its major future focus will be to describe ways cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is manifested and to develop powerful concepts that can explain teaching and learning related to diversity” (Banks, 2013, p. 80).

The sense of urgency required for improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for students from culturally diverse backgrounds continue to gain importance as groups that were once considered minority groups collectively make a growing segment of the population. The future prosperity, economic infrastructure, and technological competitiveness will stress the value of highly trained culturally responsive teachers.

This study was limited to a small number of teachers in a single middle school setting. Recommendation for further study would be to explore and examine culturally responsive teaching perceptions of a wide variety of participants including students, teachers, and administrators from diverse cultural backgrounds and in other learning institutions who interact with culturally diverse learners. There is more research work needed to fully understand the implementation and practice of culturally responsive teaching in schools. Such research could spell out an educational policy on culturally responsive teaching to be enacted by all schools. This study did not emphasize the effects of culturally responsive teaching on student performance, therefore further empirical studies are equally needed to address the effect of culturally responsive teaching on student academic performance outcomes. Such research for instance, may focus on the progress teachers make in the achievement levels of diverse learners under their guidance. Follow up studies could also be conducted on teachers after a certain number of years of teaching to identify culturally responsive teaching growth.

## **Conclusion**

This research study contributes to the literature through filling salient gaps by building on the available literature through expanding or adding to the scope and generalizability of the existing literature. This research expands on the topic of study through providing a fuller understanding of culturally responsive teaching, bringing new appreciation of culturally responsive teaching, and helping to fulfill the research objective.

Teachers in this study manifested multiple and intersecting identities. These diverse experiences influenced their understanding and implementation of culturally responsive instruction. The teachers intersecting identities made them aware of the multiple forms of oppression and privilege each individual may face and how they interact with one another. Intersectionality helps teachers to understand the learners' experiences, power, and privilege. Some students may not have access to privilege because of intersecting marginalized identities. Having that understanding can help teachers adopt a culturally responsive teaching approach to guide the diverse learners to appropriate resources and instruction.

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## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Protocol**

Hello, my name is Keph M Isanda, and I am a doctoral student from Wichita State University's Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to assist this research by participating in this interview. My research is working to learn about how teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching on their instructional practice and to examine practices to implement culturally responsive teaching in diverse classrooms. The name of the study is "Middle school teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice" You have been selected to participate in the study because as a middle school teacher, you have unique knowledge and experiences which will contribute to the research.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names or identifying comments will be used when I report the results of this session. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate analysis directly from your comments. The digital recording of our conversation will be transcribed. For confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms for each participant during the transcription process. The recording and transcription will be kept in a secure location for the duration of, and for five years after the conclusion of the study.

This interview will last approximately 40-60 minutes. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it. If at any point you feel too distressed to continue the study, you may be excused without penalty.

Have you read and signed the consent form?

Do you have any questions about it before we begin?

Do I have your permission to audio record our interview?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What are your experiences working with a racially diverse population at this school?
2. What is your understanding of culturally responsive teaching?
3. What are the district and school expectations regarding culturally responsive teaching?
4. Does your principal support culturally responsive teaching? If so, how so?
5. Do you consider yourself to be a culturally responsive teacher? Why or why not?
6. How does the diversity of your students and awareness of their cultural backgrounds influence/inform your instructional practice?
7. How would you describe your cultural identity?
  - a. How does your awareness of your own cultural identity impact your instruction?
8. How do you build relationships and partnerships with, among, and between your students?
  - a. How does your relationships with students influence your teaching practices?

9. Have you shifted your instructional practices (curriculum and instructional changes) to meet your students' academic needs? If so, how so? If not, why not?
  - a. Do you examine the instructional materials you use in the classroom for racial and ethnic bias? If so, how so? If not, why not?
  - b. Do you include examples of the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups during classroom lessons? If so, how so? If not, why not?
10. What changes need to be made in the general school environment so that all students can be successful?
  - a. What challenges/obstacles do you face when applying culturally responsive teaching?
11. Do you collaborate or work collectively with other teachers to achieve effective culturally responsive teaching? If so,
  - a. How so?
  - b. Who takes the lead on that?
  - c. How do the teachers at this school advance culturally responsive teaching?
12. What professional development course(s) have you participated on culturally responsive teaching, if any, and how is it beneficial to instruction?
13. Tell me about any community cultural resources within the city.
  - a. Do you make use of these resources? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered during this interview that would be helpful for this study?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Observation Protocol**

During the study, I anticipate conducting one to two classroom observations per participant scheduled to last approximately 30-40 minutes each. During the observation I'll assume the role of nonparticipant/observer as participant whereby I will only be observing and taking notes without direct involvement and the participant is aware of my presence. I realize that I can talk to the participants if they engage me during the observation, this way I can record a conversation in my field notes which could be useful to bring quotes into my final narrative. I will develop and use an observation checklist to make sure that all parts of the observation are completed.

During the study I will write field notes during/or as soon as possible after the observation. To avoid forgetting important details, I will flesh out the field notes as soon as possible after the observation. I will include both descriptive and reflective notes. Descriptive notes are the research questions I will ask myself while reflective notes are preliminary themes of what I am learning from the observations. Field notes are helpful to broaden data collection and can help me produce data that will be of use during data analysis.

The teachers to be interviewed will be the same teachers to be observed.

### **Observation Guidelines**

I will seek to observe and record the following: -

1. Ways in which teachers interact with their students.
2. Evidence of culturally responsive teaching themes in the teachers' teaching based on planning and preparation for differentiation.
3. Nature of resources, tools and documents used to support culturally responsive work.
4. The teachers' cultural awareness, knowledge and understanding of the diverse learners in the classroom.
5. Obstacles if any, the teacher may face when applying a culturally responsive teaching approach.
6. Motivation and engagement of the teacher during instruction.
7. The diversity of learners in the classroom.



## APPENDIX C

### Consent Form

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study, **Middle school teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice**. This study is designed to examine teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice in diverse middle school classrooms.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a middle school teacher and you have successfully obtained at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university or college and qualified or certified to teach middle school students. Approximately 6 – 10 participants will be invited to join the study.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview and allow me to observe one to two class sessions. Each interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location. Each participant will be asked to share their shared experiences regarding culturally responsive teaching instructional practices. This information will be obtained via a set of questions asked by the interviewer. I plan to interview 6-10 teachers at Coleman Middle School. I anticipate conducting individual interviews lasting approximately 40 - 60 minutes. I also anticipate conducting one to two classroom observations per participant scheduled to last approximately 30-40 minutes each. Sample questions to be used during the interview include: *How does the diversity of your students influence your application of culturally responsive teaching instruction? How does your awareness of your own cultural identity impact your instruction and your relationship with your students? What professional development course(s) have you participated in on culturally responsive teaching, if any, and how was it beneficial to instruction?*

**Discomfort/Risks:** During this study, it is expected that the risks, discomforts and inconveniences will be minimal. Participation is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you can feel free to not answer it. You also have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No identifiable information will be used. Minimal discomfort may be experienced when recalling your cultural experiences.

If at any point you feel too distressed to continue the study, please inform the researcher and you may discontinue your participation without penalty. If the distress continues after you discontinue or finish participation, you may wish to contact the Wichita State University Counseling and Prevention Services. They are located in the Student Wellness Center, phone number (316)-978-4SWC, email [Annette.Santiago@wichita.edu](mailto:Annette.Santiago@wichita.edu).

**Benefits:** Participants will get an opportunity to share or voice any opinions related to culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice. The research will gain insight into culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies. Schools across the nation may use these findings to improve graduation and retention rates of culturally diverse learners. The findings may help improve the implementation process of culturally responsive teaching in schools. The study will add to the growing body of research about culturally responsive teaching.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies.
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board.

The researcher may publish the results of the study. If so, your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

Each interview will be digitally recorded for later transcription. After the interview has been transcribed, each participant will be given an opportunity to receive a summary of their interview for review. Digital copies of transcriptions and recordings will be secured in password-protected location available only to the researcher. Any hard-copy items will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet in the WSU ISLE office of the faculty advisor for the five years.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact the principal investigator, Dr. Jean Patterson, Wichita State University – ISLE Office, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, (316) 978-6392, email: jean.patterson@wichita.edu Or Kepha M Isanda, phone number (316) 299 1562, email: t782y476@wichita.edu

If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, a
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name (Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Study Email Invitation**

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is Kepha M Isanda, I am a student in WSU's Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. My dissertation study aims to learn about middle school teachers' perceptions regarding culturally responsive teaching on instructional practice.

I am inviting you to participate in this study based on your role as a qualified middle school teacher working directly with learners in a culturally diverse school setting. You will be asked to share your perceptions and experiences regarding culturally responsive teaching instructional practices.

If you are willing to participate in this study and share your perceptions, you are welcome to respond to this email and accept the invitation. I anticipate conducting individual interviews per participant at a mutually agreeable time and location. The interviews are scheduled to take approximately 40-60 minutes and will be digitally (audio) recorded. I also anticipate conducting one or two classroom observations per participant scheduled to last approximately 30-40 minutes each.

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this study and thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kepha M Isanda  
Doctoral Student  
Educational Leadership  
Wichita State University  
Phone: (316) 299 1562